

Standards-based grading promotes learning and accountability

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During the 2011–2012 school year, I implemented a standards-based grading (SBG) pilot in my Middle Years Programme (MYP) geometry classes. The intent of the project was to provide all stakeholders with transparency into the grading process and to make awarded grades meaningful. I planned to accomplish this by first developing standards extracted from the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and then directly linking all graded assessments to them.

I had hoped once I briefed my students on the new grading policy they would embrace it and adjust how they worked to earn grades. I wanted them to shift from chasing compliance to demonstrating mastery over course learning objectives. I was delighted by my students' mathematics progress over the first few months of the pilot, but I lacked understanding of exactly how SBG was helping learners perform. Consequently, I formulated a research question and committed to exploring the ways SBG positively affected learners and struggling students in particular. My conclusions were that SBG almost immediately benefits both struggling and high-performing students and promotes long-term learning.

THE ISSUE

My grading methods were complex, impossible to describe or defend, and failed to make direct connections between what learners demonstrated they knew and could do with their grades. I wanted to streamline the process, offer my students complete transparency, and produce grades that reflected and communicated mathematics learning-objective mastery. I wanted to replace my traditional methods with standards-based grading and SBG supportive policies.

I teach at South Iredell High School, an American public school in North Carolina. There are 1,200 students enrolled, with approximately 250 of them choosing the International Baccalaureate (IB) MYP and Diploma Programme (DP) course options. My principal and our district's director of international studies, who is responsible for alignment between the MYP and DP curricula throughout our district, were supportive of my classroom action research projects and they allowed me to draft policy and implement an SBG pilot in my classrooms.

I was curious about how my least-prepared and least-confident students would fare under my SBG policy. It was my experience that

those who were struggling usually relied on grades they receive by completing homework and participating during classroom activities to cushion low performance on summative assessments. I decided to design and implement a plan of action where I would track and study course grades during the SBG pilot so I could better understand how SBG affected students, particularly those who were struggling.

Even though I aimed to adjust grading practices, I relied on my programme's established assessment framework to guide me as I designed assessments for SBG. My assessment procedures had to be transparent and deliberate to produce activities that help students understand what they know, understand and can demonstrate throughout the learning process. I viewed effective assessment as part of the instructional process because it provides the timely information needed to adjust my teaching practices. I endeavoured to provide clear written requirements and the rubrics that would be used for scoring them at the time of the assignment. Accordingly, my SBG assessments had to:

- be integrated into a wide range of learning opportunities
- encourage student learning by providing useful feedback
- promote student self-responsibility

- affirm student success and progress
- inform and enhance lesson planning
- advance subject area literacy
- connect material to other disciplines meaningfully
- form positive attitudes towards student learning
- facilitate a deep understanding of the content
- focus on curriculum objectives
- support student inquiries using the Areas of Interaction
- align to the MYP Unit Question
- develop higher-order thinking skills
- increase communication, global awareness and international-mindedness
- provide opportunities for self-assessment and reflection
- utilize various Approaches to Learning.

Linking assessment to learner outcomes/standards/objectives is not really a new idea in education and has been part of MYP for a while. Rewriting criteria in “student friendly language”, linking them to what is being studied in the classroom and communicating assessment criteria to students are all “standard practice” in the MYP (or should be)! Focus on assessing student improvement (taking into consideration existing skills), differentiated assessment and using assessment to support student learning are all MYP practices.

(International Baccalaureate, 2008, p. 41)

However, it is important for practitioners to have evidence of this as good practice (that is, practice that promotes student learning) through action research, and to be presented with “tried and tested” ideas about how this can be implemented.

Research clearly indicates that the level of student autonomy relates directly to the level of student performance (McCombs, 2012). Also, I wanted to implement a grading and assessment policy that would promote student reflection and subsequent action so students would expand their reflective and balanced learner profile attributes. I am

most interested, therefore, in changes to my practices that improve student control over and accountability for their own learning.

Knowing that clearly communicated learning objectives lead to improved student performance, I formulated a research question and set out to study how using SBG affected serious students:

How do reforming teaching practices and assessment policies in support of the implementation of standards-based grading (SBG) affect serious students who persevere in their determination to learn in a programme of rigorous coursework?

