

Meeting the Demands of STAAR: 2011 Secondary School Leadership Institute  
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**Three Types of Assessment:**

- **Pre-Assessments:** These assessments are used to indicate students' readiness for content and skill development, and to guide instructional decisions. Any kind of assessment completed prior to teaching a lesson.
- **Formative Assessments:** Frequent and ongoing assessment, completed en route to mastery; ongoing assessment could be considered as "checkpoints" on students' progress and the foundation for feedback given—the most useful assessment teachers can provide for students and for their own teaching decisions. Not a typical test—it is designed to provide precise feedback to both the teacher and the student. Often it is not counted as part of a student's grade. Corrective feedback (re-doing work) with a second parallel formative assessment is given and mastery is expected before the student moves on to the next material.
- **Summative Assessments:** These assessments are given to students at the end of the learning—culminating demonstration of what the student has learned. These assessments are used by the teacher at the end of instruction to evaluate a student's learning, certify competence, and assign grades.

**Designing Assessments:**

- Start with where we are going—*summative assessments*. Design this one first, and make sure everything in the unit's objectives or understandings is accounted for in the summative assessment. Literally write out the culminating project or unit test before we design the first lesson.
- Once summative assessments are identified, determine the *pre-assessments*. They are smaller pieces and versions of the summative assessments.
- Identify frequent and plentiful *formative assessments* that will guide instruction and help with feedback to ensure mastery of the material.

**Common Assessments:**

- Teachers that teach the same subject should work together to develop common assessments so that assessment is consistent within subject areas.
- A common final exam should be developed for each subject. This creates consistency and also creates accountability.

## Notes:

- Spend considerable time and effort designing and using formative assessments offered en route to summative achievements. These frequent checkpoints are where students learn the most.
- In order for assessment to be valid, it must be varied and done over time. Assess the student on the same material a while later (distributive practice)
- Allow students to redo work for full credit. Students are not “on” 100 percent of the time No one is. Rick Wormeli (*Fair Isn't Always Equal*) states:

“Before readers get too hung up on their interpretation that such extensions and multiple attempts would never be allowed in the real world, they are encouraged to reexamine two premises: *First*, for most grade levels and in all subjects, it’s developmentally inappropriate to hold students to adult-level competencies and deadlines. We’re preparing students for being who they are right now, and they are just now coming to know the subjects we teach. *Second*, the real work is like this. In almost every professional situation, we can set things up for extended deadlines (or finishing projects with enough time left to make multiple attempts to fix our mistakes before the deadline).

- A surprise to some: Low grades push students farther from our cause, they don’t motivate students. Recording a D on a student’s paper won’t light a fire under that student to buckle down and study harder. It actually distances the student further from us. Guskey and others have documented this effect (Guskey and Bailey 2001) (Wormeli).
- When it comes time to generate the letter grade that will declare mastery or lack thereof, we have to respect the student’s individual development and consider that everyone learns at a different pace and in a different manner and, perhaps more important, that these variances are not setbacks, negative, or punishable.
- Zeros skew the grade to a point where its accuracy is distorted. Teachers using the 100-point scale who do not replace a zero with a fifty, sixty, or seventy to equalize the influence of all grades earned end up recording inaccurate grades. What should a final grade reflect?

## References:

Thomas Guskey, *Implementing Mastery Learning*.  
Rick Wormeli, *Fair Isn't Always Equal*

## Designing Classroom Expectations for Re-doing Work (Heather Sass, SREB)

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### Why Redoing Work is Essential to Helping More Students Meet Standards

- Asking students to redo, polish and perfect their work is part of successful classrooms, particularly in schools of high-minority, high-poverty
- Redoing a few pieces of written work a few times results in greater learning than writing many pieces that are graded once each
- Providing specific information about learning in terms of particular objectives increases achievement
- Using feedback is the single most powerful innovation to enhance student achievement
- Instilling a sense of persistence in struggling students can replace hopelessness

