

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ELEMENTARY REPORT CARD CHANGES FOR 2005-2006

1. What are the changes to the elementary report cards for this school year?

Report cards for grades K-5 will use a system of Exceeds, Meets or Needs (EMN) to indicate levels of student progress. For fourth and fifth grade students in particular, this is a change from using the percentage-based letter grading system (A, B, C, etc.) that has been used in previous years. While grades K-3 have used a similar process in the past, the new report cards will more accurately reflect the standards and benchmarks identified by the Davenport Community Schools as necessary for grade-level success.

2. What are standards and benchmarks?

Standards and benchmarks identify the essential knowledge and skills that should be taught and learned in school. They define what students should know and be able to do at each grade level.

Concepts and skills based on the standards are woven through the grades to provide students with an opportunity to develop increasing levels of understanding over time. Standards and benchmarks are shared across our school district and provide the structure for our local curriculum.

3. Why make this change now?

At the heart of this change is the belief by professional educators that reporting proficiency on standards and benchmarks give the most meaningful “picture” of student learning. It compares the student’s performance against a set of standards. It does not compare the student’s performance against the performance of other students. The student is rated on a continuum of performance as it relates to the standards. It is not a record of student’s effort; this will be reported in the Skills for Life section of the report card.

3. What do Exceeds, Meets and Needs really mean?

The new standards-based system reports how students are progressing toward meeting grade level standards and benchmarks. A lack of proficiency on any standard or benchmark does not signal failure. It means the student needs to continue developing in that area. The following performance levels are used by elementary teachers to report student achievement:

- E Exceeds grade level expectations
- M Meets grade level expectations
- N Does not meet grade level expectations
- X Not applicable at this time

4. Why use Exceeds, Meets and Needs rather than the letter grade system?

Standards-based reporting focuses instruction on student-centered learning and thus increases student achievement.

Areas where students are below expectancy become evident which creates drive for different instruction, for outside tutoring, and for greater parent involvement in addressing areas of student need.

The current system focuses on the product rather than the process. The “Exceeds, Meets, Needs” system places the focus on the expectations themselves and the process involved in generating the work or product. At the elementary level, classroom instruction is being geared to build the skills or processes necessary to learn higher level concepts. The “Exceeds, Meets, Needs” system allows teachers to assess and determine how well students are meeting expectations– it’s more diagnostic and more effective in focusing on student learning.

5. Why is a focus on “process learning” so important?

Let’s use the example of learning how to ride a bike. You typically don’t teach the hardest skill (balance – the actual independent riding of a bike) first or separate from other skills. You teach how to get on the bike, how to pedal, how to stop or use the brakes, how to steer, where to ride, how to put on a helmet, etc. All those skills are important to master before the actual skill of balance and truly riding the bike can be effectively learned.

Process learning focuses on the skills needed to learn the more challenging concept. Before students learn how to read (the more challenging concept), they learn how to recognize letters and then words, learn patterns, learn that writing moves left to right in our culture, and so on. The more effectively you master these basic skills, the more effective you’ll be in learning to read.

6. How does “Exceeds, Meets, Needs” equate with letter grades?

Simple answer is that it doesn’t. The two systems are not based on the same criteria and are not interchangeable.

7. Does the new system affect grades on daily work or daily assignments?

There will not be traditional letter grades or percentages to assess proficiency in meeting standards and benchmarks. Daily assignments will be assessed with rubrics and rating scales developed by teachers, as well as the class together.

8. Will there still be academic achievement honors at the end of the school year?

We understand that students need and want motivation to do their best. We will work with our schools to find meaningful ways to celebrate achievement for all students. Our goal is to make sure that students receive the on-going feedback and support they need to be successful.

9. How will progress be reported for exceptional education students?

Progress by exceptional education students will be reported on grade level standards and benchmarks. Again, a lack of proficiency on any standard or benchmark does not signal failure—but that the student needs to continue developing in that area.

It will be especially important for teachers to define individual student progress through the teacher’s comments section of the report card. Conferences and ongoing one-on-one communication among teachers, students, and parents will be necessary to accurately report individual student progress and to help all students achieve success.

10. How will this change be communicated to parents and guardians?

“Frequently Asked Questions” will be posted on the Davenport Community Schools website, and hard copies will be available in all buildings.

Report cards will be available for display in our buildings so that both parents and students can see how the system will look.

Grade level outlines of standards and benchmarks will be available as handouts in all buildings.

Sample newsletters and informational letters will be available for buildings to adapt and send to parents/guardians.

Talking points will be provided to teachers to use when discussing the new system with students and parents.

A newly designed report card envelope will introduce standard-based reporting.

Information will be provided at conferences.

The autodialed system will inform parents of the new reporting system and direct them to additional sources of information.