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Standards-Based Grading That Results in Grades Accurately Reflecting Students' Knowledge

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December 11, 2014

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Submitted on December 11, 2014
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St. Catherine University
St. Paul, Minnesota

Advisor _____

Date _____

Abstract

The purpose of this research project was to measure the effectiveness of grading practices commonly associated with Standard-Based Grading (SBG). Participants included 60 ninth and tenth grade struggling readers in a rural Midwestern high school. Qualitative data collection methods included: Google Forms, student reflection and journaling, conferencing with students, and comparing this year's grades to last year's grades (by student). During a four week period, certain SBG practices were implemented such as: offering re-dos, highest possible F (59%), specific feedback, and not grading all formative work. Without grading every assignment, student's English grades decreased from the previous year. However, students reported feeling their grade was an accurate representation of their knowledge. Grading practices will remain throughout the year in this same manner and data will continue to be collected as research has been beneficial.

“In school, many of us procrastinate and then successfully cram for tests... We might cram to get the grades and degrees we need to get the jobs we want, even if we fail to get a good general education” (Covey,2009, pg 17). This quote from Stephen Covey speaks about society and the severe disconnect between grades, education, and knowledge. Ideally, if good grades are achieved a good general education has been given and relevant knowledge has been learned. Unfortunately, this does not always happen. Grades often are based off information which has nothing to do with standards being met or knowledge obtained. Educational Leaders have noticed this disconnect and have come up with several solutions to help grades become a more accurate reflection of what students have truly learned.

I teach in a rural community with a population that hovers around 12,000. Our high school enrollment is at 1,300 this year which is the most students the school has seen in over a decade. The town is not incredibly diverse with a population that is 88% white, 7% American Indian, 2% Black, and less than 1% of each Asian and Hispanic. Its diversity comes in the form of socioeconomic status. Our free and reduced lunch population is at 30% at the high school level but three of our five elementary schools are at 50% and the remaining two are near 40%. That being said, we consider our free and reduced population our largest minority.

In my specific position, I work with struggling readers. A majority of my students are either part of the free and reduced lunch population, living in foster care, or living in a group home. Many have struggled through school for several years by the time they walk through my classroom door. Through conversations with students over the years, I have found that getting grades has not been a positive experience for them. Often times,

students become discouraged after receiving a poor grade or when they get to the point where they do not believe they can receive a passing grade anymore. There are other times when students believe they know the material but due to missing work or poor behavior they do not do well in a course. Right now in education, “most current grading practices are grounded in tradition, rather than research on best practice. Teachers continue to average scores to calculate grades; combine indicators of achievement, behavior, and progress into a single grade; and grade on the curve, despite evidence showing the detrimental consequences of these practices” (Jung & Gusky, 2011). There has to be a better way to ensure students earn accurate grades based on their knowledge. Through my action research I hope to find a method that not only helps improve the accuracy of student grades in my classroom, but also helps improve student attitudes towards grades and their ability to do well in an English classroom.

Beyond student attitude, grades help determine students' lives after high school. Colleges often look at GPA, grades, and high-stakes test scores in an effort to find which students will be successful on their campus. Unfortunately, many schools are finding “that the grades students earn in their courses often are not good predictors of how they will perform on those exams” (Welch & D'Agostino, 2009; Willingham, Pullack, & Lewis, 2002). This discrepancy uncovers a long-hidden truth: historically, grades have not been reliable indicators of what students know and are able to do” (Jung, 2001). If colleges are depending on grades and GPA to determine who gets accepted to their school, I would like to be able to give them accurate information on my students.

In the past, I have accepted late work from students, given written and verbal feedback on assignments, and made several accommodations for students. Yet, I still feel

there has to be a more accurate way to grade. When reflecting on changes made in the past, I realized that the feedback students were getting from me could have been better feedback. Dinnen & Collopy (2009) found that “descriptive feedback is more effective at raising student achievement than feedback that merely evaluates the extent to which something is right or wrong.” The feedback being given to students was more evaluative than descriptive. Accepting late work is a step in the right direction as evidenced by Guskey (2004) and his research on how zeros are not good motivation for students.

Feedback, accepting late work, giving purposeful work, and the percentage of a failing grade are all aspects I would like to improve in my classroom in an effort to give students more accurate grades. These are all important pieces of Standard Based Grading, or SBG. SBG is not an entirely new concept but it is also not a method that has been in effect for very long. I feel the uniqueness of my students (all labeled as “struggling readers”) will bring new and relevant information to the study of Standard Based Grading. Due to its relative newness, its effect on the accuracy of student grades and attitude has not been studied to the extent of many other grading methods. This is why the question I have decided to research is: What effect will Standard Based Grading have on the accuracy of student grades in a secondary English classroom?

The current grading system is due for a major overhaul. Far too often it forces teachers to take into account factors other than the student’s knowledge when assigning grades.

Jeanetta Jones Miller (2014, *What the Researchers Say About Grades*, para. 3) speaks to the importance of grading systems when she states “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.” With the traditional grading system, students can earn a passing grade simply by turning in work. Standards-based grading is “more accurate than grades that are based on traditional grading systems that incorporate a mixture of academic performance, extra credit, behavior, and work habits,” (Proulx, Spencer, & Westerberg, 2012, *The Promise of Standards-Based Grading*, para. 2). Standards-based grading is a better way to show what standards students have been able to master over the course of the school year. In addition, many researchers believe “standards-based grading is fairer for students' report cards because achievement is more accurately represented in relation to learning expectations or standards,” (Tierney, Simon, & Charland, 2011, para. 2). Grades should accurately portray the students' learning in their specific classrooms.

Grades are interpreted by many different individuals; students, teachers, counselors, parents, colleges, and more. Yet there is no consistent set of criteria to base grades off of. This means the interpretation of grades can vary from one person to the next and takes away the credibility of grades. A student's grade should, ideally, represent how well they know the material; it should not reflect behavior in class or many other non-academic based criteria. This should be the base of how teachers grade so all interpretations, no matter who is looking at them, can begin with the same understanding. However, literature concerning grading practices reveals that a greater than expected number of factors are used in determining student grades. While traditional tests and quizzes are almost always considered, other factors include evaluations of class participation, homework, projects, oral presentations, notebook reviews, labs and lab reports, effort, neatness, behavior and attendance, as well as a teacher's personal

assessment of a student's traits and personal characteristics, (Carey & Carifio, A Critical Examination of Current Minimum Grading Policy Recommendations, 2009).

