

Table of Contents

About the Authors	vii
About Marzano Research	xi
Foreword <i>by Robert J. Marzano</i>	xiii
Introduction	1
A Necessary Paradigm Shift	3
A Word About Terminology	4
How to Use This Book	5
1 Planning Instruction With Proficiency Scales	7
Identifying Priority and Supporting Standards	7
Understanding Proficiency Scales	8
Planning Standards-Based Instruction	11
Differentiating With Response to Intervention	32
Summary	34
2 Instructing With Proficiency Scales	35
Administering the Preassessment	36
Introducing the Proficiency Scale	37
Beginning Content Instruction	40
Developing Proficiency	43
Moving Past Proficiency	45
Summary	46

3	Setting Goals and Tracking Progress . . . . .	.47
	Setting Goals. . . . .	.48
	Tracking Progress . . . . .	.62
	Celebrating Success Toward Goals. . . . .	.67
	Summary . . . . .	.69
4	Administering Quality Classroom Assessments and Figuring Grades . . . . .	.71
	Understanding the Types of Assessment . . . . .	.71
	Scoring Assessments. . . . .	.80
	Figuring Grades. . . . .	.82
	Summary . . . . .	.96
5	Teaching Exceptional Students . . . . .	.97
	Linking Standards-Based Learning and Multitiered Systems of Support .97	
	Using Proficiency Scales With Exceptional Learners . . . . .	.98
	Assigning Grades to Exceptional Students.	108
	Using Standards-Based Learning in Special Classes	110
	Summary	119
6	Communicating Grades	121
	The Message.	121
	Parent Communication	124
	Report Cards.	128
	Technology and Grade Communication.	132
	Summary	134
	Epilogue	135
	Appendix A: Frequently Asked Questions	137
	Procedure and Policy.	138
	Priority Standards and Proficiency Scales	138
	Assessment.	140
	Grading in a Standards-Based Classroom	141
	Appendix B: Creation of an Elementary Unit Plan	145
	References and Resources	149
	Index	155

Introduction

Schools changing instructional and assessment practices to accommodate new standards means many teachers are required to make what they often consider a major transition in their teaching. For many teachers, this transition comes after years of successful teaching in a familiar, comfortable format, with content they know well. It may feel as though they're shifting over to the latest hot topic in education, and the last thing in the world they want to do is move away from teaching methods, policies, and practices that have served them well for their entire careers.

Some teachers may have a substantial philosophical issue with the whole notion of teaching to standards. They may have entered the teaching profession because of their love of the content and with a strong desire to share that passion with their students. In fact, they've been doing just that for many years, and their students light up when their teacher "does her thing"! Now, with this new concept of teaching, they face the need to change. Will it be a positive change? Will it be stressful? Will they be successful?

Yes to all three.

It may appear that the only obvious outcome of this transition is the associated stress for teachers. Change is never easy, and shifting to standards-based learning won't be either. So, if teachers are going to go through the stress of these changes, it ought to be for very good reasons. Let's start by examining some of these reasons.

One of our authors, Jeff Flygare, taught in a traditional classroom for over twenty years before transitioning to standards-based learning. The following is his message to teachers facing the change to standards-based learning.

First, understand that I know how you feel. Before changing to standards-based learning, I had taught as a traditional English language arts teacher, using traditional instruction and grading practices, for twenty-one years. I was very successful. My students learned the content, and they returned to my classroom to take additional classes from me often. It was working for me, yet I took on standards-based learning without anyone telling me I had to. Why? Because, as good as I was, I knew I wasn't reaching all my students. When I looked at changing my instruction, assessment, and grading practice, I knew that my best students would still learn under the new system, but I thought perhaps with standards-based learning, which promised more student involvement with and commitment to their own learning, I might reach more of my students. And that was exactly what I found to be true.

I shifted to standards-based learning over one weekend in August just before the new school year started. I figured out the basics of standards-based learning, found a way to make our very traditional online gradebook report standards-based scores, and rolled it out with my new students on the first day of school. They had no idea what standards-based learning was, so I committed as much time as they wanted to take during the first thirty days of the school year to explain how this new instruction and assessment system worked. They had lots of questions. I covered the same ground with them many times in that thirty days, but eventually they began to get the idea that I would have standards in the classroom, that instruction would focus on those standards, and that they would be expected to gradually reach proficiency on those standards.

