Dissertations

12-2017

Standards-Based Grading within a School District Using Personalized Learning

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STANDARDS-BASED GRADING WITHIN A SCHOOL DISTRICT USING

PERSONALIZED LEARNING:

A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University

December, 2017

Document Origination Statement Digital Commons @ NLU

This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The "program" can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

Works Cited

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ABSTRACT

This policy advocacy document, as part of my study, focused on my desire to implement a new grading practice within the district. This change will result in moving to a standards-based grading system from a traditional grading system. Although this would be a new practice within the district, many districts throughout the nation are making similar changes. The reason for my policy is associated with the need to measure more accurately student performance and to determine if students have mastered content specific standards within a course of study. Educators must place emphasis on the mastery of content specific standards that include related skills. I found that implementing a standards-based grading system in a school district will provide students the opportunity to be evaluated and measured more objectively to learn as individuals driven by their needs and interest.

PREFACE

This was a topic of high interest to me for various reasons. The first reason is associated with the district's implementation of the personalized learning program during the 2015-2016 academic school year. The philosophy of personalized learning aligns perfectly with the concept of standards-based grading. It allows the needed flexibility associated with that approach to teaching and learning it. This flexibility lends itself to grading practices that account for a student's ability to master content specific standards throughout a course of study. The second reason for selecting this topic, is to move to a grading system that accurately evaluate and measure what students are able to do.

It is no secret the grades should accurately report what students can do or have learning overtime. However, through the use of the traditional grading system it is difficult to determine what students have learning. The grades assigned in using the traditional method of grading are often times comprise of a variety of factors that are not associated with the outlined content specific standards of the course. Needless to say, within the traditional grading system there are many factors which promotes inconsistencies in grading.

The focus of the policy advocacy document is to communicate critical aspects of the process that will be used to advocate for a change in grading practices within the district. The overarching goal was to promote a policy that is focused on improving student learning. While researching and writing this policy advocacy document, nothing caused me to question my decision to implement the standards-based grading system within the district. Based on the research, it appears to be a sound decision, and this document will help reassure the reader that the district is heading in the right direction.

While working on this document, I learned several leadership lessons that have enhanced my skills as a district leader. Most importantly, I learned how important it is to listen to the perspectives of all stakeholders and to value their input. I also found that when attempting to implement this type of change, you cannot take people's feelings and experiences for granted. Simply stated, it is necessary to put yourself in the shoes of others and lead with empathy.

Additionally, as a leader you must be patient and trust the process. Change doesn't happen overnight, it takes time. Having a clear vision for change and developing a plan that accounts for all aspects associated with any adaptive change is essential. Overall, I learned that it takes the involvement of all stakeholders to implement sustained change. Developing this policy advocacy document has been a rewarding experience.

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SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT

Introduction to the Problem

In this chapter, I will provide the readers with a definition of critical terms that will be used throughout my policy advocacy document. This will include providing the readers with information regarding the historical perspective of my topic. Also, I will describe the critical aspects associated with my policy advocacy document. Additionally, I will communicate how I became aware of this policy issue and my vision for how this policy will address the problem.

During the 2015-2016 academic school year, the district in my study implemented personalized learning within several schools. This instructional approach was designed to tailor the learning experiences to each student's individual needs, skills, and interests. The goal was to engage students in their own learning and provide them with the skills needed to be successful in college, careers, and life. To accomplish this goal, personalized learning uses a variety of tools to help students identify their individual skills, strengths, weaknesses, interests, and aspirations (Rickabaugh, 2016). Students are empowered to work with teachers to develop specific learning experiences and goals based on standards within the curriculum. As a result of this personalization of instruction and learning, there is a need to develop a requirement specific to how grades are assigned to students who are enrolled in personalized learning programs. Currently, students within the district are graded using the traditional method of grading. This method of grading does not allow for the flexibility needed in schools using the personalized learning method of grading. Additional information regarding the traditional grading method will be explained in the following section. Because this

method of grading doesn't provide the level of detail needed to truly determine the student's ability to master content specific standards, I am recommending that the district develop and implement a policy to account for the needed flexibility associated with personalized learning. This flexibility would specifically target grading practices that account for student's ability to master content specific standards for the courses they are enrolled.

Specifically, I am recommending a policy that will allow for standards-based grading (SBG). Based on research, the purpose of SBG is to ensure that grading practices align with content specific standards and testing (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). This approach to grading differs from the traditional grading practices that are commonly used within schools. The traditional approach to grading is made up of an average score, which is calculated by combining teacher determined grades for such items as class assignments and tests. Based on my experiences as a professional educator, grades within the traditional grading system consist of assignments that do not reflect students' ability to master content specific standards. For example, grades assigned to students for having or not having a parent signature on documents, classroom expectations, homework assignments, and tests do not reflect students' ability to master content specific standards. Consequently, students are penalized for compliance related issues, such as having a late assignment and missing or incomplete assignments. This penalization is applied despite the student's ability to demonstrate mastery or understanding of the content.

Unlike the traditional grading system, SBG provided detailed information to stakeholders, who are the students, parents, and teachers, about the students' individual

performance on content specific standards. This form of grading allowed students and

parents the opportunity to monitor and track progression of learning for content specific

course standards (O'Connor, 2009). Additionally, standards-based grading provided

teachers with the opportunity to adequately determine student's performance on content

specific standards. Guskey and Jung (2006) emphasized that the greatest benefit of

standards-based grading is that it provides vital information about student's achievement

and performance.

Based on my understanding of standards-based grading, I believe that this method

of grading would provide the district with the flexibility needed to enhance the

implementation of personalized learning. As indicated earlier, personalized learning

consists of innovative learning opportunities, differentiated learning approaches, and

individualized support systems that are designed to meet the unique and specific needs of

individual learners. This alternative approach to learning is focused on student centered

learning. Learning is not a one size fits all (Rickabaugh, 2016).

I became familiar with the concept of personalized learning during the summer of

2015 when the district worked to complete an application for a grant sponsored by the

Bill and Melinda Gated Foundation. This grant focused on the Next Generation of

Learning. It challenged school districts to create innovative approaches to learning and to

develop ways to address the needs of student learners beyond the usage of traditional

educational approaches used within schools.

Thus, the district's design team purposed to develop a system of learning that

would provide students with a personalized approach. Upon completion of a very tedious

screening process, which consisted of completing a comprehensive application and

presenting the plan to the Gates foundation, the district was awarded nearly $2.8 million

dollars to implement the personalized learning initiative. Again, this initiative was

designed to transform the educational approach used to educate students throughout the

district. This instructional approach was designed to empower students to take ownership

of their learning and to account for how students learn best.

Since the implementation of personalized learning within several schools, there is

a need to re-examine the current grading policies to ensure proper alignment, which is

why this policy problem needs to be addressed. One of the major principles associated

with personalized learning is to enable students to move at their own pace and receive

credit upon demonstration of mastery of content specific standards. It is necessary to

utilize a grading practice that is flexible and accounts for the mastery of content specific

standards. Standards-based grading would provide the needed flexibility so students

could learn at their own pace and receive credit upon mastery of standards. Therefore,

the policy that I am recommending would require the usage of standards-based grading to

evaluate students in schools using the method of personalized learning. I envision that

this policy will provide the flexibility needed to allow schools to effectively use

personalized learning. Additionally, this system of grading would allow professional

educators, parents, and students to closely monitor students' mastery of course standards.

<div align="center">**Critical Issues**</div>

The development of a standards-based grading policy would allow teachers to be

more focused on curriculum that guides classroom instruction and assessments. This

method of grading can be used to assess and identify where students are in the process of

learning and understanding their level of mastery of course specific standards. The

concept of assessing student performance has been a part of educational practices for centuries. However, recognizing obstacles associated with the assessment of student performance has required changes in practice over time. Guskey (1994) reported that in the late 1800s, teachers maintained records of grades by simply recording which skills had been mastered by students. Students were moved between levels as they demonstrated mastery of skills. Additionally, in the early 1900s, the United States experienced an increased number of public high schools. Teachers within high school settings introduced the usage of percentages to grade student performance. During this time, the usage of percentages to record student performance appeared to be a natural shift for high school teachers. However, in 1912, several authors published a study that would challenge the usage of percentages to assess student performance. The challenge was associated with the need to determine a reliable measure of student performance. In the 1930s, the concept of grading students on a curve became increasingly popular. Middleton (1933) reported that the usage of grading on a curve appeared to be equitable and fair to students. Despite Middleton's belief, several researchers advocated for a system that determined mastery of skills and assessed students on their ability to truly master the skills. The desire to transform grading practices led to an investigation by author Ellis Page (1958), who conducted research to evaluate how specific feedback and comments could impact students within classrooms. The outcome of his research suggested that when accompanied with targeted and specific feedback from the classroom teacher grades can have a positive impact on student performance. Needless to say, the battle associated with grading and reporting of student learning continues to be a challenge for educational institutions today.