It is difficult to distinguish what qualifies as academic and what qualifies as behavioral. Most teachers will not be able to agree 100% on where these actions belong and if students should be graded on these actions or not (Dockery, 1995, para. 5). “If a grade reflects what students have learned, we must not penalize students' grades over behavioral issues,” (Dockery, 1995, para. 5). Teachers need to focus on what the students are learning, not outside influences. “...traditional end-of-course grades are the final products of many factors, including quizzes, homework, behavior, and attendance, with standards based grading nothing but mastery matters. Standards-based grades account for nonacademic elements very minimally or not at all,” (Spencer, 2012, Headnote, para. 3) which helps the grade reflect actual student learning. When grading systems differentiate between practice and mastery, students have more incentive to master the skills necessary because there is nothing there to cushion their grade. This motivates students to move from easy concepts to more difficult concepts and rewards them “for ultimately obtaining knowledge, no matter how long” it takes, (Spencer, 2012, Headnote, para. 2).

Students' grades are often comprised of in-class assignments, tests, and projects along with homework. Although homework has been a subject of debate, “research indeed suggests that homework has an important effect on learning” and “students who spend more time doing homework achieve at a higher level than those who spend less time,” (Keith, 2004, Homework's Influence on Learning, para. 2). Homework is an essential part of learning, and it is even more important when actually completed at home: “out-of-school homework had a substantial effect on grades, whereas in-school

homework had no such effect,” (Keith, 2004, Abstract, para. 1). However, homework is for practice. It is not meant for summative purposes. “Teachers assign homework for extra practice, not to evaluate academic expertise. Too many students receive little support with homework, yet we give them a grade that usually has the same weight as daily work completed in class under our supervision,” (Dockery, 1995, para. 14). Homework assigned needs to be thoughtful and productive, not busywork. Again, if the purpose of homework is to give students extra practice, it is important to remember that not all students learn alike. Educators differentiate their teaching; so it makes sense then to offer a variety of homework assignments as well. Traditionally, “homework grades do not accurately express student understanding,” (Shippy, Washer, and Perrin, 2013, Headnote, para. 2) because everyone is expected to do the exact same assignment. Homework does not necessarily mean that it needs to be graded. Homework, along with behavior, attendance, notebooks, and group work, should not be included in a student’s grade; “instead, students should be graded solely on mastery of course content,” (Shippy et al., 2013, Headnote, para. 2). Assigning homework can be important as long as the homework helps to further the students’ learning, but it does not necessarily need a grade.

A zero in the grade book can take a student’s grade down significantly. A zero is “seldom an accurate description of a student’s achievement and skew average grades dramatically,” (Guskey, 2004, Headnote, para. 1). Additionally, zeros are “motivation killers,” (Dockery, 1995, para. 8). Many teachers claim to use zeros as a way to motivate students when, in fact, “research indicates the opposite--most students are discouraged by zeros and tend to give up, (Dockery, 1995, para. 8). More students tend to become discouraged and give up once a zero is entered as their grade for the assignment. In his

article, “0 Alternatives,” Guskey (2004) states “if the grade is to represent how well students have learned, mastered established learning standards, or achieved specified learning goals, then the practice of assigning zeros clearly misses the mark,” (The Use of Zeros, para. 3). When the notion of using zeros as a punishment is taken away, teachers are able to “make practice and course work more purposeful so that students believed that it was important to complete it,” (Proulx, Spencer, & Westerberg, 2012, Shifts Happen, para. 3). There is no advantage to using zeros for grading. A zero in the grade book discourages students from trying to master needed skills and does not accurately measure their knowledge.

Low scores often have a similar effect as a zero for students. They see too many low grades on assignments, and they begin to find themselves less motivated and less likely to continue trying their best. “No studies support the use of low grades or marks as punishments. Instead of prompting greater effort, low grades more often cause students to withdraw from learning,” (Guskey, 2000, Policy 3: Using Grades as a Form of Punishment, para. 2). Students should be given an opportunity to relearn and redo an assignment they earned a low score on. This shows that the student has not mastered an important skill they are expected to learn.

Several zeros or low scores often result in a failing grade. In a typical grading scale, 90-100 would equal an “A” grade; this is a range of ten points. An “F” could be anywhere from 0 points to 59 points; giving a 59 point spread compared to ten. In other words, “while the intervals representing most grades are typically 10 points or less, the interval for an “F” is typically 60 points or more,” (Carey & Carifio, A Critical Examination of Current Minimum Grading Policy Recommendations, 2009). This type of

grading is not only unfair but also demotivates students. “When combined with the common practice of grade averaging, the results of traditional grading are, too often, grades that are unfairly skewed by one or two poor performances,” (Carifio, 2011). Once the student receives a zero or a few low grades it is likely they will realize that they cannot pass and will stop trying. Often times when grades are discussed people forget to focus on the secondary effects grades can reinforce. These qualities include higher student confidence, self-efficacy, motivation and future performance, (Carifio, 2011). Minimum grading is a strategy that can lead to many of these secondary effects and there are many students who would benefit.

One of the most important aspects of grading is feedback. In fact, Miller argues “the most important purpose of grades is frequent, detailed feedback (2013, Standards-Based Grades, para. 1). If the purpose of grades is to reflect knowledge or progress, it is helpful to not only assign a grade but “provide comments, checklists, and/or brief written summaries regarding each student's work, (Dockery, 1995, para. 4). Feedback can be a series of anecdotal notes on the work in progress or a portfolio, it can be conferences with the student, it can be ongoing discussions with the student (either in person or through technology such as Google Docs, blogs, etc.), or it can even be a recording of verbal feedback for the student. Feedback should be given not to explain a grade, but to let the student know what they forgot to include (or forgot to show what they learned) or could make their assignment even better.

There are many different ways to make the traditional grading system a more accurate portrayal of a student's knowledge. A few topics in need of change include grading on actions instead of academics, the use of zeros, what an “F” is worth,

homework, and feedback. Once these changes take place, the grading system would not only make more sense, but it would also be more likely to encourage students to do their best and make it easier to understand the grading process.

Methodology

Before beginning my research I had to consider my students and class sizes. I decided to focus on my four classes of struggling readers. Since these students have already been identified as struggling students, their class sizes are smaller. Class sizes usually average around 12 and I have four classes. This year I ended up with a total of 59 students; 30 ninth grade students and 29 tenth grade students.

For the next step to complete my action research, I had to decide what I would like to change about the grading system I had used since beginning to teach. To do this, I had to think about what it was, specifically, that I did not like about the system. I decided I did not like that students' grades did not seem to reflect actual knowledge obtained in my classroom, but instead reflected a combination of knowledge and student behavior. I also did not like that a failing grade made up over half the grading scale. In addition to these major dislikes, I also found issues with missing work, no option to redo work, formative work being graded with the same weight as summative assignments, and the grading all formative assignments.

