

# Salem Public Schools

## FAQs About the Standards-based Report Cards



### **What is a standards-based report card?**

A standards-based report card lists the most important skills students should learn in each subject at a particular grade level as defined by the Massachusetts State Education Frameworks.

Instead of receiving letter grades, students are evaluated on how well they have mastered content, skills, and learning standards. The marks show whether the student has met, approached, or has not yet attained each standard. Students get separate marks for effort and work habits. This is important information for parents even if these characteristics aren't included in the assessment of the student's academic skills.

### **What's the same, and what's different about the new report card?**

The standards-based report card for K-5 looks similar to the former report card in that the standards, the benchmarks that students must meet at grade level, are defined for each subject area. Previously, only in grades K-3 were students' skills graded as performance skill indicators. The standards in all grades K-5 are now measured as performance skill indicators that are defined as, Meets Standard (M), Developing (D), and Not Exhibited (NE). The biggest difference in the standards-based report card is evident in grades four and five. In the former report card, letter grades, A, B, C, D, and U were offered as the measure of success towards meeting the standard.

The K-5 report cards are now more consistent with the district middle school report cards used in grades 6-8 at Collins Middle School, Saltonstall School, and the Nathaniel Bowditch School. The middle school report cards are also standards-based and evaluate students

using performance skill indicators, not letter grades.

### **Why have the report cards been implemented now, in the middle of the year?**

We realize that unveiling a new report card in mid-year presents some obvious concerns. The reason for the delay involved plans by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to revamp several curriculum areas. These anticipated changes would have impacted the standards that are listed at each grade level. We learned in late October that the changes would not be forthcoming during this academic year.

### **Why change from letter grades of A,B,C,...?**

The revised report cards for Salem's primary, elementary, and middle school grade students assume that the child's parent or guardian is the audience for the reports. The current format is based on two reasonable but different assumptions. The first is that a parent wants to know what her/his child has learned. The second is that telling a parent that her/his child has earned a 'B' or an '87' in mathematics does not tell the parent anything about what the child has learned.

Telling a parent that the child has mastered multiplying three digit numbers by two digit numbers does tell the parent something. The first may be a presumption. The second is a fact.



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### **Why has the section for reporting math grades been expanded?**

The former report cards did not reflect the work being completed in the Everyday Math (EM) program. One of the most common criticisms of the former report card was the absence of a connection between what was being taught in the Everyday Math program and how student learning was being reported. The report card committee members dedicated themselves to making certain that the standards being measured by the EM program were, indeed, being reported. The standards listed for math in each grade level are taken directly from the EM program.

### **Who was involved in the process of developing the K-8 standards-based report cards?**

The volunteer committee was comprised of the seven elementary school principals, the middle school principal and two 6-8 middle school-level assistant principals, a K-8 assistant principal, the assistant superintendent, the elementary mathematics coordinator, two members of the technology department, and 25 teachers representing each K-5, K-8, and 6-8 school in the district.

### **How can I learn more about the report cards and how my child is performing?**

Parent conference time enables you to talk with teachers about your child's progress in school. However, the relationship between parent and teacher should be an ongoing one not limited to the twice-yearly meeting confined to a ten or fifteen minute meeting. Frequent conversations, notes in your child's assignment notebook, and phone calls both to and from the teacher are the best ways to ensure that you understand your child's progress.

Take advantage of the extra information offered in these new report cards. Standards-based report cards give you more detailed information about how your child is doing in each subject. You can use this information to help your child. Choose a skill you're concerned about and ask the teacher how you can help your child with it at home. You can also ask the teacher what he or she can do to help your child at school. Let your child's teacher and principal know what you think of the new report card. Because report cards are designed to communicate with parents, they need to be easy to understand and helpful to parents. If you have any suggestions or concerns about your school's report card, share them with the teacher and principal.