

MADISON METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT (MMSD)
MIDDLE SCHOOL STANDARDS-BASED REPORT CARD INITIATIVE
SURVEY RESPONSES AND COMMENT ANALYSIS

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Introduction

This analysis provides an overview of patterns and trends from parent, student, and teacher comments on the Middle School Report Card Survey. The first section describes parents' ideas and preferences in regard to the 2008-09 standards-based reporting. The second section describes students' opinions and experiences with the new report card. The third section explores teachers' comments on the initiative. Finally, a brief cross-case analysis describes areas of consensus and disagreement among parents, students, and teachers.

Method

Prior to analysis, Spanish language comments were translated to English. After identifying information was removed from the documents, all comments were converted from Excel to Word documents and uploaded into Nvivo coding software. The comments were coded as parent, student, and teacher cases. I used free node coding to organize responses by emerging themes. I read and re-read the comments within each node multiple times, looking for common themes and nuances within the responses.

For reporting, themes were organized under specific survey question-guided headings to provide context and explanation for the quantitative survey results. All but the very lowest frequency (less than 5) responses are discussed at least briefly in the report. At times additional related themes surfaced and these are integrated into the report. Dominant themes (topics discussed most frequently) for each group were highlighted with a special symbol. Themes that were discussed by all three groups or two of the three groups were re-read and developed for the final analysis. In the report, very light editing (mainly spelling correction) was applied to some of the quotations for readability.

Results

Group Responses: Parent, Student, and Teacher

Parents' Comments on the New Report Card

Themes Complementing Survey Questions

This section details themes that relate to the six main parent survey questions. The questions are: 1) The definitions of the 4-3-2-1 are useful, 2) The standards-based report card helps me understand more specifically what my student knows and can do, 3) On the report card, teachers provide clear and meaningful comments about my student's progress, 4) The separation of the academic standards from the learning skills provides me with more detailed information to help my student become a better learner, 5) Scores of 4-3-2-1 are sufficient to provide clear and helpful information about my student's learning, and 6) I understand that the standards on the report card are connected to the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards as defined by the Department of Public Instruction.

It should be noted that there was one area receiving quite a large concentration of attention from parents. That area was teacher comments. It is highlighted with asterisks (**) below, indicating that it was a key parent concern.

The middle school my student attends is.....

Black Hawk	50	Black Hawk/Sennett	1
Cherokee	135	Hamilton, Sherman	1
Hamilton	286	Hamilton, Wright	1
Jefferson	163	Jefferson, Toki	1
O'Keeffe	131	Sennett, Neon	1
Sennett	179	Sherman, Spring Harbor	1
Sherman	83	blank	15
Spring Harbor	95	total	1475
Toki	148		
Whitehorse	130		
Wright	54		

Grade

6	7	8	6, 7	6,8	7,8	6,7,8	blank	Total
416	507	452	14	44	26	4	12	1475

The definitions of a 4-3-2-1 are clear and useful.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Blank	Grand Total
Total	279	354	658	152	32	1475
	19%	24%	45%	10%	2%	
	43%		55%		2%	

#1: Definitions of knowledge attainment levels. Forty-four percent (43% due to a data error corrected as of 8/3/09) of parents said that the 1-4 grading system was not clear and useful. Parents indicated that it is very difficult to understand what exactly the 1-4 system represents. They wanted more clarity in terms of translation between numbers and attainment.

The standards are written in teacher lingo. The basic parent doesn't have the deep understanding of the standards and only teachers use them to guide instruction. Plus not all standards for each area are listed so you only get a small picture of what is being looked at. (parent comment)

Rubrics to explain assessment of standards are wordy and gray- subjective - "most," "good," "some" - what is that? (parent comment)

While some parents appreciated more information about their children, most preferred a simpler approach:

It is hard to navigate, difficult to discern what is relevant to my child and what is "general information", and does not give a clear, concise, picture of how my child is doing. It is long and abstruse. (parent comment)

In fact, most parents (and particularly 7th and 8th grade parents who had experience with the A-F system) indicated that they focused on what they understood best—letter grades and grade point averages—for information.

Many saw the definitions of 1-2-3-4 as a measure to curb grade inflation by effectively capping the number of 4's received (and thus curtailing the number of honor roll students). Many also saw the 1-4 scale as a way to mask student failure, make low-performing students feel better, and create a larger pool of average '3' and '2' students. Ultimately parents commenting on the survey tied this understanding to decreased motivation for their children who they perceived as now being labeled 'average'.

The standards based grading is just a way to disguise differences between students (close the achievement gap). It is a DISINCENTIVE for students and appears to have been significantly detrimental for my child's performance. The difference between a "high 3" and a "low 3" is vast -- why work when it does not change your grade? (parent comment)

Teachers within schools and between schools, parents reported, sometimes used different percentage-based grading scales bound to each of the number categories to assign numbers to assignments and the report card. Parents gave this as a reason for reverting back to a letter grade system on a universal 90-100%=A scale.

Particularly problematic for many parents commenting was the definition for a '4'. This definition wavered between teachers. Some never gave 4's and some gave them more liberally. Some teachers, parents complained, gave 4's for mindless extra credit work or large quantities of

low quality work, while others did not offer opportunities for going above and beyond to earn a '4' at all. Parents wondered at times if it was or was not possible for a student working very well at grade level to receive a '4' or if this was only possible for students inherently very advanced beyond the grade level.

My daughter is an outstanding student, with extremely high scores on the WKCE, and yet she is now receiving grades of B in her academic classes. She and I are both confused as to how to "work" this new system so that it accurately reflects her ability. I don't believe students are being clearly told what it takes to get a "4." There are not enough opportunities to get a "4" and it seems very subjective. It's very de-motivating for a super-achieving student to get "B's" on a report card. This system needs to be fixed. (parent comment)

I originally liked the idea that the report cards were shifting to reflect actual knowledge that our children have, not just "A" for effort, but my daughter can know all the content and be given a 3 and not make honor roll. In order to make honor roll, she has to do extra work and some of it is not very critical. Some is just busywork. And let's be honest, how can you demonstrate in-depth knowledge in specials? (parent comment)

Many families of high-achieving 7th and 8th graders noted a drop in grade point average with the standards-based system. Many former honor students were not making honor roll and this was upsetting to the parents who saw the new trend as a block to students' future success.

4-3-2-1 is a narrower scale than ABCDF and does not allow for as much discrimination. Teachers seem confused by it and "scores" are very inconsistent. Our son (previously a straight A student) has been very discouraged because the new system, while appearing better in that it adheres to "standards", makes no room for effort/relative improvement, etc., and a numerical score (e.g., 93) is counted as a 3 now, something he is crestfallen about. We HATE the new system! (parent comment)

Teachers seem reluctant to give "4". I am not sure how my daughter could have been an A student last year and now is a "3" when she is working as hard and her work seems to be of quality. When you are looking for scholarships you need a 3.5 or better. (parent comment)

Various groups such as parents of ELL learners, parents of children with IEP's, and parents of students in advanced classes all had problems with definitions of 1-2-3-4 and how they worked in their children's cases. As three voices from these groups explained:

The new report cards are confusing. Why does a student need to go above and beyond to get a 4? This is hard for ESL students. (ELL parent comment)

The teachers don't seem to have discretion about the letter grading portion - for example, if my daughter, who has math in her IEP, works really hard at math but doesn't meet the standards for getting a 2, she will wind up with a D grade. This doesn't make sense, since

she has a differentiated curriculum in math (not a separate curriculum). (parent of child with IEP comment)

Now expectations are less clear and we consider this a year without grades. For example, he took algebra in 6th grade and now is in trig which means he gets all 4's because the grade is relative to where he should be in 8th grade, but that tells us NOTHING about how he is performing in the class itself. (parent of child in accelerated math comment)

The standards-based report card helps me understand more specifically what my student knows and can do.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	(blank)	Grand Total
Total	291	464	601	97	22	1475
	20%	31%	41%	7%	1%	
	51%		48%		1%	

#2: Understanding what my child knows and can do through the standards-based report card.