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

All of my students chose to participate in the International Baccalaureate MYP course of study. In our district, students select the type of schooling that matches their needs from several options, which includes the IB. Consequently, the IB programme tends to attract students who are committed to and value education. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that means they are all strong mathematics students. Many of them relish the rigorous liberal arts components and struggle with the more technical science and maths requirements. Accordingly, I had a mixture of students; some had strong foundational knowledge, math confidence and previous successful math experiences, and others arrived with many mathematical content knowledge gaps and without faith in their own abilities. Students were assigned to one of the four classes based on the course elective choices, so there was no attempt to separate or group students by math competence. I had three classes of 20 students and a fourth class of 8 students.

My new SBG policy directed that standards be extracted from the North Carolina Standard Course of Study curriculum essentials, rewritten in student-friendly language and communicated to students. (See Appendix 1 for an overview of the SBG policy and Appendix 2 for the entire Assessment, Grading and Communication policy that serves as the framework for my implementation of SBG.) This enabled students to key in on the essentials of each lesson so they could really focus their attention on learning the course’s important elements and, in turn, better prepare for assessments (Reeve, 2005).

The policy also mandated that grades be derived entirely from summative assessments. The set assessments followed activities and assignments designed to aid comprehension and provide students with practice opportunities. The policy, therefore, generated favourable conditions for ‘spiralling’. Students would be faced with *old* ideas and

concepts again and again as the material was integrated into *new* topics. This gave students the incentive to stay focused and routinely review their skills.

Finally, the policy required each standard to be assessed multiple times so student trends could be determined and used for grading purposes. When a trending algorithm is used to assign grades in conjunction with SBG, students are evaluated on how they perform over time against a single standard. Students who exhibit growth in assessed skills will be awarded with a trend score that honours their improving achievement; trending effectively forgives poor initial performance as long as progress is ultimately made. Trending their scores prompted students to consider their study practices and reflect on the results of their efforts so they could improve their learning and their performances during follow-on assessments. This allowed struggling students to remain hopeful and fervent even when they took longer

norm referencing, when students all performed well, they were not rewarded for their displays of mastery. These practices did not result in grades that communicated what students knew and could do, so they were also excluded in my new SBG policy. ‘Curving’ grades encouraged students to fend for themselves and compete against their peers.

I also changed the way I assessed group work. Students practised their communication skills and they had to be open-minded to appreciate the perspectives of others as they collaborated on assignments and activities. In the past I would sometimes award grades to the entire group for a single submission. One consequence of this practice was that some students failed to contribute honourably and proportionally, knowing that others in their groups would have to carry them in order to protect their grades. Under my SBG policy, however, students were only graded on individual work. Summative group assess-

“Trending their scores prompted students to consider their study practices and reflect on the results of their efforts so they could improve their learning and their performances during follow-on assessments.”

to process and understand the material. It also offered forgiveness for students who uncharacteristically performed poorly. Alternatively, it allowed students who already demonstrated vast knowledge and skill to focus their attention elsewhere without having to complete what, for them, would have been *busy work*; students no longer had to work mindlessly in order to protect their high grades. This assisted students to prioritize their work and obligations as they strove to live balanced lives.

Previously, I included practice homework problems, documentation of lab procedures or results, and discovery class activities in student final grades. These practices favoured self-disciplined students who put consistent effort into class assignments but did not always reflect meaningful student learning. My SBG policy excluded grading these formative assignments but encouraged students to use them to develop deep understanding necessary for long-term success.

Additionally, I occasionally graded on a curve where students were compared against each other to determine what letter grade to award for their work. In these norm referencing situations, the highest scoring student was assured an A even if he objectively performed poorly and failed to adequately meet the learning objectives. Also, with

ments were broken into student components so each person received a grade reflective of what he or she individually demonstrated, regardless of how the entire group performed.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

First, I compiled individual record data of the three assessments over the 26 separate mathematics standards. The data was very compelling, showing that about one fifth of the students demonstrated early mastery. This supported the premise that students were previously being burdened by unnecessary busy work that added no learning value. Additionally, two thirds of the students demonstrated *proficient* college readiness upon completion of the course.

Second, I compiled student data from 68 individuals spanning all of the standards. Amazingly, 64 students—94% of the cohort—managed to achieve overall college readiness. (The other four students attained proficiency.) Perhaps even better, 26 of the 64 students who achieved college readiness (38% of the cohort) performed in the mastery and excellence levels, demonstrating their comprehensive understanding of the topics and concepts contained within the standards. Finally, I had no students who were merely competent and no students who were failing.