### Have you heard these protests against re-doing work?

Point	Counterpoint
Allowing students to redo work fails to teach them a sense of responsibility and accountability.	The greater responsibility is in persisting in completing work until it meets standards, which also builds internal motivation. All students need to be held responsible for not only turning in work, but for doing quality work, which make take some students more time than others.
Allowing students to redo work fails to prepare them for the real world.	There are many situations in the real world in which redoing is allowed, and even expected. Redoing work is an important part of the learning process and part of most professional training programs.
Allowing students to redo work isn't fair to students who get it right the first time.	The issue is whether we are assessing students in relation to each other or in relation to the standard. If our goal is to get all students meeting standards, the reward for the student who gets there more quickly is that they do not have to redo the work, and can use the time for enrichment activities. The final grade in a standards-based classroom reflects the degree to which the student met the standard rather than how quickly they achieved it in relation to other students.
It is the "fault" of the student for not getting it right the first time.	Sometimes whether or not a student masters a standard can be due to circumstances beyond their control. Students may have had poor instruction in previous courses or fundamental skills or concepts. They may need more time or a different instructional method to understand.
It's too much work for the teacher.	There are many ways to manage redoing work that can lead to greater efficiency in getting students to meet standards.

**"In standards-based classrooms, students have the opportunity to continuously revise and improve their work over the course of several days."**

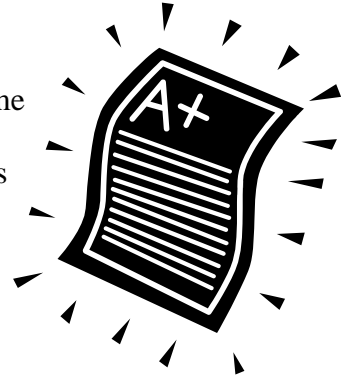
Doug Reeves, Making Standards Work. Advanced Learning Press, Englewood, Colorado. 2003.

# Facing the Grading Controversy

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Grading seems to be the last frontier of individual teacher discretion. The same school leaders and community members who would be indignant if sports referees were inconsistent in their rulings continue to tolerate inconsistencies that have devastating effects on student achievement.

Doug Reeves, "Leading to Change: Effective Grading Practices," *Educational Leadership*, May 2008



## What is Standards-Based Grading?

Providing feedback to students on the degree to which they are meeting the standards\*. The grade communicates information that will help students assess their own progress and supports further learning.

## Why Standards-Based Grading?

- Provides clear, accurate feedback on what students know and can do
- Places a consistent focus on learning rather than compliance to individual teachers' expectations
- Communicates readiness for the next level
- Promotes a better match between grades and standardized or state assessment results

## What Should "Count?"

Assessments That Relate to Standards	Assessment of Other Learning Factors
Use in Determining Standards-Based Grade	Report Separately From the Standards-Based Grade
Tests Projects Performances, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Essays</li> <li>➤ Research Papers</li> <li>➤ Presentations</li> <li>➤ Lab Experiments</li> </ul>	Homework Completion and Practice Class Participation Attendance Tardiness Student Behavior Effort Timeliness Following Class Rules Extra Credit (for completion only)

\*Standards refer to learning outcomes which may also be delineated as benchmarks, grade-level expectations or performance indicators.

## Facing the Grading Controversy

Issues	Recommendations
<p><b>Alignment with Standards</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Factors other than achievement are included in grading.</li> <li>➤ Classroom assessment methods may or may not measure quality work in relation to the standards.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Decide on the evidence you will collect to determine if students have met standards. Align and code all assessments with a reference to the standards being measured. ASK: “Does each assessment measure what was taught?”</li> <li>➤ Distinguish between formative and summative assessments. Plan for both.</li> <li>➤ Create a grade book that records evidence of learning in relation to the learning outcomes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Compiling Scores Into a Grade</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Inconsistent methods are used to determine grades.</li> <li>➤ Grades are determined by averaging scores or amassing points (as a percentage of total points) through a marking period.</li> <li>➤ “First” efforts or practice work is not distinguished from summative assessment.</li> <li>➤ “Borderline” grades are resolved with “some extra credit.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Use a consistent method to convert scores to a final grade.</li> <li>➤ Base grades on summative, not formative assessment. Provide feedback frequently, grade occasionally.</li> <li>➤ Replace early evidence with more recent evidence.</li> <li>➤ Collect additional evidence for borderline grades.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Using Grades as A Form of Ranking or Punishment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Students are graded in relation to each other as opposed to in relation to learning criteria.</li> <li>➤ Zeros are used to punish students for missing assignments.</li> <li>➤ Students are penalized for redoing work that is not to quality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Focus on credit for learning and not credit for ability or credit for compliance.</li> <li>➤ Expect students to redo work without penalty to improve their performance on the standards. Students receive the grade that reflects the degree to which they have met standards.</li> <li>➤ Use the Power of “I” and give incompletes for missing work. Communicate with parents when work is missing and require work to be made up before, during or after school within negotiated timeframes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Involving Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Students have little understanding of how their grade is determined.</li> <li>➤ Students experience grades as something that is “done to them” rather than a reflection of their learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Teach assessment criteria and indicators of quality work, encouraging students to assess their own work.</li> <li>➤ Provide frequent feedback using formative assessments.</li> </ul>

