



Lake Washington

GIRLS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Standards-Based Learning
Handbook
2025-2026

Standards-Based Learning

Standards-based learning (SBL) is a grading philosophy and system that focuses on learning as a process, one that happens over time and through active engagement. Instead of averaging scores or relying on one final grade, SBG measures how well students understand specific learning goals and grade-level skills. It focuses on what students know and can do. Students receive scores on a 1–4 scale that reflect their level of proficiency on clearly defined standards. This approach gives students multiple opportunities throughout the term or year to demonstrate growth and mastery.

The purpose of standards-based learning is to support student achievement by clearly and fairly communicating progress in a way that is timely, specific, and focused on growth. It encourages students to reflect, take ownership, and keep working toward their goals, even if they don't get it right the first time.

In a standards-based system, feedback is central—it's how students *learn* from their mistakes and deepen their understanding. Grades are not final judgments, but reflections of current progress.

SBL vs. TRADITIONAL

Standards-Based Learning	Traditional Grading System
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uses a number scale• Emphasizes most recent evidence of learning• Indicates what a student knows and is able to do at a given point in time• Communicates expectations ahead of time to students• Emphasizes student progress• Separates content skills and learning behaviors and reports them separately	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uses a letter scale• Includes every score, regardless of when it was collected; scores are averaged• Weighs grades based on types of work - participation, homework, test, projects, etc.• Includes learning behaviors, such as homework completion, in the overall grade

Standards and Learning Targets:

All learning expectations and communication about student progress will be grounded in clearly-defined learning targets, which can be found on grading rubrics. These learning targets are written in student-friendly language and aligned with content-area/skills-based standards. Teachers are expected to take relevant standards from their discipline and “deconstruct” them into specific knowledge and skills students need to master the content.

For example, consider this Social Studies standard:

Standard: *Evaluate how historical events, individuals, and movements have shaped society and influenced contemporary issues.*

When deconstructed into individual learning targets, this standard might result in the following student-centered learning targets:

- I can identify key historical events and the people involved.
- I can explain the causes and effects of a historical event.
- I can describe how a historical movement influenced society.
- I can compare different perspectives on a historical issue.
- I can connect past events to current social or political issues.
- I can analyze how historical decisions impact people today.
- I can use evidence from primary and secondary sources to support my thinking.
- I can evaluate the long-term significance of an event or movement.
- I can explain how individuals have contributed to social or political change.

These learning targets make it clear what students are expected to know and be able to do—and they provide a strong foundation for instruction, feedback, and assessment.

Key Terms

Summative Assessment - summarizes learning at the end of a period of learning (unit, trimester) but is not the end of learning if the evidence shows more instruction or practice is needed.

Formative Assessment - occurs during the formative period of learning when expectation is of growth not achievement. Formative assessments are targeted and determine next steps. There is a difference in formal formative assessment and practice. Practice activities are low-risk opportunities to engage with content and skills; it allows the teacher to uncover misunderstandings, recognize patterns, and determine needs.

Feedback - information shared with students about their learning to help them grow. It is specific, timely, and descriptive with a focus on the quality of work and progress toward learning goals. Good feedback identifies strengths and areas for improvement, guides students on what to try next, and encourages reflection and revision.

Learning targets - help students take ownership of their learning by making goals clear and specific. They describe what students should know and be able to do by the end of a lesson,

unit, or course. Written in student-friendly language, learning targets help focus both instruction and assessment. Each learning target is aligned with standards, which are measurable, visible, and designed to clarify the purpose of learning. Learning targets not only support student understanding—they also guide teachers in delivering focused instruction and providing meaningful feedback.

Learning behaviors - the consistent habits and actions that support a student's success across all classes. These behaviors reflect a student's readiness to learn, participation in the classroom community, and responsibility for their own work. At L-Dub, we define the following learning behaviors as expectations in every class:

- **Preparedness:** Arrives to class on time, with necessary materials, and ready to engage in learning.
- **Collaboration:** Works productively and respectfully with peers in both large and small-group settings.
- **Engagement:** Participates actively in class activities, listens attentively to peers and instruction, and uses class time effectively.
- **Assignments:** Completes all assignments thoroughly, on time, and in alignment with directions.

These behaviors are essential for creating a positive, supportive learning environment and for helping students develop the habits needed for academic and personal growth.

Rubrics - tools that clearly explain what success looks like for a particular skill or learning goal. It outlines the criteria teachers use to assess student work and describes different levels of performance—often using terms like *emerging*, *developing*, and *proficient*. Rubrics help students understand what is expected of them, how they can grow, and what they need to improve. Rubrics are based on learning targets and grounded in standards that help to ensure that grading is consistent, fair, and focused on learning, not just completion or effort.

Proficiency Checklist -

PROFICIENCY SCALE

LWGMS Proficiency Scale

Below Proficiency		Approaching Proficiency		Proficient		Exceeding Proficiency
1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4
Student demonstrates limited target skill(s) or understanding.	*	Student demonstrates some target skill(s) or understanding.	*	Student demonstrates specified target skill(s) or understanding.	*	Student demonstrates target skill(s) or understanding AND additional depth or complexity.