Students were considered to be *competent* if they minimally met the course objectives as established by the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. Furthermore, they are considered to be *college ready* if they reasonably and consistently demonstrate the ability to apply all of the required and enrichment topics listed in the associated pacing guide. While teachers and students were comfortable with exclusively using rubric scores to describe performance, parents requested assistance connecting criterion-related scores to the traditional letter grade system they already understood.

Prior to this SBG project, I had students who were unprepared, lacked confidence and bordered on failing mathematics throughout the entire year. This year, however, my struggling students were able to forge paths for themselves that allowed them to learn, demonstrate their knowledge and skills and earn satisfactory grades.

Students tracked their progress following each graded summative assessment. Each week, they considered the requirements of each standard and their level of achievement against these standards. They reflected and made decisions about how to study, how much time to spend focusing on mathematics, when to seek assistance, and when to change strategies. Struggling students were able to tailor their efforts to their individual needs so they could succeed. No student was at risk of failing mathematics.

My struggling students were not the only ones taking advantage of this transparent grading system; my highest performing students also benefited. I was surprised to find that 20% of the time, students had mastered the learning objectives before the unit of study was completed. In the past, there was no relief possible for students in this circumstance. Early mastery was not considered or acknowledged, so students were inconvenienced and bored; they were trapped in the one-size-fits-all practices of traditional grading. With SBG, however, students who clearly did not need additional instruction or practice opportunities were able to focus their attention elsewhere. Students relished this flexibility and cherished the privilege of making choices about their work. SBG had the unexpected advantage of providing an incentive for excellence as my students realized doing their best work would be rewarded.

With SBG, students knew each standard would be assessed multiple times, so students used poor grades to fuel their efforts. Under traditional grading, students had minimal motivation to look back, figure out what they did not know, and find ways to gain key skills. SBG, however, offers students a chance at redemption, so they voluntarily choose to continue to work on their knowledge gap areas. Students found themselves habitually pursuing excellence.

This policy change supported collaboration as each student was accountable for their own individual learning. High-performing students were much more accepting of group assignments and low-performing students were no longer unfairly awarded grades without making individual progress. SBG built learning community as students felt free to help one another without endangering their own grades. Students understood there were no quotas, so SBG indirectly encouraged caring and principled behaviours.

RELEVANCE

My adoption of SBG supplied students with the information and tools they needed to be successful all year long in mathematics. SBG encouraged students to balance the freedom offered with the responsibility to learn willingly as they partnered with their classmates and me, their teacher. Furthermore, students developed and strengthened their reflection and analysis skills as they thoughtfully evaluated their results against the requirements of the content standards.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

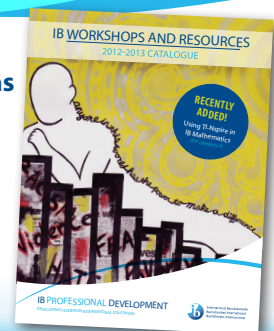
My analysis and conclusions are based on my perceptions of previous and present experiences. It would have been interesting and helpful to be able to characterize precisely how students behaved under traditional grading practices so a sharper contrast could have been

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extracted. This limitation could have been mitigated by collecting pre- and post-test data, but I did not think to do so at the time.

The limited scope of the pilot also needs to be considered. Students experienced SBG in only one of their eight classes. I think students will be much more adept at distilling actionable findings from their tracking data when they are working on it in every class. Additionally, SBG was new to students and they were uncomfortable for a while. Next year when every class utilizes SBG, students will already be familiar with SBG and only minimal adjustments will be necessary.

There are a few questions that could be addressed in a follow-on study or further action research.

- How does changing to SBG impact average (mid-ability) students?
- How does changing to SBG impact parents?
- How does changing to SBG impact teachers?

My original focus was on how changing to SBG would matter to struggling mathematics students. Coincidentally, I also saw a significant impact on my high-performing students. Students who are in neither category, however, were not considered separately. There were no observable effects on mid-ability students. This fact warrants additional investigation to determine the factors that result in stagnation so they can be properly addressed in hopes of raising mid-level student achievement as well.

I had a few exasperated parents who voiced concerns over the change to SBG. While I kept parents informed about the pilot and how students were responding to it, I never investigated if parents had to change the ways they helped or provided oversight to their children. Parents are important stakeholders in our IB programme, and while I believe SBG enables them to focus more on their student's learning and less on grades, I have no data to back up that conjecture.

Finally, implementing SBG mandated many changes from the teacher's perspective, and those were only incidentally documented. A more thorough exploration of what teacher adjustments are crucial for success and what serendipitous outcomes emerged as by-products would be appropriate, pertinent and engaging.