## KEY ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE RE-DO POLICY/NO ZERO POLICY

1. Students no longer receive zeros when work isn't turned in; they don't have an option not to turn in work.
2. Late work is just that – late – but it must be *completed* if teachers are to correctly determine if students know and understand the standards being taught and assessed.
3. Students must be given extra help opportunities (*required*) to complete the work during the school day (not during the class – ever), after school, Saturday School, or whatever fits your school's possibilities. (This piece is completely up to schools to determine how this help can best be delivered.
4. Consequences change for students not having work ready to turn in on time:
  - Require students to stay after school in an extra help setting to complete work
  - Require students to attend an extra help class during the school day
  - Some policies state that students are not allowed to participate in any extra-curricular activity (sports, band, chorus, clubs – events and practices), if they are missing any assignments or have attempted to turn in poor quality work.
  - Must contact students' parents and solicit their assistance – this must begin early and will have the greatest impact.
  - Requires a parent conference at a pre-determined number of missed assignments or failed tests, etc.
  - Students will receive an "I" on any assignment not turned in.
4. Tests may be excluded from the policy.
  - a. Teachers may choose to give students opportunities to raise test scores by coming in during extra help times.
5. Students cannot receive an A (or a B in some schools) on any assignment that is late or turned in incomplete (some schools have instituted specific time periods)

### A few students will still fail no matter what you do. So.....

- i. Final report cards have asterisk or note reporting to parents that the F is a result of failure to complete work.
  - ii. *The goal is to get all groups of students to meet grade-level course standards at an acceptable level.*
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## Leading to Change / Effective Grading Practices

Douglas B. Reeves

If you wanted to make just one change that would immediately reduce student failure rates, then the most effective place to start would be challenging prevailing grading practices. How can I be so sure? Try this experiment in your next faculty meeting. Ask your colleagues to calculate the final grade for a student who receives the following 10 grades during a semester: *C, C, MA (Missing Assignment), D, C, B, MA, MA, B, A*. I have done this experiment with thousands of teachers and administrators in the United States, Canada, and Argentina. Every time—bar none—I get the same results: The final grades range from *F* to *A* and include everything in between.

As this experiment demonstrates, the difference between failure and the honor roll often depends on the grading policies of the teacher. To reduce the failure rate, schools don't need a new curriculum, a new principal, new teachers, or new technology. They just need a better grading system.

### Ineffective Grading

The results of my experiment are not surprising. Guskey and Bailey (2001) and Marzano (2000) have synthesized decades of research with similar findings. Neither the weight of scholarship nor common sense seems to have influenced grading policies in many schools. Practices vary greatly among teachers in the same school—and even worse, the practices best supported by research are rarely in evidence.

For example, the most effective grading practices provide accurate, specific, timely feedback designed to improve student performance (Marzano 2000, 2007; O'Connor, 2007). In the best classrooms, grades are only one of many types of feedback provided to students. Music teachers and athletic coaches routinely provide abundant feedback to students and only occasionally associate a grade with the feedback. Teachers in visual arts, drafting, culinary arts, or computer programming allow students to create a portfolio to show their best work, knowing that the mistakes made in the course of the semester were not failures, but lessons learned on the way to success. In each of these cases, "failures" along the way are not averaged into a calculation of the final grade.

