



# DMPS

SECONDARY

**GRADING**

**PRACTICES**

TEACHER HANDBOOK

---

2014-2015



Think. Learn. **Grow.**

[www.dmschools.org](http://www.dmschools.org)

# Table of Contents

---

- [Summary of Work/District Task Force.....](#)3
- [Guiding Practices for Grading.....](#)4
- [Guiding Practice 1: 4-Point Scale.....](#)5
- [Guiding Practice 2: Separating Behavior from Academics.....](#)7
- [Guiding Practice 3: Body of Evidence.....](#)10
- [Guiding Practice 4: Conversion to a Grade.....](#)13
- [Guiding Practice 5: Multiple Opportunities to Demonstrate Proficiency.....](#)14
- [Guiding Practice 6: Accommodations and Modifications.....](#)15
- [References.....](#)16

[Additional resources may be found at http://grading.dmschools.org](http://grading.dmschools.org)

## Summary:

---

One of the most prominent topics of discourse in education on the national stage is also one of the most controversial: effective grading practices. In the spring of 2012, Des Moines Public Schools identified the development and utilization of district-wide effective grading practices as the next step for implementation of the Common Core Standards. A Grading and Reporting Task Force was organized in August 2012 for the purpose of developing district-wide guidelines and practices that would ensure effective and consistent implementation of both the grading and the reporting of students' learning. The team consisted of teachers, administrators, and support personnel from across the district's secondary schools. The initial question posed by the task force was *How confident are we that the grades assigned to middle school and high school students are consistent, accurate, meaningful, and supportive of learning?* (O'Connor, 2011). The responses to this question varied widely and in so doing reinforced the district's earlier position that implementation of effective grading practices is the next critical phase in Des Moines Public Schools' mission to ensure that all students possess the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to be successful at the next stage of their lives. To this end, the task force worked collaboratively to develop Guiding Principles which will support teachers and administrators in decision making as the district moves with focused intentionality towards truly effective grading practices.

## District Task Force:

---

*A special "thank you" to the following individuals who invested numerous hours in an effort to improve our system for students:*

Curriculum	High School	Middle School	Special Programs
Noelle Tichy – Teaching and Learning Kim O'Donnell - Science Christi Donald - Math Mike Sherman - Assessment	Mindy Euken – Roosevelt BJ VanVleet – Hoover Cheryl Bjurstrom – North Pamela Harshbarger – East Sara Curto – Lincoln Doug Wheeler – Hoover Christa Carlile – Central Mike Vukovich- North Jeri Moritz – Hoover	Audrey Rieken – Weeks Chris Reeves – Weeks Cheryl Modlin – Callanan David Johns – Meredith Jake Troja – Harding Patty Gronewold – Hiatt Josh Brown – Goodrell Liz Griesel – Hoyt Mike Pentek – Harding	Vinh Nguyen - ELL Theresa Routh-Chapman – ELL Susan Hope – Special Education Janet Young – Special Education Casey Dunley - TAG

## Core Belief:

---

Des Moines Public Schools commits to all stakeholders to provide ***fair, accurate, specific, and timely*** information regarding student progress towards agreed-upon common standards as well as feedback for next steps and growth areas. Grades communicate what students know and can do.

Fair	The same work, by the same student, should receive the same grade, even if the teacher is different.
Accurate	Grades are based solely on achievement, which means other factors, like behavior and attendance, are not used to calculate a grade.
Specific	Grading policies should be so clear that students should be able to tell teachers what grade they have earned, even before the teacher calculates it.
Timely	Feedback to students is so timely that students can actually use that feedback, right away, to improve their performance on tests and assignments.

Adapted from *Elements of Grading: A Guide to Effective Practice* (2010) Dr. Douglas Reeves

## Guiding Practices for Grading:

---

1. A consistent 4-point grading scale will be used.
2. Letter grades, derived from the 4-point scale, will be based solely on achievement of course/grade level standards. Student participation, work completion, and ability to work with others will be reported separately using the “DMPS Citizenship and Employability Skills Rubric.”
3. Scores will be based on a body of evidence.
4. Achievement will be organized and reported by learning topic, which will be converted to a grade at semester’s end.
5. Students will have multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency.
6. Accommodations and modifications will be provided for exceptional learners.

---

## ***Guiding Practice 1:***

***A consistent 4-point grading scale will be used.***

---

<b>Scale Score</b>	<b>Academic Descriptor</b>
4	Exceeding Standard
3	Meeting Standard
2	Developing Toward Standard
1	Insufficient Progress
0	No evidence of student understanding in submitted work.
M	Missing – student has not submitted evidence.

