

Building a Strong School-Family Partnership

Family engagement is a key strategy of the Bellingham Promise. Research is clear; your involvement in your child's education matters! Students whose families are engaged in their school lives attend class more regularly, achieve at higher levels, and generally have better behavior both at home and at school.

Our middle school family engagement model includes a wide variety of ways for teachers, parents and the school to communicate with one another about student learning. Some examples include:

- » Curriculum nights and open houses
- » School and class newsletters and web pages
- » Student work and classroom communication
- » Phone calls, emails, notes home
- » Skyward Family Access
 - *MS Gradebook available Nov. 2012*
- » Parent, teacher and student conferences
- » Progress Reports
 - *Sent home Nov. and April*
- » Assessment Reports
 - *Sent home after district and state assessments*
- » Report Cards
 - *Sent home Feb. and June*



Having been engaged in standards-based instructional strategies for years, middle school staff are excited to match our reporting system to our practices. There are two changes underway that will support and improve how staff communicate with you about your child's progress.

1. A new student information system called **Skyward** has replaced the outdated Zangle/ParentConnect system.
2. All Bellingham middle schools are transitioning to a **standards-based reporting system**. This shift in the way staff report your child's progress will make it easier to see your child's achievement toward common core national, state and district learning standards.

Skyward Supports Better Communication

The new student information system (Skyward) supports standards-based reporting. Family Access, much like Zangle's ParentConnect system, will allow families to see information on their child's assignments, test scores, and work habits; it also gives parents a window into the learning focus of each class. As staff phase in components of Family Access, you will see the Gradebook become an option on your Family Access menu in mid-November.

Standards-Based Education and Reporting: More Specific, Objective, and Fair

Because a standards-based system is focused on student performance in relation to grade-level learning targets (standards), it is a more fair and objective way to determine how each student has demonstrated he/she knows and are able to do. This approach provides students and families with more specific information about the parts of each subject that have been learned and what needs more focused attention. It also gives students more ownership of their learning because they are involved in monitoring progress of their learning.

What's the difference between the traditional "A" through "F" grading system and a standards-based reporting system?

Traditional Grading

- A, B, C, D, F represent percentage of points accumulated
- Non-academic factors affect grades, such as participation, work habits, attendance, late work, etc.
- Everything is graded and averaged together
- Early assignments can skew the final grade
- Reports a single grade for each class

Standards-Based Grading

- 4, 3, 2, 1 represent student performance in relation to specific standards
- Based on common core national, state, and district standards
- A report of what students know and are able to do
- Reflect academic performance only
- Behavioral information (called Student Success Attributes) reported separately

When will I notice a difference in the reporting system?

Progress reports will be coming home the second week of November. Staff will include reference information in the first progress report to assist you in reading the new information.

Staff expect the Gradebook section of Skyward's Family Access to be online in mid-November. In the meantime, each middle school has a plan for keeping families informed about student progress. Throughout the year, schools and teachers will continue to engage families in multiple ways on behalf of students. Please contact your child's teacher or school office with any questions.

"Think of a baseball card. When you looked at Mickey Mantle's card, it didn't say an A on the back. It included his fielding average, hitting average, home runs — then you know why he's a good player. Why would we give a student just one grade?"

— Robert Marzano, Education Researcher

