

Teachers, Families Cope With New Grading System

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Wednesday KMXT told you about common core and the new Alaska standards for learning, and what those look like in Kodiak classrooms. The new curriculum has changed the way information is presented, but more than that, it's also changed how students' understanding is measured.

Superintendent Stewart McDonald said students are now being asked to apply things they learn, rather than simply study and pass a test.

"Think of a spelling test. I made 100 percent spelling the words right, the next logical question to ask is can I use those words correctly in my writing. But the new content standards we're dealing with don't stop there. They say, no, can you use those words in a meaningful way and apply it and actually get work done. Did you use those words to persuade, did you use those words to do something more engaging and applied. And that's the difference."

McDonald said the old system would assign a percentage and that would give a student a letter grade. Now teachers use a rubric that will assign numbers related to comprehension. For example, understanding with errors is a one and developing skills are a three.

Jenny Schauf is the curriculum coordinator for the district and said standards based learning has been going on in the elementary schools for more than three years, but now it is being used in the middle school.

"Middle school is rubrically based as well, so the rubric score is, they no longer receive a letter grade per say, but they still do use that conversion at the high school."

Unlike the middle school, students at the high school still receive letter grades, but how those grades are determined now comes from the rubric system.

McDonald said feedback about this new grading format has been mixed. More often than not, families that have good communication with teachers about how the rubric system works and what grades mean are satisfied.

"Where the breakdown is happening is when a parent only receives a number of 1.8 or 2.3 and if

it had showed up as a letter C or a letter B, they would say well that means something to me.”

He said parents should work with teachers and administrators to make sure they are getting the proper feedback and understanding how this new system works, especially if they think their child might be struggling.

McDonald said there has been a huge learning curve for this new grading system, especially for teachers who are being forced to redo how they measure students’ learning.

“They are almost classroom to classroom, feelling like they are a brand new teacher. And so they are relearing, rethinking and redesigning lessons and trying to figure out how do I take this lesson and get it to the application level. It’s a struggle, and it’s frustrating.”

McDonald said students will be taking pilot tests this spring to measure how they are doing with the new standards, meaning teachers have had less than a year to adjust to the changes and present the new curriculum.