

Principal's Message-Special Edition

Parent-Teacher Conferences and Performance Based Grading (PBG)

With mid-terms and Parent-Teacher Conferences upon us, I thought this would be a good time to review how things are going with PBG implementation. The faculty has had numerous conversations about PBG and how they are working with it in their classes. The teacher PLC groups discuss this on a weekly basis, and the elective teachers discuss it in their district-wide teacher groups monthly. It also continues to be a topic of conversation amongst the junior high school principals. We know that we are making a philosophical shift in how grades are viewed and understood.

I feel confident that on the philosophical side of things, we can all generally agree that focusing on essential curricular standards and assessing student knowledge and understanding of those standards is a move in the right direction. This philosophical approach necessarily leads to the elimination of extra credit and bonus point opportunities as teacher and student effort should focus on the essential standards. It also leads to a shift in the understanding of homework. Homework should be targeted toward providing students appropriate practice that will help solidify learning of the essential standards. Homework now classifies as a learning activity and no longer impacts a student's grade; however, it continues to be an important piece in the process of learning.

Most of the questions I have heard from both teachers and parents have to do with the actual implementation of PBG. How assessments are assessed and how those assessments then generate PBG grades for students. The Gradebook does look vastly different and there are questions about how parents can look at the new Gradebook and make sense of what is going on with their student. These are items I would like to address prior to Conferences the next two nights. The remainder of this communication will be broken down into subheadings. The overall length of this piece will be a bit long, but by using subheadings you should be able to scan down and only read the pieces that are pertinent to you.

Level 3 and 4 Proficiency:

There is a difference between Level 3 and Level 4 proficiency. Students can earn 4s on assessments, and, in fact, Level 4 should be a goal for students. Level 3 proficiency means that a student knows/understands the essential standard(s) being assessed. Level 4 means they exceed Level 3 by being able to utilize or apply the knowledge they gained by achieving Level 3. All assessments should allow for a student earning a 4. I have encouraged teachers to utilize rubrics for assessments that clearly define each of the four proficiency levels.

One concern I have heard is that students feel they are being pushed only to become proficient (Level 3). I have discussed this with the faculty, and am reiterating it here, Level 4 is attainable and should be the goal for students. Levels of proficiency are steps along a path, though. If a student is struggling with a specific standard, their goal should be first to get to Level 3 so they have the knowledge of the standard. Once they have the knowledge, then they can re-set that goal and look at achieving a Level 4. PBG looks at learning as a process, and as we implement, we don't want to lose sight of the process and the building of knowledge that happens.

Assessments and Grades:

One of the big shifts as we implement PBG is students should become partners in their learning. They need to be empowered to be successful, and that means they need to know what they're learning, why they're learning it, and how their learning will be assessed. I am having ongoing conversations with the teachers about these elements and how we, in each classroom, can make things more transparent for students. PBG is not a "gottcha" system of grading. There shouldn't be pop quizzes. In many cases, teachers shouldn't be giving huge, arduous end of unit tests anymore either. Assessments should be more frequent, but shorter and more targeted.

In the PBG system we are using different terminology. For example, we are talking about assessments as opposed to tests or quizzes. The terminology is important because assessment is a broader term that has more flexibility for teachers and students. Teachers choose what will count as assessments in their classrooms, but those are decisions students must be aware of. If something isn't identified as an assessment prior to being done, it shouldn't be used as an assessment. A big topic of conversation with the faculty has been the Gradebook requirement that a standard must be assessed three times before it generates a grade for a student. This requirement is forcing teachers to rethink assessment because there isn't time to give students three traditional tests for each standard taught.

Teachers have autonomy to decide how to approach assessments. You may find when looking at your student's grades that a teacher assessed a standard one time and moved on. This may happen when there is a straight-forward standard that gets taught and everyone in the class is successful on it. Instead of belaboring the point and forcibly doing three assessments, the teacher can make the decision to move on to other standards that need more time. In Gradebook, you will be able to see that standard and assessment and know how your student did on proficiency of the standard, but that standard will not impact the overall grade for the class because it was only assessed one time. Conversely, a teacher may decide they want that standard to count on the grade, but they still may not want to force three assessments if it isn't necessary. In this case, a teacher may enter one assessment score three times and force Gradebook to generate a grade for the assessment that impacts the class grade. This process shouldn't happen on every assessment in a class, but it is possible on occasion.