In order to create objective, accurate grades, it is necessary to utilize a scale with specific descriptors for each performance level (scales). The smaller the scale, the higher the inter-rater reliability, which means individual distortions are less likely. For example, an A in Teacher 1's class represents the same level of mastery as an A in Teacher 2's class across the hall or across the district. Averages will not be used when operating within a single learning topic; therefore, low scores on early learning attempts will not negatively influence a student's grade.

Marzano references considerable meta-analyses of educational studies that show that a grade based on frequent use of scales with clear descriptors results in a more accurate rendering of students' mastery at the end of a grading period. Studies have shown that the reliability of a score obtained by a single teacher using a smaller scale is .719, whereas the reliability of a score obtained using the point system is .294 (Marzano, 2006, p. 118). Basing a grade primarily on mathematical averages often distorts accuracy (Marzano, 2000, pp. 61-62). Mathematically and ethically this is unacceptable.

<b>Do Less</b>	<b>Do More</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Translate the 100 point scale to a 4 point scale</li><li>○ Give feedback only in the form of a score</li><li>○ Average scores – penalize a student for early learning attempts</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Use a consistent 4-point scale instead of a 100 point scale</li><li>○ Use common scales to score student work</li><li>○ Communicate clear expectations to students – share scales with students prior to assessment</li><li>○ Give formative feedback that communicates where the student is in relation to the goal and what the student needs to do to reach the goal</li></ul>

---

## ***Guiding Practice 2:***

***Letter grades, derived from the 4-point scale, will be based solely on achievement of course/grade level standards. Academic conduct, work completion, and ability to work with others will be reported separately using the “DMPS Citizenship and Employability Skills Rubric.”***

---

If we incorporate behavior, attendance, and effort into the grade, we no longer consider grades accurate indicators of mastery of written standards. The grade should reflect what the student knows and is able to do (Wormeli, 2006).

Measuring behavior is subjective and does not reflect what the student knows and is able to do. We can provide anecdotal evidence, such as amount of time and resources students spend on a task; however, we do not have a commonly accepted, legally justifiable, non-subjective method for measuring how hard or sincerely someone is working. Although we teach behavior the same as we teach academics, the two should never be averaged into a grade. Inclusion of behaviors into performance has been shown to be a disincentive to academic motivation. “Low grades push the students farther from our course, they don’t motivate students. Recording a D on a student’s paper won’t light a fire under that student to buckle down and study harder. It actually distances the student further from us and the curriculum, requiring us to build an emotional bridge to bring him or her back to the same level of investment prior to receiving the grade” (Guskey and Bailey, 2001). While curriculum guides suggest a standard pacing of instruction, penalizing a student for requiring more time, support, or resources to master a standard is contrary to differentiation and best practices in teaching and learning. Therefore, the Citizenship and Employability Skills Rubric (CER) is used to separate behaviors from the student’s progress towards mastery of standards and will be reflected on the report card.

### **1. Reporting of Citizenship and Employability Skills**

Student performance on the Citizenship and Employability Skills Rubric will be reported by individual teachers during reporting periods. Citizenship and Employability skills will NOT be calculated as part of the student’s GPA. Teachers do not need to collect a body of evidence for Citizenship and Employability Skills in the grade book. Traditional documentation will serve as evidence.

<b>Do Less</b>	<b>Do More</b>
<p><b>Skewing a student's grade with behaviors such as late work, frequent attempts, attendance, disruptions, and non-participation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ex: Giving student the next higher or lower grade because of effort OR deducting points from late work or re-takes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Grading students on academic work, regardless of the time and effort it took to reach proficiency on a standard</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ex: A student receives a grade based on a body of academic evidence</li> </ul>

## 2. Participation within a Standard

Participation points may be used if that is the actual standard that is being taught. If participation is the actual standard being taught, then it's appropriate to grade it because it is the mastery we are seeking. Participation grades should reflect mastery of the standard, not that a student attempted. Example: a student performs in a musical group in music class or needs to participate in a team sport in PE in order to demonstrate understanding of the standard.

