

Promotion and Graduation by Portfolio

Student work is assessed at Parker via portfolios, using school-wide standards and rubrics. To advance through its six-year program of studies, students are required to meet the school's standards for Divisions I, II, and III; each may do so at the rate appropriate for his or her individual development. Students demonstrate mastery of curricular standards in each Division through "Gateway Exhibitions" in which they present and defend their academic portfolios. The final Gateway is graduation, for which students present special Graduation Portfolios in several areas.

In Year-End Assessments, teachers evaluate student progress in narrative form, and assess their work (as "Just Beginning," "Approaches," or "Meets") relative to the curricular standards for their Division. The Parker transcript shows these assessments as well as the dates on which the student advanced from Division to Division in each area. A narrative evaluation by faculty, summarizing the student's high school career and academic potential, accompanies the Parker transcript, as does the student's reflective self-summary.

Parker doesn't use numbers, rank, or traditional A–F grades. Narrative assessments at mid-year and year's end contain the student's academic evaluations. Parker's transcript form simply documents the student's progress through our academic program, using the following code:

JB = Student is **Just Beginning** to work toward a Division's standard

A = Student's work **Approaches** the standard for a particular Division

M = Student's work **Meets** the standard for a particular Division

Because motivation and hard work predict success in college and later life, the transcript also indicates student's progress and effort.

Gateway Exhibitions

Parker School students progress through three **Divisions**, the curricular standards of which are roughly comparable to late middle-school level work (Division I), foundation-level high school work (Division II), and advanced or independent high school work with transition to post-secondary education (Division III). Each Division comprises a multi-year curricular cycle, and students of mixed ages are grouped together for the entire cycle. "Promotion" at the Parker School consists of students exhibiting readiness to move from Division to Division, as follows.

Each year all Parker students assemble a **Year-End Portfolio** in each Domain, which serves as the basis of their Year-End Assessment report. When that Portfolio shows they are consistently meeting the Standards of Division I in a particular academic Domain or team (Mathematics, Science, and Technology (MST); Arts and Humanities (AH), or Spanish), as well as making academic progress, students may advance to the next Division via the "**Gateway Portfolio Exhibition**".

Gateway Portfolios are quite similar to the Year-End Portfolios, but they are formally exhibited before a mixed audience of students, teachers from both Domains, parents, and community members. Gateway Portfolios also include a cover letter in which students sum up and reflect on their progress throughout the Division and their readiness for the next Division's challenges. Students' ability to reflect on their work and respond to audience questions is an important element of their demonstrating readiness for promotion.

The Gateway Portfolio Exhibition marks a student's successful progress through the multi-year Division curricular cycle, and his or her readiness to work toward the next Division's standards and goals. Students who continue in a division are not "repeating" curriculum but rather entering another year of that cycle. Students who advance to the next division move into the beginning of that division's multi-year curriculum cycle.

Students may proceed at different times into the next Division in each Domain; for example, many students are in Division II MST and Division I Arts and Humanities, or vice versa. Gateway Portfolio Exhibitions take place at several appropriate points in school year. Teachers and advisers consult with families to decide the best time for each individual student to advance into a new Division.

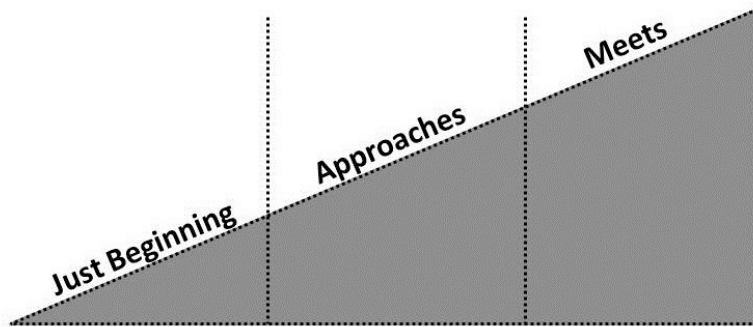
Assessment at Parker

(a translation for parents!)