Once I had a list of what I did not like in my current grading system, I had to figure out how I was going to change it. In the beginning, the major changes I planned to make include:

- A minimum point value for an "F" grade on an assignment (meaning any "F" will be 59% and no lower).

- A “Relearn and Redo” policy will be enforced for all grades under a “C” (A grade under a “C” will go into the grade book as Incomplete until the student tries again and the higher of the two scores will then be entered). Many of my students are unable to come to school early or stay late so I will be incorporating work days/make-up days into my lesson planning during this time. Students may study (relearn) during this time or redo assignments or tests.
- Grades will be strictly based on academic material (not behavioral).
- Not all formative (practice work) assessments will be graded. Formative assessments will be differentiated so not every student is necessarily working on the exact same assignment.
- Students can turn in late work with no penalty.
- Zeros will not be given unless the assignment is missing.
- Assignments will be divided into two categories: formative (practice) assessments and summative (final) assessments. Formative assessments will be worth 10% of the final course grade and summative assessments will be worth 90% of final grade.
- Students will be aware of which standard/s each assignment is addressing.
- Each assignment, formative or summative, will be graded on a 4 point scale.

Some of these goals I had to change as I moved ahead in my action research. I discovered there was no way to convert to Marzano’s 4 point scale within the gradebook (Campus) we use. Instead, I posted the scale (see Appendix A) at various points around the room so students were aware of what the numbers meant and left my feedback on their papers/assignments with a number from the scale instead of a grade. In the actual gradebook I had to assign a grade. The best system I could come up with was a 4=A,

3=B, 2=C, 1=D, and 0=F. I also switched from allowing students to turn in any and all late work at any time to allowing students to turn in any and all late work within a unit. However, once we were done with a unit students could no longer turn in work because I felt it was no longer educationally relevant or helpful to the student.

Once I established what I wanted to change, I started planning how I was going to collect data. Students, parents, and teachers all see different sides of the story when it comes to grades. I felt it was important to hear feedback from all parties involved. In order to hear all points of view, I created a Google Form for each of these groups that I planned to give within the first week or two of school.

Since my action research was based on grades and grading practices, there were several changes that I had to make that deviated from the traditional grading pattern. When there were changes in my grading system compared to the “norm”, I addressed the changes in my syllabus which was sent home the first day of school. Also on the first day of school, I went over the syllabus with students and explained some of the reasons for the changes. We had brief discussions on grading practices but nothing in depth.

On the fourth day of school (Friday), I sent a letter home to parents explaining my Action Research and asking permission to use information given to me by their child. In this same letter, I asked if they could please take the time to fill out a Google Form themselves in order to give feedback from a parent’s perspective (see Appendix B). Once I allowed enough time for forms to come back (they had a due date of a week after I sent them home), I asked students to share their thoughts on grades by completing the student Google Form (see Appendix C). Students were given class time to complete the form and were asked to be as honest as possible. In addition, I contacted staff in my building by

sending a letter (see Appendix D) and asked if they would be willing to give me some feedback through a Google Form (see Appendix E) on their thoughts about grading practices and what they do in their own classrooms. After two weeks, I did not have any feedback from parents. I decided to send an email out to parents and ask, once again, if they were able to fill out a Google Form to give some feedback on their thoughts regarding grades.

Once students began to see grades from assignments entered into the gradebook, and began to see some of the changes being made, we had more in depth discussions and I assigned a few journaling opportunities to get a feel for what students were thinking about the changes. All journaling was done in class and was not graded. I did not grade these journals since they were formative and I also did not want students to feel as if they would get a bad grade if they disagreed with some of the changes made. In addition, I asked them to be honest with me as this would help decide if I continued grading with these changes, go back to the “old” way of grading, or kept some changes while ditching others. Many of my students have me for more than one year so they know what they say could have an impact on them in the near future.

Three weeks into my research I began looking at student grades from the year before and comparing them to their current grades in my class. I noted the grades so I could look once more at mid-quarter. My action research was complete before I could compare a full quarter grade so I checked grades at 3 weeks (when students had enough assignments in so that one grade would not overpower any others), and 4 weeks (mid-quarter).

At the end of my research, I conferenced with a few students and held a class discussion to find out their thoughts on the new grading system being used. At this point, they should know what they liked and disliked about it. Again, students were given class time to complete this Form and it was not graded. The results of these conversations, along with the data collected and analyzed, helped form the action plan for the remainder of the year.

Analysis

Throughout my research on grading practices I used mostly qualitative data. Different forms of data included: Google Forms, student reflection and journaling, and comparing this year's grades and missing work to last year's grades and missing work (by student). All this data formed an interesting picture of what students, parents, and teachers consider important in a grade and how students react to changes in a system in which they have grown comfortable.

The first piece of data collected from my English students came from a Google Form pre-assessment. The form consisted of 13 questions about grading and what they would change about grading if it were in their power. A similar Google Form was sent to teachers in my building in order to hear from their side and see if there were any major differences in opinion. 21% of students strongly believe their grade is an accurate reflection of their knowledge (see Figure 1), while 45% of teachers believe grades they assign students are an accurate reflection of their knowledge (see Figure 2).

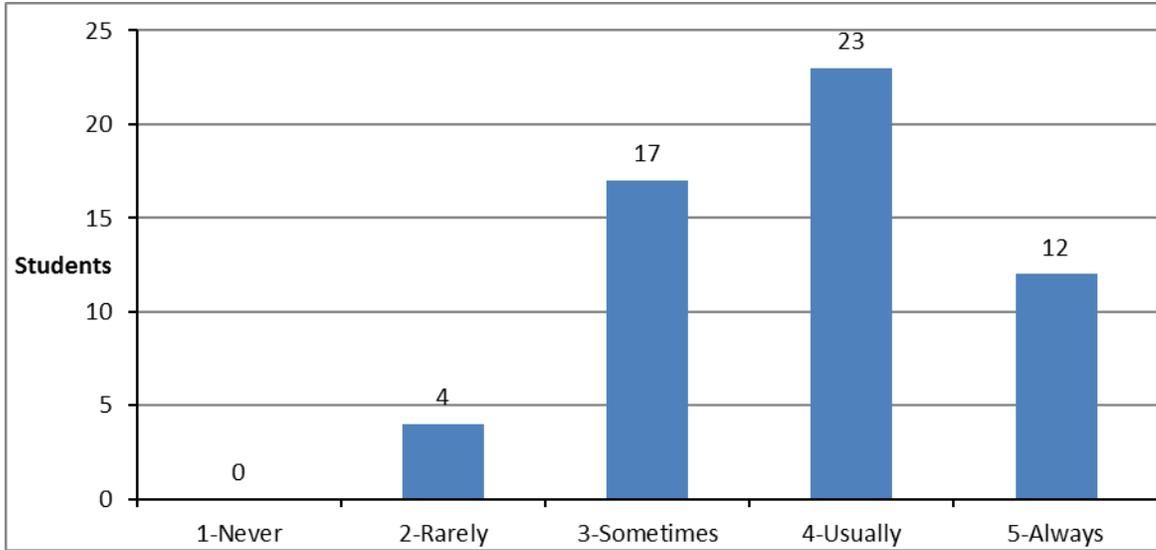


Figure 1. The effects of student belief on if grades are an accurate reflection of their knowledge.