Rarely parents wrote in support of standards-based grading philosophies, indicating that it helped the children themselves focus on knowledge acquisition and pushed them toward deeper understandings of course material. Half of the parents felt the report card is not helpful in understanding their children's attainment better.

Standards-based grading has helped our children pay attention to what is truly, full comprehension of material and what going above and beyond looks like. They respond to this in a constructive way. (parent comment)

Parents sometimes expressed an overall level of frustration with the standards-based philosophy, citing that it does not intricately show students' unique strengths and weaknesses and that students do not appear to shine unless they are significantly advanced beyond grade level expectations.

Teacher comments and work graded and returned to the student are the best way to understand the level of achievement. The "new" report cards do not truly reflect work done by students as parents have no way of knowing how each part of the standard is weighted to give the overall summation. This parent truly wonders if standards and real education correlate - my guess - no! ... This system allows each child to only be average unless they are well above their classmates in each category. Telling a child they are average and at appropriate grade level does nothing to excite or inspire learning - just another day at the education factory! (parent comment)

Some parents asked for more detailed information on the grading of ongoing assignments to allow them to understand more precisely where problems occurred within specific assignments and tests across the quarter so they might help to remediate difficulties. To them, the standards-based system gave them an incomplete picture of what their children knew and could do. They tended to see knowing and doing in terms of work completion, correctness, and quality of response and workmanship on the full span of classroom work assigned each quarter.

It would be helpful for students and parents to have a better understanding of how the individual assignments and test grades they receive as each quarter progresses figure into the final progress assessment. It's hard to assess what the numerical score on an individual assignment or quiz "means" in terms of a skill that is strong or lacking. (parent comment)

Many parents showed concern that homework does not matter in standards-based grading. Many stated that their children were less motivated to do homework because they were not assessed on it. In some cases, parents cited that their children's motivation for learning and grades dropped because of this lack of attention to homework. The connection of decreased motivation was sometimes also tied to a shift in the way once-'A' students were coming to see themselves as students within a standards-based system. These parents complained that their children's grades were now closer to other students' they knew of who were perceived of as inherently not strong students by comparison.

My daughter stopped doing math homework this year because homework "doesn't count" under the new standards, she dropped from As to Cs in math as a result, and the teacher never contacted us to tell us homework wasn't being done. I hate the new report card system, as does my daughter. She just sort of gave up because under the new system her A's turn into B's, even in classes where she's doing the same work as in the past. This system may make those on the very bottom look better but it's ridiculous to pull down the grades of those who were doing well in school every year up to this point. Please do not bring this system up to the high school level!!! (parent comment)

On the report card, teachers provide clear and meaningful comments about my student's progress.

	None	Few	Most	All	(blank)	Grand Total
Total	90	753	496	118	18	1475
	6%	51%	34%	8%	1%	
	57%		42%		1%	

****#3: Teacher feedback and comments.** A large number of parents wished for more teacher comments on the report card. Fifty-eight percent (57% due to data error corrected as of 8/3/09) indicated that they were dissatisfied. Parents wanted comments that spoke to their students' personal strengths and weaknesses. They specified that comments simply describing course content and "canned" generic comments were not helpful. Several parents commented that teachers provided no comments at all. These thoughts were representative:

While the comments on the report cards indicate what my student is being assessed on, there is NO information about what is being done well and where improvement is needed. No strengths and weaknesses highlighted, nothing to help build a plan and

objectives for the coming grading period. I believe evaluating a student to academic standards is a sensible goal but do not feel this program is doing it effectively. There simply is not enough information on the student's performance. (parent comment)

I want the teacher to write comments about what is missing in my child's learning and then write a direct, clear recommendation delineating what we can do to help her complete her knowledge in a specific area (this is what the teacher knows how to do based on his/her education and experience and what I am not trained to do for my child). These recommendations would bring value to the report card. (parent comment)

Parents commenting spoke highly of Infinite Campus as a tool for understanding where their children were at with assignments. Most were presently dissatisfied with the lack of Infinite Campus use. They connected the change to standards-based assessment to the downturn in Infinite Campus use:

[Standards-based report card implementation] has caused the school to move away from the use of Infinite Campus (as it doesn't tie well to the new system). This was a major setback that should be rectified in any way possible. Infinite Campus did a great job of communicating with parents and students. (parent comment)

Overall, parents noted that communication and collaboration should be part of an ongoing system of feedback that goes far beyond the report card. Some underlined the importance of teachers communicating problems with students' performance right away so the problems could be quickly remediated. Parents reported that the report card was not a good place to find out their student was doing poorly. Several asked for comments to be mandatory when students were receiving grades of less than '3' or 'M' in academics and learning skills.

A few responding parents were quite satisfied with the relationships developed between home and school. These few lauded the communication between home and school, noting teachers who sent home weekly class updates or emailed parents regularly with lists of homework assignments:

The teachers do a great job providing tools of communication. I get better feedback on what my student is doing from the weekly sheets that come home. The Web site is great for double checking homework and communicating with the teachers. The report card seems to be an affirmation of the more detailed information that has been communicated already. (parent comment)

The separation of the academic standards from the learning skills provides me with more detailed information to help my student become a better learner.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	(blank)	Grand Total
Total	228	509	638	72	28	1475
	15%	35%	43%	5%	2%	
	50%		48%		2%	

#4: Academics and learning skills separation. Though there were relatively few comments addressing this area, some parents thought that the more information that was provided about students, the better, and so they appreciated the separation generally. Half of parents overall appreciated the separation. The broad nature of the categories of M, S, and R was problematic. As one parent explained,

Homework completion should be stressed more strongly, and more information should be given about the student's homework than completed "most of the time", "some of the time", or "rarely". Homework helps students learn skills they will need all their life. (parent comment)

The choices "most of the time" and "some of the time" are useless and being interpreted in multiple ways. "Most of the time" MEANS "more than half". Should the highest rating be "more than half?" In our experience, some teachers take that literally and others have taken to mean "always" or nearly always (for example our son was given a 3 for missing one homework assignment. Another teacher gave him a 4 for doing 75% of the homework). (parent comment)

Parents who opposed the separation of learning skills and academics described the separation as elementary school-like and potentially hindering their children's potential for success in more competitive high school and college environments.

While number grading and the separate learning skills section at the elementary level may be appropriate for teaching them how to learn, I believe it is not appropriate at the middle school level and absolutely NOT appropriate at the high school level. Children need to start learning what it takes to get an A, B, C, etc. in middle school as this is society's metric for performance in high school and at college. This way, they have an opportunity to improve their learning skills before the grades start counting on their permanent record. Having the separate learning skills is not very useful in combination with letter grades as teachers can best do this via the comments section (i.e., they know exactly why a student is not getting a better grade and most are very helpful in providing a comment to explain the good or poor performance without having to go through the motion of assigning an M, S, R, or whatever for every category). (parent comment)

Scores of 4-3-2-1 are sufficient to provide clear and helpful information about my student's learning.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	(blank)	Grand Total
Total	332	461	564	91	27	1475
	23%	31%	38%	6%	2%	
	54%		44%		2%	

#5: 1-2-3-4 as a full picture of student learning. The majority of parents (54%) felt that the numbers were not enough to provide clear information about students. Although a few parents wrote that they welcomed the change to standards-based reporting, most parents responding often said that *letter* grades were the best indicator for understanding their students'

performance. Parents indicated problems with the hybrid system. Specifically, they responded that the hybrid number and letter reporting (a) was confusing, inconsistent, incomplete and too subjective, (b) gave inaccurate indicators of their children's abilities and potential, (c) deskilled teachers by not allowing them to directly determine letter grades, (d) took too much of teachers' time, and (e) caused their children to become demoralized (and ultimately learn less in some cases). As these representative comments explain in further detail:

I am completely flummoxed by the attempt to translate these standards to letter grades. If every graded assignment in every class had an element of it that required students to perform above grade level (earn a 4), and only those performing above grade level received A's, then equating the performance relative to the standard with a letter grade would make sense. For this to work, a 10-question quiz would have to have 2 above-grade level questions on it (questions only advanced or "4" students could answer), and students who got only the 8 grade-level questions correct would therefore receive 3s/Bs on the assignment -- an indication that they met but did not exceed the grade-level expectation. That is not my understanding how assignments are designed and graded. This scenario also assumes that only students who can (and do!) work above grade level should receive A's. Maybe that's true? Should only students who perform above grade level be able to get A's on their report cards? If so, I hope this system does not follow our students into high school, where grades will actually affect their futures. In my opinion, the standards are a welcome addition to the reporting system but should not be automatically linked to letter grades. (parent comment)

Parents are very frustrated trying to understand one with respect to the other (numbers versus letters) when in reality it just can't be done. I do not know of a single parent that likes it. While I can choose to ignore the number grading and just focus on the letter grading as that is a metric we all understand, unfortunately the teachers cannot! (parent comment)

I understand that the standards on the report card are connected to the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards as defined by the Department of Public Instruction.

