

Standards Based Grading: Students' Perspective

Dunbar Student Voice Team, December 2016

Standards Based Grading was partially implemented this year at Dunbar. Many students and parents were concerned about the grading changes, and there have been instances of misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and miscommunication that have kept this initiative from being successful. We, members of the Dunbar Student Voice team, would like to offer our services as consultants in the ongoing policy making decisions about this issue at our school. As major stakeholders, we feel that a student perspective on the committee is not only beneficial, but necessary, in order to make this transition as smooth and transparent as possible.

On Nov. 29, several members of the student voice team attended the meeting with Dr. Tom Guskey. We were encouraged by his presentation, and felt that we understand the core reasons why Dunbar is moving toward Standards Based Grading. In fact, with more information, we are now convinced that this is going to be a positive move for all students. However, there were issues that arose from the meeting. First, when Dr. Guskey asked the faculty to choose their primary purpose for grading (of the six presented), there was a clear division between what individual teachers think, and what parents think, about what should be the guiding reason for grading. We took this seriously, and began to think about what we think the primary purpose for grading should be. After reading five of Dr. Guskey's books, reviewing the video of the presentation, interviewing several teachers and students, and looking at Dunbar's current policy, we would like to share our findings.

The Purpose for Grading

Of the six purposes for grading presented during the presentation, we concluded that No. 3 was the most important and beneficial. It states the purpose for grading as "To select, identify, or group individuals for certain educational paths or programs." We agree with this because grades should be used primarily to drive instruction by providing teachers with the data they need to move forward in the classroom. Every worksheet, homework assignment, and project needs to have specific feedback to students on what specifically needs to be addressed to further academic progress. According to Dr. Guskey, grades should be the primary source of evidence used to group students so that they can learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses, and so the teacher knows where to focus.

The Grading Scale

The scale is 1 to 4, but it's still a grading system that still involves percentages. One of Dr. Guskey's main issues with percentages is that they're easily connected to opinions rather than rubrics. We agree. On the current rubric, a score of three is deemed "meeting expectations" and this is translated as a 92%. There is a disconnect here. If a student is *meeting* the expectations, shouldn't this be considered a 100%?

A Clear Understanding of SBG

When asked if they had a clear understanding of SBG, and if they felt completely comfortable and prepared to implement it, only 1 out of 7 teachers said yes. When asked to give their best, brief definition of SBG, many teachers could not fully explain what it meant, and none of the definitions matched. If teachers are not consistently aware of what SBG means, then how can we be?

We, the students, are on the front lines, moving from classroom to classroom--some implementing and some not--and we are the ones who are living with the consequences of this new policy. We feel that, as the committee moves forward in its work, that students should be involved and consulted. We pledge to do the extra research and work necessary to be as informed as possible, and to work to bridge understanding between teachers and students. We, as primary stakeholders, are ready to serve with you to make the transition to Standards Based Grading as successful as possible.

Thank you for your time,

Brittana Turner, Joseph Jett, Abby Wheatley and Silvano Trinidad
Representatives of the Dunbar Student Voice Team