The high school in which this study was conducted has no building guidelines or rules for grading and, as a result, many teachers grade differently. In fact, 5 out of 12, or 42% of staff admitted that they did not believe our building staff graded consistently. This means students are subject to many different styles of grading throughout their school career. This could lead to some distrust when it comes to grades reflecting knowledge given the discrepancy in how many students think grades are accurate verses

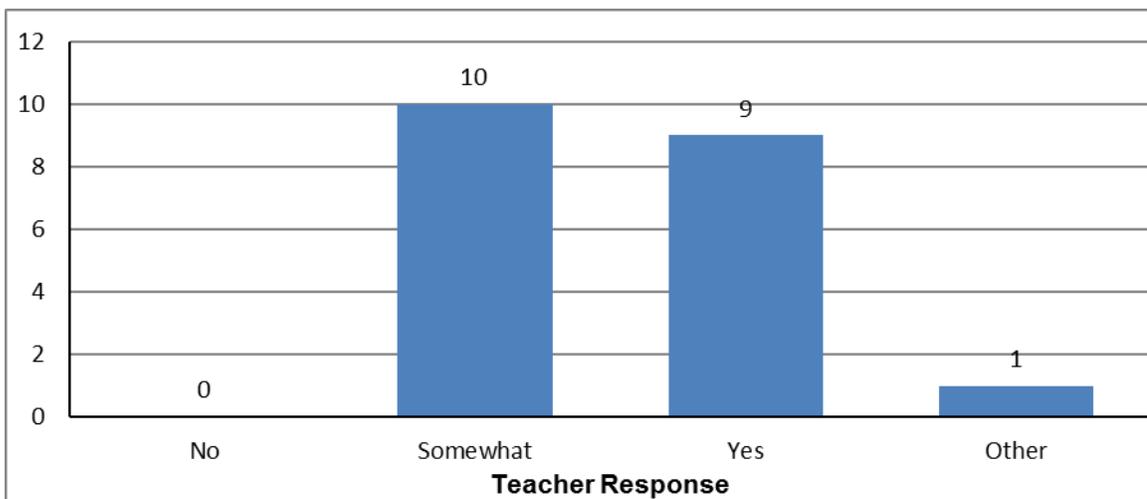


Figure 2. The effects of teacher beliefs on if student grades are an accurate reflection of student knowledge.

how many staff believe grades to be an accurate reflection. Students are able to see a wide variety of grading styles and may become distrusting of how teachers come up with grades. The diversity in which teachers grade can be seen in the variety of answers given when asked if they included behavior as part of a student's grade. 25% of teachers claim that whether or not they grade behavior depends on the assignment given. Another example of the wide variety of differences in grading is late work. Some teachers will not accept late work at all, others will accept it but will deduct points for it being late, while others will give full credit no matter when an assignment is turned in. In my building, 25% of teachers surveyed accept late work and give full credit all the time while 45% of staff accept late work, but not for full credit (see Figure 3). In looking at student responses, 25% of students strongly believe they should be able to turn in work at any time and receive full credit on the assignment (see Figure 4). When asked what they, the students, would like to see in a grading system, many students suggested always accepting late work or accepting late work for a certain amount of time, grading everything, allowing re-dos, and grading based on effort.

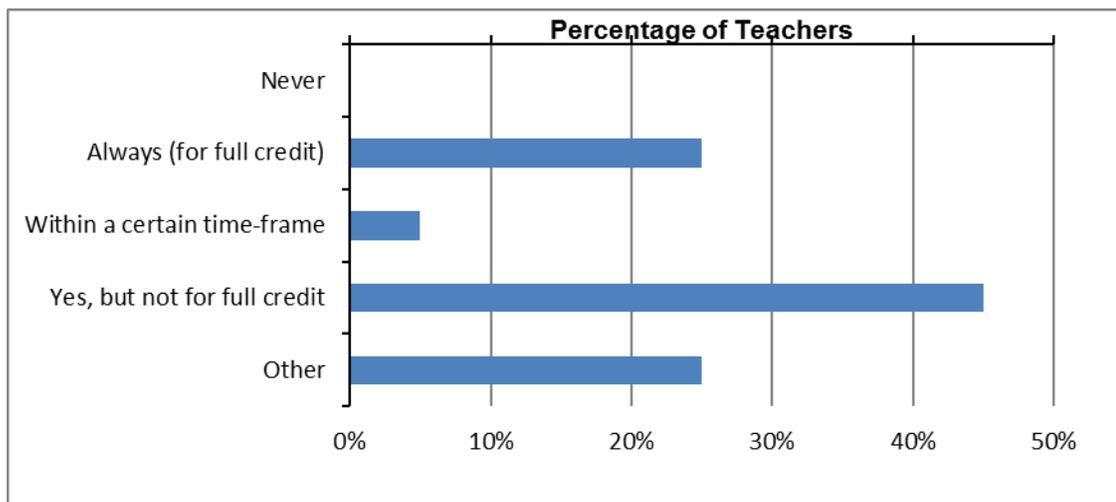


Figure 3. The percentage of teachers currently accepting late work for full credit, partial credit, within a time-frame, or not at all.

