

H-DHS is Transitioning from a Traditional to a Competency-Based Grading Model

Hillsboro-Deering High School is transforming grading from a traditional model to a competency-based grading system. Over the past two years teachers have revised course competencies, aligned them with the state and national standards, and developed rubrics and assessments to accurately measure what students know and are able to do.

Competency education is based on the principle that grades earned by a student measure what the student knows and is able to do. Courses are organized into competencies, which clearly identify key content and skills a student needs to demonstrate proficiency in a course. Student work is examined through the use of rubrics to measure student learning and report that learning on report cards and transcripts.

Using the competency model, students are given many opportunities and many pathways to demonstrate that they have reached proficiency. They are able to progress at their own pace. Their teachers provide individualized instruction and facilitate their learning progression. Teachers collaboratively develop assessments which measure how well students perform. The result is a rigorous education that identifies exactly what students know and are able to do and to what degree.

A rubric is a tool that clearly defines the criteria and levels of proficiency. Rubrics can be specific to a particular assignment, or can broadly cover an entire competency for a course. Grades are derived by examining student work and determining which level on the rubric scale is the most appropriate match. Teachers generally develop rubrics that are specific to the course, competency, or skill they are assessing. Students are provided with these rubrics when an assignment or task is given so that they have a clear expectation of what they need to do in order to complete the assignment or task at a proficient or higher level.

The competency education model is quickly becoming recognized by higher education institutions as a far more reliable and rigorous assessment method than the traditional model. Through our conversion from a traditional to a competency education model, our student transcripts remain consistent. Our transcript still lists each course a student completed, their final course grade, and how many credits the student earned. We still list other information such as: Class Rank, Grade Point Average, and SAT scores.

We are confident that this competency-based model is a more accurate representation of what students know and are able to do. Our system teaches our students to become critical thinkers and problem solvers. Our students can analyze situations and adapt to new ones. School must prepare students for real life. It is not enough anymore to simply memorize facts and figures. A competency-based education model promotes a rigorous learning environment that prepares our students to better interact with our ever-changing world in college and beyond.

To preview a draft of the 2015-2016 report card and communication diagram, please visit the high school website at hdsd.org.