<b>Do Less</b>	<b>Do More</b>
<p><b>Giving students credit for simply attempting OR withholding points when a student does not attempt a task</b></p>	<p><b>Giving students credit for demonstrating specific skills related to the standard</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ex: Students receive credit for eye contact during a speech, vocal intonation during performance, demonstrating safety procedures during a lab</li> </ul>

## DMPS Citizenship and Employability Skills Rubric

		Academic Conduct	Work Completion	Working With Adults	Working With Students
<b>Exceeding</b>	<b>4</b>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arrives on time prepared for class every day.</li> <li>Participates every day, actions drive instruction forward.</li> <li>Consistently does what's expected and helps others do the same.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completes work as assigned every day.</li> <li>Routinely submits work on time.</li> <li>Takes full advantage of retake/redo opportunities and support.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assumes responsibility for learning by seeking help and asking questions in a timely manner.</li> <li>Consistently listens and follows suggestions given by adults.</li> <li>Consistently demonstrates effective communication skills and willingness to work with adults.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effectively leads a group of students.</li> <li>Can help resolve most conflicts.</li> <li>Seeks out different points of view.</li> <li>Embraces diversity in others.</li> </ul>
<b>Meeting</b>	<b>3</b>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arrives on time prepared for class consistently.</li> <li>Participates in class, actions benefit instruction.</li> <li>Accepts responsibility for their actions, rarely requires redirection.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistently completes work as assigned.</li> <li>Usually submits work on time.</li> <li>Takes advantage of retake/redo opportunities and support.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Usually assumes responsibility for learning by seeking help and asking questions when needed.</li> <li>Usually listens and follows suggestions given by adults.</li> <li>Usually demonstrates effective communication skills and willingness to work with adults.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effectively communicates with other students.</li> <li>Does not participate in conflicts.</li> <li>Accepts different points of view.</li> <li>Accepts diversity in others.</li> </ul>
<b>Developing</b>	<b>2</b>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arrives on time prepared for class inconsistently.</li> <li>Participates in class, actions at times distract from instruction.</li> <li>Usually follows redirection and changes their actions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inconsistently completes work as assigned.</li> <li>Inconsistently submits work on time.</li> <li>Occasionally takes advantage of retake/redo opportunities and support.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Occasionally seeks help and asks questions when needed.</li> <li>Inconsistently listens and follows suggestions given by adults.</li> <li>Sometimes demonstrates effective communication skills and willingness to work with adults.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Occasionally communicates effectively with other students.</li> <li>Does not escalate conflicts.</li> <li>Occasionally accepts different points of view.</li> <li>Occasionally accepts diversity in others.</li> </ul>
<b>Beginning or Insufficient Progress</b>	<b>1</b>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rarely brings materials to class, even with teacher coaching.</li> <li>Rarely participates, comments often distract from instruction.</li> <li>Does not follow redirection to change their actions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rarely completes work as assigned.</li> <li>Rarely submits work on time.</li> <li>Rarely takes advantage of retake/redo opportunities and support.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rarely seeks help and asks questions when needed.</li> <li>Rarely listens and follows suggestions given by adults.</li> <li>Rarely demonstrates effective communication skills and willingness to work with adults.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not communicate effectively with other students.</li> <li>Escalates conflicts.</li> <li>Does not accept different points of view.</li> <li>Does not accept diversity in others.</li> </ul>
<b>No Evidence</b>	<b>0</b>	<p><b>Even with help, the student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not bring materials.</li> <li>Does not participate.</li> <li>Does not follow directions.</li> <li>Escalates situation when given redirection.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Even with help, the student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not complete work as assigned.</li> <li>Does not submit work on time.</li> <li>Does not take advantage of retake/redo opportunities and support.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Even with help, the student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not seek help and ask questions</li> <li>Does not listen and follow suggestions given by adults</li> <li>Does not demonstrate effective communication skills nor a willingness to work with adults</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiates conflict</li> </ul> <p><b>Even with help, the student:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not communicate effectively</li> <li>Does not accept different points of view</li> <li>Does not accept diversity</li> </ul>

*Adapted with permission from Council Bluffs School District*

\*All bullet points are indicators for the level. Not all indicators must be met in order to score a student at a particular level in each category.

---

## ***Guiding Practice 3:***

### ***Scores will be based on a body of evidence.***

---

#### **Body of Evidence Definition:**

A collection of artifacts that measure student learning as indicated by the proficiency scale. The body of evidence must contain a minimum of two collaboratively\* designed assessments.

*\*excludes singleton teachers*

Assessments that could be used to determine students' proficiency towards standards include but are not limited to:

- Projects
- Teacher-created tasks
- District-created assessments
- Performances
- Presentations

#### **1. Performance Level**

Assessments are designed to require a level of performance indicated by the proficiency scales. Teachers create these assessments collaboratively within PLCs to ensure adequate rigor for each standard.