	Yes	No	(blank)	Grand Total
Total	1097	339	39	1475
	74%	23%	3%	

#6: Report card connections to DPI state standards. Very few parents responded in comment form to this question. About one quarter of parents indicated they did not understand this connection. The comments given below are some of very few pointing toward why parents may not understand the connections between the new system and the state standards. These reasons include lack of knowledge about accessing state standards, the complexity of educational systems, and the degree to which parents of various cultural groups might place the responsibility for education with trained professionals:

I realize that it's my responsibility to understand these concepts, but I don't know where to look for the info. I have never heard of the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards, etc. I, as a parent, need a class in how to manage my child's academic career and what it means for him as he prepares for college and life. (parent comment)

I leave my son's learning in your hands, you have the power, you have the knowledge, and they are the future of the world. (parent comment, translated from Spanish)

Summary of Parents' Comments

Of the nearly 1500 parent comments, just 14 were translated from Spanish to English. It is difficult to pinpoint the demographics of parents responding to the survey. A large number came from the following middle schools: Hamilton, Sennett, Jefferson, and Toki. What is clear, however, is that many parents who wrote much described themselves as parents of high-achieving students (or at least high achieving students before the standards-based system). It is important to understand that the parent comments that form the basis of this section are likely not representative of all parents in the district.

The following points were commonly detailed by parents in regard to the standards-based report card initiative:

- 1) Many parents who wrote would prefer a letter grade-based system because they feel it is motivating for their children and connects to present opportunity structures. These parents note that the shift in systems has served to lower evaluations of their students' performance and in some cases lessen students' motivation to succeed. They often communicated that they saw the initiative as an effort to create a larger pool of average students while not allowing students who do not put forth effort to fail.
- 2) Parents asked for more simplicity in the report card, and clarity and precision in defining 1-2-3-4.
- 3) Parents felt that a 4 should not require extra credit (particularly busy work-type extra credit) and that the 4 should be attainable for students who have mastered grade-level material.
- 4) Parents felt that there was inconsistency between teachers in interpreting the standards and reporting marks.
- 5) Parents of students with IEP's and accelerated students had specific concerns about how the new system affected their children. Some parents were concerned about how other parents with challenges in language and literacy would be able to interpret the report card.

- 6) Parents were concerned that teachers spent too much time grading. Some believed that the teachers themselves assigned both letters and numbers.
- 7) Parents wanted more information about homework, projects and tests. They wanted specific feedback on what could be improved on these items rather than simply numbers.
- 8) Parents highly valued specific comments from teachers on the report card. They wanted comments targeting their children's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.
- 9) Many stated that they appreciated Infinite Campus in the past but that teachers were not using it often now for home-school communication.
- 10) Parents had mixed ideas about the effectiveness of separating learning skills and academic standards. Some thought that this provided more information, some thought the Most of the Time, Sometimes, and Rarely learning skills indicators told little and were inconsistently interpreted by teachers.
- 11) Parents found the reporting of both number and letter-based assessments to be very confusing and unfair. They did not like the fact that teachers did not directly assign the letter grades.
- 12) A few parents commented that accessing and understanding state standards and guiding their students through a complex assessment system was mystifying, while some indicated they trusted the education professionals to be responsible for students' learning.

Students' Comments on the New Report Card

Themes Complementing Survey Questions

This section explores comments related to the four student survey questions: 1) The standards-based report card is clear and useful for me to understand what I know and can do, 2) I know what to do to earn 4-3-2-1 in academic standards, 3) Scores of 4-3-2-1 are enough to give me information about my learning, and 4) I know what to do to earn a Mostly, Sometimes, or Rarely in learning skills.

There were just a couple categories dominating students' comments. Many students wrote "nothing" for likes and dislikes. Another large group of students indicated that they wanted letter grades and G.P.A.'s as part of their report card. Student support for the A-F theme is marked below with double asterisks (**) in the sections it applies to.

The standards-based report card is clear and useful for me to understand what I know and can do.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Blank	Grand Total
Total	340	461	970	282	11	2064
	16%	22%	47%	14%	1%	
	39%		61%			

****#1: Understanding the standards-based report card.** The first of the four student survey questions stated, "The report card is clear and useful for me to understand what I know and can do." Thirty-nine percent of students said that the report card was not clear and useful. Several students explained that interpretation was difficult for everyone involved, not just themselves. They saw teachers and their family members as confused with the standards based report card. As one student stated:

They are confusing for my teachers, my mom, and my dad and for me, because I do not know how to explain it to them, because it is hard for even me to understand and they do not get it also. (student comment)

Comments indicated that part of the difficulty was tied to the *presentation of the report*. Specific areas students felt needed to change included: (a) presenting the information in a language to match the language spoken at home, (b) simplifying the amount of information provided (some suggested reorganizing to put the grades on the first page and then more specific information later, while some suggested minimizing the information given to simply the letter grade, grade point average, and teacher comments), and (c) increasing the font size.

Another student described the confusion as rooted in the number and letter systems presented simultaneously in the same report. Students wrote that the off-site translation of numbers into letters—translation described as not readily explained by teachers to students and parents—left many students confused about what the report card actually meant:

I think that this new grading system is very vague in terms of the difference between a 3 and a 4 and it is not explained well to the students. Last year's system was easier for parents, teachers, and students to understand. ... Our teachers have repeatedly explained to us that if we have a problem with the A,B,C grade on our report card, they can't complain, because the computer takes your 1,2,3,4 and then translates it to A,B,C and the teachers have no control over our final grade. I think this is ridiculous because the teachers are the ones who have watched our progress throughout the quarter and taught us new concepts or ideas, the ones who truly understand our level of understanding when it comes to the subject they teach us. I think that they should also be the ones who have the final decision over our grade, not a machine. (student comment)

Several students framed the new standards-based grading system as a distraction from what would prepare them best for high school and then college, arguing that the de-emphasis on homework and the turn to a numbers-based grading system were inconsistent with systems they would meet in the future. In some cases, students framed the new system as elementary school-like and thus holding them back from learning to work within more sophisticated structures (like those in place in high schools and middle schools). Students argued that this inconsistency was taking away from their ability to prove what they know now and may be able to achieve within a broader opportunity structure. This was a common articulation:

Another thing is that instead of making grades like in elementary school so we can be 'happy', we should have it so things are like high school, so we can be PREPARED. (student comment)

Other students discussed the scope of what was included within the standards-based assessments as test-focused rather than incorporating a wide range of homework, assignments, and tests. Further, students wrote that the limited range of possible grades (for example 1-2-3-4 as opposed to A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, etc.) available within the current system made for less precision in pinpointing attainment within a standards-based system. Students also commented on the very wide range of percentage grades translating to a '3' or a '2' on the report card. As one middle-schooler explained,

There were really only test scores, not showing homework and class work, so it really is not showing kids' effort, how hard or how they are not working. It doesn't make sense that all the kids can be graded on 4 grades and there is no way to show the difference between a high 3 of a low 3. (student comment)

