

Do you have to change your grading system with CBE?

One consideration of adopting or experimenting with competency-based education (CBE) is how to report student progress. Traditional schools in the USA often use an A-F or percentage grading system. But for CBE schools, there is no one way to approach progress reporting. Some of the common changes schools consider are:

- **Grading on a 1-4 scale.** Some schools replace the traditional 100 point scale and letter grades with a 1-4 scale. On this scale, a 3 is typically “proficient.” Other schools create a hybrid system, combining aspects of traditional grading with a 1-4 scale.
- **Work habits, also called study skills or habits of mind.** CBE acknowledges that a student’s work habits are separate from their mastery of the material. Some schools eliminate work habits grades, while others disaggregate and report them separately.
- **Retakes.** A central idea of CBE is that students should have multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency, or show what they know. It can be up to the individual teachers or the school to set reasonable limits on how retakes are administered and for what types of assessments.
- **Holistic reporting.** Some schools choose to move away from grades entirely, focusing more on narrative progress reports or checklists to communicate student progress.

When grading systems change, report cards also change in response. CBE report cards can be complicated to decipher, with long keys explaining the new systems. Proponents like that they focus on the student’s demonstration of mastery. ([Sample CBE report card](#) from Norwich Public Schools, Norwich, CT, USA. Report card starts on page 5.)

Students have a variety of responses to shifts to CBE grade reporting systems. Some express confusion, while others find the new system helps them focus on what they needed to become proficient. Both students and parents may worry whether CBE grading will negatively affect the college admissions process. However, admissions leaders overwhelmingly agree that students from CBE schools are not at a disadvantage when applying to college. ([See a statement](#) from 75 New England colleges and universities.)

Keep in mind: while changing the grading systems may seem like an obvious first step for schools exploring CBE, some educators in CBE schools advise focusing on teaching, learning, and other systems-level concerns before tackling grades.

Learn more:

- Guide to standards and proficiency-based grading for a hybrid system at [Noble High School](#)
- Resources on the [Great Schools Partnership, Grading & Reporting](#) page