*Scores ending in ".5" indicate that a student met the criteria for a column and met some but not all of the criteria for the subsequent column.

Proficiency Level	Terms	Descriptions of the level	Examples of language students might see
X	Assessment excused	Student is excused from this assessment.	
NE	No Evidence	There is insufficient evidence to assess the student's learning of this standard due to absences and/or non-completion of an assignment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You didn't complete the assignment. <u>You need a plan to relearn, practice, and then assess on this standard.</u>
1	Emerging Proficiency	Student demonstrates limited target skill(s) or understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can do limited parts of the assigned task. You need a plan to relearn, practice, and then reassess on this standard.
1.5		Student met the criteria for a column and met some but not all of the criteria for the next column.	
2	Developing Proficiency	Student demonstrates some target skill(s) or understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You meet some of the criteria necessary to demonstrate proficiency. You know some of the target content and need to work more on other parts to demonstrate proficiency.
2.5		Student met the criteria for a column and met some but not all of the criteria for the next column.	
3	Proficient	Student demonstrates specified target skill(s) or understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target objective You meet all of the criteria necessary to demonstrate proficiency. You know (can do) what was taught and practiced.
3.5		Student met the criteria for a column and met some but not all of the criteria for the next column.	
4	Exceeding Proficiency	Student demonstrates specified skill(s) or understanding AND additional depth or complexity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can apply what I have learned/can do to new contexts. You can add additional depth or complexity to my work.

Assessment

Assessment is a key part of the learning process and is designed to support, guide, and measure student growth. At L-Dub, assessments are used to evaluate how well students are meeting clearly-defined learning targets and to provide meaningful feedback that helps them improve. Assessments take many forms—including class discussions, projects, quizzes, writing assignments, and performance tasks—and are designed to reflect a range of skills and understanding. The primary purpose of assessment is not to sort or rank students, but to inform instruction, support reflection, and ensure that each student has the opportunity to learn and succeed.

Frequency of Assessment:

In a standards-based grading system, students are assessed regularly and purposefully to monitor progress toward specific learning targets. Rather than relying solely on high-stakes tests, teachers use a range of formative and summative assessments throughout each unit to provide timely feedback and support ongoing learning. This approach ensures that students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their understanding and receive feedback that informs their growth. Frequent assessment also allows teachers to adjust instruction as needed to meet students where they are and guide them toward proficiency.

Homework:

At L-Dub, we view homework as a tool to support learning—not as a judgment of a student's abilities. Homework provides students with opportunities to practice skills, reinforce content, and work toward meeting learning standards. It also helps build important habits like time management, responsibility, and self-advocacy.

Our homework approach is rooted in our standards-based grading (SBG) philosophy, which means that we see learning as a process that happens over time. Homework is one step in that process. It allows students and teachers to identify what's understood, what needs more practice, and where additional support may be helpful. Teachers use homework as a way to provide descriptive feedback, not grade, because feedback helps students grow. We want students to learn *from* homework, not be *defined by* it.

Students are expected to complete and turn in homework on time. While homework completion is recorded as a learning behavior, it is not used to determine a student's academic proficiency. If your student is unable to complete an assignment due to illness, family emergency, or another excused reason, we ask that they (or you) communicate with the teacher before the assignment is due. In most cases, the assignment will be due the following school day. Teachers may adjust expectations depending on the subject or grade level.

We also encourage students to reach out to their teachers directly when they have questions or need support—this helps them build confidence and ownership of their learning.

If you have questions about how homework works in a particular class, please don't hesitate to reach out to your child's teacher.

Reassessment:

Reassessments are an essential part of the learning process. If a student is not yet proficient and scores a "1" on any standard on a summative assessment, they are required to reassess. Teachers should notify both the student and their family by email.

Students who are approaching proficiency and wish to reassess any "2's" from a major assessment—or who feel ready to demonstrate full proficiency—should be given the opportunity to do so. Teachers may use professional judgment in these cases, particularly if the standard will be reassessed later in the course.

Reassessments must evaluate the same standard but with new content, and students are not required to redo the entire assessment—they may reassess just one standard or section. Importantly, the most recent score should always be recorded in the gradebook, even if it is lower than the original.

Student Success Plan:

Students who have a Student Success Plan (SSP) will be held to all learning behaviors, learning targets, and standards. However, accommodations or modifications will be provided and will be taken into consideration as teachers build curriculum, assignments, and assessments.

GOOGLE CLASSROOM OVERVIEW

We want to make sure students and families have a clear window into what's happening in class—especially for students who miss a day or want to review material. Google Classroom will be updated regularly so that parents/students can follow along.

For every class meeting, you will see:

- The agenda (always pinned at the top of the page)
- Any homework assigned
- Any classwork to be completed by students who were absent

As needed, you may also see:

- Slides or notes from a unit or lecture
- General resources for the class
- Essential questions we are exploring
- Learning targets for the unit or lesson

How information will be organized:

All information will be labeled by date and type, so it's easy to find.

