WMRSD Leaders and Learners – Your Community Connection
White Mountains Regional School District

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Lancaster Elementary School Updates Its Competency-Based Student Learning System

At Lancaster Elementary School, staff are always looking for ways to make learning easier for students and clearer for families. This year, the school is making an update to the way student progress is communicated through its Competency-Based Student Learning System.

The goal is simple: to provide families with a clearer picture of what their child knows, what they can do, and what they are still working to learn.

Beginning this year, families will notice some changes to student report cards and, in some cases, individual assignments that come home. Instead of primarily reporting progress on individual standards, report cards will use Learning Scales to show student progress toward larger competencies in Mathematics, Reading/Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, and Unified Arts.

What Is a Competency?

A competency is a larger skill or area of learning that students develop over time. It brings together the knowledge, skills, and understanding students need to be successful.

For example, in mathematics, students do more than learn how to complete a particular type of problem. Students are expected to solve problems, explain their thinking, choose appropriate strategies, and use what they have learned in new situations.

Rather than looking at one assignment or one skill at a time, competencies help teachers and families look at the bigger picture of student learning.

This means asking questions such as:

- What do students understand?
- What can students do independently?
- Can students use what they have learned in a new situation?
- What do students need to continue working on?

Understanding the Learning Scale: E, A, D, and B

The Learning Scale uses four levels to show where a student is in their learning. These levels help describe progress rather than simply assigning a traditional grade.

E = Extending

Extending means a student has a strong understanding of the competency and can take their learning a step further. Students may be able to make connections, solve more challenging problems, explain their thinking in greater detail, or use their learning in a new situation.

A = Applying

Applying means a student understands the competency and can use what they have learned independently. Students are able to apply their knowledge and skills to classroom work, problems, or situations they have been asked to address.

D = Developing

Developing means a student is building their understanding of the competency. Students may demonstrate parts of the skill independently but still need additional practice, instruction, feedback, or support.

B = Beginning

Beginning means a student is just starting to develop the knowledge and skills connected to the competency. Students are learning the foundational skills and may need significant instruction, practice, modeling, and support.

It is important to remember that these levels show where a student is right now. They are not labels for students, and they do not mean that a student is finished learning. Students will continue to grow and move along the Learning Scale as they gain knowledge, skills, confidence, and independence.

What Will This Look Like on Assignments?

Families may also see an E, A, D, or B on individual assignments that come home. Teachers may use a Learning Scale rating to show how a student's work demonstrates a particular competency.

There is one very important thing to remember:

The letters E, A, D, and B are not traditional letter grades.

For example, an A means "Applying." It does not mean the student received an A grade. An E means "Extending." It does not mean an E or F grade. These letters are simply a way for teachers to communicate where a student is in their learning.

How Is This Different From Our Previous System?

The previous standards-based reporting system focused on individual standards and skills. This provided families with information about the specific things students were expected to learn.

The new competency-based system takes a slightly bigger-picture approach. One way to think about it is that standards are individual pieces of the puzzle, while competencies help everyone see the completed picture.

Instead of only asking, "Can the student do this particular skill?" teachers are also asking:

- Can the student use this learning?
- Can the student explain their thinking?
- Can the student apply what they have learned independently?
- Can the student use their learning in a new or different situation?

This approach allows the school to focus more on the development of students as learners and less on whether they have simply completed a particular assignment or checked off a particular skill.

When Will Families See Learning Scale Ratings?

Report cards will be shared with families three times each school year, at the end of each trimester. Families will receive report cards in November, March, and June.

The report cards will include Learning Scale ratings for competencies in:

- Mathematics
- Reading/Language Arts
- Social Studies
- Science
- Unified Arts

These report cards are just one part of the communication between school and home. Throughout the year, teachers will continue to provide feedback, share student work, communicate with families, and use classroom assessments to monitor student progress.

What Is the Goal?

Ultimately, this change is about making student learning easier to understand.

The school wants students to know what they are learning and what they need to do to continue growing. Families should have a clear picture of their child's progress, while teachers should have meaningful information that helps them plan instruction and provide students with the support and challenge they need.

At Lancaster Elementary School, staff believe learning is a journey. Students will not all reach the same place at the same time, and that is okay. What matters is knowing where each student is, understanding what they need next, and continuing to help them move forward.

The goal is to move beyond simply reporting what was taught and focus on what students know, what they can do, and how they continue to grow.