



Response to Sept. 21, 2021, West Cook News Article

Last week *West Cook News* ran an article alleging that the OPRFHS division head of history has lowered the standards for her American History class, based on her syllabus for the class. The very premise of the article is false: The division head on whom the article centers has never taught the American History class in question, let alone had a syllabus for it.

Aside from this fundamental flaw, the article claims that the College Board's grade-point-average (GPA) conversion scale amounts to the "U.S. standard" for classroom grading. This is an apples-to-oranges comparison. GPA is how schools average final course grades together; how a teacher grades assignments *within* a class is something else entirely.

The article completely misunderstands--and misrepresents--the difference between percent-based grading and rubric-based grading. Educators have struggled for the past several years to find ways to convert the time-honored percentage-based grading scale (90% or better = A, 80-89% = B, etc.) to a much more learning-centered rubric that recognizes levels of mastery of specific skills and standards.

Most standards-based scales are 0-4 or 0-5 and reflect students' increasing skill or mastery. The numbers in a standards-based scale do *not* correlate with the traditional percentage-based, letter-grade scale. For instance, on a standards-based scale of 1-4, a score of 1 indicates that students have little understanding of a concept and cannot demonstrate any mastery of it. As students learn and progress, they can demonstrate partial mastery of a standard and score a 2. Once they meet a target, they score a 3. The 4s are reserved for students who exceed the learning target.

Unfortunately, most schools' student information systems (including Skyward, the system that OPRFHS uses) don't easily account for these better standards-based methods of grading. As a result, teachers who use standards-based grading find ways to make it work, fitting a square peg in a round hole. For instance, below is a 0-4 standards-based grading scale from noted educational scholar Dr. Robert Marzano. The chart illustrates how one might convert the standards-based scores to a traditional A-F scale.

Marzano (2010) Standard to Letter Grade Conversion Scale

3.75-4.00 = A+	2.84-2.99 = B+	2.34-2.49 = C+	1.76-1.99 = D+
3.26-3.74 = A	2.67-2.83 = B	2.17-2.33 = C	1.26-1.75 = D
3.00-3.25 = A-	2.50-2.66 = B-	2.00-2.16 = C-	1.00-1.25 = D-

Below 1.00 = F

Claiming that, for instance, a 3 *out of* 4 means that the student got a 75% utterly misrepresents standards-based grading, presumably to make the case that OPRFHS has lowered its standards--which is patently false.

What is particularly egregious is that the article associates the challenges that our Black and Brown students faced during the pandemic with what it pretends are lower standards. The implication here is that even despite these “lower standards” (which, of course, are nothing of the sort) our Black and Brown students still struggled. Other than brazenly insulting our students, this implication is made despite the well-documented fact that the pandemic has affected our communities of color harder than several other communities across our county. At OPRFHS, we do have higher standards than this article implies, including in our journalism classes. By any measure, the article cited here fails to hit the mark.