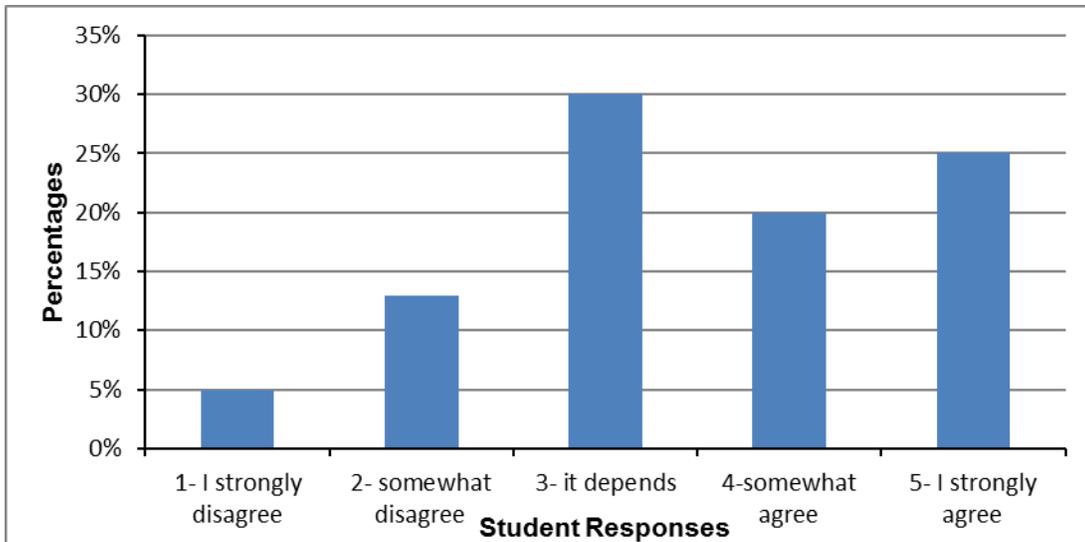


Figure 4. The percentage of students who feel they should be able to turn in late work with no penalty, as long as it is completed.

Seven out of fifty-six students stated that they would not change the grading scale at all. This shows us how ingrained the grading scale is in our society. In fact, this was something I wanted to change at the beginning of my research and I found that it was not even possible to do so in our online grade book. My original plan was to change from the A, B, C, D, F grading scale to Marzano's four-point scale. I was unable to do so in the gradebook so I tried coming up with a hybrid-type of system. The four point scale, with explanations, was posted in the room (see Appendix A) and the grades that appeared on their work were based on the 4 point scale. Unfortunately, the grades that appeared in the gradebook were A-F. A score of four was equal to an A, a three was equal to a B, and so on. This was explained to students several times. However, every time they got work back with a 1-4 score on it, students would ask "What does this 3 mean? Is it good?" I found that the A-F grading scale is much more ingrained in students than I originally

assumed and believe it would take a systematic change, or a whole building change, to successfully overhaul the system.

After three weeks operating under the new grading system of allowing late work to be turned in, allowing students to resubmit assignments with a score under a “C” (or a “2” on the 4 point scale), and really putting thought into assignments created and what standard it is meeting, I

decided to compare their current mid-quarter grade with last year’s first quarter mid-quarter grade (see Figure 5). What I found was confusing at first. It seems as though more students’ grades had taken a turn for the worse rather than improving, even with all the

accommodations set up for

them. In fact 12 students’ grades were lower than they were last year at this time, with only eight students improving their grades and one student had the same grade.

After some reflection, I determined that my assignments this year are more standard-based and most likely more challenging for my struggling readers. Many of these students had me last year, eight out of twenty-students in fact, and I have to wonder

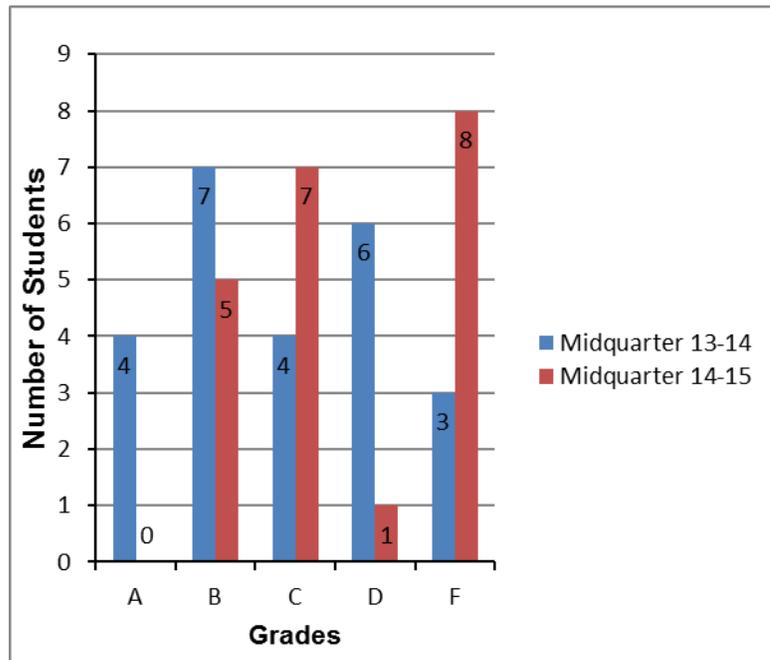


Figure 5. The effects of Standard Based Grading techniques on students’ grades shown through comparisons from the same students the year before at the first mid-quarter to this year at the first mid-quarter.

if they are not taking assignments seriously due to last year not being challenging enough. If this is the case, I am pleased with the changes I am making. One other change that could be blamed for the fall in grades is that not all formative work is being graded. There are some assignments which count as zero points and simply marked as “turned in” or “missing”. This does not impact their actual grade for the class but it does help me see if a student is habitually not handing in their work. Students I spoke with on an individual basis did not even notice this change. I believe grades have gone down this year in part to me not grading every piece of

formative work. In the past, when students were graded on everything, there were often times they would get a decent grade and it, in turn, would raise their overall grade. This is no longer happening in my classroom.

Last year, these same students had a combined 47 missing assignments. This year, they have a combined 24 missing assignments (see Figure 6). That means that last year the mean for missing assignments was 2.2 per student and this year it dropped to 1.1 missing assignments per student. This is both

	Missing Assignments	Missing Assignments
Student A	0	3
Student B	0	4
Student C	4	1
Student D	1	0
Student E	2	4
Student F	0	0
Student G	2	0
Student H	0	3
Student I	3	0
Student J	0	0
Student K	7	2
Student L	3	0
Student M	0	2
Student N	0	0
Student O	2	0
Student P	0	0
Student Q	0	0
Student R	9	0
Student S	5	4
Student T	0	0
Student U	8	1

Figure 6. The effects of Standards Based Grading techniques on student missing work shown by comparison between the same students last year at first mid-quarter and this year at first mid-quarter.

encouraging and discouraging. It is encouraging because students seem to be taking advantage of their ability to turn assignments in late. It is discouraging because even with more assignments turned in, grades are lower than they were at this time last year.

Unfortunately, I was only able to compare student feedback to teacher feedback as I did not receive any feedback from parents. This, in itself, is technically data; speaking to the lack of parent involvement the majority of students in my classroom receive. I was not able to meet in person with any parents and I feel like this was a major downfall. If I had been able to meet in person I believe I would have been able to obtain more forms of feedback from conferencing with parents.

