

How does this practice prepare students for the ‘real world’? There are no retakes in the ‘real world’.

It’s only sensible to expect different things of students during the learning process than we expect of them when it’s time to demonstrate final proficiency. Applying expectations for a high level of competency to students who are in the process of coming to know content is counterproductive, even harmful.

The teacher who claims to be preparing students for the working world by disallowing all redos forgets that adult professionals actually flourish through redos, retakes, and do-overs. Surgeons practice on cadavers before doing surgeries on live patients. Architects redesign building plans until they meet all the specifications listed. Pilots rehearse landings and take-offs hundreds of times in simulators and in solo flights before flying with real passengers. Lawyers practice debate and analysis of arguments before litigating real cases. Teachers become much more competent and effective by teaching the same content multiple times, reflecting on what worked and what didn’t work each time.

LSAT. MCAT. Praxis. SAT. Bar exam. CPA exam. Driver’s licensure. Pilot’s licensure. Auto mechanic certification exam. Every one of these assessments reflects the adult-level, working-world responsibilities our students will one day face. Many of them are high stakes: People’s lives depend on these tests’ validity as accurate measures of individual competence. All of them can be redone over and over for full credit.

Grades and points have been used for a long time. Why fix it if it isn’t broken?

There is little evidence to support traditional grading practices. In fact, we have data that illustrate our traditional grading practices are broken.

How many school districts in Iowa are utilizing this system of grading?

Though the Dept. of Education doesn’t keep records of this, more than 55 districts across the state have started exploring this work.



What is the timeline for SRG implementation?

- 2012-13** → District-wide task force study
- 2013-14** → Middle school partial implementation (5 teacher leaders from every MS)
- 2014-15** → Full MS implementation; select 9th grade courses
- 2015-beyond** → SRG system will follow students

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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Education plays a big role in helping every student answer the question: what do you want to be when you grow up?

But how can our schools and teachers do a better job of making sure students gain the skills and abilities to realize their goals and dreams?

One way is to improve how we monitor and report the progress students make in the classroom.

A lot has changed in education over the past century. But one thing, unfortunately, has not: the As, Bs, Cs, Ds or Fs used on report cards.

Des Moines Public Schools is making the switch to a new and improved grading system – called Standards-Referenced Grading – to help students, teachers and parents know whether work in the classroom is heading in the right direction and pointing toward the goals and dreams of our students.

What is Standards-Referenced Grading (SRG)?

In education, the term standards-referenced refers to instructional approaches that are aligned to learning standards — i.e., written descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do at a specific stage of their education. In other words, *standards-referenced* refers to the use of learning standards to guide what gets taught and assessed in schools.

What are the advantages of SRG?

Improved communication and additional feedback for parents, students and teachers - parents and students will see areas of academic strength and weaknesses in the grade book rather than seeing a test score or homework assignment and wondering what the next steps might be. Teachers will know which standards they need to re-teach. Students will know which standards for which they need additional learning opportunities and/or practice.

What are the DMPS Guiding Practices?

A 25-person task force, comprised of teachers, curriculum coordinators, administrators, and specialists researched SRG practices in place across the country and developed 6 guiding practices to be implemented district-wide to serve as a common framework:

1. A consistent 4-point interval 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 by standard/learning topic and reported as a scale score. Cross topic scale scores will be converted to a letter grade for the course.
5. Students will have multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency.
6. Accommodations and modifications will be provided to students with special needs.

How is the role of assessment different in this system?

In a traditional grading system, student assessments were often given for the purpose of entering a score in the grade book. Assessments in an SRG system are given for the purpose of identifying future learning opportunities for students.

Are certain standards weighted in the grade book?

No, all standards have equal weighting.

How will feedback be given beyond a score in the grade book?

Because teachers and students operate from common scales that define what each level 1-4 means, the feedback can be targeted. Example: “You received a score of 2 because you have sufficiently stated your claim. In order to get a 3, you will need to support your claim with text evidence.”

How do scores translate to a grade?

Teachers collect a body of evidence for each learning topic. At semester, teachers will examine the evidence and determine a final topic score for each topic. Final topic scores are then averaged and converted to a grade using the following conversion scale:

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

How will this system impact GPAs?

Students will be given a score 1-4 for each reporting period to demonstrate the learning is still “In Progress”. All scores will be converted to a grade at the end of each semester. Student GPAs will be figured the same way they always have and college transcripts will look the same.

How do colleges feel about SRG?

Colleges want grade point averages to be an accurate reflection of student learning and understanding. Grades should correlate to a student’s performance on high stakes assessments, such as Iowa Assessments or ACT.

Is there a problem transferring SRG to college for acceptance?

No – students will still receive grades and a GPA.

How does SRG help students be prepared for college?

Identifying one’s strengths and weaknesses as a learner, being self-motivated to meet course objectives, developing strong study habits, and mastering course standards are all aspects of this system that will help students in college.

Won’t we have grade inflation with such a large A range?

We anticipate the opposite. Getting an A will require a student to demonstrate grade level mastery on *every single topic* for a course. Because we no longer give extra points for non-academic tasks, a student will need to demonstrate improved learning to raise a grade.

Shouldn’t attendance, effort and completion of homework be rewarded?

Yes, those things are important. However, they should not be graded. These are behaviors, not learning targets. Students should be held accountable for these things and their progress is reported on the DMPS Citizenship and Employability Skills Rubric.

Why do we not include homework in the body of evidence?

We only want to include evidence that we know was completed independently by the student.