A small number of students cited tracking personal improvement and a better understanding of their own knowledge acquired within the new system as a plus:

I like about the report cards this year is that it shows you that you improved and that it shows what you know and what you do not know. (student comment)

I know what to do to earn 4-3-2-1 in academic standards.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Blank	Grand Total
Total	148	294	1140	472	10	2064
	7%	14%	55%	23%	0%	
	21%		78%			

#2: Clear expectations. The second question on the report card survey, "I know what to do to earn a 4-3-2-1 in academic standards," Was answered positively by most (78%) of students. A few students wrote that they appreciated being told what a teacher was looking for criteria-wise. One noted a shift toward a focus on learning as different from an emphasis on right and wrong answers:

If you get a question wrong, instead of losing points, the teacher can see if you knew how to do it and if you just made a silly mistake. You won't get a bad grade because you made a stupid mistake. (student comment)

Most comments, however, reflected difficulties understanding the standards-based system. Students spoke of frustrations in not understanding what number grades meant and not understanding specifically what was wrong and what could improve:

It needs more detail about how to earn a 4, 3, 2, or 1. I don't fully understand the expectations for how to improve my grade or what the grade means. (student comment)

You don't know what you need to improve because all it is is a number. If you get a question wrong, you have no idea because it's grouped with the other questions, and you have no idea if which question you got wrong. (student comment)

While a couple students appreciated the challenge of working for a '4', these comments were few and far between. Many students who wrote extended comments complained that the criteria for a '4' was: (a) unclear, (b) inconsistent from class to class, and (c) sometimes not possible to attain. Many students indicated (often vociferously) that their grade point averages and letter grades had dropped compared to previous years of middle school. Many students complained that they had fallen from honor roll and that many fewer students were making the honor roll at their schools. As one student complained,

The A,B,C grading system was easy to understand and it helped us understand what we needed to do to improve our grades. This new system just rewards the very smart advanced students and those that are under achieving. Those that were B-A students before are now 2-3 students now, making them feel like they are not able to succeed, like they are not as smart as they used to be. (student comment)

More specifically, the following comments are representative of students' views on the criteria for meeting standards for a '4':

The way to earn a 4 is too high. You have to go above the standards, which you can't do on a multiple choice or fill in the blank test. The highest you could get on that is a 3, even if you get every answer right, just because it is regular knowledge. I think that a 4 should symbolize knowing everything you should, 3 should be knowing almost everything, 2 should be partial knowledge of the subject, and a 1 should be not attempted or knows nothing in the subject. (student comment)

I don't like the 4-3-2-1 system. Sometimes teachers are unclear on how to get a 4, and sometimes, for certain teachers, if you get a single question wrong on something, you only get a 3. I feel this is very unfair. You shouldn't have to be perfect to get an A. (student comment)

Many, many students noted inconsistencies between what was expected for certain number grades between different teachers at their schools. Students felt that different criteria were confusing and problematic. Many noted the change from the more school-unified grading scales (90-100%=A, 80-89%=B, etc.) they had worked within in the past. The comments applied to both ongoing assessments and the report card grades.

It is confusing to everybody, even the teachers. Each teacher has their own idea on how the grading should work. Some people will give me 4's if I get everything right, others won't. (student comment)

I think the standards are very bad because first of all teachers grade at different levels (Ms X will give a 3 for an 85% where as Ms Y will give a 2 for an 85%) and that an 84% and a 64% can be the same thing, a 2 ('partial understanding'). This does not make very much sense to me that a D student can get the same 'grade' as a high B student some of the times. (student comment)

Scores of 4-3-2-1 are enough to give me information about my learning.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Blank	Grand Total
Total	374	636	811	233	10	2064
	18%	31%	39%	11%	0%	
	49%		51%			

****#3: A full picture of student learning.** The third survey question asked whether the 4-3-2-1 was enough to give a full picture of student learning. While 51% indicated that numbers were sufficient, students argued for A-F grading in myriad ways. Most students responding wrote comments indicating a primarily competitive rather than an individualized frame of reference for understanding grading practices. They often noted that a 1-4 scale does not allow some students to fail, while creating a broader midsection of performance standards. Many students related

their understandings to concerns about high school performance and college admissions rather than knowledge acquisition.

The fact that I, an A student, can work much harder than someone else yet the teacher still has to give us both a 3 even though my work is far superior. (student comment)

Students suggested solutions to this problem of broad attainment ranges. An increased range of number grades and a switch back to an A-F system were popular suggestions:

You should be able to have a 2.5 or 3.5 to show that we are close to a 3 or 4 but not quite there. Otherwise it sort of looks like you are doing really bad. (student comment)

Kids like having a bigger variety of grades to get. If there's just two grades, it doesn't really show on what level they know. If there are 5 grades, like ABCDF, then you have a better idea of where you belong. (student comment)

Students also noted a problem of 'what counts' in grading. Commonly, students noted that few pieces of student data were factored into grades and that homework was de-emphasized in relation to tests. This provided a thinner picture of progress for the report card grade. For some students, this represented a focus away from hard work and toward a measure of innate ability.

The new grading doesn't give credits for kids who do their homework every day. The grades only give credits for the students' test results. For example, a student can work very hard, study, and do their homework every night but when it comes to tests, they freeze up and their score is bad but students that don't study, work hard, or do their homework but they get a good scores on their tests.....it's not really fair....students should also get credit for working hard on schoolwork and test results. That can show that the student does work hard and want a good grade. (student comment)

Other students wrote about the problem of home-school communication and accountability for homework feeding a drop in motivation.

Because homework does not count on your report card, you don't have to do it. A lot of the parents don't know how to read the reports, so they won't know how you did. (student comment)

Students indicated, overall, that the new standardized report card did not help them see ways to improve their grades and their learning. In the past, percentages and grades helped them know how hard they needed to work on subsequent assignments to meet their desired attainment levels.

If I get a B on a quiz or a test, I can know exactly how many questions that I need to get right on the next test for them both to average out to an A. With this new grading system, I have no idea. (student comment)

More specific teacher comments, particularly ongoing teacher feedback throughout each course of study, were cited by many students as necessary for growth.

The report card would be better if the teachers for each of your classes wrote down a note telling the pupil how he or she could improve or what she can do to keep getting good grades if he or she is starting to get confused during classes. This is how I think the report card system can be improved. (student comment)

I know what to do to earn a Mostly, Sometimes, or Rarely in learning skills.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Blank	Grand Total
Total	114	210	1297	430	13	2064
	6%	10%	63%	21%	1%	
	16%		84%			

#4: Learning skills: rarely, sometimes, and never grading. There were few student comments addressing the learning skills portion of the report card. Most students (84%) knew the expectations connected to these skills. The comments were positive, stating that this was an area of the report card students were comfortable with. This comment is representative:

I like the rarely, sometimes, and mostly grading because you know how you're doing.
(student comment)

Summary of Students' Survey Responses

It is notable that many of the students writing extensive comments about the standards-based report card identified themselves as high-achieving students. Quite a large number of students answered 'nothing', or similar non-descriptive responses, to the comment query. Students felt there was much room for improvement in the standards-based grading system. While many were confused by the new letter and number system and called for simply turning back to the former A-F grading, there were also constructive comments about what could be changed to make the new system better. Students who wrote extended comments indicated that:

- 1) Students feel that teachers who know students' abilities should be directly responsible for assigning marks.
- 2) Students reporting are very concerned about being seen as individuals who are maturing and seriously preparing for high school and college. They wished to learn the current systems for success and do what is necessary to succeed within current opportunity structures. They also wanted reassurance that they would certainly be successful in high school and college ahead.
- 3) Students indicated they would appreciate clearer guidelines for meeting various standards. Most problematic were inconsistencies across teachers in what was expected for various levels, broad ranges for the '3' and '2', and the often inaccessible nature of the '4'.
- 4) Students wanted a shorter, simpler report card format that was easily readable and understandable for both themselves and their parents.