With the implementation of personalized learning within the school district, it appears that the stage is set to engage in dialogue about the need to change the grading policy from the traditional grading model to the standards-based grading model. Reeves (2008) reported that schools need to move beyond traditional grading practices to reduce the failure rates within schools and to encourage students to take ownership of learning. In the traditional grading system, teachers often include nonacademic factors in their gradebooks that impact students' final course grades. The usage of standards-based grading provides more information than a summary letter grade, and it will require teachers to remove nonacademic factors from student's grades. Standard-based grading would clearly identify areas of strength and the academic needs of students. Additionally, it would allow students to take ownership of their learning.

When taking actions to implement new initiatives, it is imperative that one carefully consider methods to communicate change. Kotter (2012) indicated that while gaining a commitment and understanding from stakeholders is never easy, it is something that must be done to ensure successful implementation of change. Failure to clearly communicate the vision and to ensure stakeholders understand the change could result in disaster. Therefore, another critical issue associated with the implementation of standards-based grading within the district is the need to ensure that stakeholders (parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community members) have a true understanding of the policy and its impact on student achievement and performance. This includes getting them to understand how the usage of a standards-based grading policy could benefit students.

Recommended Policy and Envisioned Effect

I am recommending a policy that would require the usage of a standards-based grading system within schools. This method of grading would be a new concept used within the district as all schools are currently using the traditional method of grading. While preparing for the implementation of the standards-based grading system, the initial plan is to pilot this method of grading within schools using the personalized learning model that was implemented during the 2015-2016 school year. Again, personalized learning includes a variety of instructional approaches designed to account for the individual aspirations, interests, needs, and cultural backgrounds of students throughout the learning process. Since the general goal of personalized learning is to focus on the individual learning needs of students, it can be best summarized as student-centered learning (Rickabaugh, 2016). As a result of implementing a standards-based grading system in schools using the personalized learning method will be given the flexibility needed to account for student-centered learning. Additionally, this system of grading would allow professional educators, parents, and students to monitor closely students' mastery of course standards. This form of monitoring will provide a clear picture of areas of strengths and opportunities for growth for individual students. Ultimately, this method of grading would empower stakeholders (teachers, parents and students) to develop specific learning experiences and goals based on standards within the curriculum.

SECTION TWO: NEEDS ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I will show through careful analysis why there is a need to develop a policy to account for standards-based grading to enhance our implementation of personalized learning within specific schools. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the problem and the recommended policy to resolve it, I will explore five disciplinary areas: educational, social, political, economic, and moral/ethical. These areas will be used to provide information regarding the development of a policy that will be embraced by critical educational stakeholders such as superintendents, school board members, district leaders, administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

Education Analysis

The educational aspects of this policy would change the way students are graded. Currently, all schools within the district use a traditional grading system that combines elements such as tests, quizzes, homework, classroom participation, and extra credit projects to determine the student's grade. These elements are averaged together to determine the student's quarter and/or semester final letter grade. Since these items are averaged together to determine a percentage that correlates to a letter grade, students and parents do not know if content specific standards have been mastered. The usage of standards-based grading (SBG) systems would provide a clearer picture of a student's ability to master content specific standards. This grading system also would give parents specific information about the standards in which their child needs to improve. The implementation of this policy would require teachers to re-evaluate instructional practices being used within classrooms, and it will result in teachers determining alternative ways to evaluate students as they work to demonstrate mastery of content specific standards.

This level of change could be unsettling for stakeholders (teachers, parents, and students). However, through the creation of professional development platforms, the challenges associated with this policy could be addressed.

Brookhart (2005), reported that the traditional grading systems present two major drawbacks: 1) teachers must combine evidence from multiple sources to determine a single letter grade for a student in each subject area, and 2) it is impossible to interpret and determine the true meaning or values of the assigned grades. Unlike the traditional grading system, standards-based grading would provide stakeholders (students, parents, and teachers) with detailed information about the mastery of specific course standards. Given the nature of this topic, Guskey (2006) commented on the benefits of SBG, which are in the following list.

- SBG provides more meaning and value to grades for both students and parents
- SBG communicates specific information about a student's ability to master course specific standards
- SBG provides students with the opportunity to track their own progress and take ownership of learning
- SGB allows school districts to control more effectively grading practices
- SGB empowers teachers to make instructional adjustments to better meet the needs of students

Brookhart (2011) reported that within the standards-based grading system, grades reflect what students learned within courses. These grades allow stakeholders to evaluate students based on their ability to master content specific standards. Given the increased levels of accountability within the educational arena, professional educators are

responsible for ensuring that students learn and master standards. Moving to a system that allows stakeholders to track the progression of learning and the mastery of content specific standards could help ensure appropriate interventions and supports are put in place to meet the unique and specific needs of each and every student learner.

Social Analysis

The social aspect associated with this policy involves teachers, students, and parents knowing where students are academically as they work towards the mastery of content specific standards. This overall approach to learning could be the change needed to increase student engagement and improve student achievement. Providing students with information about where they are in the learning process helps them track their own progress to determine areas of strength and need. Additionally, it provides teachers with information that can be used to help them plan and deliver classroom instruction to meet the unique and specific needs of learners. Standards-based grading adds value and meaning to grades assigned to students, and this value and meaning promotes self-awareness within students. Unlike the traditional grading system, which penalize students for not getting it right the first time, standards-based grading provides students with additional opportunities to demonstrate mastery of content specific standards. For example, within the traditional grading system, students are given one opportunity to successfully complete a task. Once this task is submitted and graded, the results are final and are reflected in the teacher's gradebook. Giving students multiple opportunities to achieve at higher levels before assigning a final grade is a critical component of standards-based grading. As stated earlier, this method of grading could increase student engagement and improve student achievement for all learners despite their background,

ethnicity, and experiences. Similar to the thinking behind the usage of standards-based grading, personalized learning requires a different approach to learning. This approach to learning has major implications for professional educators as it leads to a paradigm shift within classrooms.

Beyond the social aspects mentioned previously, Ryan and Deci (2000) identified the following elements of associated with personalized learning that contribute to increased levels of student engagement:

- Student autonomy: giving students the power to take ownership of their learning and to determine what they are doing and how they will demonstrate mastery of content specific standards.

- Student self-efficacy: this occurs when students are given the necessary skills to complete the assigned task successfully.

- Student relatedness: this occurs when students are given opportunities to develop close relationships with those whom they like and/or respect.

- Student relevance: this occurs when students perceive things as having meaning or purpose; getting students to clearly see how things connects to them (self-interest).

Ferlazzo (2017) indicated that, although every lesson taught within classrooms may not contain a high concentration of the above elements, it is essential that teachers work to integrate these elements into daily lessons. As noted, these elements were designed to increase student engagement within classrooms. Based on my professional experiences as an educator, I don't believe it is too much to ask teachers to incorporate these elements into their daily lesson plans. When these elements (autonomy, self-

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efficacy, relatedness, and relevance) are combined, the impact on student achievement is increased. Students take ownership of learning and they feel that they can proactively determine their life paths.

Consequently, the thinking behind standards-based grading is to provide teachers with specific information about the progression of learning as students work towards the mastery of course standards. Fowler (2009) reported that there is great value in creating fraternal networks in which group members have a sense of belonging and purpose. The use of standards-based learning is designed to build networks of support for all involved. The standards-based system accounts for the multiple challenges educators face when attempting to educate students. The method of grading works for students with diverse backgrounds, students with disabilities, students from low social economic backgrounds, and students who lack the motivation to succeed using the traditional grading practices. Standards-based grading provides students with the opportunity to prove that they have mastered content specific standards. Additionally, students are encouraged to demonstrate mastery of those standards using the method that works best for them.

Guskey (2006) indicated that this approach to learning creates a fair and equitable system of grading that benefits all learners. He further reported that this system of grading distinguishes three types of learning criteria: product, process, and progress. Product is described as what students can do and what they know at a specific time. Process describes the student's attitude, belief, and motivation towards learning. Progress refers to the progression of learning over time. These three learning criteria can provide stakeholders with specific feedback about student achievement. This information can be used to develop personalized learning plans for students.

Political Analysis

As indication is section one of this policy advocacy document, the district within this study has worked extensively with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to implement personalized learning within schools. Based on this level of commitment and my interaction with district leaders, I believe that there is a healthy appetite to align grading practices to enable schools to truly implement all components of personalized learning. This level of alignment would result in a shift from the traditional grading system to a standards based grading system.