For a grade to be generated, a standard must be assessed three times. Once it has been assessed three times, the three assessments are assigned weight based on a decaying average. The important thing to remember is that the most recent assessment will always carry the most weight. This fits into the model that learning is a process and students should know the material

much better by the third assessment than they did on the first assessment. Also remember that assessments can be redone. This fits the model in that even if the class has moved on to other standards and learning, a student can continue to work on a standard they feel they can get to know more thoroughly and re-assess to show the teacher they have improved their understanding. Each teacher should establish an assessment re-take protocol, so that may be something you want to find out from your student's teachers at Conferences.

7th and 8th Grade Mid-terms and Report Cards:

We will not be printing mid-term reports for 7th and 8th graders. We made this decision because with Gradebook's requirement that a standard be assessed three times before generating a grade, mid-terms would be somewhat misleading. Our teachers and students have been busy working and learning, but, in most classes, you will see that a number of standards have been assessed, but only a few have been assessed three times. Essentially, we are in the middle of the learning process, and generating a mid-term would be more misleading than helpful in determining what is happening in a given class. However, I absolutely encourage everyone to get into Gradebook and go through your student's schedule class by class and look at what they have been learning. One of the strengths of PBG is that you can see the exact standards your student is learning and how they are doing on each of those standards. Gradebook is color coded (red is low, yellow is they're getting closer to proficient, and green is they have it).

Because we are mid-way through the quarter, though, we are asking teachers to publish Citizenship grades. We definitely don't want to wait until the end of the quarter for you to find out your student is having trouble with citizenship in a class. As we are not printing mid-terms, Citizenship grades can be found in Gradebook.

The last big thing we want everyone to know is that the junior high school principals, after a discussion that started at the end of last school year and went throughout the summer, requested that 7th and 8th grade report cards not convert PBG grades to letter grades. We felt that this would take the focus off the learning and not be conducive to the PBG system. Focusing on the PBG scores will be a better indicator of the learning taking place in each class. However, we acknowledge that some of our 7th and 8th graders are in classes that earn high school credit. Those classes will still see their PBG grade converted to a traditional letter grade on the report card. This will be true for foreign language classes and 8th grade students in Secondary Math 1 Honors.

9th Grade Mid-terms and Report Cards:

We will be publishing mid-term reports for 9th graders. As you may recall, 9th grade teachers had the option of implementing PBG this year or staying with the traditional grading system. All reports, mid-terms and report cards, will convert PBG grades into traditional letter grades as all classes count for high school credit. We will make sure the conversion table for PBG to traditional grade is printed on the reports. It will be important for you to know which of your student's teachers are using PBG and which are not as how the classes are run is impacted by the grading method.

The other word of caution I would give for 9th grade parents is that if your student is in a PBG class, the grade reflected on the mid-terms probably isn't indicative of the work being done in the class. The PBG Gradebook requires that three assessments be entered on a standard before a grade will be generated. Therefore, a mid-term grade may only be reflective of a couple of standards that have had three assessments while there may be others that have only had one or two assessments. PBG classrooms really focus on the process of learning, and this mid-term point is a little early in the process. It would be beneficial for you to take some time with your student and get into PBG Gradebook and go through their PBG classes and see what standards are being worked on and which ones have had three assessments, and which have had fewer.

Learning Activities:

Teachers should be tracking completion of learning activities. As mentioned earlier, these cannot impact a student's grade, but it is important to make sure work is being done. In talking to the faculty, I have found that the method being used for learning activity completion tracking varies from teacher to teacher. I recommend talking to each of your student's teachers to find out if they are tracking completion, how they are tracking it, and where they are tracking it. It would make sense that if teachers are tracking completion, it should be done in a way that parents can also see. In many cases, teachers will require completion of learning activities as a prerequisite to being able to redo an assessment, so this is a key piece in the learning process.

General:

If you have general questions about PBG including the philosophy or what Gradebook looks like, the district has posted material that covers these. I recommend going here: <https://www.graniteschools.org/grading/resources/>. This is the district's PBG Resource page. The third video down, "Parent and Student Discussing PBG Grades" can help you navigate PBG Gradebook.

Sincerely,

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