- 5) Students wanted more of their daily and ongoing work to factor into their report card grades. They wanted more specific teacher feedback on their classroom work and on their report cards. They wanted to have an ongoing sense of how they were doing—what they could be improving specifically.
- 6) Students felt that the learning skills marks (mostly, sometimes, rarely) were adequate.

Teachers' Comments on the New Report Card

Themes Complementing Survey Questions

This section details comments related to the 14 primary teacher survey questions. The questions are: 1) The standards-based report card helps me communicate more specifically what my students know and can do, 2) Standards-based reporting gives me a better sense of each student's strengths and level of understanding, 3) The definitions of 4-3-2-1 are clear and useful, 4) Separating academic standards from learning skills provides more detailed information describing students' current levels of understanding, 5) Scores of 4-3-2-1, without a letter grade, are sufficient to describe student understanding, 6) I understand that the standards on the report card are connected to the WI Model Academic Standards as defined by the Department of Public Instruction, 7) The power standards assigned to the content area I am teaching appropriately define the skills and knowledge of the concepts essential to the content area, 8) I am comfortable sharing information about standards-based learning and assessment with students and parents, 9) The information and professional development focused on standards-based education have been thorough and useful, 10) The Infinite Campus grade book is a useful tool for reporting standards-based grades, 11) I had sufficient time to complete the quarterly grading tasks, 12) I used Infinite Campus grade book to enter assign/assess scores in 2007-8, 13) I used Infinite Campus grade book to enter assign/assess scores in 2008-9, and 14) My students put the same effort into their homework as they did before standards-based report cards.

There were five major areas that teachers were most concerned about in their overall survey response as indicated by the plethora of comments about: (a) how parents understand and interpret the report card, (b) the hybrid standards-based number and letter grade reporting, (c) professional development and training, (d) Infinite Campus, and (e) time invested in grading. These areas are indicated by double asterisks (**) below, marking the high level of importance to many teachers. These areas of concern sometimes cut across more than one survey question. Thus more than five areas below have asterisks (**).

The subject area I teach is in..... (check all that apply)

Applied Technology	7	1.33%	Physical Education	13	2.47%
Family and Cons Ed	7	1.33%	Science	74	14.04%
Fine Arts	25	4.74%	Social Studies	103	19.54%

Language Arts	111	21.06%	World Languages	20	3.80%
Library Media & Technology	6	1.14%	Other	39	7.40%
Mathematics	98	18.60%	not answered	24	4.55%
			total	527	100.00%

I am a...

Cross Categorical Teacher	ESL/Bil Res Teacher	Regular Ed Teacher	not answered	Grand Total
28	14	249	24	315

The standards-based report card helps me communicate more specifically what my students know and can do.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	not answered	Grand Total
Total	58	73	127	24	33	315
	18%	23%	40%	8%	10%	
	42%		48%		10%	

****#1: Communicating specifically what students know and can do.** Many teachers saw the new report card as a communication tool needing improvement. Forty-two percent did not believe that its use increased specificity in reporting. One problem was inconsistency among school staffs about what constituted each number. This caused confusion and inconsistencies among teachers and confusion and frustration for parents.

Standards-based reporting is meant to provide families with a better understanding of what students know and are able to do. As our system is currently designed, we are providing less information and potentially more inaccurate information. If staff members in some buildings can't even agree on what constitutes a '4' vs. '3', and some staff refuse to give '4's, this really does not reflect what students know, but rather is just a time consuming number game. And for those staff members who are trying to play by the rules and give students an accurate picture of achievement, I find this computer software lacks the ability to really bring that hope to reality.
(teacher comment)

The wide range of percentage equivalents connected to some of the numbers, particularly the '2' and '3' were difficult for some teachers to justify. They felt that these wide ranges told little of the story of students' performance.

1-2-3-4 actually tells the student and parent less about how a student is doing than a letter grade. A '3' correlates to anywhere from about the 70th to the 95th percentile. Most parents want to know if their student is doing 'D' work or strong 'A' work. The numbers don't tell anyone that information. (teacher comment)

Teachers also said that writing more comments specific to each child was a really important way of sharing student progress that was compromised within the new system. They also noted the challenge for parents of changing their thinking over to a numbers system. Again and again, teachers said that parents wanted to know their student's letter grade. That was the language of performance the vast majority of parents understood, according to teachers.

I would rather write a paragraph about how the student is functioning rather than do all those clicks for number grades and then the parents really don't know how their child is doing. I have gotten lots of complaints from parents about how the grading is reported. When I send home progress reports that list all assignments with 4-3-2-1 and without a letter grade, I get email and phone calls asking for a grade. (teacher comment)

Teachers sometimes commented that students felt defeated by a system that was not encouraging to their efforts. Though the vast majority of teachers' comments reflected support for a numbers-only system, some were concerned about quashing students' motivation:

Kids turn off when the system makes it difficult for them to see their A for effort. It confuses the students to be viewed within the standards based grading system. Teaching the standards is one thing, holding up fragile individuals to the standards is sometimes defeating for all concerned. (teacher comment)

Finally, several teachers felt that the format of the report could be streamlined and that this would make the reporting process better for families and their students.

The report cards are SO difficult for parents to read! Many parents have come to me saying they don't understand what the report card says. The print is so little & there is so much of it! I think MMSD should come up with a more visually-friendly format, where parents can readily see the standards and their student's number grade. (teacher comment)

Standards-based reporting gives me a better sense of each student's strengths and level of understanding.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	not answered	Grand Total
Total	53	77	126	26	33	315
	17%	24%	40%	8%	10%	
	41%		48%		10%	

#2: *Knowing individuals' strengths and levels of understanding.* Teachers were, overall, supportive of the standards-based assessment philosophy in their comments. Forty-eight percent of teachers answered the new report allow for a better understanding of students' strengths and understanding. Though there were not many comments about what standards-based grading brought specifically, a few teachers pointed to the importance of moving the focus to what students actually do know about content and skills.

There are some positives. I like that we talk about understanding vs. points. I like that I can be specific in students' weaknesses. I like that it has been sometimes easier to assess than give points. (teacher comment)

Some teachers noted concerns, however, about how various groups of students' needs were served by the new system. There was concern by some that the new system did not take all students' abilities, effort, and performance styles into account when assigning marks. As these teachers explained:

Some students are at a biased disadvantage due to ultimate skill levels and ability to understand. (teacher comment)

Minority parents have told me that it puts too much emphasis on final tests and assessments and devalues daily effort, which is biased against the nervous/apprehensive test taker. This has made grading less objective since a teacher can 'pick' a trend score rather than determine total points received or percentage. I have never in my career felt fuzzy about a grade, but this year I have struggled with assessment tools so I can feel more clear. The 1-4 system is similar to holistic scoring of writing, but with writing when teachers differed in our assessment by more than 1 or if teachers disagreed about a score we came back together to decide why-that check and balance system is not practical and in place for doing that now, just left up to teacher discretion which is why it is less objective. The difference between 4 at the elementary level and middle school level caused huge confusion and many teachers still use it wrong. (teacher comment)

The definitions of a 4-3-2-1 are clear and useful.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	not answered	Grand Total
Total	78	104	84	16	33	315
	25%	33%	27%	5%	10%	
	58%		32%		10%	

****#3: Clear and useful definitions of 4-3-2-1.** Fifty-eight percent of teachers felt that the definitions of numbered levels were unclear. Many, many teachers commented about the range of the 1-4 system, with the vast majority indicating that grading categories were too broad to accurately reflect student knowledge. These concerns were connected to teachers' request for an end to letter grades, more attention to grading students with special needs, attention to homework and late work requirements and how these might factor into grading, and consideration of expanding the range of possible numbers for grading:

The numbers 1 - 4 aren't clear to me in terms of what they represent, but having them attached to a letter grade just makes the waters even muddier. As things stand now, just one 4 on a power standard and 3's on the others guarantees an A, which is not right and is not an accurate reflection of most of my students' achievements in math. (teacher comment)