Therefore, based on my professional experiences within the education profession, politics plays a huge role in determining who has the power to make and control decisions. Additionally, politics often determine how educational systems are governed. When planning to implement the standards-based grading systems one must carefully consider the following as potential political barriers: 1) getting educational stakeholders, such as school board members, district leaders, administrators, teachers, parents, and students, to understand what is meant by learning mastery and its connection to the proposed student grading policy change and to get the school board to accept and approve it as sound policy and 2) ensuring they also understand, accept, and support the notion that the latter assessments are designed to report more meaningfully and accurately the standards that students master or need to further develop. Both political hurdles become more difficult because many stakeholders (school based administrators, teachers, parents, and students) are very accepting and comfortable with the current use of only letter grades to determine students' academic progress and rankings. The focus seems to be on

where students stand in terms of other students in terms of their GPA, weighted or unweighted.

The first political issue mentioned, ensuring stakeholders have a clear understanding of what is meant by learning mastery, is a critical notion that must be considered. Slavin (1987) defined mastery of learning as an instructional approach that uses ongoing feedback to improve learning. This approach to learning examines instructional methods that clearly determine performance outcome measures that all student learners must master prior to moving to the next learning standard. Benjamin Bloom is credited with determining the meaning of learning for mastery. His thoughts about learning for mastery aligns with the thinking behind standards-based grading and personalized learning. Bloom (1971) emphasized that students should be required to demonstrate mastery of standards prior to moving forward. Using this approach to learning allows students to work at their own pace. There are great benefits in providing students with the time to master standards.

Additionally, this approach to learning helps teachers make instructional adjustments to meet the unique and specific needs of students. Bloom (1971) reported that if teachers are given the opportunity to provide students with additional time to demonstrate mastery of learning, students could reach higher levels of achievement. The failure to build a common language around this concept could result in major confusion between educational stakeholders. Working to get educational stakeholders to truly understand what is meant by learning mastery is essential.

Within any given school or district, students arrive in the classroom with different levels of experiences and background knowledge. These differences impact the pace at

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which students demonstrate mastery of course specific content. Students learn at different rates and they respond differently based on their experiences and background. When students are graded on course specific standards, all parties (teachers, students, and parents) can determine the specific skills they have been mastered and what skills need additional attention. In other words, one can determine the progression of learning and make instructional adjustment to improve overall performance. Teachers will need to prepare for students who are at multiple levels and may need to group students based on their level of mastery. This progression of learning affords students with the opportunity to take ownership of their learning. More importantly, students are not penalized for needing additional time to demonstrate mastery of standards.

The second political issue that must be addressed is the need to ensure that assessments are designed to accurately report what students know and can do. Morris (1996) defined assessment as a term used to describe the actions associated with the collection of data about what the students have learned. Based on research, the implementation of formative assessments within schools has encountered many challenges, such as the need to ensure alignment of standards, performance outcome measures, and professional development for teachers. Within our educational system, students' performance on assessments is used to determine the effectiveness of the teacher's ability to teach. Assessment is at the center of effective teaching and learning practices within schools. To enhance the quality of education and to improve learning, students must be regularly and accurately assessed.

The alignment of content specific standards and student assessment is an ongoing challenge for professional educators. Performance outcomes are designed to define the

knowledge and skills students are expected to master during the progression of learning. In a perfectly aligned system, the curriculum objectives outlined in the standards match what students are expected to learn at the end of the unit. If the assessments do not align with the curriculum and standards, then the data collected will be pointless as no true judgement could be made about a student's performance. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that accurate measures are in place to determine the mastery of content specific standards against student performance on both formative and summative assessments. And they must be used effectively.

Assessments must have a high degree of validity and reliability. Additional teachers must be given the necessary professional development to build their capacity to design assessments for the mastery of learning. Assessments should be aligned to the learning objectives/standards and with teaching and learning practices used within the classroom. To meet the unique and specific needs of diverse learners, a variety of teaching, learning, and assessment methods must be used.

The political challenge associated with standards-based grading is that this form of grading makes it difficult to assign an overall grade to the students. Moving from assigning an overall letter grade to a student is problematic as parents and students see value in the current grading system. Letter grades make sense for parents because that is what they received when they were in school. Getting parents to buy into this new way of grading may lead to many complaints as standards-based grading systems remove class ranking and the concept of honor roll within schools.

Finally, the ultimate political challenge is getting the superintendent and school board to adopt the policy and be willing to support the staff in putting the policy into

practice. As with the implementation of policies and practices within any school district, obtaining buy-in and support from both the superintendent and school board members is essential and necessary for the successful implementation of the policy or practice. Patience and understanding must prevail during the initial phases of implementation. As indicated earlier, based on my experiences and involvement with leaders within this district, there is a healthy appetite to engage in conversations specific to shifting to a standards based grading system. This method of grading would provide schools using the personalized learning approach with the flexibility to assess students based on the mastery of course specific standards.

<div align="center">**Economic Analysis**</div>

In a society which emphasizes the need for educational institutions to provide students with the needed skills to compete within our global society, it is imperative that measures are in place to ensure that students graduating from high schools are prepared for college, career and life. Therefore, as a professional educator, I believe it is my responsibility to help enhance our local economy by ensuring that students have access to resources and tools needed to be productive members of society. Fowler (2009) reported that a highly skilled workforce is one of the most important factors when planning for economic growth. Skills such as having the ability to communicate, problem solving, and thinking at higher levels is essential. Wagner (2008) indicated that, "due to the world's demand for a global knowledge economy, educational systems must ensure that students learn the skills of the future: critical thinking and problem-solving, collaboration across networks and leading by influence, agility and adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurialism, effective oral and written communication, accessing and analyzing

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information and curiosity and imagination" (pg. 67). Without these essential skills

students, will not be able to compete for jobs within our global society nor contribute

effectively to job creation. Therefore, educational institutions must ensure that these

opportunities are embedded in the fabric of curriculum frameworks and instructional

practices. Without a doubt, this means implementing new ways to teach and assess

student learning.

As indicated in Chapter 1, the district is using a different approach to learning in

the form of personalized learning. Students are encourage to take ownership of their

learning using this approach to learning. Specifically, it includes a variety of

instructional approaches which were designed to address the individual learning needs,

interests and cultural backgrounds of students. This approach to learning aligns to the

thinking behind the usage of standards-based grading. Additionally, many of the critical

skills reported by Tony Wagner are embedded in the thinking associated with

personalized learning.

There would be no economic impact for the district as a result of the

implementation of the standards-based grading policy; however, there may be an

economic impact for students if the policy is not implemented. The economic aspect

associated with standards-based grading is twofold: 1) the need to better understand the

overall quality of the work produced by students, and 2) the need to develop assessments

that determine the mastery of content specific standards. When reflecting on our current

world, having the ability to measure one's capacity to produce high quality work is

essential. As it stands, everything in our current job market can be considered a

performance assessment measure. If individuals cannot perform at high levels, the results

can translate into negative consequences. These consequences often are displayed in the inability of individuals to continue their education and compete in our global society for higher paying jobs. Professional educators must work to ensure that critical standards are explicitly being taught and mastered by students. They must ensure quality of instruction always. This includes making the necessary teaching adjustments to meet the needs of students who fail to demonstrate mastery of standards. Educators can help students understand the ideal of quality by working to ensure that grades are based on course specific standards (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006).

On the other hand, when reflecting on the need to develop assessments that determine the mastery of content specific standards, one must note that the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act called for greater levels of accountability for school districts. This forced educational institutions to pay close attention to the role of curriculum and assessment alignment. La Marca (2001) defined alignment as the degree to which there is a match between the standards and what is assessed. As one can imagine, this is a great accountability issue that must be addressed.

Within educational systems, assessment plays a critical role in determining whether a student meets or exceeds course specific standards. Additionally, these assessments were used to hold teachers, schools, and districts accountable for improving student performance. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were released in 2009. They provided states and districts the opportunity to revamp assessment systems to ensure alignment. In fact, the states did make significant improvements to assessment systems. One improvement was to make it possible to develop assessment systems that have the capacity to measure students' demonstrated mastery of standards.

Moral/Ethical Analysis

In my professional opinion, the moral and ethical aspect of standards-based grading is a factor that school districts can control. Based on what researchers are reporting there are multiple ways to assess student learning. Therefore, school districts have a moral responsibility to change practices to better meet the needs of student learners. Currently, teachers take ownership of grades and factors associated with assigning grades to students. In most cases, the grades given in the traditional grading system have very limited value and do not reflect the students' mastery level of standards. In fact, the current system of grading does not provide teachers with the necessary information to change instructional practices to help individual students increase their own learning and certainly does now give parents a clear picture of what their children or youth know and don't know. The need to develop a system that accurately reflects a students' level of mastery of standards and what they still need to learn with the guidance of their teachers is essential. Additionally, it is an ethical and moral imperative to mitigate the subjectivity found within the traditional grading system.