I was sure I could explain the system to them given enough time. But I never expected the sudden (within thirty days) and profound change in their attitude toward their own learning that manifested itself in front of me every school day! The entire conversation in the classroom changed. In a highly competitive and high-performing high school, where most of my students would go on to college, the focus of my students went, almost immediately, off grades. They began to talk with me and each other about what they knew and what they were learning, and how they were doing on the learning progression to proficiency on each standard.

This will happen with your students. It may not happen as fast as it did with mine. But stay tuned into their conversations as you begin to practice standards-based learning and be ready to catch your jaw when it drops. The most important change you will see is the way in which your students begin to accept responsibility for their own learning. There will also be some additional benefits. Homework completion may increase. Enthusiasm about the content may increase. Apathy may decrease. And you will find yourself creating many more lifelong learners than you have been.

I realize how difficult it is to believe until you see it happen. But be open to it, and, most importantly, give standards-based learning a legitimate try. Don't try it for two weeks, or two months. Give it a couple of school years. And really try it. Don't leave something (like student goal setting) out. Do it all. Do it at your own pace, but do it all. Then, be objective about what you see and what you don't see.

There is even more good news. While standards-based learning is better for students, in fact, once teachers make it through the transition stage to full implementation, standards-based learning is better for teachers. It provides time to go deeper, clarity about the content, and evidence that they are reaching more students.

A Necessary Paradigm Shift

Standards-based learning will require some fundamental paradigm shifts, but these shifts won't mean teaching in a completely different and unfamiliar way. When standards-based learning is happening in the classroom, the content taught won't change very much. Even the teaching strategies that teachers use won't change much. But how teachers think about *what* and *how* they teach will change profoundly.

Perhaps the biggest paradigm shift for the teacher in the classroom is moving away from the notion that there is a substantial amount of content to work through in a school year and toward the notion that there is a set of standards, including factual knowledge and sets of skills, that he or she must develop in students. The content is there as the *vehicle* to develop those standards. The sequence of dealing with the content will likely be very similar to what has been traditionally taught, but its purpose will be different.

While curriculum and instruction will be very similar, the one area that will change a great deal will be assessments. Now, instead of assessing specific content in, say, a unit test, the unit test will assess certain standards by asking students to use the content they've learned to show their growth on the standards. This is a subtle but powerful difference.

Essential to standards-based learning is the use of the standards to identify, for teachers, students, and parents, what the students must *know* and be able to *do* by the end of the learning. This places what happens in the students' heads at the center of everything pedagogical in the classroom. Teachers are looking to change the students' knowledge and abilities through their actions. This represents a change from traditional teaching. Traditionally, teachers design instruction to present content to students that they expect them to learn. In standards-based learning, they design instruction to promote student learning of the standards through the content. The good news is that standards-based learning, in placing the student's learning at the center of what happens in the classroom, is a much more effective method for accomplishing the teacher's new educational task—helping every student learn.

One major focus of standards-based learning is to achieve an integrated model of learning. Because the standards will sit at the center of everything teachers do in the classroom, identifying and clarifying those standards properly will integrate everything teachers do. Therefore, standards-based learning is a highly effective method of connecting curriculum, instruction, assessment, and feedback.

A result of this alignment for teachers who have taught in a traditional setting for a very long time is that, once the transition to standards-based is made, a clarity emerges that often wasn't there before. Importantly, that clarity will emerge for students as well. For perhaps the first time in their experience of school, they will see the relevance of everything teachers ask them to do, and they will be much more likely to participate in the learning because they are motivated to watch their own progress.

A Word About Terminology

In this book, we use the term *standards-based learning* rather than *standards-based grading* because the program involves so much more than assigning students grades. One important aspect of standards-based learning is that with standards as the focus of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and feedback, the grades students receive are meaningful to them in terms of their own learning.

Two terms that this book uses interchangeably throughout, though our primary usage will focus on the latter, are *standards referenced* and *standards based*. This occurs because the process for figuring grades in each concept is essentially the same. However, there is a difference between the terms, as can be seen in a review of literature on these two topics.