Include homework in grades, even if it has a maximum percentage attached. Late work should hold a penalty as it impairs their ability to concentrate on what the class is now learning. There should be a MUCH better definition of what constitutes the difference between a three and a four. Teachers need to understand that a four can be earned without having a PhD on the subject. I am also wondering why all of the Special Education students seemed to be doomed to always get a 2 on every assignment. (teacher comment)

There needs to be more definition of the levels students are working at (achieving) and at least increase the levels to 1 - 5 (instead of 4). There also needs to be a LOT more discussion on how to grade students with disabilities. (teacher comment)

If 4-3-2-1 is continued we should also have 1.5, 2.5, 3.5 and 4.5. (teacher comment)

The ranges between 4, 3, 2, and 1 are not consistent or equal. It does not give adequate information to the student. There is a big difference between someone who scores an 89% and someone else who scores an 81%. Also, what does 'partial' mean...does anyone get a 1? (teacher comment)

Set consistent parameters for 4-3-2-1. Many explanations are watered down, and don't give a specific. For example, if there are certain tests that happen to have a score that could be considered a percentage, there are teachers in the school that have their 3 range as 89%-95% and other teachers that have their 3's as 78%-95%. This is too big of a range. We need to hear it from downtown what they feel is a 3 range type product. Even if we don't, or shouldn't use percentages, in our minds, knowing what the range could possibly be might be helpful. (teacher comment)

Again and again, teachers commented that the high end of the standards-based grading scale was problematic. There was a lack of clarity and consistency as to what constituted '4's.

It seems silly that students need to perform beyond what they are taught to earn the 4. Shouldn't the 4 mean that they are performing what they are taught at the highest expectations? (teacher comment)

Also, there is no uniformity....many teachers I know are 'cheating' the system by giving kids a 4 because there's pressure to give A's.... so you can have 2 teachers in the same building interpret what a 4 means. ... Also, figuring out trend scores is up to the judgment of the teacher.in the old system, it was a mathematical equation to find their percents....now we have to hhhmm and hawww... well is this a 3 or a 4.....too much is left to that particular teachers' interpretation....so this new system is greatly flawed into giving grades that aren't deserving. (teacher comment)

[I need] more clarifications of what constitutes a '4' grade: examples, rubrics in each subject area, assignments, and ways for kids to get a 4. (teacher comment)

None of my students receive a 4 as part of the power standards. A 4 indicates a student has the ability to teach the subject, has learned everything there is to learn and is perfect. Get rid of the 4's. (teacher comment)

Several teachers talked about needing more time to collaborate, discuss and share ideas. This was one suggestion for how this might be done efficiently:

Some example rubrics from teachers throughout the district staff have done for various units would be great to have on the DWW for others to use. It would help out a lot of teachers, we wouldn't have to reinvent the wheel and there are some great ideas for units/covering a standard that would be nice for everyone to have access to. (teacher comment)

Separating academic standards from learning skills provides more detailed information describing student's current level of understanding.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	not answered	Grand Total
Total	34	80	135	31	35	315
	11%	25%	43%	10%	11%	
	36%		53%		11%	

*****#4: Providing detailed information about students' strengths and levels of understanding.***

While most (53%) of teachers thought it was helpful to separate academics and learning skills, teachers largely described the process of inputting data as cumbersome compared to what was provided to the parents on the actual report. At the same time that the report was viewed as needing more academic detail beyond content categories, the format itself was seen as too complicated for parents.

My first big shock with the IC standards-based report card was, given the great amount of detail that I put into the system, how very little detail was reported to the parents on the report card. I took all this trouble to break everything down into specific standards and report these grades as specific standards, and none of this information showed up on the report card. Content 1, 2, etc., means nothing. Unless I write all the standards covered in the teacher comment section, none of the standards covered are reported on the report card. Yet the report card is so busy with stuff, one can hardly interpret it. (teacher comment)

It seems like the new report card was intended more as a way to teach teachers about standards. Seems as though parents do not really want or need all the information the report card is reporting. (teacher comment)

It's too cluttered and hard for a 'normal' parent to understand. (teacher comment)

There were a few comments urging more work in assessing and grading English Language Learners and students with IEP's. Concerns about these groups are woven through many themes described in this section.

I think that more work could be done to reflect ELL student learning in the standards based grading system. (teacher comment)

Rethink the 'folders' - for LA, the folders didn't match the standards groups very well. We were told to report on 'Reads at Grade Level' yet that does not appear in our district standards. When that folder is averaged in with the other standards, its effect is discriminatory against those ELLs, EENs, and other students who arrive in our district at a linguistic or cognitive disadvantage. (teacher comment)

Scores of 4-3-2-1, without a letter grade, are sufficient to describe student understanding.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	not answered	Grand Total
Total	56	76	90	61	32	315
	18%	24%	29%	19%	10%	
	42%		48%		10%	

****#5: 4-3-2-1 is sufficient without a letter grade to describe student understanding.** Forty-two percent of teachers believed the numbers were not enough but the story is complicated. A few teachers wrote that they wanted to revert back to letter grades because they spoke to students and parents most clearly. They believed students and parents strongly prefer letter grades.

Parents and students really like retaining the letter grades- they are my clients and I believe that we should keep these in order to communicate in a way that speaks to what parents and students are thinking. (teacher comment)

The vast majority of teachers commenting in this area supported using ONLY numbers for grading. The hybrid letter-number system was seen as quite problematic in that it took attention away from the standards-based effort that teachers were working hard to use. Further, the translation process often reported letter grades that were lower than what typically high-achieving students' families were used to. As one teacher noted, however, even with the elimination of letter grades, families will need to be educated about the standards grading more, particularly if fewer students are receiving the highest grades available and there is a narrower distribution.

I would like to see the elimination of letter grades--they seem to distract parents and students from the comments and 1, 2, 3, 4 ratings on the rest of the report card. Also, nothing we do in the classes with the students uses letter grades, so the letter grades are not really connected to student learning. (teacher comment)

I don't think that letter grades should be linked to 4,3,2,1 grading. It is a nightmare for lots of parents who have had A and B students in the past to now have to deal with their

children getting Bs and Cs with no large changes in their school study habits. It turns out that many parents can't understand that a 3 is a good grade, and they in turn make their children feel bad for getting 3's on their report card. (teacher comment)

PLEASE GET RID OF THE LETTER GRADES!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I can justify the 4-3-2-1 evaluations and like that idea of them, but it is hard to sell to students that a '3' is a good grade (isn't the purpose of school to understand what they are trying to teach you?) when it comes out to a 'B'? With the number/letter combo, the district should be re-educating parents about what to expect. I now see many fewer students reaching a 4 ('A') and way more getting a 2 ('C') - parents need to understand this better. (teacher comment)

I understand that the standards on the report card are connected to the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards as defined by the Department of Public Instruction.

	Yes	No	not answered	Grand Total
Total	264	18	33	315
	84%	6%	10%	

#6: Understanding that standards are connected to the WI Model Academic Standards. A small minority (6%) of teachers indicated they did not know of this link. There were few comments connected directly to this question—some teachers said that they feel strongly about teaching to standards and taught to the standards before the standards-based report card initiative.

I also feel that as certified teachers, we are required to have our curriculum so we teach to the state/national standards regardless of the grading. I don't feel the standards-based grading is necessary to ensure we are teaching to the standards. (teacher comment)

The power standards assigned to the content area I am teaching appropriately define the skills and knowledge of the concepts essential to the content area.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	not answered	Grand Total
Total	34	84	135	23	39	315
	11%	27%	43%	7%	12%	
	37%		50%		12%	

#7: Power standards define essential skills and concepts for my content area. Half of the teachers reported satisfaction with the power standards. Teachers wanted more specific standards information included on the report card but they wanted the format to be simple and easy for parents to read and understand.