Reeves (2008) indicated that cultural biases found in the traditional grading system is a major moral and ethical issue. For example, the meaning of a word can take on many different forms depending on aspects such as a students' background and culture. Too often students are penalized with low grades for not knowing the correct answer when clearly there is evidence of cultural biases in assessments.

I believe assessing student performance against a standard provides a more accurate diagnosis of strengths and areas of academic concern. Guskey (2009), reported that SBG practices allow educators to remove barriers associated with cultural biases. It

provides specific information regarding where student learners are in the process of demonstrating mastery of standards.

In conclusion, the usage of the traditional grading system raises the moral question of whether it is fair to give students extra work to increase low grades. It is no secret that if a student has a pattern of consistent low performance, dropping a low grade or providing extra credit may raise the average. In this case, the final grade does not tell us about the student's performance and level of mastery of course standards. Teachers using such strategies as removing "bad" assignments, throwing out low test grades, shifting the weights of assignments, and padding grades with nonacademic task do not help improve students' learning. Unfortunately, this distortion of the truth is a common practice taking place within classrooms and it must be challenged.

SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

The topic of grading practices has been a long standing controversial issue within the education profession. The biggest controversy is centered on the meaning associated with grades given to students. Do these grades communicate a student's performance on multiple tasks or do they communicate a student's ability to demonstrate mastery of content specific standards? Grading practices, which were designed to communicate student performance in several areas, now includes nonacademic factors such as good or bad behavior, high or low motivation and/or consistent or inconsistent compliance with general rules and expectations. Many believe that grades should be reflective of what students know and can do. The focus on determining what students know and can do provides educational stakeholders (students, parents, and teachers) with specific feedback on a student's ability to demonstrate mastery of required standards.

In this chapter, I will share the goals and objectives associated with the usage of standards-based grading systems within school districts. Additionally, I will communicate why there is a need for a policy that supports the usage of standard-based grading verses the traditional grading practices used within this district. Finally, I will provide a rationale to support this policy change that will include valid reasons and evidence to support my position.

Goals and Objectives of the Policy

My goal is to implement a grading practice that provides educational stakeholders with specific information about student's ability to master course specific standards. Based on research, my goal can be accomplished through the implementation and usage of a standards-based grading system. As indicated in section one, SBG provides

information to stakeholders (students, parents, and teachers) about student's performance on content specific standards. O'Connor (2009) reported that this form of grading allows students to monitor and track their progression of learning. Furthermore, SGB grading does not penalize students for failure to comply with subjective rules that are set by classroom teachers. Scriffiny (2008) reported that this form of grading is known to communicate what individual students know and have learned. Additionally, this method of grading removes subjectivity, which is often found within grading systems. Lastly, it gives meaning and adds value to grades given to students.

The shift from the traditional practices associated with grading to what is known as standards-based grading has proven to be a rewarding yet challenging process. Several districts have engaged in work to change grading practices to better determine and evaluate learning outcomes for students. These districts understood the vital role that grading practices play within the educational arena. In my professional opinion, standards-based grading practices embrace high expectations and personalize learning for all students.

Unlike traditional grading practices, which average several components to determine a final grade, SBG focuses solely on proficiency (what students know and can do). When classroom teachers use traditional grading practices, many factors are included in a student's grade, factors such as homework, effort, behavior, and every form of assessment used within the classroom. Given the wide range of factors commonly found within a traditional grading system, this method of grading cannot be converted to the standards-based method. Thus, I suggest that standards-based grading could be implemented and would provide stakeholders, parents, students, and teachers with

meaningful data regarding student's capacity to master content specific standards. Marzano (2010) outlined the following four criteria required of a uniform grading system:

- Accuracy: Looks at the specific skills that the students have learned

- Consistency: Looks at the process for measuring student learning uniformly

- Meaningful: Looks at what has taken place during the learning process. It is designed to communicate what learning has occurred

- Supportive of Learning: This form of learning focuses on student's ability to demonstrate proficiency. Additionally, it provides opportunities for professional educators to determine interventions and enrichments for students needing additional support

The criteria outlined by Robert Marzano (2010) enables districts that implement a standards-based grading system to understand accurately the learning components needed to ensure student success. Upon reflection on these components, I concluded that each of them provide students, parents, and teachers with the opportunity to determine what students know and can do. This format of grading demands high quality teaching. Additionally, it promotes an environment where students are held accountable for demonstrating mastery of standards and where teachers use information to change instructional practices to better support student learning.

Stakeholders Related to the Policy

When reflecting on the needs, values, and preferences associated with this policy, there are many interested stakeholders. They include district and school staff members, parents, and community persons that benefit from better educated student graduates.

When there are so many different persons with various expectations and desires, it is difficult to find common interests; however, students' learning and their future success would be two jointly held values and preferences. They also represent the learning needs of every community. However, the key stakeholder in my policy proposal is the students.

For this reason, my focus is on their needed learning outcomes. In this regard, I believe the usage of learning outcome measures is essential and should communicate clearly the skills and knowledge that students must be able to master and demonstrate. When expectations are clearly communicated, students know what to expect and they tend to achieve at higher levels of performance. Dale (2016) reported that professional educators must shift their thinking from focusing on what is taught to what is learned. Beyond focusing on what is learned, professional educators can examine the condition for learning within the classroom and ensure that student centered approaches to learning are embedded in the fabric of the learning environment. Wagner (2014) indicated that one of the most effective ways to promote student ownership of learning is to connect the work with the real world – simply put make it matter. For classroom teachers, this can feel like a risky move, but it can promote more engagement within the classroom and increased levels of student achievement.

As indicated by Guskey (2011), SBG provides stakeholders with a wealth of knowledge about a student's capacity to demonstrate mastery of content specific standards. This wealth of knowledge can be used by professional educators to determine alternative ways to meet the needs of student learners. Additionally, students who fail to demonstrate mastery of standards can be given additional time and multiple opportunities

to demonstrate mastery of standards. This additional time and practice can truly benefit students who struggle to master a concept within a pre-determined amount of time.

Fowler (2009) used the term efficiency to describe the need for educational systems to obtain the best possible return on investment. This return on investment (ROI) is critical since the main purpose of the education system is to produce citizens who can compete in our global society. Tracking the academic return on investment for student learners is a mandatory task. This can help educators identify areas of strength and weakness within our educational system. Therefore, several stakeholders would be involved in the implementation of this policy. The above stakeholders would consist of teachers, parents, and students. When reflecting on the needs, values, and preferences of the above stakeholders, the first task would be to use research and data to drive my actions. Too often, schools and districts implement change efforts without truly taking the time to build a case for why the change is necessary and how the change impacts student performance outcomes. Again, building the case for why the change is necessary is essential. Frontier and Rickabaugh (2015) identified four important questions to consider when planning to implement change:

- Why is the change necessary?

- How much change needs to occur?

- Where should the change occur?

- Who will participate in the change process?

The alignment of the answers to the above questions can be used to guide one through the process of setting the stage for change. Using the questions outlined by Frontier and Rickabaugh (2015), I will engage in collaborative conversations with

stakeholders. Information obtained during these conversations will be used to determine

my course of action. Additional information regarding specific implementation actions

will be outlined in section four of this policy advocacy document.

Rationale for the Validity of the Policy

In the traditional grading system, student evaluation criteria depend on individual

teachers' interests and views. Therefore, they are inconsistent for students and often non-

aligned to the knowledge and skills actually needed for them to meet continuing

education needs or employment in our emerging global workforce. Symonds, Schwartz,

and Ferguson (2011) indicated that students without a postsecondary education will be

left without jobs in the late twentieth century. This outcome would have a significant

impact on the economy.

This leads me to believe that our educational teaching and assessing systems need

to be redesigned to include both mastery of skill and content specific standards. As stated

earlier, it is not enough for educators to say they taught the content. They must ensure

that students have learned the content to prepare them well for postsecondary education

and/or work. It is my belief that shifting one's focus on essential content standards and a

grading practice that addresses whether or not students have mastered them is essential.

Additionally, this change in practice can help educators determine alternative ways to

support student learning based on multiple assessments.

The goal of this policy is to implement a grading practice that would provide

educational stakeholders with specific information about how well students have

mastered course specific standards. As indicated earlier, SBG is designed to allow

students to take ownership of learning outcomes. It empowers them to chart their own

learning progression and to determine ways to demonstrate mastery of content. It forces

the use of standards to develop an individualized driven approach to curriculum and

instruction.