- Example:
 - *12/5/24 Agenda*
 - *HW: Reading Questions for Romeo and Juliet Act 1*
 - *12/5 Classwork: Reading and Discussion Questions*
- Resources will be placed into groups in the "Classwork" section for better organization beyond the "Stream."

Grouping may be by:

- *Unit*
- *Week*
- *Subject or topic*
- *File type*

We hope this makes it easier for you to stay connected to what's happening in the classroom and to support your student's learning.

Report Cards

We believe that good teaching means students know how they're doing in class. Students are aware of what they're being measured on and how they're progressing, and they receive regular, individualized, and substantive feedback from their teachers and peers. Because the primary support and feedback for students comes in classes, the standards portion of our report card is geared slightly more toward families. Our goal is to design a report card that is digestible, viewer-friendly, and meaningful.

Why do we use both standards and skill-based strengths/opportunities for growth on report cards?

Together, standards and narrative reports can provide students and families with holistic feedback on their progress. Standards provide clear measures of student progress in the class's designated learning goals. Narratives allow teachers to complete the picture—they highlight overall trends, provide examples of specific work, and show students and families that we see, know, celebrate, and support them.

Report card structure:

- Report cards come at the middle and end of each trimester.
- The Fall and Winter mid-term report card includes a course description, standards, skill strengths/opportunities, and a recommendation from each class. Spring trimester only standards are reported.
- The end-of-term report card includes a course description and standards. When needed, the end-of-term report card may also include a recommendation. (This includes when a student receives a 1, or has a significant change in progress or work.)
- Standards for year-long classes do not reset at the end of terms but carry over from September until June.

Process:

Midterms - Narratives and Standards (Fall, Winter; Spring Standards Only)

- Required of all classes
- Standards
- Narrative reports have three parts:
 - Course description
 - Areas of Strengths and Growth
 - Recommendation

End of Term - Standards and Recommendations

- Required of all classes
- Standards
 - Students receiving a 1 will have an accompanying recommendation that contextualizes the standard score.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the advantages of standards-based learning?

A significant advantage of SBL is that the standards - or the skills and content assessed in each class - are clearly articulated and tracked throughout the term or year. In class, assignments, instruction, and feedback are clearly connected to individual standards, so students know what is expected of them and what they are being assessed on at any given point. Similarly, students and families/caregivers can see individual feedback indicating which learning outcomes a student has mastered and which they are still working on. Additionally, students learn and progress at different paces. The goal of standards-based learning is for students to demonstrate mastery in the objectives, and one student's timeline might look different from another's. An advantage of this approach is that students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency; they can continue working on and demonstrating progress in standards throughout the year, and can return to previous skills or reassess when needed.

Why aren't grades just averaged?

Because the purpose of standards-based learning is to report what students know and are able to do, averaging does not provide an accurate picture of where a student is in their learning. Our ultimate goal is for students to master the skills and content outlined in each class. Ideally they are growing and improving throughout the course of the year, and the most recent data and assessments more accurately reflect what a student knows and can do.

So is a 3 like an A, a 2 like a B and so on?

No. While it may feel as though standards-based scale scores are easy to translate to the traditional A, B, C, D, F, it is actually quite difficult and should be avoided. The two methods (traditional and standards-based) are entirely different systems and philosophies. In standards-based learning, a 1 (not yet proficient) is a very narrow range which communicates that the student has made little or no progress toward the standard. A 2 (approaching proficiency) tends to have a larger range because it includes student performance that ranges from just a little closer to the standard than a 1, to just a little short

of meeting the standard of a 3. A 3 (proficient) indicates that the student has met the standard, and is right where we expect the student to be. When a student has not only met the standard but has also taken the skills and concepts and applied it independently with greater complexity and depth, a student may earn a 4 (exceeds proficiency). In traditional grading, letter grades report the number of points earned in a subject, often include scores related to homework and participation, and don't necessarily clearly communicate what the student has learned.

What about students who have learning plans or accommodations?

SBL principles and tenets are equally as applicable and appropriate for students with learning plans. Some students have accommodations that support them with making progress toward grade-level standards. Students are instructed and supported with these accommodations, and then graded on the standards as written. Some students may have modified grade-level expectations (standards) written into their Student Success Plan.

How will I know what progress my student is making and if she is on track to meeting the standard?

Student progress is tracked in online gradebooks through Alma. Alma is updated regularly by teachers, and students and families/caregivers can log into Alma at home to track progress or see if there are any missing assignments. Alma can be accessed through the Parent/Caregiver or Student Portal.

You may also reach out to your student's teacher to better understand the standards, what assignments or assessments contribute to each standard, and how your individual student is doing. Over the course of the year, we will send students and families six grade reports - one at the middle and end of each trimester. We encourage you to look at student scores over the course of the term (or year), and pay attention to trends in these scores.