The post-feedback I received from students was encouraging. 42 students answered that they strongly agreed or agreed that their grade was a true reflection of their knowledge compared to only 35 at the beginning of the year (see Figures 7 and 8). This shows that even with lower grades, students do feel their grade is an accurate reflection of what they have learned. When compared to their pre-assessment results, students did feel

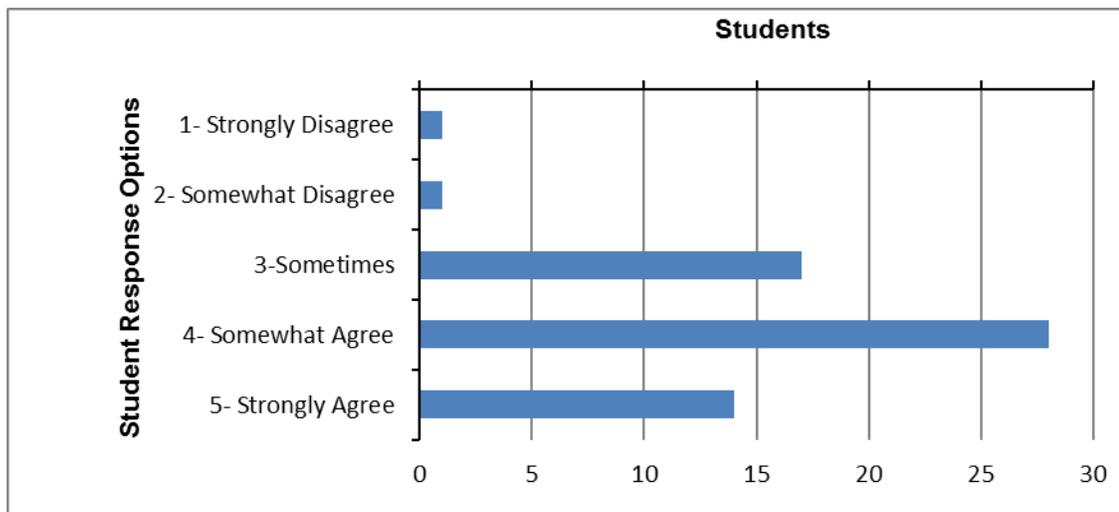


Figure 7. The effect of Standard Based Grading techniques on the students’ belief that their grade is a true reflection of their knowledge. I (the student) feel my grade is a true reflection of my knowledge (post-assessment).

more confident that their grades reflected their knowledge (see Figure 8).

Some of the most beneficial data collected revolved around offering the opportunity to redo assignments and also student thoughts on feedback. I was not sure how many students would take advantage of the situation when they had the opportunity to relearn and resubmit an

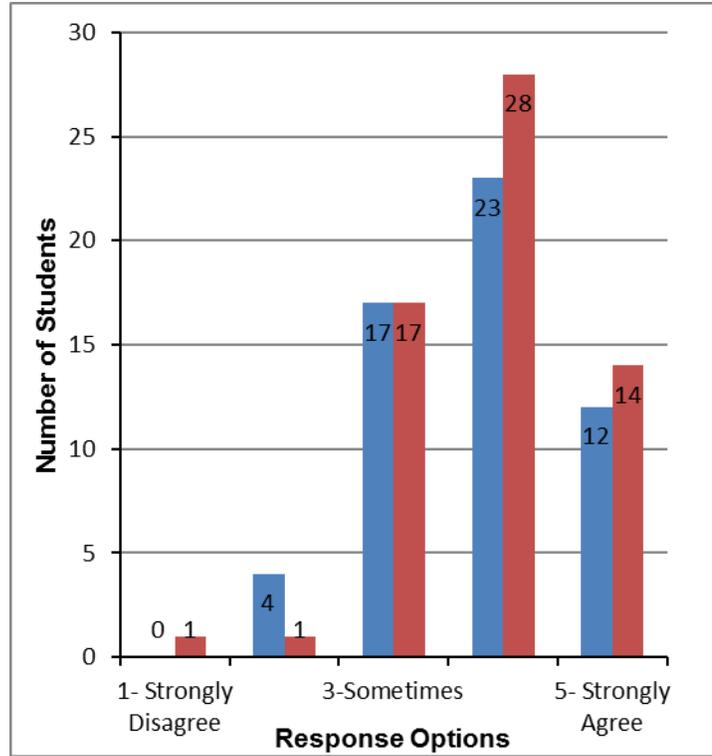


Figure 8. The effect of Standard Based Grading techniques on the students' belief that their grade is a true reflection of their knowledge (comparison of pre-assessment and post-assessment).

assignment. As it turns out, several students did take this chance to help not only improve their knowledge but also improve their grade. In the post-assessment survey, 65% of students stated that they had revised and resubmitted at least one assignment. The even better news was that 62% of students claimed they resubmitted the assignment because they wanted to be able to do a better job. Only 10% of students admitted they did not take advantage of the opportunity to resubmit an assignment (See Figure 9). This shows that students are taking their grades into their own hands and care about either what they are learning, their grade, or both.

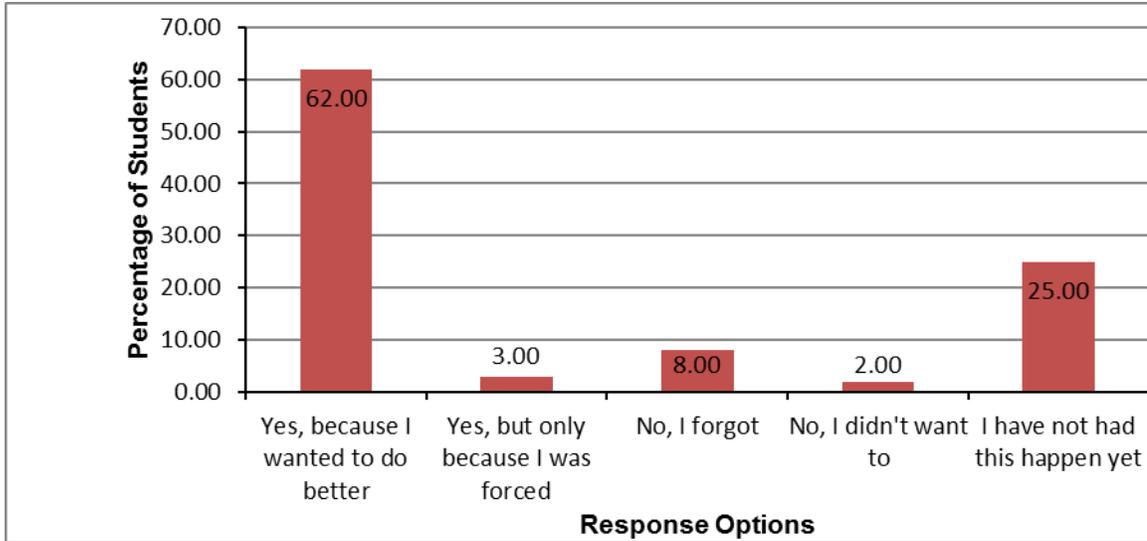


Figure 9. The effect of allowing students to resubmit work, if and why they take advantage of the opportunity.