Standards may follow the state model, but are too general in their current form. If I am truly following a standards based model, then more time would need to be allotted to allow for teachers to enter the specific standard covered in each power standard. (teacher comment)

The report is too general. The power standards do not communicate enough information. Maybe if it is included in the sub-standards it would better communicate what the students are doing well in and what they need to improve on. (teacher comment)

Further, several teachers mentioned wanting control over the number and weighting of power standards so these standards could be adjusted depending on what was appropriate for their students in relation to the content each quarter. For various content areas, teachers wanted some tweaking done to the current standards. The Wellness area said they have no standards. Multiple teachers from Social Studies/Language Arts and Math and Science shared these concerns:

Investigation and Research ... seems much more appropriate for Social Studies. On that same note, I wonder about the validity of having the evaluation of some subjects based on the average of only two power standards, yet others have four. (teacher comment)

It is my opinion that the math and science reporting information distributed to teachers is not geared to the standards, but geared to the curricula purchased by the district. CMP is admittedly not all inclusive of the standards--this is acknowledged by the district. Yet the reporting system is geared toward CMP. Although I have not looked up the state science standards, it is clear the standards sent out to us from the district are directly from FOSS. Just as no math curriculum will cover all our needs, neither will one science curriculum. Yet the standards sent out to us directly reflect FOSS. (teacher comment)

I am comfortable sharing information about standards-based learning and assessment with students and parents.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	not answered	Grand Total
Total	30	71	144	36	34	315
	10%	23%	46%	11%	11%	
	32%		57%		11%	

****#8: Comfort level explaining the new system to students and parents.** While the majority (57%) of teachers felt comfortable explaining the new system, some teachers felt unprepared. Some noted that the communication between home and school needs to be more ongoing and multimodal with attention to parents who speak a language other than English. Some indicated that they themselves need more support for understanding the system so they can better communicate with students and families.

Standards need to be written so parents can understand them. At this time, I have many parents that ask me what the middle school standards mean. At times, I am not even sure. (teacher comment)

It is easy to check off that we have tried to communicate by sending home information bulletins and pamphlets, but it takes time to re-explain and REALLY communicate this information... All the families want to help their children. (teacher comment)

I feel that it was difficult to communicate standards based grading to our ELL parents. They are more comfortable with the A, B, C, D format and much translation had to be done to explain the new system. (teacher comment)

The information and professional development focusing on standards-based education have been thorough and useful.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	not answered	Grand Total
Total	55	120	91	13	36	315
	17%	38%	29%	4%	11%	
	56%		33%		11%	

****#9: Information and PD focused on standards-based education have been thorough and useful.** Teachers indicated that more training is needed to implement standards-based education better. Thirty-three percent of teachers considered their training to be complete. Several teachers gave suggestions and areas for extra attention:

I am part of the World Language Leadership Team and I have gained much knowledge through this committee about the standards within World Language; however, any World Language teachers that are not a part of that committee, I believe, did not receive enough information or have discourse as to what the 4-3-2-1 means, and how to use the grading guide properly. (teacher comment)

It is essential that enough time is given to teachers to fully implement standards-based learning and assessment. This includes the creation of new assessments, rewriting of curriculum and developing ways to communicate standards to our shareholders. Grants for teachers for summer work would be motivating to allow teachers the time to meet these needs. (teacher comment)

We needed much more training on how to get IC to work with the new grading system. Fortunately, an after school class was started at my school to help us with this. However, this has required extensive time outside of the regular school day. (teacher comment)

Many teachers are uncomfortable with fitting the standards based assessments onto IC, and parents are frustrated because they want to use the portal and not all teachers are using it. These teachers need some additional support or training to be effective and then IC can be the tool it's meant to be. (teacher comment)

The Infinite Campus grade book is a useful tool for reporting standards-based grades.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	not answered	Grand Total
Total	88	90	89	7	41	315
	28%	29%	28%	2%	13%	

	57%	30%	13%	
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****#10: The IC grade book is a useful tool for reporting standards-based grades.** The teachers had very positive things about using Infinite Campus in the past as a communication tool for students and parents. This school year, however, proved very, very frustrating for a large number of teachers. Only 30% considered IC grade book helpful. Teachers complained of multiple folders and pages to pull down, excessive numbers of clicks, slowness with logging on, grades being erased, needing to type in extra information repeatedly, and having no way to verify if the information was received and reported correctly. As one teacher summed up:

IC was fabulous, the best motivation ever for kids improving their scores when they could visually see what a score would do to their grade, they could calculate their own grade which gave them ownership and let them understand they earn a grade, it's not what I give them. IC is confusing now with assignments overlapping in different standards, no groupings to tell which assignments were bigger or more important, just a running total, can't print out for parents because hard to decipher. (teacher comment)

ELL and bilingual teachers had extra challenges.

Doing comments in Spanish is SO frustrating! I am a bilingual teacher & able to write my own comments in Spanish. However, IC does not recognize accents or other Spanish language characters, which are necessary to write in proper Spanish. Furthermore, the comments then have to be 'translated' (copy & pasted) through a second program (GUI) before they will show up on the Spanish report card. It is a waste of time and a HUGE frustration for all bilingual teachers and ESL teachers. (teacher comment)

Teachers shared additional suggestions about what needed improvement and ideas for how that might be accomplished:

IC has been very useful in the past, but it wasn't retooled enough to be effective with the standards-based reporting. The number of clicks and the amount of assignment description took way too long. I like using standards-based rubrics, but this usually means taking about 4-5 evidences from one assignment, that end up in different folders and sometimes in different power standards. To have to retype all pertinent information 4-5 times seems a poor use of teacher resources. (teacher comment)

Many things that are expected (using standards to letter grade conversion, for example) should be automatic defaults - teachers should not have to remember to click that option for each individual class each quarter. If grades have not been posted by the deadline, they should be posted automatically, not just forgotten. The grade book can be made to be much more user friendly with spreadsheet type applications - adding assignments and grades should be as simple as clicking on a column, not going into another complicated application. (teacher comment)

I had sufficient time to complete quarterly grading tasks.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	not answered	Grand Total
Total	96	97	81	3	38	315
	30%	31%	26%	1%	12%	
	61%		27%		12%	

****#11: I had sufficient time to complete the quarterly grading task.** No teacher wrote indicating they had enough time to do the grading. The majority (61%) said they did not have enough time to complete this work. Many stated that the time commitment was excessive. Teachers stated that the time spent in grading limited their abilities to write adequate comments, communicate with parents, and teach as well as they would like.

The infinite campus program is extremely user-unfriendly, unforgiving and time consuming. By the third time that I entered grades, I thought that it would get easier, but I still find myself having to read back over the 100+ page user guide trying to figure out what I'm doing wrong. There has been no extra time provided to enter the over 800 marks I need to make each quarter. When you think you are done, there is no good way to check to see if you are really done, making missed grades and mistakes common. Because it is so time consuming to enter the marks, much less time has been spent this year on developing relationships with students and their parents and on other important district goals. (teacher comment)

I don't think the district realizes the time it takes just to enter grades and comments. I used to use infinite campus to record all assignments but since the program can no longer calculate grades, I have quit trying to do that. It takes dozens of hours to enter the data. (teacher comment)

It is hard to imagine how much time is spent inputting standards-based grades into infinite campus. These many hours could be better spent teaching, planning, evaluating and communicating with parents and students. (teacher comment)

I am a huge fan of standards-based reporting and rubrics. I've used them my entire career. It's important for teachers to have accurate data on students. However, as a parent, I am most concerned with the comment section of my child's report card. I used to write a paragraph for each student every quarter, describing strengths and areas for improvement. With this new grading system, I no longer have time to make comments because I spend so much time mouse-clicking and going back and forth between different screens. I feel like I'm hoop jumping instead of providing helpful feedback of a child's progress.

Teachers added comments about what might help the situation from their perspective.

If they all were where on 1 screen (for grading by task) and I could insert a grade and hit tab or enter to get to the next table - it wouldn't be so bad. (teacher comment)

[I need] more time to complete grades each quarter. Instead of half days for inservice, use some of those for grading days so middle school teachers do not feel so rushed to get them done on time, in between teaching, meetings after school, IEPs, etc. (teacher comment)

I used the Infinite Campus grade book to enter assignment/assessment scores during the 2007-2008 school year.