CONCLUSION

The use of standards-based grading (SBG) helped dedicated students learn, prompted them to be accountable for their own progress, relieved high-performing students from the necessity to complete

unproductive work, and made rigorous courses successful for struggling yet serious students. SBG prompted students to focus attention where they needed to in order to be individually successful. It relied on reflection and student autonomy so students were responsible for their growth and results. Each student was encouraged to tailor a course of study to meet their needs and circumstances.

While I currently teach Level 5 MYP (15 year old/10th grade) students, I believe SBG would be profitable within the Primary Years Programme (PYP) and Diploma Programme (DP) as well. I see no limitations for implementing SBG as long as students receive coaching to understand how *trend grading* works and how to respond to their results because SBG requires reflection and informed decision making.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Merrilynne Henderson received a bachelor of industrial engineering in Industrial Systems Engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. During her career as a process engineer she supported the aerospace and technology industries. She has 12 years' experience teaching and currently teaches DP mathematics in North Carolina.

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APPENDIX 1: WHY ARE WE MAKING THIS CHANGE? WHAT DO WE HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH?

Basic facts

Standards-based grading is a grading system where every grade is directly connected to a pre-established curriculum learning objective. Unit standards will communicate what concepts are key and foundational. This information will lower student anxiety, increase student confidence and allow students to connect their performance to their grades.

Teachers will reassess the same standard several times. Every assessment item/question will be obviously and directly connected to a pre-established unit objective, so students should know what to expect.

A student-led conference is a communication event where students inform their parents and guardians about their progress, learning difficulties, academic performance, acquisition of the learner profile traits, understanding of the approaches to learning, successes, concerns and subject-area literacy improvements.

Standards-based grading

(IB learner profile attribute: communicators & principled)

- Assists us to guide learners toward excellence.
- Makes grades about subject performances; gives grades meaning.
- Communicates what learners demonstrate they know and can do.
- Makes grading practices more transparent to students and parents.

- Facilitates student understanding of what subject concepts are key.
- Assists teachers with value-added lesson planning.
- Supports enduring learning as opposed to rote memory.

Student-led conferences

(IB learner profile attribute: reflective; approaches to learning; information literacy)

- Improve student accountability.
- Prompt everyone to communicate clearly and well.
- Operate as a reflection tool.
- Lead learners to investigate their performances.
- Mandate the formation of a data-based assessment of student achievement.
- Require the determination of good news and opportunities for improvement.
- Necessitate learners to figure out why they had success or poor performance.
- Entail developing action plans to repeat working strategies and change failing ones.
- Involve learner assessment of previously implemented action plans based on results.

APPENDIX 2: ASSESSMENT, GRADING AND COMMUNICATION POLICY

Standard-based grading practices

The Diploma Programme (DP) staff at South Iredell High School (SIHS) will adopt and exclusively utilize standards-based grading practices that are authentic to the learning experiences of the students.

Included: All types of summative assessments that directly evaluate curriculum standards may be used to measure student knowledge and skills; any time individual students demonstrate what they know and can do it may be included in student grades.

Not Included: Only factors directly connected to the curriculum will be included in student grades. Grading policies often try to grow character or control behaviour, but these factors do not communicate

what students have demonstrated they know and can do. Additionally, activities designed to facilitate learning where students are scored as a group, receive instructional coaching, or learn, practise and master new content may not be used to measure student knowledge and skills and will not be included in student grades.

Late work, missing work, disruptive behaviour and academic dishonesty cannot be penalized by decreasing student grades. DP staff will devise other methods to deal with these issues.

Formative assignments (most class work and homework) exist to grow students toward success, but they may not be used to measure student knowledge and skills. Although formative assignments will not be included in student grades, they are important and must still be assigned, as students generally need skill application experiences to learn and master new material. DP staff will devise other ways to motivate students to put in the time and effort required to be successful.

Group projects and activities where a single group score is awarded to the entire group may not be used to measure student knowledge and skills and will not be included in student grades. Summative group assignments where students collaborate and demonstrate what they have learned can be beneficial. DP staff will devise group grading strategies that consider each student contributor separately.

Extra credit may still be offered and accepted only for the sake of enrichment. It can no longer be rewarded by increasing student grades. Students who choose to promote their classroom communities and participate in enrichment activities will have to do so for the sake of unity and their interest in learning alone.