Standards referenced means that teachers report student progress in reference to the priority standards for a specific grade level or course (Marzano, 2010). Grant Wiggins (1993, 1996) and Robert J. Marzano (2010) describe *standards-referenced grading* as a system in which teachers give students feedback about their proficiency on a set of defined standards and schools report students' levels of performance on the grade-level standards, but students advance at the end of the course or year based on passing performance and other factors, only some of which may involve proficiency on the standards. Marzano (2010) observed, "The vast majority of schools and districts that claim to have standards-based systems in fact have standards-referenced systems" (pp. 18–19). In a system of standards-referenced grading and reporting, students might move upward in grade or content level without demonstrating proficiency in all the standards for that particular course or grade level.

Standards-based grading is a system of assessing and reporting that describes student progress in relation to standards. In a standards-based system, a student can demonstrate mastery of a set of standards and move immediately to a more challenging set of standards. This means that if a third-grade student masters the entire set of third-grade mathematics standards in two months, that student immediately begins to work on fourth-grade mathematics standards. The same principle applies to all grade levels and subject areas: as soon as a student demonstrates competency with all the standards for a specific level

and subject area, he or she immediately begins working on the next level of standards for that subject area. At the same time, a student who does not achieve proficiency on the standards continues to work on those standards until he or she reaches proficiency. Thus, standards-based grading is the process teachers also use for *competency-based* or *proficiency-based learning and reporting*.

For the purpose of our work and this book, we will use the term *standards-based learning* to represent the practices and processes we explain. However, we will refer to *standards-referenced reporting* when appropriate during our discussion of traditional methods of grading and delivering report cards.

How to Use This Book

While it is true that there are resources for administrators and school leaders involved with the change to standards-based learning, we want to provide a resource for the K–12 classroom teacher who has to make standards-based learning work in his or her classroom. While we present the theory behind standards-based learning, this book's purpose is to provide practical guidance for the classroom teacher. We base the information we present in these pages on our years of training classroom teachers around the world in their transition to this new concept of teaching.

Our approach is sequential, and we present each stage of adopting and implementing standards-based learning. In each chapter, teachers will find specific advice and examples designed to make the transition easier.

Chapter 1 discusses how to plan instruction in a standards-based learning environment using proficiency scales. This chapter provides detailed guidance on how to understand the learning progressions within proficiency scales. It then discusses how teachers can use their proficiency scales to create and sequence cohesive lesson and unit plans to optimize student learning.

In chapter 2, teachers will then learn how to instruct their classes using proficiency scales. Special mention is made of instruction techniques to use when beginning content instruction, as students develop proficiency, and when students move past proficiency.

Chapter 3 outlines the crucial student practice of setting goals and tracking their own progress toward these goals. It provides strategies for how teachers can encourage, both implicitly and explicitly, goal-setting behaviors in their students and highlight goals that will best encourage student learning. Finally, this chapter contains ways for teachers and students to track progress both individually and classwide, as well as suggestions for celebrating success as they reach goals.

Chapter 4 thoroughly explains how to administer quality classroom assessments in a standards-based environment, and how to subsequently figure student grades. We present types of assessments and different scoring methods, as well as strategies for calculating summative scores using proficiency scales and dealing with unusual patterns of performance.

Special considerations for teaching exceptional students is the topic of chapter 5. This chapter provides guidance for using and modifying proficiency scales with exceptional learners, such as students with disabilities, English learners (ELs), and gifted learners. It also discusses how to link standards-based grading with special classes such as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) classes.

Finally, chapter 6 delves into how to best communicate the standards-based system of grading to parents and other community members. It details how to approach parent-teacher conferences, including student-led conferences; how to convey proficiency scale grades on report cards; and how to convert standards-based grading methods to letter or percentage grades, when required. A list of frequently asked questions can be found in appendix A for additional information on implementation of standards-based learning practices.

While not a step-by-step guide, this book tries to provide the basic information most teachers can use as a starting point to adapt their instructional program to their specific needs. We will provide the overall framework, specifically advising where we think teachers must implement elements and suggesting places where they can adapt elements. In the end, you as the teacher must make the program your own. We hope we can provide the advice and benefit of our experience for your journey.