As I have noted on several occasions, the SBG method of grading differs from the

traditional method commonly used within schools. The major difference between

traditional grading practices and standards-based grading practices is that in SBG systems

students are assessed against a set of course specific standards. On the other hand,

traditional grading practices assign grades to students based on multiple components

which can be subjective in nature. These components are then averaged to determine a

student's final grade. The final grade does not communicate anything specific about a

student's level of mastery of content specific standards.

Rothman (2012) reported that 39 percent of students graduating from high school

were unprepared to enter the workforce. In a survey conducted by Education Trust in

2010, it was determined that more than one in five students graduating from high school

lacked the skills needed to pass successfully the test used to determine entry into the

military (Theokas, 2010). The military entrance exam is a test designed to measure basic

knowledge in problem solving, reading, mathematics, and science. After reviewing these

data, it makes me wonder why so many students graduating from high school do not have

the skills necessary to enter the workforce, or enter college without having to take

remedial courses. Why weren't systems in place to determine areas of deficiency before

graduation? Could this be associated with pitfalls within the traditional grading system?

Again, the traditional method of grading does not communicate specific details about the

progression of learning for students in various content areas is very limited.

Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) indicated that standards-based

grading determines a student's level of proficiency by measuring them on their

performance on well-defined course specific standards. This form of evaluation adds

value and meaning to grades assigned to students. The chart below illustrates the

differences between the traditional grading system and standards-based grading practices.

Table 1.

Differences between the Traditional and Standards-based grading systems

Traditional Grading System	Standards-Based Grading System
1. Based on assessment methods (quizzes, tests, homework, projects, etc.). One grade/entry is given per assessment.	1. Based on learning goals and performance standards. One grade/entry is given per learning goal.
2. Assessments are based on a percentage system. Criteria for success may be unclear.	2. Standards are criterion or proficiency-based. Criteria and targets are made available to students ahead of time.
3. Use an uncertain mix of assessment, achievement, effort, and behavior to determine the final grade. May use late penalties and extra credit.	3. Measures achievement only OR separates achievement from effort/behavior. No penalties or extra credit given.
4. Everything goes in the grade book – regardless of purpose.	4. Selected assessments (tests, quizzes, projects, etc.) are used for grading purposes.
5. Include every score, regardless of when it was collected. Assessments record the average – not the best – work.	5. Emphasize the most recent evidence of learning when grading.

Adapted from O'Connor K (2002). *How to Grade for Learning: Linking grades to standards* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

In conclusion, when reflecting on the goals outlined in this policy advocacy

document and the research associated with this topic, the focus must be on the need to

prepare students for life beyond high school. As a result, I have concluded that steps

must be taken to implement standards-based grading within the school district in my

study. Implementing a grading practice would provide educational stakeholders with specific information about a student's level of mastery of course specific standards. Grading practices that clearly communicate learning targets and assess a student's demonstrated level of mastery of course standards will provide students and teachers with specific information about the progress of learning. This in turn can help prepare students for post-secondary opportunities in continuing education and/or work. This was one of the purposes of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Rothman (2012) reported that the Common Core State Standards are set of standards and expectations that clearly articulates the knowledge and skills students need in English language arts and mathematics at each grade level. The purpose of these common goals and expectations is to ensure that students are prepared to succeed in college, career, and life. Additionally, the importance of high-quality academic standards is emphasized within the Common Core State Standards. Specific learning outcomes are clearly stated within each standard so stakeholders (professional educators) can determine what a student should know and can demonstrate at the end of each grade. Given that level of clarity outlined for each standard, it is imperative that professional educators determine ways to identify when a student masters content specific standards.

SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

As indicated in section one of this policy advocacy document, the implementation of a standards-based grading policy would allow stakeholders to assess and know where students are in the process of learning as they work to demonstrate mastery of content specific standards. The information obtained would allow for the personalization of instruction to meet the unique and specific needs of students. Additionally, standards-based grading would allow teachers to focus more on curriculum that guides classroom instruction and assessments.

It is my belief that the accountability movement has forced schools/districts to examine grading practices to ensure that outcome measures accurately reflect student performance on content specific standards. Grades assigned to students that measure levels of proficiency on content specific standards can be connected to the value of efficiency. The values of efficiency mean "obtaining the best possible return on an expenditure or investment" (Fowler, 2009, p. 114). As indicated by several researchers, there have been debates over what to teach since the start of public education. Additionally, the concept of measurement of learning has been widely debated. A key question in all these discussions is: How do we know if students have mastered a set of skills?

As a professional educator, I believe moral leadership is needed to ensure that students are provided with high quality educational opportunities and they are assessed in ways that truly highlight areas of strengthens and opportunities for growth. Wagner (2008) reported that educational systems must ensure that they are producing student learners who have the skill set to compete in our global society. Additionally, he indicated that educational institutions should create environments that prepare students for life beyond

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traditional education. Simply stated, students must develop the knowledge and skills necessary to work in an increasingly more knowledge based global society. To create these types of environments, Wagner (2008) suggested the following seven survival skills:

- Critical thinking and problem solving

- Collaboration across networks and leading by influence

- Agility and adaptability

- Initiative and entrepreneurialism

- Effective oral and written communication

- Accessing and analyzing information

- Curiosity and imagination

It is essential that students master these seven survival skills to become productive members of our society who will contribute to solving issues faced within the twenty-first century. The goal is to ensure students can thrive in the new world of work. Achieving this goal is not optional as educational institutions must equip all students with the tools to be successful.

In this section of my policy advocacy document, I intend to highlight the pros and cons of implementing of a standard based grading policy. Communicating the pros and cons is essential as it will provide the stakeholders (parents, students, teachers, and professional educators) with information that can be used to make informed decisions about how learning is assessed. As communicated in section one of this policy advocacy document, this method of grading is relatively new and it was designed to determine alternative ways to evaluate a student's ability to master content specific standards.

Arguments for the Policy

Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) reported that the purpose of SBG is to align grading practices with content specific standards and testing. This approach to grading differs from the traditional grading practices that are commonly used within schools. The traditional approach to grading is made up of an average score which is calculated by combining teacher determined grades for such items as class assignments and tests.

The U.S. Department of Education (1994) expressed concerns regarding the traditional method of grading. Specifically, these concerns were associated with the lack of correlation between taught standards and assessed standards. As one might imagine, there are many educational stakeholders (teachers and school leaders) who are in support of the use of standards-based grading. In fact, this method of grading has been implemented throughout the nation based on the advocacy of many researchers and educational leaders. These researchers and educational leaders noted a variety of advantages that support the continued usage of and implementation of standards-based grading. One of the most notable advantages of standards-based grading is that students are given specific information about what they are expected to learn and how they will be assessed (Scriffiny, 2008). When students are assessed on their ability to master content specific standards, learning is then about the individual's ability to demonstrate mastery of standards. Guskey (2011) said this results in students being judged on what they have learned and can demonstrate.

Marzano and Heflebower (2011) determined that standards-based grading results in a more accurate assessment of learning outcome. They indicated that through the use of SBG, students are assigned grades based on their individual level of achievement and performance on a set of targeted standards. This allows educators to communicate a true

picture of a student's ability to master standards. Classroom instruction can be adjusted

to meet the specific yet unique needs of students (O'Connor & Copper, 2008).

Classroom teachers have access to information that can help them determine what

instructional adjustments are needed to ensure that all students are able to achieve.

Another advantage of standards-based grading is that stakeholders are provided with

specific and targeted information about a student's ability to master content standards.

McGee (2012) reported that, unlike traditional grading systems that do not reveal specific

areas of strength and weakness, SBG provides detailed information about the progression of

learning. For example, Table 2 compares student performance or ability when measured

with a traditional assessment method and a standards-based method.

Table 2

Comparing Traditional and Standards-Based Grade Books

Traditional Grade Book			
Name	Homework Average	Quiz 1	Chapter 1 Test
Kyle	75	55	92
Jason	72	60	75
Bernard	100	45	65
Ray	50	95	82
Standards-Based Grade Book			
Name	MAFS.6.EE.3: Represent and analyze quantitative relationships between dependent and independent variables	MAFS.6.G.1: Solve real-world and mathematical problems involving area, surface area, and volume.	MAFS.6.RP.1: Understand ratio concepts and use ratio reasoning to solve problems
Kyle	Partially proficient	Proficient	Partially proficient
Jason	Proficient	Proficient	Partially proficient
Bernard	Advanced	Partially proficient	Partially proficient
Ray	Proficient	Partially proficient	Below proficient

When reflecting on Table 2, which method of grading clearly illustrates the standards students know and the standards they still need to learn? Using a standards-based grading system provides a wealth of information to help teachers make instructional adjustments. Based on Table 2, the teacher would need to provide additional instruction and support to students in standards MAFS.6. G.1 and MAFS.6.RP.1 for them to reach mastery. However, using the traditional grading practices, it is difficult to determine exactly which standards must be retaught. As indicated in section one of this document, the traditional form of grading simply reports where students are in meeting the standards, without any indication of how they are doing during the progression of learning or what instructional modifications are needed to ensure successful achievement.