Another optimistic outcome was the amount of positive feedback received on teacher feedback being given. One of my priorities was to give students better feedback on their assignments and I believe I was successful. 94% of students responded that when they see feedback on an assignment they, at the very least, read the feedback. 74% stated that students not only read the feedback, but they also thought about how they could improve. The simple fact that students are reading feedback and wondering how they can do better in class is amazing.

Action Plan

Grading, like many aspects of teaching, will always be a topic in which I am looking for ways to improve. There are several opinions available on what form of grading works best and is the most accurate. Before deciding on your grading system, it is important to think about what you want to achieve through grades. One can accomplish a variety of different goals all through the use of grades. Grades can motivate (or demotivate) students, provide feedback, show how well a student knows a certain set of

materials, or show how well a student can follow directions. In my case, I wanted my students' grades to be an accurate reflection of their knowledge.

Through my action research, I learned many new strategies that I plan to continue implementing. Students overwhelmingly appreciated getting feedback on their assignments and this is something I plan on continuing without question. I have always tried to include feedback but during this research I worked at giving more specific feedback to students. Good feedback, of course, takes time to give and I often find myself wondering how often students actually read the feedback they are given. I was surprised to find that 74% of my current students claimed not only to read the feedback but also take it into consideration for how it can improve their work

In addition, through student interviews, students stated they preferred written feedback opposed to oral feedback. I would like to add a question to my beginning of the year survey for students to see what type of feedback they prefer. I will continue giving written feedback to students as my primary source of feedback but if I know a student prefers oral feedback I can attempt to use it more with that specific student.

I would like to continue my research on grading throughout this school-year. I am very intrigued by my findings so far. When I compared students' English grades from last year's first mid-quarter to this year's English mid-quarter grades, I found many students have a significantly lower grade. At first I could not figure this out. I thought of all the different reasons this could be happening. I then looked at how many missing assignments these same students had last year compared to this year. This information further confused me as students, on average, had much fewer missing assignments than last year. This should, in theory, mean fewer zeros and therefore higher grades, not lower.

A missing assignment has been the only way a student can earn a zero in my class this year. If they do the work, the worst score they can have is 59%, and if their score is lower than 69% they are offered a chance to redo their work. With these adjustments, I could not fathom why grades would be so much lower. I began reflecting on what other changes could have caused such a drastic change. One of the changes I made involved not grading every piece of formative work assigned students. I still collected these assignments, marked them in the gradebook as “turned in” or “missing”, and gave feedback on these assignments, but they were worth no points. These were assignments that were good practice for students, but were generally “easy” points in the past. It is my belief that the lack of these “easy” points given resulted in overall lower grades. I believe the lower grade is technically the more accurate grade since it is grading based on knowledge and not simply the ability to turn something in. It is, however, difficult for me to see such a drastic change in grades. I would like to continue comparing grades like this throughout at least an entire semester and see if this trend continues. If it does, I may reconsider how I am giving summative assessments and see if I need to make further changes.

I was also impressed by how many students, 62%, took advantage of being allowed to resubmit work they did poorly on the first time around. Since students know they will get an assignment back if they do poorly, I believe it motivates them to do well on it the first time around. It also provides another opportunity for learning if they truly did not understand a concept. I fully intend to continue my policy on allowing students to redo work.

As I continue to think about grading systems and how grades can best be used in my classroom, I will also continue to gather student feedback. I have always been interested in hearing what students think of my class but I have failed to ask specific questions about grades and grading. I plan on incorporating these types of questions into my student feedback surveys so I continue to learn more information from students. Through this research, I have found easy ways to make visuals from this student feedback and I plan on using those visuals in the future as well since they make data so much easier to understand. Teachers should always be learning and striving to find ways to make themselves and their teaching better, and I plan on learning more about the best way I can utilize grading practices in my classroom.

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Appendix A
THE FOUR POINT SCALE
How do you rate?

4	I understand it, and I can teach or apply it in new ways.
3	I understand it, and I can discuss and apply it with accuracy.
2	I understand some of it, but I need a little more practice and help to avoid making errors.
1	I don't understand enough to discuss it or use what I know accurately.
0	Even with help, I do not understand.

Appendix B

Dear Parents,

As you may know, I am a St. Catherine University student pursuing a Masters of Education degree. An important part of my program is the Action Research project. As your child's English teacher, I have chosen to learn about standard-based grading because research has shown that it can lead to more accurate grades and an increase in student motivation. I am working with a faculty member at St. Kate's and an advisor to complete this particular project.

I will be writing about the results that I get from this research, however none of the writing that I do will include the name of this school, the names of any students, or any references that would make it possible to identify outcomes connected to a particular student. Other people will not know if your child is in my study.

When I am done, my work will be electronically available online at the St. Kate's library in a system called Sophia, which holds published reports written by faculty and graduate students at St. Kate's. The goal of sharing my final research study report is to help other teachers who are also trying to improve the effectiveness of their teaching.

The risks are minimal for students who participate in this study. However, your student might feel an increased amount of accountability to their schoolwork. They will be held to high standards, as always in my classroom, and they should walk away from this study knowing exactly what they were expected to learn, and how well they understood the concepts. This should be an enjoyable experience for all students involved and is an opportunity for them to share their experiences with being graded. The benefit of knowing they are being graded fairly should reassure all students to try their best and really attempt to understand the materials.

If you decide you want your child's data (feedback, journals, and conferences) to be in my study, you don't need to do anything at this point.

If you decide you do NOT want your child's data included in my study, please note that on this form and return it by Friday, September 5, 2014. There is no penalty for not having your child involved in the study; I will simply delete his or her responses from my data set. All students will receive the same treatment in my class, regardless of your decision on this matter. If at any time you decide you do not want your child's data to be included in the study, I will remove included data to the best of my ability.

Additionally, I will be looking for feedback about grades and grading practices from guardians as well. I value your opinion as a guardian and would like to take your thoughts into account as I look at different changes that can be made within my current grading system. I will be sending a form to you through your email address you have provided the school. By completing the questions, you will be demonstrating your willingness to participate in the study. Participation is voluntary and confidential. If you choose not to participate simply do not answer any of the questions; this will not effect your student's grade in any way.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Danielle Asplund, via email at dasplund@isd318.org or by phone at 218-327-5760. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, you can ask me or my advisor Amy Adams, via email at eadams@stkate.edu, who will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Opt Out

I do NOT want my child's data to be included in this study. Please respond by
September 5, 2014.