*(If the standard says students are to analyze, the task should require some level of analysis.)*

#### **2. Validity & Reliability**

Part of demonstrating proficiency on standards for a course is being able to demonstrate that skill multiple times in multiple contexts. The world outside of school is going to require this of students and student assessment should mirror this reality. A student's final score (0-4) for a standard will need to be substantiated through a minimum of 2 collaboratively designed assessments. These could be created by the district or by building level PLCs.

#### **3. Role of Homework**

Homework is practice. It is a teacher's choice to use homework as a means to practice and provide feedback. Teachers can track homework completion and report separately on the "DMPS Citizenship and Employability Skills Rubric." Homework is not included in the body of evidence because we don't know who completed the work. *(Sometimes students—or adults—don't have to practice skills they are already good at. Likewise, students who are struggling through practice but eventually demonstrate the*

*skill should not have those faulty, early attempts negatively impact their grade mathematically – see “sample grade book”.)*

#### 4. Role of Semester Finals

Finals should be viewed as another opportunity for students to demonstrate proficiency or improvement. Final assessments do not carry more weight in the grade book than other evidence.

#### Sample Grade Book

Teachers record progress toward learning topics in their grade books. These scores will be based on a numerical scale from 0-4, with 0 representing no evidence and 4 representing a demonstration that exceeds the standard as it is written and intended for the grade level

*Jill’s Progress:* Jill needed more practice and an additional attempt to demonstrate the standard (which she did, as indicated by the final score of “3”).

*Juan’s Progress:* Juan showed strength in his practice and scored a “3” on his first assessment. He will have additional opportunities to work toward a score of “4.” The classroom teacher will provide specific guidance for Juan so he feels supported in this extension, which he demonstrates on the district-created task.

*Jack’s Progress:* Jack’s progress was varied, but across all of his attempts, the teacher has made a professional judgment that Jack is still not proficient by the end of this unit. The teacher will continue to work with Jack to provide additional instruction and practice with the full expectation that Jack will be proficient on this topic in this class, during this semester. He will have multiple opportunities throughout the semester to perform at a higher level.

#### Example for an Academic Learning Topic:

Name	Practice Task 1	Practice Task 2	Common Assessment 1 (school PLC created)	Practice Task 3	Common Assessment 2 (school PLC created)	District Common Assessment 1 (district created)	Final Topic Score
Jill	1	2	2	3	3	3	3
Juan	3	3	3	M	3	4	4
Jack	2	1	1	2	2	2	2

*All work (practice, common assessments, etc.) are fully aligned to the standards being measured. Practice can be recorded to show progress and to allow the teacher to make instructional decisions, not to be included in the final topic score.*

<b>Do Less</b>	<b>Do More</b>
<b>Assign an arbitrary number of points for a task</b>	<b>Base all tasks on the 4-point scale</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Organize parts of a task by standard</li> <li>○ Assess each part according to the 4-point scale defined for the particular standard</li> </ul>
<b>Reveal components of summative assessments just on “test day”</b>	<b>Reveal assessment components at the beginning of a unit</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Design assessment prior to instruction</li> <li>○ Align each assessment item to the corresponding 4-point scale</li> </ul>
<b>Work in isolation</b>	<b>Work in collaboration to develop (and score) assessments</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Work with course-alike colleagues to develop assessments prior to instruction</li> <li>○ Collaboratively score common assessments according to the 4-point scale</li> </ul>
<b>Grade stacks of work</b>	<b>Assess representative samples of work</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Assign meaningful work that will enable you to see what students know about a learning topic</li> <li>○ Look at representative samples to determine student understanding</li> </ul>
<b>Create assessments from test-generators, which tend to assess low cognitive levels only</b>	<b>Create “tiered assessments” that present questions across a range of cognitive challenges</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Using the 4-point scale, create questions for all levels (progressing, demonstrating, exceeding)</li> <li>○ Group items at a particular level together for easy determination of proficiency</li> <li>○ Don’t penalize students for attempting questions at level 4</li> </ul>
<b>Assign homework daily or for each concept taught</b>	<b>Assign meaningful work</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Give students time to practice while you are available to answer questions/correct misconceptions</li> <li>○ Let students practice without tying it to their grade</li> </ul>
<b>Set fixed and inflexible deadlines for student work with harsh penalties for failing to meet the deadline</b>	<b>Set fixed deadlines for work and hold students accountable by requiring them to complete work</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Check in frequently for long-term projects</li> <li>○ Require students who fail to meet deadlines to complete the work</li> <li>○ Record failure to meet deadlines as a reflection of academic conduct rather than a reflection of what students know</li> </ul>

---

## ***Guiding Practice 4:***

***Achievement will be organized and reported by learning topic, which will be converted to a grade at semester's end.***

---

Teachers will organize and report evidence of student learning using pre-established learning topics aligned to the course standards. These topics are categorized into clusters.