In addition to the most notable advantages of an SBG system, Scriffiny (2008) reported the following benefits:

- SBG students can demonstrate what they know

- SBG allows educators to use data to drive actions

- SBG allows students to track and monitor learning progression

- SBG adds value and meaning to grades

Through the use of standards-based grading, students are strongly encouraged to take ownership of their learning. This level of ownership motivates students to track their progression of learning. Researchers have indicated that this method of grading can be used to help close the achievement gap that exists among low-income and minority students. On a larger scale, regardless of ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and/or background, equitable outcomes are often evident because through standards-based

grading all students have access to standards and assessments. As stated previously, SBG provides students with a clear understanding of what should be learned and how learning will be measured.

Finally, when reflecting on the advantages associated with SBG, one must consider the moral implications associated with determining how students are assessed and the true meaning of grades. Through the usage of standards-based grading, several researchers have indicated that students achieve at higher levels because they are given specific information about their progression of learning over time (Scriffiny, 2008). If done well, this method of grading can make education more equitable by helping professional educators pinpoint areas of strengths and weaknesses for students during the learning process.

Arguments Against the Policy

When reflecting on the implementation of an SBG system, it is imperative that one understands the role that traditional grading practices has played within the history of education. This method of grading has been in place for centuries. Thus, many understand and value this method of grading despite the noted shortfalls. Guskey (2011) reported that students and parents are familiar with the concept of assigning a final letter grade for a course. This encompasses having a level of understanding behind the meaning of a grade, such as a "B" or 94% (Guskey, 2011). The push to focus on content specific standards in the classroom and the expectation of college or post-secondary education for all have forced professional educators to consider alternative ways to determine whether or not students can demonstrate mastery of essential standards.

While several states/districts have implemented aspects of standards-based grading practices, there is little to no research that proves that this method of grading has a greater impact on student achievement. Based on the work of several researchers, there are several unique challenges associated with the implementation of a standards-based grading system.

Challenge 1: Clarifying the Purpose

The challenge of clarifying the purpose speaks to the ability of the organization or system to communicate clearly the meaning and relevance of the information. It is what I would classify as the compelling "why" that drives the work and adds value. As communicated by Guskey and Jung (2006), one must consider the following three questions when attempting to gain an understanding of standards-based grading:

1. What information must be communicated?

2. Who are the primary stakeholders needing this information?

3. How would the information received be used?

These authors indicated that one of the most common mistakes made by professional educators during the implementation of new concepts is associated with the failure to truly clarify and communicate the vision. Once the vision is clearly determined and communicated, it is much easier for an organization to move forward with the implementation of change (Guskey and Bailey 2001). Kotter (2012) reported that vision plays a critical role in the success of an organization. Transformation efforts cannot take place without vision.

Challenge 2: Differentiating Grading Criteria

Differentiating instructional approaches needed to meet the unique and specific needs of students is the second challenge associated with standards-based grading. It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to determine how they will evaluate student achievement, work habits, and progression of learning. This includes determining ways to communicate plans directly to students, parents, and teachers. The time associated with additional teacher tasks is reported as a disadvantage of the SBG system. Teachers claim that this approach results in increased workload as they are tasked with re-teaching and reassessing students who fail to demonstrate mastery of content specific standards over time. This re-teaching and reassessing requires teachers to spend more time organizing evidence of mastery and planning instructional units. Tomlinson & Allan (2006) indicated that differentiation of instruction includes one or more of the following:

- Content (what students learn)

- Process (how students learn)

- Product (how students demonstrate learning or the end result of student learning)

Brookhart (2011) said one of the major drawbacks in systems using the traditional method of grading is that a multitude of diverse data points are used to determine the summative grade for a student. As noted previously, this melting pot of data sources doesn't provide stakeholders with the opportunity to pinpoint specific areas of strength and weakness during the learning process. On the other hand, the standards-based grading method allows teachers, students, and parents to have access to detailed information about a student's detailed academic performance in school.

Another drawback of the traditional grading system is that a single summative letter grade offers no information about what students have learned. Unlike the traditional grading system, SBG systems break information down into precise elements of learning. These elements of learning are directly aligned to content specific standards associated with each course. When reporting on each of these standards, parents are given detailed information regarding their child's level of achievement. This information can be used to provide additional support to students, and it promotes collaboration between stakeholders. Lastly, using the SBG method, students are given several opportunities to master standards.

When reflecting on the moral leadership principles within the education profession, the ultimate goal of education is to enhance the learning of each and every student at all costs. Standards-based grading uses feedback to enhance and enrich student learning throughout the progression of learning regardless of the time of the school-year. Students are strongly encouraged to continually strive to learn. Therefore, feedback plays a huge role during the learning process as students cannot learn from mistakes unless they are told what they did wrong.

In closing, changing grading methods and practices has many advantages and disadvantages. Implementing this type of change can be a culture shock for teachers, parents, and students. This is simply because we as human beings are creatures of habit, and we are accustomed to doing things the way they were done when we experienced them.

Conclusion

The information I shared in this section of my policy advocacy document addresses the advantages and disadvantages of standards-based grading systems. As previously noted, the implementation of a standards-based grading system is a huge undertaking. It requires the support of many critical stakeholders – school leaders, teachers, parents, and students. Additionally, this change requires a shift in mindset. The current mindset may engage in resistance to a new assessment method, but this resistance can be overcome with time and thoughtful planning. As indicated by researchers, the advantages associated with SBG outweigh the challenges of implementing the practice. Therefore, it is my personal belief that we cannot be satisfied with not knowing if students are mastering content specific standards.

Nationally, the accountability movement has forced districts and schools to determine ways to assess and accurately measure academic growth for students within classrooms. Currently, the traditional grading system that is used within schools contains several peripheral influences that do not reflect student achievement, such as attendance, behavior, and compliance with non-academic tasks. Using the traditional grading system, students are often compared to one another rather than judged on their performance on content specific standards. Additionally, students are assigned a grade at the end of a semester or quarter that does not indicate areas of strength and weakness. Again, this grade doesn't report what students really know. Simply, stated, the traditional grading system leaves room for teacher interpretation, which can be linked to subjectivity.

SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

In this section of my policy advocacy document, I share information regarding the implementation of the standards-based grading system. Fowler (2009) provided several critical items that I must consider in implementing any new policy. First, he defines the concept of implementation as the stage of formally adopting a policy into practice. This adoption in my case must be done by the school board based on the recommendation of the superintendent of schools. The policy must be clear enough to ensure successful implementation. Beyond the development and adoption of the policy, the superintendent and other district and school must determine the process that will be used to implement it and communicate with person within the district and community.

Implementing a policy to change grading practices used within a school district can be a very challenging and complex task. This challenge is impacted by deeply rooted beliefs, values, and experiences of persons affected by the change. As indicated in section one of my paper the traditional method of grading has existed for decades. Millions of persons educated within public schools have firsthand knowledge of this method of grading.

Creating a policy to change this system of grade could have negative implications for a school district. Thus, it is imperative that persons developing the policy involve multiple stakeholders in first developing the policy and then ensure that a well-developed implementation plan is created. This must include professional development of impacted staff on the policy requirements and how to, in this case, use the new grading system for maximum effect. It also must include educating the parents.

As indicated in section one of this document, the most important responsibility of a classroom teacher is determining how students will be assessed and graded. The

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determined method of grading and/or record keeping is paramount as it allows teachers to evaluate student performance and ability to master course specific content. Simply stated knowing what and how students' performance on course specific content helps teachers determine areas of strengthen and growth opportunities for students.

Unlike the traditional grading method that is common used, standards-based grading provides stakeholders (teachers, parents and students) with a clear and accurate picture of what a student should know and be able to do. This form of grading focuses on measuring students' mastery of a specific set of standards. Additionally, through the usage of standards-based grading a student's progress toward mastery of content specific standards can be tracked and closely monitored. During the tracking process, students are strongly encouraged to take ownership of and monitor their own learning progress. Also, teachers can provide an accurate and timely feedback to help student achieve at higher levels.