Name of Child

Date

Signature of Parent

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix C

Student Feedback on Grades: Pre-assessment

1) I feel my grades are a true reflection of my knowledge.

*For example, when you get an A you usually feel you really know the material or when you receive a D you feel you did not understand a majority of the material taught.

1- I do not feel my grades reflect what I have learned

2

3

4

5- I feel my grades are a good indicator of how well I understood the material

2) My grades are very important to me.

1- I strongly DISAGREE with this statement

2

3

4

5- I strongly AGREE with this statement

3) My grades are very important to my parents.

1- I strongly DISAGREE with this statement

2

3

4

5- I strongly AGREE with this statement

4) I feel I should be able to turn in late work with no penalty, as long as it is completed.

1- I strongly DISAGREE with this statement

2

3

4

5- I strongly AGREE with this statement

5) I would like the chance to redo work I did not understand the first time.

1- I strongly DISAGREE with this statement

2

3

4

5- I strongly AGREE with this statement

6) What are some things you would like to see changed about the way teachers grade?

* Imagine you are the teacher. What assignments would you grade or not grade?
What grading scale would you use? Would you accept late work and/or allow students to redo assignments?

7) How well do you know the standards you are expected to meet in each class?

1- What are standards?

2

3

4

5- Very well- I have some of them memorized

- 8) Do you believe you could benefit from knowing which assignments meet which standards?
- Yes, I feel this could greatly benefit me because I would be more aware of expectations.
 - I feel this would benefit me somewhat
 - This might benefit me a little bit
 - I do not see how this would help me at all
- 9) What does formative assessment mean?
- *If you do not know, that is okay. If you have an idea but are not sure, write down what you think it is.
- 10) What does summative assessment mean?
- *If you do not know, that is okay. If you have an idea but are not sure, write down what you think it is.
- 11) If you had the opportunity to let teachers know your true feelings about grades and grading procedures, what would you tell them?
- 12) What grade do you hope to earn in this class?
- A
 - B
 - C
 - D
 - F
- 13) What are you planning on doing in order to earn that grade?
- *In other words, what actions will you take (or not take) that will result in that particular grade?

Appendix D

Dear Grand Rapids High School Staff,

As you may know, I am a St. Catherine University student pursuing a Masters of Education degree. An important part of my program is the Action Research project.

As an English teacher here, I have chosen to learn about standard-based grading because research has shown that it can lead to more accurate grades and an increase in student motivation. I am working with a faculty member at St. Kate's and an advisor to complete this particular project.

If you are comfortable, I am asking that you fill out a Google form looking for feedback on how you grade and if you plan on making any changes in the near future. I will be writing about the results that I get from this research, however none of the writing that I do will include the name of this school, the names of any students or staff, or any references that would make it possible to identify outcomes connected to a particular student. Other people will not know that your information is in my study.

When I am done, my work will be electronically available online at the St. Kate's library in a system called Sophia, which holds published reports written by faculty and graduate students at St. Kate's. The goal of sharing my final research study report is to help other teachers who are also trying to improve the effectiveness of their teaching.

The risks are minimal for staff who participate in this study. However, you might feel uncomfortable answering some questions as it may be a topic you have strong opinions about. However, this should be an enjoyable experience for all involved and is an opportunity for us all to reflect on our grading practices.

If you decide you want your data (feedback) to be in my study, please sign this release form and return to me by Friday, September 5, 2014. If you decide you do NOT want your data included in my study, you do not need to do anything at this point. If at any time you decide you do not want your data to be included in the study (after giving permission), I will remove included data to the best of my ability.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Danielle Asplund, via email at dasplund@isd318.org, by phone at 218-327-5760, or just stop in my room to speak about any concerns you may have. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, you can ask me or my advisor Amy Adams, via email at aadams@stkate.edu, who will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or

concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739.

I do want my data to be included in this study. Please respond by September 5, 2014.

Name of Staff

Date

Signature of Staff

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix E

Grading: Staff Feedback

As I explained in my initial letter, I am doing my action research project on grading practices. I would like to know more about how my coworkers grade and what you think about new ideas that are being researched on the topic of grading.

- 1) Explain your current grading practice as concisely as possible.
- 2) Do you currently accept late work?
 - a. Never
 - b. Always (for full credit)
 - c. Within a certain time-frame
 - d. Yes, but not for full credit
- 3) How often do you assign homework?
 - a. Every night
 - b. 3-4 nights a week
 - c. 1-2 nights a week
 - d. Rarely
 - e. Never
- 4) Do you feel your students' grades reflect their actual knowledge?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Somewhat
- 5) Are you happy with your current grading system?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Somewhat
- 6) If there was one thing you would change about how you grade, what would it be?
* (You can answer nothing if you are completely happy with how you grade!)
- 7) Do you feel your building grades fairly consistently?
* In other words, would an A in one class be an A in another?
- 8) How important do you consider student grades?
Not important at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very important

Grading: Staff Feedback (cont.)

9) How important do you feel parents consider their student's grades?

Not important at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very important

10) Do you count behavior as part of a student's grade?

* Behavior can be staying on task, turning work in on time, participation in class, etc.

a. Yes

b. No

c. Sometimes, it varies depending on assignment

Appendix F

Student Feedback Post-Assessment

- 1) How often do you check parent portal for your grades, missing work, and other items?
 - a. Every day
 - b. 2-3 times a week
 - c. 1 time a week
 - d. 1 time a month
 - e. Never

- 2) Have you had any assignments this year that you have been given the opportunity to redo?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I have no idea

- 3) If you answered yes to question #2, did you take the opportunity to redo your work?
 - a. Yes, because I wanted to do better
 - b. Yes, but only because I was forced
 - c. No, I forgot
 - d. No, I didn't want to
 - e. I haven't had this happen yet

- 4) When I see a score of 1-4 and the teacher tells me it is the "Marzano Scale" I know what those numbers mean.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Kind of

- 5) I feel like I can be successful in this class.
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 6) I see the feedback left from my teacher/s and I...
 - a. Read it, but that is it
 - b. Read it and think about how I can improve
 - c. Don't bother reading it
 - d. I have never noticed any feedback

- 7) What means more to you?
- Written feedback
 - Oral feedback
 - The grade
- 8) Are you motivated to do well in this class?
- Yes
 - For the most part
 - Some days
 - Not at all
- 9) I feel my grade in this class is a true reflection of my knowledge.
* In other words, if you are getting a "B" you feel like you are getting most concepts but may need a little more work on others.
- 1- I do not agree with this at all
2-
3-
4-
5-I agree with this statement
- 10) I am in grade
- 9
 - 10