

School Board weighs pluses, minuses, then eliminates them

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Standards-based grading turns an A- into an AB, all but eliminates GPA at OHS

The Northern Ozaukee School Board approved a switch to standards-based grading at Ozaukee High School that will change the look of student report cards.

The standards approach to grading has been in place at the middle school for several years, but the change had not advanced to the high school.

The grading system establishes educational goals related to mastery of the subject matter, giving a more objective assessment of student progress.

Letter grades are reinterpreted to represent mastery, proficient, basic and minimal, rather than numeric values.

High School Principal Jeff Sauer told the School Board the approach all but eliminates the use of grade-point averages.

He conceded the traditional rating of student performance is still needed to satisfy scholarship application requirements and colleges.

Several high-school teachers used standard-based grading in a pilot program last year, and Sauer said the evaluations were well received.

Sauer said teachers who took part in the pilot program believe students appreciated the personalized feedback the system offered on proficiency.

The grading does drop the plus and minus from the grading scale. Instead, easier to describe intermediate grades of AB and BC will be added to report cards.

“What this system does is define where we want our students to be,” Sauer said.

The determination of mastery and proficiency drew praise from board members.

“It is simple and consistent, but no matter what we do, there is going to be some grouching with any change,” board member Tom Hoffmann said.

Supt. Blake Peuse said the grading system sets a higher bar for classroom performance.

“It increases the academic rigor a little. We want all of our students to be at least proficient in a subject — which is the equivalent of a B in the old system,” Peuse said.

“Average is no longer a C ... it is proficient.”

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The grade-system change also allows for added value for advanced placement classes. Performance in AP classes will add 1.0 to grade-point averages. Previously, AP class performance added .5 to a student's GPA.

As an example, under the new grading system, a B in AP calculus would be treated as if the student got an A in a conventional class.

In hopes of heading off questions about how standards-based grading will be implemented, Sauer said he hoped to prepare short videos and podcasts that will be available by the start of the school year.

The School Board unanimously approved the grading system change.