Standards: Standards for each course, such as *I can* statements, will be established at intervals developed by the teachers of that course. For example, teachers familiar with the MYP Unit Planner can align their unit standards to coincide with the MYP Unit Planner Stage Two Backward Planning listings of *un-packed* and student-friendly course curriculum skills. Otherwise, DP teachers will set unit standards that coincide with course outlines. Four to six separate lists of standards for each year of course content will be sufficient.

DP staff will group unit objectives together to form about ten standards that are valued equally. Every summative assessment will consist of tasks that evaluate those specified standards. Assessments can evaluate multiple standards as long as distinct tasks are linked to single standards. DP staff members may divide questions into multiple parts where necessary to accommodate this requirement.

Rubric correlation: Evaluation tasks will earn points based on established markschemes so that a rubric score can be determined.

Students may be awarded scores of non-scorable (NS) under several circumstances. When students are absent and miss scored assignments, the students will receive scores of NS and will have the opportunity to make up the work upon their return. When student submissions have not met the submission requirements (because they are illegible, without assigned headings, printed with only interim cartridge ink, presented in an incorrect format due to margins/size/font/etc., or anything else the teacher determined and communicated in advance), they will receive scores of NS. If student portfolios are disorganized or incomplete so that it inhibits or prevents moderation, this can result in scores of NS. In similar fashion, assessment tracking charts that are incorrectly or incompletely filled out so that they hinder grade entries into NCWise may result in students receiving scores of NS. Additionally, when students submit fraudulent work due to academic dishonesty, the work will be rejected and the students will receive a score of NS. Finally, when DP teachers evaluate student submissions of nonsense due to a gross lack of effort or the failure to demonstrate even rudimentary skills, they will receive scores of NS.

In NCWise, an NS score is recorded as a 60. This gives students ample incentive to make up work that was missed or rejected and learn material that will be assessed again. (Students are responsible for finding out what they missed and making arrangements to make up the graded assignments when they are absent from class.)

In recognition that DP students are sacrificing a great deal to participate in the rigorous programme and they could more comfortably earn high grades with less adjustment to their learning styles in a traditional setting, the lowest grade awarded to avid DP students will be a C-. Nonsense as described above, however, results in failing marks of NS and 60. The C- bottom floor for avid DP students is justified by the removal of the grade inflation that comes from including formative and extra credit work in the grading process.

There are no quotas for As, Bs, Cs, or Fs because there is no need to fit grades to any distribution. If every student demonstrates mastery by meeting the objectives framed by the standards and earning the top rubric score of seven, they all should and will receive As. We intend to use this policy to instil in our students that they are not competing against each other for grades, so they are free to collaborate and support each other as they build and maintain a strong and rich community of learners. Additionally, with standards-based grading there

is no *curving* of grades, so even the top scoring students won't receive As if they don't meet the objectives and earn sevens.

Significance of trends: Each standard will be assessed multiple times. If rubric scores for an individual standard are flat or periodic, they will be averaged. Students who exhibit growth in assessed skills by earning increasing rubric scores for individual standards will be awarded with a trend score, which reflects and honours their improving achievement. Students who exhibit declining skills by earning decreasing rubric scores for individual standards will receive a trend score that reflects their initial understanding. These trend score ideals do not invalidate or corrupt the superb trend scores received by students who operate at the excellence level uniformly.

When an individual student has earned the same rubric score twice, that establishes a bottom floor trend score. This promotes balance in DP student lives and provides motivation to manage their time and dedicate themselves to learning instead of merely going through motions to safeguard grades.

There are several main differences between grading by trends and grading by averages. Trend grading is more forgiving to students who have an outlier poor grade. Trend grading is also beneficial for students who take longer to process and understand the material, but eventually meet all the learning objectives. Additionally, under trend grading, once students demonstrate their knowledge and abilities, they are relieved from the mandate to continue to give a mastered skill time and attention.

Tracking student performance against standards: Students will track their performance to standards and their resulting scores on a seven-point scale in every DP course they take. Tracking sheets will have data columns for every occurrence when a standard is evaluated and students will update the pertinent information based on their performances. Students will additionally use these sheets to assist with data collection for student-led conferences and as tools for reflection to improve their learning.

NCWise: DP staff will have an NCWise grading column for every standard evaluated within a grading period. Every time a standard is reassessed and students update their tracking sheets, DP staff will refer to the published trend analysis output table to determine the appropriate trend score. Trend scores communicate student understanding and correlate to grades.

