

For the 2016 senior classes across the district, the OPS grading scale has changed at least five times since they were in middle school. The goal of these changes is to find a grading scale that is more in line with the national standards and that accurately represents student learning.

The previous grading scale that OPS used left a 64% margin for failure, a grade of an "F" being anything less than a score of 64%. These new scales aimed to lessen that gap, making it easier for students to pass classes.

Unfortunately, when put into practice, the current grading scale doesn't pass the test.

According to the Secondary Grading Practices brochure that can be found on the OPS website, Standards Based Grading gives students grades that "are based on achievement of District-wide/State content standards, which specify what students should know and be able to do."

OPS high school teachers have been trained on the Standard Based Grading practices over a period of five years. Despite the fact that they all took the same training and were supposed to learn the same thing in order to have a uniform grading scale, not all teachers follow the proper procedures.

One teacher said that he disagrees very strongly with the grading system because he doesn't feel it prepares the students for the future. He tries to follow the college system to best prepare the students for success after high school.

This teacher requested to be anonymous because he did not want to get in trouble for his differing views.

Some teachers still grade by points, converting the percentage score into groups that are split up into the 1-4 scale.

While others grade on a curve, giving the students with the highest score in the class the best grade and everyone else a grade based off of their score in comparison to the best score.

Many teachers have claimed that grading on a curve prepares students the best for college since that's what many professors do "in the real world." However, the aforementioned pamphlet explicitly states that "Grading on a curve is not based upon an individual student's work and should never be used."

It is no question that not all teachers are on the same page with the grading scale that OPS requires them to follow.

But for parents, or teachers, that are still confused, there is a short video on the OPS website that gives a brief explanation on what Standards Based Grading is and how it will be implemented throughout the entire OPS district.

After a short intro, several words pop up on the screen. The first word to pop up is "consistency."

Consistent grading practices are supposed to ensure that all teachers use the same system to keep all grades fair and allow students to have the highest chance of success.

However, when most teachers use their own version of the system, it makes it harder for the students to succeed.

It doesn't seem fair that students are expected to succeed in all of their classes when they don't even know what they need to do in order to be successful.

Previous grading scales allowed unit tests and semester finals to be weighted differently based off of their importance or difficulty level. The video also explains that individual assignments will not be weighted because scores go in folders that already have weights.

Teachers have found a way around this by entering the grade into the gradebook twice, as if it were two separate assignments, even though students shouldn't be graded for the same thing more than once.

OPS may not have chosen the most effective ways of implementing Standards Based Grading, but how will anyone ever be able to determine it's effectiveness if the majority of teachers are not doing it the way that they are supposed to be.

The district is constantly trying to compete at the local level with other school districts in the metro as well as on the national level, but until OPS can develop a grading scale that is actually beneficial to students, or until they can get all of their staff on the same page, OPS will continue to fall behind other districts.