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Parents upset about new grading system in Bangor Township Schools district

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Andrew Dodson | The Bay City Times



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Bangor Township Schools Superintendent Shawn Bishop talks about the district's pilot program of standards-based grading to a crowd of more than 120 parents Tuesday night.

BANGOR TWP. — Parents are calling a new grading system in the Bangor Township Schools district unfair, arguing their students are earning lower grades as a result.

To a crowd of more than 120 parents and students, Superintendent Shawn Bishop and John Glenn High School Assistant Susan Gillings informed parents about a pilot program called standards-based grading. The grading system forces students to go beyond basic application of concepts learned in the classroom.

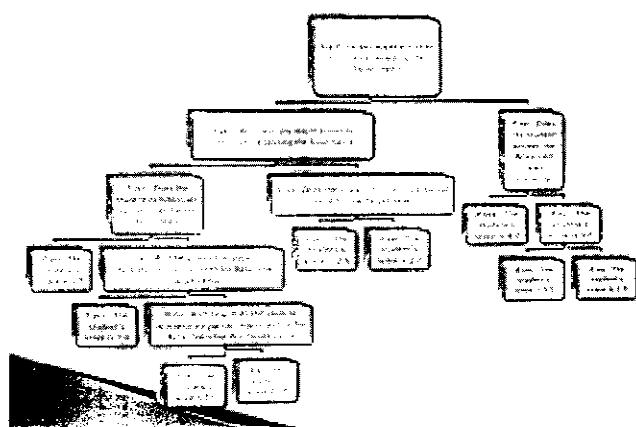
But parents call the system unfair and want the school district to go back to traditional grading.

"I think it's hokey," said Tom Killey, whose grandson is a sophomore at John Glenn. "The concept is good, but how they are grading it needs some work."

Gillings said students will still earn a letter grade, but the style in which classroom material is presented is different. Giving an example of a quiz, Gillings said it would be broken down into three parts:

- **Basic Section:** This section measures the basic knowledge of a specific area that the teacher is covering. A student who just passes the basic section earns a 2.0 grade, or a 'C' letter grade.
- **Target Area:** This section is where students should be at, said Gillings. It shows that students can apply basic knowledge to real-world situations. A student who is in the target area earns a 3.0 grade, or a 'B' letter grade.
- **Advanced Section:** This section shows that students can take applied knowledge a step further and make a connection to an outside issue that a teacher wouldn't cover. Students in this section earn a 4.0 grade, or an 'A' letter grade.

Standards Based Flowchart

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This flowchart that was handed out to parents at the meeting, explains the process of grading with standards based grading.

Jodi Kraska of Bangor Township, said her sixth-grade student Taylor Kraska missed four out of 12 questions on a basic section of a recent quiz. She said the teacher would only continue to grade the test if the student would correctly answer at least 10 basic questions completely.

"If a kid knows a lot about the subject, but misses 1 or a few questions in the basic section, they won't grade the rest of his quiz — even if the target, or advance sections are correct," said Kraska. "Their definition of proficient is different than my definition of proficient."

Board of Education Treasurer Brian Tobin attended the meeting as a board member and as a parent of a high school student. He admitted the school district communicated poorly to parents about the new grading system. He said no board action was taken in implementing the system.

"I would say 95 percent of the parents here are not upset about the instructional aspect of the system, but are about the grading (aspect)," said Tobin. "Some of those issues do need to be ironed out."

Bishop said the district researched the grading system at Bridgeport-Spaulding Public Schools in Saginaw County, which has implemented the program, and through various data.

"This is something we didn't take lightly," said Bishop, who is in his first year as superintendent. "This is a way to make our kids more prepared for the world they live in. Anything we can do to make them better we are going to do because we owe it to our kids."

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