As indicated by several researchers changing grading practices can be a very challenging task, however despite the challenges noted about standards-based grading, it is my personal belief that the benefits associated with this change is worth moving forward. Kotter (2012) suggests the following eight-stage process when attempting to implement major a change within an organization:

1. Establish a Sense of Urgency (this involves identifying and discussion cries, potential crises or major opportunities)

2. Create a Guiding Coalition (getting stakeholders to work together as a team)

3. Develop a Vision and Strategy (creating a vision and developing strategies to achieve that vision)

4. Communicate the Change Vision (constantly communicate and model the expected behavior)

5. Empower Action (change / get rid of obstacles or things that undermine the vision)

6. Generate Short-Term Wins (plan for visible improvements, creating quick wins and rewarding people along the way)

7. Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change (hire and promote people who can implement the change vision)

8. Anchor New Approaches in the Culture (communicate the connection between the new behaviors and organizational success) (p. 23).

Each of the above steps are critical components that can determine the success or failure of any change, including a new policy. It is my professional belief that step one of Kotter's change leadership model is the foundation that is needed to get things started. If this step is not properly done, the success of a policy will be limited. In terms of my proposed usage of the standard-based grading policy, the sense of urgency for this work comes from the district's inability to determine if students can master content specific standards.

As indicated previously, the traditional grading method provided an unclear picture of a student's achievements. The overall grades given simply do not tell what a student understands and knows. When grading systems properly assess students based on what they know and can do, teachers can effectively, identify students' strengths and weaknesses, monitor and track student learning, and make instructional adjustments to better support student learning. Through the usage of ongoing classroom assessment

(informal and formal) educators can shape student learning, help students improve their performance, and help determine the students' progress toward mastering content specific standards.

Fowler (2009) explains that successful implementation of a public policy depends on the organization's ability to develop and maintain the capacity and will of those within the organization. During the planning phrase, the organization must anticipate all the possible issues before moving forward. This planning process could be described as forward mapping. Forward mapping is a concept that Fowler (2009) describes as developing and writing scenario that illustrates what the new policy would like look when fully implemented (p. 290).

Rationale

When reflecting on the traditional grading practice, which is used within most school districts, one might ask, "Why would anyone want to ditch the traditional grading systems that has been in place for decades to implement a new grading policy? Could it be that educators are looking for a robust method to assess students' progression of learning over time or could it be associated with a desire to add meaning and value to grades given to students? Marzano (2010) reported that grades assigned to students using the traditional grading practice are imprecise that they are almost meaningless.

What does it mean when a student is given an A+ on a test or quiz? Does this mean that the student mastered a set of skills or mastered the information or content taught? On the other hand, does a grade of F mean that a student understood none of the taught material or less than 60% of the material? Within the traditional, grading system how are grades used to provide feedback on academic performance?

Several researchers have indicated that standards-based grading practices provides students with grades that are accurate, meaningful, and supportive of student learning. O'Connor (2009) stated that standards-based grading would provide teachers with the opportunity to differentiate instructional practices to support student learning. This method of grading provides flexibility and it provides students, parents, and educational stakeholders with real time performance outcome measures. Marzano (2010) highlights the four criteria that makes the standards-based grading system appealing to educators. These four criteria are listed and described below:

- Accuracy: Basing a student's grade on assessments *of* learning, allows the teacher to create a clear and accurate picture of what the student has learned without the influence of non-academic factors. Factors such as effort and behavior are not part of the student's academic grade.

- Consistency: For each lesson, the classroom teacher provides a learning scale, which is used to describe exactly what the student should know or can do. The scale identifies that criterion for proficiency and are used consistently to determine level of achievement.

- Meaningful: A meaningful grade is one that clearly communicates the learning that has taken place. In a standards-based classroom, scores are recorded by the learning outcomes rather than by categories, such as tests or homework. This makes it easier to identify areas of strength and areas of growth.

- Supportive of Learning: SBL supports student learning by focusing on demonstrated proficiency and providing enrichment and intervention as needed. The reassessment policy supports student learning by allowing new levels of

learning to occur when a student demonstrates improvement or mastery of the standard.

The goal is to implement a policy that accurately reports students' ability to master content specific standards. Based on the research it appears that the standards-based grading method provides the details needed to determine accurately the academic strengths and weaknesses of students on a continuous basis. Lastly, it provides teachers with the opportunity to make instructional adjustments to meet the unique and specific needs of individual students.

Planning for Implementation

Fowler (2009) defines implementation as the process of putting a decision or plan into effect. It is imperative that during the planning stage, an organizational framework be created and put in place. This must include a review of current work practices, capacity of the organization, and available and needed resources. The budget must be reviewed, so that appropriate resources can be secured to sustain the policy. As reported by OnStrategy, a company that specializes in implementing strategic plans, nine out of ten organizations fail to effectively implement their strategic plan for many reasons:

- Sixty percent of organizations do not link resources to strategies (they fall to budget).

- Seventy-five percent of organizations do not obtain buy-in or incorporate incentives to motivate others to get involved.

- Eighty-six percent of business owners and managers don't take the time to plan, discuss and evaluate strategy.

- Ninety-five percent of the typical workforce simply do not understand their organization's strategy. This is due to the failure of the organization to clearly communicate the vision. (Olsen, n.d.)

An implementation plan provides an organization with the opportunity to map out the road ahead. In other words, this type of planning allows one to create the roadmap needed to pursue specific goals and carry out related activities for doing so. Of course, having an implementation plan or roadmap does not guarantee that the desired outcome will be reached. However, it does provide directions, which should be used to determine action. During the planning process, one must address the what and why of activities. This includes taking the time to determine and address the who, where, when, and how of implementation. All the above are critical aspects that must be in place to avoid some of the common mistakes reported by Fortune Magazine.

When planning for implementation, leaders must identify the "players" involved before implementation. Specific to my desire to implement the standards-based grading system, the critical players are made up of both internal and external members within the educational system and community at large. Before implementation can take place, I must ask the following questions.

- Will stakeholders (teachers, administrators, parents and students) support efforts to adopt a new grading practice?
- Will the policy benefit students and improve the quality of instruction taking place within classrooms throughout the district?

To switch from a traditional grading system to a standards-based grading system is easier said than done. It is not an event; it is a process that involves many within the

organization. This process takes time and lots of energy from everyone involved. School

districts must understand how this method of grading would give both students and

parents a better way to evaluate the progression of students' learning within academic

subjects. In the section below, I discuss the stakeholders that will be involved in the

implementation of the standards-based policy and determining in different ways what

resources are needed to ensure successful implementation.

Stakeholders Involved

Several critical stakeholders will be involved in the development and

implementation of this new grade policy. As indicated in section one, the district is

currently using the traditional grading practice within all schools. However, since the

implementation of personalized learning, several educators expressed an interest in

wanting to change the grading practice to determine ways to more accurately assess and

determine students' ability to master content specific standards. This level of interest led

to the exploration of this standards-based grading policy.

The following persons are the specific stakeholders that will be involved in the

development and implementation of this new policy: the superintendent of school, school

board members, other district level leaders, principals, teachers, students, and parents.

Initially, all stakeholders will serve as advisors to the members of the implementation

team. Specifically, these persons will be asked to help lead the organization through the

change process and to provide feedback and input on the new policy. The above process

is aligned to the second stage outlined in John Kotter's eight-stage process for creating

major change. This stage emphasizes the need for organizations to create a guiding

coalition. According to Kotter (2012), the role of the guiding coalition is to help lead the

change effort and keep the organization on target as it moves through the eight stages of change. The composition of this group of diverse individuals should bring unique qualities, perspectives, and experiences to the table. Additionally, the collected view of the group should enable the team to see all sides of a situation and encourage innovative ideas to surface.

Once this feedback is obtained, I will move forward with the writing of this new policy – moving it from the conceptual level to the required operational language. Additionally, the latest research on standards-based grading practices will be shared with all stakeholder groups. This research will include the pros and cons of this type of change.

Prior to full implementation of this new policy, members of the School Board and the District's Executive Leadership team will be presented with a copy of the policy during a board workshop. The current practice within the district requires several reviews by the members of the School Board and a recommendation for board approval from the Superintendent of Schools before a policy can be changed or implemented. It takes about one full month to complete the above process. Again, once the policy is written and thoroughly reviewed by the superintendent and executive cabinet members, the superintendent will add the policy to the agenda for a school board workshop. During the school board workshop, the new policy will be presented and the board members will be given the opportunity to openly discuss the recommended policy. Based on the feedback given during the workshop, the next step would be either to make additional changes and/or to move forward with implementation plan. If the green light is given, the policy will move to the next level. This level involves two public readings during

regular scheduled school board meeting. During these meetings, the policy is posted for the general public to view and the public is given the opportunity to comment on the policy during school board meetings. After the second public reading, the school board members can act on the policy – they can move to approve or disapprove the policy. As with any initiative within a school district, the superintendent would have thoroughly vetted the initiative before moving to seek approval by the school board members.

