STANDARDS-BASED INSTRUCTION (SBI)

THE BEGINNINGS
In 2015 Kindergarten teachers began researching alternate report cards that would provide skill mastery information to families. This led to a multi-year task force of teacher work groups dedicated to moving to a standards-based instruction and reporting process. The first Kindergarten report card was released in January 2018 and Grades 1-4 unveiled their new report cards in November 2018. The initial feedback from K-4 parents was resoundingly positive.

THE MOVEMENT GROWS
Starting in 2018 departments at Belgrade Middle School began to receive training and have time to work on developing the components of a standards aligned system. As of December 2019 all middle school departments have received at least an initial training on the SBI process and have begun to plan for a standards based report card to be published in the Fall of 2021. The majority of department heads in both schools have received training in the PLC process which compliments our work with standards.

Belgrade administrators were trained in PLC and SBI during 2019. This is a critical step as the district has scheduled PLC time each Friday for the first time in history. This hour is dedicated to professional development, data analysis and planning that will positively impact student achievement.

THE VISION
The move to standards referenced instruction was a deliberate choice to:

1. Increase clarity for teachers and parents about what is learned and reported.
2. Use assessment to guide instruction rather than just provide an averaged grade.
3. Provide an improved tool for communicating student achievement to families.
4. Separate academic achievement from behavior and other factors.
Belgrade administrators are committed to supporting the growth of the Standards model to all schools. There are added challenges at the Middle School and High School, but the advantages listed above will compensate for the challenges of implementation.

LEADERSHIP
The responsibility for implementing SBI in the district lies with the Curriculum Director supported by each building principal. In addition, teachers play a critical role as developers of prioritized (reported) standards, assessment tools, tracking forms, and instructional resources. Two representatives from each grade level at each building serve on a K-4 SBI Team. At the middle school and high school, departments will comprise their own implementation teams. Professional development and paid work time are key components of our implementation plans.

TIMELINE
Recognizing that implementation of a new approach is a challenge given our lack of curriculum support staff, work time, and PD. The following next steps reflect the order in which the process will likely unfold:
2. 5-8 Report Card / K-4 add other subjects - projected 2021-22
3. 9-12 Standards based instruction implemented - projected 2022-23
4. 9-12 Standards based report card to follow

COMMUNICATION

Decision-makers: Principals, Curriculum Director, Superintendent

Advisor: Jenny Combs, Alliance for Curriculum Enhancement

Work Groups: 2 grade level reps from each building for K-4 / departments for 5-8 and 9-12. Reps are to communicate with peers at each building.

Curriculum Director: Inform Superintendent and School Board and work with principals to involve parents.
Principal: Inform and educate staff within the building.

Q & A

Q: Why are we changing how we report grades in K-8?

Our current grading system was originally designed to separate students into categories: college students vs. laborers. A single letter isn't effective in communicating a student's performance and achievement. Our challenge is to prepare all students with a standard of knowledge and skills, to provide feedback that informs instruction and to communicate with parents about their child's strengths and deficits.

Q: Don't the textbooks companies hire experts to do all this work for us?

Textbooks companies include as many standards and activities as possible to make the book attractive to certain states and all teachers. They make no effort to prioritize and operate on a "one size fits all" approach. While we can use texts and online resources, we want to adjust materials based on student needs.

Q: Does this mean I will spend more time assessing and not very much time teaching?

Absolutely not! Standards-based instruction, grading, and reporting is not about testing. In fact, teachers will collaborate to create clear and efficient assessments of standards for the purposes of reporting that will shorten and lighten the testing load.
Q: How will we know if a student is eligible for school activities?

Schools that have extra-curricular activities will develop a system of accountability to determine eligibility. Completion of assignments at a proficient level will likely be the target.

Q: Can a student advance to the next grade if they have not mastered the standards?

Yes, the record of what specific standards the student has mastered and/or needs more work on will be a great advantage for next year’s teachers so they can accommodate needs much earlier than in a traditional model. If students are significantly behind, then perhaps further testing needs to be done to see if the student needs additional supports.

Q: What does a teacher do with the student who passes the standard on the very first try?

This is the proverbial challenge of teaching---accommodating those who are at either end of the instructional spectrum. Teachers can have independent activities planned for those students. Some schools have found success dividing students up into enrichment groups for those who show early mastery and reteaching groups for those who need another try. Utilize other resource people such as the librarian or Gifted-Talented Teacher.

Q: Is this an initiative that will go away with time or changes of staff?

Standards-based instruction (SBI) is gaining a strong foothold in our country as well as internationally. SBI and grading is based on the principle that grades should convey how well students have achieved standards. Belgrade Public Schools believe that grades are not about what students earn but about what students learn.
Q: What is the timeline for including electives and special classes in SBI?

There is no firm timeline right now, but as the core academic subjects are developed then electives and other courses will be added as time and resources allow.

Q: What can I do now to prepare for the change if my school doesn't yet have an SBI process?

1. Reflect on your current grading practices and what you believe grades really represent. Be prepared to engage in conversations about what grades mean and who grades are really for. In essence, begin cleansing your grades by making sure that assignments are meaningfully aligned to content standards (no busy work).

2. Work with your department or grade level to answer four questions:
   a. What do we expect students to learn?
   b. How do we know if they have learned it?
   c. How do we react when students have met the standard?
   d. How do we react when students have not met the standard?

Q: How does SBI relate to Professional Learning Communities?

They truly go hand in hand! SBI is focused on developing assessments and procedures to determine mastery of standards. Professional Learning Communities provide the structure and time to review data and collaboratively plan instruction so that all students learn. They are symbiotic parts of the process of making sure that we reach all students.
Q: Why Standards Based Instruction?

It makes sense that if we're going to increase learning we need to be more clear about what we want students to know and be able to do and then agreeing on how we're going to assess that learning.

Q: Has Standards Based Instruction been successful?

Yes, the highest achieving schools in the world use this approach to increase student achievement. This isn't a new approach in education even though it is new to us. In much of our district we are seeing increased learning as we focus our instruction with Standards Based Learning.

Q: How do PLC’s work into the Standards Based Instruction plans?

PLC’s are a process that help us structure our conversations about what we want students to know, how we'll assess them and how we'll follow up if they know it or haven’t learned it yet.

Q: Is time available for learning content other than standards?

Absolutely---think of standards as the minimum competencies that we want students to have so that they can extend their learning in interactive units, blended learning, and self-directed projects. The curriculum and instruction are much larger than the set of standards that are housed under the curricular umbrella.
Q: Is Standards Based Instruction the same as Standards Based Grading?

Not really. It’s possible to teach using a Standards based approach, but then convert the grade to a percentage or letter grade. Most teachers find that this doesn’t usually make sense as you’re taking data that is more specific and reporting it in a more general way.

Q: So, bottom line, is our district making a long term commitment to this process?

Yes! We are moving towards full implementation, but don’t have a concrete timeline for completion at each level. We will continue to provide professional development and support for implementation of Standards Based Instruction with the intent that all schools will be on board within the near future. The full implementation of Standards Based Grading may lag behind that process.

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