Contrast these effective practices with three commonly used grading policies that are so ineffective they can be labeled as toxic. First is the use of zeroes for missing work. Despite evidence that grading as punishment does not work (Guskey, 2000) and the mathematical flaw in the use of the zero on a 100-point scale (Reeves, 2004), many teachers routinely maintain this policy in the mistaken belief that it will lead to improved student performance. Defenders of the zero claim that students need to have consequences for flouting the teacher's authority and failing to turn in work on time. They're right, but the appropriate consequence is not a zero; it's *completing the work*—before, during, or after school, during study periods, at "quiet tables" at lunch, or in other settings.

Second is the practice of using the average of all scores throughout the semester, a formula that presumes that the learning early in the semester is as important as learning at the end of the semester (Marzano, 2000; O'Connor, 2007). Interestingly, when teachers and administrators have been students in my graduate courses, they routinely insist that they should be evaluated on the basis of their understanding at the end of the semester rather than their work throughout the term.

Third is the use of the "semester killer"—the single project, test, lab, paper, or other assignment that will make or break students. This practice puts 18 weeks of work at risk based on a project that might, at most, have consumed four weeks of the semester.

A small but growing number of school systems are tackling the issue head-on with comprehensive plans for effective grading practices. (The policy developed by one such district, Grand Island Public Schools in Nebraska, is available at <http://wikiassessments.editme.com/files/GradingandReporting/G%26R%20Guiding%20Docs.pdf>.)

But even in districts that have attempted to put effective grading policies in place, enforcement is often inconsistent. Grading seems to be regarded as the last frontier of individual teacher discretion. The same school leaders and community members who would be indignant if sports referees were inconsistent in their rulings continue to tolerate inconsistencies that have devastating effects on student achievement.

## High-Stakes Grading

The Alliance for Excellent Education estimated that the annual cost of high school failure exceeds \$330 billion ("An Economic Case," 2007). Some of these failures are no doubt caused by excessive absences and poor student performance. But, as the experiment at the beginning of this column clearly indicates, many failures are caused by the differences in teacher grading policies.

Do another experiment: Randomly select 30 course failures from the last semester, and determine the cause for failure. Two common causes are missing homework and poor performance on a single major assignment—a term paper, lab, or project. What would it mean to your school if you could reduce the number of failing grades resulting solely from uncompleted homework?

The stakes of grading practices are not limited to student failure. When grading policies improve, discipline and morale almost always follow. For example, Ben Davis High School in Indianapolis, Indiana, achieved a remarkable reduction in course failures through focused attention on improved feedback and intervention for students (Reeves, 2006). I recently checked in with the school, and Principal Joel McKinney reported that the success of this challenging urban school (74 percent free and reduced-price lunch, high mobility, and increasing numbers of English language learners) did not stop with reducing 9th and 10th grade failures. As of fall 2007, enrollment in advanced placement classes had increased 32 percent; suspensions had declined 67 percent; elective opportunities in music, art, and technology had increased; class cuts and tardiness had fallen significantly; teacher morale and school climate had noticeably improved—and the course failure rate had continued to decline (personal communication, December 5, 2007). When schools take steps to reduce failures, lots of good things happen.

## The Steps to Take

Although changing grading systems is a challenging leadership task, the benefits are so great that it's worth doing.

First, create a sense of urgency. Identify the exact cost of inconsistent grading practices. How many failures can we prevent this semester if we improve our grading practices?

Second, identify teacher leaders who are already improving policies. Chances are that some teachers in your school have already eliminated the use of the average and the zero on a 100-point scale and created meaningful opportunities for corrective feedback outside of grades. Provide a forum for these teachers to share their insights with colleagues and lead the effort to develop improved policies.

Third, get the facts; gather evidence that will create a rationale for decision making. At the end of the day, your choices about teaching practice must be guided by evidence, not opinions. For example, although many people sincerely believe that giving poor grades as a punishment is effective, Guskey (2000) has marshaled 90 years of evidence to the contrary.

Fourth, reassure parents, students, and teachers that certain things will *not* change. Students will still have letter grades, transcripts, honor rolls, individualized education plans, and everything else that they have counted on as part of their grading system. What they won't have is irrational grading policies that give students widely different grades for the same work.

The benefits of effective grading practices are not limited to a reduced failure rate—although that benefit alone is sufficient to justify change. When student failures decrease, student behavior improves, faculty morale is better, resources allocated to remedial courses and course repetitions are reduced, and resources invested in electives and advanced courses increase. When was the last time a single change in your school accomplished all that?

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