Only the current trend score will be entered into the corresponding

NCWise grading column. New NCWise percentages for individual standards *replace* existing percentages. DP staff will use student tracking sheets to streamline NCWise data entry.

Communication: DP staff will use individual student tracking sheets to understand and recognize student successes and areas for improvement. Students who have trouble with self-evaluation may need initial assistance as they learn how to assign meaning to their information. Teachers will provide oversight to students as they prepare for student-led conferences. Teachers will lead and advise students as they consider what is important and what to address. One of the main reasons to adopt standards-based grading is to better guide learners toward excellence. Therefore, it is important that students grow in their abilities to unpack data, to make sense of it, and to hold themselves accountable for their learning as well as for taking maximum advantage of their educational opportunities.

The transparency of grading practices will further prompt communication between teachers and students. Students will know exactly how their performance affects their grades and they will thoroughly understand why they earned the grades they receive every marking period. By removing uncertainty, arbitrariness and teacher flexibility in the grading process, grades are purified and more directly communicate what students have demonstrated they know and can do.

Lesson planning: Through the development of standards, DP staff communicates what concepts are key and foundational. This, in turn, assists teachers with lesson planning that emphasizes the big picture and unit main ideas. Furthermore, by tying assessments directly to established standards, student performance informs teachers where additional instruction and activities are necessary.

Student-led conferences (SLCs): DP students will preside over student-led conferences with their parents and guardians in their homes. These will take place twice each school year following the distribution of report cards. First during the eleventh week of school after everyone is acclimated, and again during the twenty-third week of school when there is still one third of the school year left.

DP students will review their tracking sheets and other relevant information to decide what to share. Additionally, students may request guidance and advice from their teachers. What factors are appropriate will be determined by individual students through thoughtful reflection.

Every student should strive to include some:

- good news items to celebrate
- along with some areas for improvement.

Students need to reflect on their:

- academic work performance
- growth in the IB Learner Profile traits
- ability to employ the IB Approaches to Learning
- progress in subject area literacy.

Teachers will devise reflection questions to aid students in being thorough. Class time will be used to consider each idea individually together. Teachers will introduce each topic and provide context so students understand what types of responses would be appropriate. Also, teachers make sure students are aware of the command terms so they are more likely to answer the asked questions. With the entire class working on this together and being paced by their teachers, students will progress through the material and think about each item meaningfully.

DP students will produce an outline of items to discuss with their parents and guardians in each subject area. They will be responsible to take home a portfolio of supportive and pertinent items of their choosing to share as evidence along with their constructed comments. Students will submit notes from their conferences and will develop action plans following their considerations of the entire conference process. Parents and guardians have the option of providing feedback by email if they so choose. If issues arise during the conferences that require teacher input, parents and guardians may email the teachers for clarification and further options.

At the conclusion of the first conference of the year, students will develop plans to guide their efforts in response to their celebrations, issues and deficiencies. Following the conclusion of subsequent conferences, these action plans will be evaluated for follow-through and results so they can be modified to include new ideas and update existing ones.

Importantly, student grades and the grading system are NOT covered during SLCs. Students and parents already have progress reports and report cards to prompt them to think collectively through those things. SLCs, in contrast, will be focused entirely on student learning and authentic reflection.

Administrators will make every attempt to support the process and turn attention away from grades. This vision casting of values beyond grades and transcripts needs to be continual, direct and unwavering so that all stakeholders will ascertain the importance of students owning their educational progress and developing richer learning skills.

Accountability: When students don't know why they received the grades they did or what the grades tell them about their progress, they have a diminished role in authoring their educations. Standards-based grading practices value and reinforce principles of personal responsibility by making the grading process transparent and giving grades meaning. This makes teachers more accountable to students for their grading practices and students more accountable to themselves for their achievements and grades.

Grades are no longer mysterious as students, teachers and parents are empowered to investigate exactly how their grades were calculated. Standards-based grading leaves no room for teachers to arrive at grades privately, perhaps in an indefensible manner.

Furthermore, standards-based grading practices encourage students to explore why they had success or performed poorly. Standards-based grading leaves no room for students to be ignorant of grading

processes, to excuse themselves from responsibility, or to blame others or circumstances outside of their control for their results.

The DP staff at SIHS desires programme excellence in every way possible. Students have an open invitation with every DP teacher to inquire politely and respectfully about their grades. If students feel their grades do not reflect their achievements, even after they have met with their teachers, they may widen the conversation to include their parents, the DP Programme Coordinator, their school counselor, and even the principal.