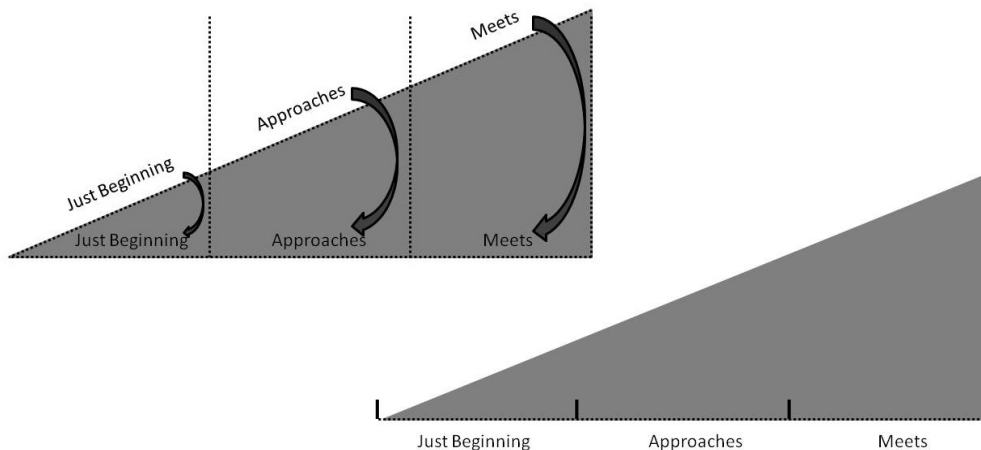
At Parker, all major projects (known as “assessments” or “portfolio pieces” in the Parker lingo) are graded, or assessed, on a continuum. Unlike the traditional grades that you probably grew up with (A, B, C, D and F), at Parker, student work receives marks along a continuum that reflect their progress towards the goal of MEETING standards.

It is easiest to think of this continuum as a hike up a mountain. At the beginning of their journey in a Division, students are at the base of the mountain and their task is to work their way up to the top of the mountain through continued practice. Students gradually improve their skills through class work, daily homework and projects and through internalizing and applying the teacher feedback they receive.

With each opportunity to practice, the goal is for students to “climb” a little higher up the mountain. We use the language of “Just Beginning” (abbreviated as JB), “Approaches” (A), and “Meets” (M) to communicate how close a student is to the “summit” of the mountain. Our belief is that all students can and will get to the top of this mountain (that is, they will MEET standards) through continued effort, practice, and utilization of teacher feedback. It takes most students about two years to consistently meet standards in any domain. When they are consistently meeting standards in each skill area, they are ready to gateway to the next division.



Therefore, when we assess student work, the “grade” or assessment is an opportunity to convey to students where they are on their journey towards Meets. Through written feedback (rubrics, progress reports, etc.), student work earns an assessment on this JB-A-M continuum. Since the mountain visual above is a bit cumbersome, we flatten it, as the visuals below show, into a one line statement about where students are on their climb towards meeting.



The line to the right is what students see on their rubrics, where their teachers give them feedback on their work.



While students might talk about “approaching” or “meeting” on a project, each of these areas is itself a range, as you can see in the visuals below. Teachers use the visual to give students a sense of where they are on the continuum, but this visual can be tricky to translate into words. There are many spots within any one range on the continuum; when we try to represent a student’s current standing on the continuum in a situation where the visual is not available to us (in conversation, on a progress report), the words we use to translate this visual are as follows. We will use the Approaches range as an example:



This is referred to as “entering the Approaches range” or an “Emerging Approaches”



This is referred to as being “solidly in the Approaches range” or a “Solid Approaches”



This is referred to as being in the “upper end of the Approaches range” or as a “High Approaches”

Over time, a student’s goal is to consistently MEET the standards for each skill area in each domain in order to be prepared to gateway (see separate document for explanation of skill areas and gatewaying). So, if MEETS is the goal for students, why is that a range as well? When students MEET the standards in a class, this means that they have accomplished the central task of the assignment and demonstrated proficiency in the skill area. However, all MEETS work looks different. The intention of the range is to both allow students to feel success and clarity about having met the essence of the standard and to give them feedback for continued growth. We sometimes hear students say, “I’ve already met in that skill area,” as if that meant that they no longer had room for growth. Our goal is to have students both feel pride in having met the standard AND to be clear that there are ways that they can continue to deepen their learning and competence in each skill area.

Ultimately, the purpose of the continuum is to give students a clear picture of where they are relative to the goal of meeting standards. But, even more important than this visual and the continuum itself are the comments that the teacher gives to the student. In these comments, teachers are highlighting for students what they have done well and where they continue to have room to grow. We encourage parents/guardians to help students focus on the comments rather than the assessment (“grade”) itself. Helping students to understand clearly what they are doing well (and should continue to do!) and what they can do to improve the next time around is the most important feedback that we want them to take away from an assessment.