Each learning topic score will be determined by trend data collected throughout the semester (*see "guiding practice 3"*), and by the teacher's professional judgment. This score will be reported in the grade book using the district 4-point scale (*see "guiding practice 1"*).

Course letter grades will represent the **unweighted average** of a student's overall learning cluster performance. According to Robert Marzano, an unweighted average "simply means that all learning goals are considered equal – no goal has more weight than any other goal" (Marzano, 2010, p. 105).

### ***Conversion to a single grade:***

Course letter grades will be determined at reporting time using the following scale:

A = 3.00 to 4.00  
B = 2.50 to 2.99  
C = 2.00 to 2.49  
D = 1.50 to 1.99  
F = 0.00 to 1.49

### ***Example:***

<b>Final Topic Score (based on body of evidence)</b>	<b>Average for Cluster of Topics</b>	<b>Average Score for all Clusters</b>	<b>Letter Grade for Course</b>
Topic 1 = 2.5	Learning Cluster 1	3.08	A
Topic 2 = 3.0	2.75		
Topic 1 = 3.5	Learning Cluster 2		
Topic 2 = 2.5	3.0		
Topic 1 = 3.0	Learning Cluster 3		
Topic 2 = 4.0	3.5		

---

## ***Guiding Practice 5:***

### ***Students will have multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency.***

---

Students will be allowed multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency. Teachers need multiple pieces of evidence to be sure students have a good grasp of the learning topics before deciding a final score. To make standards-referenced grading work, several ideas need to be considered:

#### **1. Multiple Opportunities**

According to Ken O'Connor (2009), students should be given a minimum of three chances to demonstrate what they know. This allows for possible errors that may occur due to irregularities in assessments, luck, cheating, or a bad testing day.

#### **2. Retakes and Re-dos**

Students will be allowed to resubmit work for a second chance. In most cases, professionals are not expected to get everything right the first time and school should be no different. Students will be allowed to edit and re-do work. Students will be allowed as many opportunities as possible to improve provided the teacher is giving appropriate feedback. **The ultimate goal is student learning.**

#### **3. Stipulated Second Chances**

Retaking a particular test will be allowed. Schools may implement some provisions that require students to earn a second chance. If a student has scored poorly on a topic and wants to try again, the student may engage in learning opportunities prior to the attempts. The student needs to practice the skills being measured before retesting on a specific topic. In the article *No Penalties for Practice* (Fisher, Frey, & Pumpian, 2012), it is suggested that there be more than one version of tests/quizzes so students do not simply memorize answers from the first try. A bank of assessment tasks will be created by teacher teams over time.

#### **4. Deadlines**

Due to the structure of our semesters and grading periods, there will need to be a cut-off date for multiple opportunities. It is recommended that students submit their evidence at least one week prior to the end of a semester. Semester deadlines will be determined by the teacher.

#### **5. Extra credit**

Extra credit does not exist in a standards-referenced system. Like other factors, extra credit can distort a grade. If students want to increase their grade, they will be provided opportunities to demonstrate understanding at a higher level. Additional “points” will not be given simply for doing more work or putting in more time. Grades reflect learning.

---

***Guiding Practice 6:***

***Accommodations and modifications will be provided for exceptional learners.***

---

***2014-15 WILL BE A PILOT YEAR FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS PRACTICE.***

## References

- Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Pumpian, I. (2012). *How to create a culture of achievement in your school and classroom*. Alexandria, VA: Association for School and Curriculum Development.
- Guskey, T., & Bailey, J. (2001). *Developing grading and reporting systems for student learning*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press.
- Marzano, R. (2000). *Transforming classroom grading*. Alexandria, VA: Association for School and Curriculum Development.
- Marzano, R. (2006). *Classroom assessment & grading that work*. Alexandria, VA: Association for School and Curriculum Development.
- Marzano, R. (2010). *Formative assessment and standards-based grading*. Marzano Research Lab.
- O'Connor, K. (2009). *How to grade for learning, K-12*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- O'Connor, K. (2011). *A repair kit for grading: 15 fixes for broken grades* (2nd ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Reeves, D. (2010). *Elements of grading: A guide to effective practice*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.
- Wormeli, R. (2006). *Fair isn't always equal: Assessing and grading in the differentiated classroom*. Portland, ME : Stenhouse Publishers.