Mandan 1
NORTH DAKOTA

A Move to Standards-Based Grading
—with some unexpected results

MC SUCCESS STORIES
A small rural district was making the big move to standards-based grading, but was struggling to find a solution to track and report standards.

After Mandan 1 selected MasteryConnect to support them in their transition, they experienced impressive (and some unexpected) results.

Read about their SBG transition and how MasteryConnect helped them

› Better manage teacher-created resources
› Maintain a culture of teacher autonomy and judgment
› Supercharge PLC and teacher collaboration
› Improve parent communication with easy-to-use portals
In Mandan 1, a small rural North Dakota district of 3,600 students, the elementary staff was in the midst of moving to standards-based grading (SBG). But they didn’t have the right tools to effectively track and report standards.

Sure, the state-mandated gradebook worked fine for a traditional average-based system, but it wasn’t going to cut it for the new approach. “It unfortunately doesn’t support standards-based reporting well,” explains Perry Just, Director of Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction. “It also doesn’t support teachers’ abilities to make judgment calls well either,” he continues. “And, ultimately, good teaching is all about making judgment calls.”

With an emphasis on finding flexibility for teacher autonomy, Mandan 1 chose MasteryConnect to help them implement SBG. They’d soon find that the web-based platform would not only assist them in the grading transition, it would help them communicate the change with parents while taking teacher collaboration to the next level.
Supporting teachers has always been part of the Mandan 1 philosophy. Due to its small size, there are no district-level teams to provide resources for teachers. Teachers choose their own power standards, build curriculum, and create their own assessments. “We build our curriculum—everything—on the backs of our teachers,” explains Just.

Because teachers create up to 90 percent of their assessments and materials, Mandan 1 realized the importance of providing a solution to house all of these resources in one location. MasteryConnect helps them do that in a way that’s aligned to standards, making it easier for teachers and administrators to track and report on those standards.

MasteryConnect also provides flexibility for teachers to adjust students’ scores as needed. While the district uses the latest score in MasteryConnect to reflect students’ current levels of understanding, administrators understand the latest score doesn’t always accurately reflect student learning. Maybe a student scored poorly that day for reasons outside the student’s control. MasteryConnect allows for this flexibility, and administrators support teachers’ judgment in changing scores to accurately reflect student learning.

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- Perry Just
Mandan 1 had another tricky problem to solve when implementing SBG: parents weren’t used to the standards-based and mastery-based strategies. How would they react to seeing standards in remediation without a full understanding of how formative assessment works?

Before MasteryConnect, teachers had felt like they were going backward in their efforts to connect with parents. The state-mandated parent portal didn’t provide the necessary support for standards-based and mastery-based teaching and learning, and teachers were resorting to direct contact and email to communicate with parents.

With MasteryConnect in place, Mandan 1 has the ability to offer parent portals that support standards-based grading.

With MasteryConnect in place, Mandan 1 has the ability to offer parent portals that support SBG. At first, administrators and teachers were nervous about how the new portals would be received. But after opening them to the sixth grade class, they were pleasantly surprised. “When we opened them we were a bit anxious that we'd get a hundred parent phone calls,” says Just, “we got three.”

The launch of the new standards-supporting portals in the sixth grade was such a success that the fifth-grade teams quickly asked Mandan 1 administration for access. And their results? Equally positive.

Perry Just credits the portals for being easy-to-use tools that help parents learn about the new grading structure: “Even though we have parents who don’t yet fully understand standards-based and mastery-based instruction, they appreciate the ability to see exactly where their child struggles and then email their child’s teacher for suggestions on how to help.”
MasteryConnect has not only helped Mandan 1 educators communicate with parents, but it’s helped them communicate with each other.

Mandan 1 had invested in professional development and Professional Learning Communities (PLC) as a way to help meet the increasingly stringent requirements for adequate yearly progress (AYP).

“Even though we’d begun the process and felt it was important, PLC implementation was not prioritized,” Just recalls. “It initially wasn’t even on our radar as we grappled with the early roadblocks to implementing standards-based tracking and reporting.” But, to their surprise, MasteryConnect provided the necessary umph! to fully implement the PLC process.

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- PERRY JUST

Teachers in Mandan 1 are no longer guessing whether questions and assessments are good. Entire district-wide grade-level teams “sit down” virtually to share best practices, create and revise assessments, hold each other accountable, and continually improve their instruction.

And that’s not the end of their PLC success. They’ve included affective Approach to Learning standards in MasteryConnect, so teachers of all subjects collaborate on students’ behavioral as well as academic progress. Grade-level teams use data rather than anecdotal information to focus more objectively on how they can collaborate to adjust instruction. And professional development days have been switched from the traditional “sit and get” to exclusive PLC time.
“Because of MasteryConnect and its support of the PLC process, we now have the opportunity to replace common summative assessments with common formative ones,” explains Just.

As they continue their journey with standards-based grading, Mandan 1 is confident that it’s helping them achieve their mission: to provide foundations in learning, citizenship, and work ethic that will help students reach their potential. And Just believes that MasteryConnect plays a major role.

“The implementation of MasteryConnect has been a good process for us,” Just explains. “It has facilitated an excellent transformation in the teaching and learning process. I know we wouldn’t be where we’re at without it.”
MasteryConnect provides formative assessment and competency-based learning solutions to educators around the world. MasteryConnect combines professional development with its web and mobile platforms, including Socrative, to help teachers identify student levels of understanding in real time, target students for intervention, and use assessment data to inform instruction. We now serve over 2.5 million teachers and 21 million students in more than 85% of U.S. districts and 170 countries.