	Yes	No	(blank)	Grand Total
Total	159	120	36	315
	50%	38%	11%	

I am using the Infinite Campus grade book to enter assignment/assessment scores during the 2008-2009 school year.

	Yes	No	(blank)	Grand Total
Total	120	159	36	315
	38%	50%	11%	

****#12 & #13: I used IC grade book to enter assign/assess scores in 2007-8 and 2008-9.** As described previously, time was a huge downside for teachers in their 2008-9 work with Infinite Campus. Many commented positively about past applications of the tool and were less likely to use IC presently than they had been in the past. There was a 12% drop (from 50% to 38%) in teachers using the IC grade book in one year.

Grade book in 2007/08 would calculate an average, standards doesn't allow this feature so grades have to be manually entered, so why bother writing it into my grade book the rewriting it into IC only to calculate by hand for each content area. More repetitive work than the old system, not to mention continually having to move to different sections of IC to get work done. (teacher comment)

I have returned to keeping all records on paper so I can see the ups and downs and share with students during the semester. It took me 17 hours to grade my classes last semester and this last quarter I got it down to 8 hours. Having it in my real world grade book made it easier. I was initially the first teacher at my school to have my lessons in IC. There isn't enough time in the day to keep that up in my opinion. (teacher comment)

My students put the same effort into their homework as they did before standards-based report cards.

	Yes	No	(blank)	Grand Total
Total	107	162	46	315
	34%	51%	15%	

#14: Students' effort toward homework.

Students' homework efforts dropped in the first year of the standards-based reporting initiative according to teachers. Only 34% said that students were putting forth the same homework effort as they had before the initiative. Teachers wanted more accountability for homework, with homework factoring into marks more substantially.

The comment that a student does his/her work MOST of the time is not adequate praise for those students who do it ALL. (teacher comment)

I do not like how the students now disconnect homework and class participation from their grade. Despite attempts to explain how homework and participation help them better understand and use the material, which would then help them better demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, they still now look at homework and participation as unnecessary. (teacher comment)

My students are 2-3 weeks behind from previous years because they aren't learning at the same pace as previously. I attribute this clearly to the lack of preparation outside of class and the perception that homework isn't necessary. Students are not using planners to record essential class information and parents are reporting that students are not studying for evaluations at home. We are creating a culture of students who don't understand their personal responsibility to learn outside as well as in class and that is undermining the knowledge and skills that they are able to acquire in the classroom as well. My concern is that we are not preparing students for future experiences including high school, college and the work force. (teacher comment)

Summary of Teachers' Comments

- 1) Teachers felt that the standards-based reporting could be reflective of what students know and can do but that more work developing and fine tuning the system was needed. Consistent definitions of the numbers 1-4 among teachers, using numbers only and no letters, improving the legibility of the report, and having more time and space for comments were given as ideas for improvement.
- 2) Teachers wanted more definitions of the 1-4 levels. They also wanted access to more precision in grading (through either +/-, .5 increments, or a 1-5 scale, etc.). Many teachers were concerned about the broad nature of the '2' and '3' categories and the narrowness of the '4'. There was also disagreement and inconsistency among teachers about how students might earn a '4'. Teachers wanted further discussion about grading students with special needs and ELLs. They also wanted more rubrics or time to develop them and more collaboration around standards-based grading practices.
- 3) Teachers wanted to balance clear, unencumbered reporting to parents with adequate information about the specific standards (and sub-standards) that students were assessed on. Some teachers indicated concerns for how ELLs' and students with IEPs' grades are reported. They wanted further discussion.

- 4) Teachers reported that the hybrid number-letter grading was distracting to the implementation of standards-based education because parents and students were drawn to reflect on the letters rather than focus on the meanings behind the letters.
- 5) Teachers wanted more specific standards (and sometimes more or fewer standards) to work with for reporting. While one content area (Wellness) needed standards, several others wanted to fine tune. Some teachers mentioned controlling the number and weighting of power standards themselves depending on what's appropriate for their students.
- 6) Teachers report they need more time and PD for implementing standards-based education. Key areas of training needed include aligning classroom work with the standards, aligning teacher practices, and using the IC tools. Communicating the system to families, especially ELL families, needs attention.
- 7) Infinite Campus was spoken of as a very useful tool for grading and communicating with students and families in 2007-8. This changed in 2008-9. Teachers believe that its use for standards-based grading has been lacking. They would like a much less time-consuming, much more streamlined system that facilitates communication with families by allowing them to see students' progress ongoing and at a glance.
- 8) Teachers overwhelmingly felt that they did not have adequate time or compensation to do the standards-based grading.
- 9) Teachers said that students neglected homework much more in the standards-based framework as implemented in 2008-9. They argued that students' homework needed to figure more substantially into the grading process.

Overlapping Understandings and Differences among Respondent Groups

Perspectives of Parents, Students, and Teachers

This section synthesizes perspectives of parents, students and teachers. It points to areas of convergence and disagreement about the new standards-based report card initiative.

Parents and students writing in often said that letter grades matter to high-achieving students and their families. Many students and families argued that letter grades are crucial for acquiring higher education. And not only are letter grades important for college admissions, but the preparation for college, the discipline of homework, and the maintenance of an 'A student', high G.P.A. identity were very important for many individuals commenting. Many students (and their parents) were disappointed about falling off of honor roll within the new system.

Comments reflected students' and parents' concern about fair grading for students who were not performing well. Several teachers, parents and students suggested that the new system was designed to mask the achievement gap among students. Parents and students often felt that the hybrid system was damaging in that it resulted in not only less-than-perfect numbers but also lower than expected letter grades and grade point averages (as compared to previous attainment with the letters-only system).

A few teachers commenting were sympathetic to this view that the district should revert back to a letter grade-only system, stating that families are shareholders and should be serviced by the schools in ways that meet their needs. Most teachers commenting believed that if the district is committed to standards-based education, the hybrid number and letter grades are only distracting and confusing and should be replaced with a numbers-only system. Most teachers commenting on this issue wanted clearer (and consistently applied) guidelines for the number levels with more discussion of what a '4' and what a '3' mean. It was noted by all groups that more education about the system is important for parents, students, and teachers.

Parents and teachers agreed on concerns about homework. Both groups believed that there was a serious lack of accountability for homework within the new system. These groups were concerned about creating a climate of lagging student study skills and lackadaisical independent work habits. There was concern that not taking fuller consideration of homework and other assignments in grading did not produce a complete picture of student understanding and learning. There was also shared concern about the amount of detail necessary in evaluating assignments and tests. For many, this was concern about balancing time spent on assessment and grading and time spent on teaching and learning.

All three groups made similar suggestions for improving legibility of the report card. A simpler, briefer layout was suggested with more room for comments. Some of the teachers wanted more specific information about the standards assessed on the report card.

Parents, students, and teachers also agreed on the importance of teacher comments on the report cards. Parents and students asked for comments that addressed strengths, weaknesses, and—especially—how to improve. Parents thought comments were critical when students were not getting the highest marks in academics and learning skills. Parents and students wanted to receive comments and marks designated by their teachers. “Canned” comments selected from a menu were neither appreciated by parents nor by students. Teachers were overwhelmed by grading tasks and that sometimes affected how (or if) they commented on report cards.

It was written by teachers that all families want their students to do well and by all groups that clear communication between home and school is important. Many parents and teachers framed report cards as one piece of a larger communication system that should be in place.

Parents, teachers, and students agreed that Infinite Campus had been and could be a great tool for allowing ongoing monitoring of student progress. Infinite Campus was *very* important to a great many people commenting. All three groups said that the students themselves were motivated by being able to go in and check their progress throughout each quarter. Based on teachers’ and parents’ survey responses, making better use of Infinite Campus happen would take much improvement of the grade book, more IC professional development for teachers, and sufficient time for teachers to input data and write comments.

Teachers, parents, and students indicated that there were inconsistencies among teachers in the way the system was being used. More training and professional development about understanding and implementing standards-based grading was suggested by both teachers and parents as a way to improve the initiative.