Establishing District Policy

Now that I have communicated the rationale for this policy, addressed the planning need for implementation and discussed the stakeholders that will be involved in the development and implementation of this policy, the issue remains as to how this policy will impact the individuals within the district. When reflecting on the impact of this method of grading, Guskey (1993) indicated that standards-based grading improves students' attitude toward learning and assessment.

Additionally, students almost unanimously enjoy having the ability to reassess their performance on content specific standards and learning objectives (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011). I am convinced that providing students with the opportunity to reassess their performance over time helps eliminate the stress that is commonly found within classrooms. Students are encouraged to continue working towards mastery even after taking an assessment. Thus, students tend to focus more on the feedback that is given on assignments and assessments.

It is my personal belief that through the use of standards-based grading, the potential to improve learning outcomes is significant. This will stem from having students receive number or letter grades to them receiving specific feedback on their

learning and mastering of content specific standards. My research reveals that SBG helps build and improve confidence, increase content mastery, reduce test anxiety, as well as encourage students to seek assistance during the process of learning. This improved confidence can be linked to the fostering of a growth mindset.

Dweck (2015) describes mindsets as how persons perceive their ability. This perception influences a person's level of motivation and attitude towards achievement. Specifically, persons who believe their intelligence could be improved (growth mindset) outperform those who do not (fixed mindset) believe their knowledge intelligence could be improved. Therefore, fostering a growth mindset and promoting the belief that intelligence can be improved through hard work are critical functions found within the standards-based grading system.

While researchers highlight many positive outcomes of SGB systems, there are also some challenges that must be addressed. The most significant challenge is associated with the interpretation of the scale that is commonly used to evaluate students' performance. Through the use of the traditional method of grading, number and letter grades make sense to stakeholders (students, parents, and community members) and they are more easily understood.

However, letter grades are not used within a standards-based grading system. Instead, student performance is typically broken down for each subject area or course into precise learning objectives (Guskey & Jung, 2016). This break down provides parents with detailed information about their child's achievement on the standards for each subject area. On the other hand, a single grade of "D" communicates little to no information about the student's level of achievement. Therefore, through the use of

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standards-based grading, collaboration between educators, parents, and students can be increased. This consequently helps to improve student performance.

When reflecting on The Florida Principal Leadership Standards, the following standards are the driving force behind my desire to implement the standards-based grading method within the district. Standard 2 focuses on making student learning a top priority. Specifically, this standard encourages school leaders to demonstrate that student learning is their top priority. This is demonstrated through the actions of the school leader. These actions enable educators to focus on student achievement and maintain an environment that promotes high levels of engagement and high expectations for all students.

Standard 3, on the other hand, promotes instructional planning. Specifically, this standard encourages school leaders to work in a collaborative manner to develop and implement an instructional framework that aligns all aspects of teaching and learning (curriculum, instructional practices, and assessments). The common language of instruction, as described by the Florida Educator Accomplished Practices in Rule 6A-5.065, is that educational leaders are encouraged to use data driven planning and instructional practices. The analysis of data should include the communication of the relationships between academic standards, effective instruction, and student performance. Finally, this standard ensures that high quality assessments are aligned with the adopted standards and curricula.

Throughout the implementation process, I will host several focus group meetings for administrators, teachers, parents, and students to determine ways to improve the implementation process; I will clear up misconceptions and build the capacity

implementation of those involved. It is my professional belief that the above strategy can

be used to build trust and to obtain buy-in.

Providing professional development for all involved will be critical and necessary

for the success of this policy. Professional development opportunity will be provided

using face-to-face trainings and online webinars. Again, prior to full-scale

implementation of this policy, all stakeholders will be given opportunities to learn about

this new policy, ask questions, and seek clarification of its various components. I will

develop resources such as talking points for stakeholders to ensure common language

regarding communications about this new policy.

Lastly, as recommended by Fowler (2009), I will confirm that ongoing

evaluations are conducted to guarantee successful implementation of policy. This level

of evaluation would be designed to ensure that the intended outcomes are evident.

Fowler (2009) communicated that "when the policy under consideration is very new or is

a pilot project, a qualitative study can yield valuable insights into how the policy works"

(p. 319). Therefore, I intend to have ongoing assessment conversations with stakeholders

during all phrases of implementation.

Conclusion

In closing, transitioning to a new grading system takes a lot of time and effort.

During this time, it is imperative that the district leaders develop an implementation plan

and put it in place to ensure success. Planning must include determining and carrying out

ways to gain the support of all stakeholders (administrators, teachers, parents, and

students). Obtaining buy-in from stakeholders is necessary when planning to implement

this type of change within a school district. As I reflect on my implementation plan, I would do the following:

- Provide comprehensive training to all stakeholder groups or individuals as required

- Hire an outside consultant/expert to train stakeholders

- Focus all training on clarifying: the system, the reasons for moving to this method of grading, the research and philosophy behind this method of grading, and specifics about the district's usage of this method of grading

As communicated throughout this section, the goal of standards-based grading is to improve student achievement outcomes by changing the way teachers assess student learning. This method of grading provides students, teachers, and parents with specific, actionable information regarding student mastery of content specific standards (Guskey & Jung, 2016). The focus is on determining what students know and can do. During the implementation process, I will provide all stakeholders with information about this method of grading early in the transition process. This information will be designed to provide a clear explanation of the standards-based grading system and to address common misconceptions.

SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

As indicated in section one of this policy advocacy paper, more and more districts

are moving away from the usage of traditional grading practices to standards-based

grading. This move is the result of educators wanting a better method to truly measure a

student's ability to demonstrate mastery of content specific standards. Through the use of

a standards-based grading system, students are evaluated on their mastery of standards.

This level of evaluation allows educators, parents, and students to clearly see areas of

strength and weakness during the progression of learning. Additionally, the data

provided affords professional educators with the opportunity to develop methods to

support student learning and mastery of standards.

Policy Assessment Plan

Previously, I have noted the benefits to implementing and using a standards-based

grading system; however, it is imperative that school leaders take appropriate measures to

ensure proper implementation of this type of grading policy. Beyond taking the

necessary actions to examine implementation, it is essential that they evaluate all aspects

of the policy to determine effectiveness. Fowler (2009) indicated that a policy evaluation

includes a close examination to determine if the policy is achieving its intended purpose.

According to Fowler (2009) when determining the impact of a policy, the following

processes are often described as necessary steps: 1) defining the problem, 2) generating

alternatives to the problem, 3) analyzing the alternatives, 4) developing and adopting the

policy, 5) implementing the policy, and 6) evaluating the policy. Throughout the above

steps, careful consideration of persons involved in or impacted by the policy must be the

driving force behind actions. To further help policy makers understand the importance of

developing a system to evaluate the implementation of a new policy, the HMT Magenta Book (2011) includes a resource to aid policy makers in understanding the impact of developed policy. The process strongly encourages policy makers to evaluate carefully the pros and cons of the policy. The ultimate aim of this resource is to help developers determine whether a policy is being implemented as intended.

While conducting research about the importance of creating a policy assessment plan, it became clear to me that one must build a system to monitor and evaluate the implementation of new policies. The monitoring of policy refers to the process of determining how the policy is doing. A well-developed implementation plan should include methods in which ongoing data about the policy is collected and generated.

The method used to evaluate the implementation of a policy will depend on the evaluation questions that need to be answered. Fowler (2009) reported that when developing evidence to inform policy, the following general criteria must be considered: "1) usefulness, 2) feasibility, 3) propriety, and 4) accuracy" (p. 315). He further reported that the evaluation of a policy is the final step in the policy assessment process. During the assessment process, a wide range of research methods can be used to investigate the effectiveness and impact of the policy. This is a list of questions that can help policy makers evaluate the effectiveness of a policy:

- Was the problem correctly identified?
- Were critical components overlooked?
- Were essential data or information left out of the analysis? How did this influence the final analysis?
- Were recommendations properly implemented?

- Is the policy having the desired effect?

- Are there any needs for modification, change, or re-design? What should be done differently next time?

Specific to my implementation of the standards-based grading system, I intend to obtain ongoing data to determine the effectiveness and impact of my policy. I will use grade reporting records, feedback from critical stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, and administrators), classroom observations, informal conversations, and surveys. Additionally, I intend to create several collaborative groups to obtain feedback specific to implementation of the standards-based grading system.

These collaborative groups will consist of the following stakeholders: students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and district personnel. Given the size of the school district, three collaborative groups will be created: North County, South County, and Mid-County. The purpose of having different groups provide feedback is to ensure representation mirroring the makeup of stakeholders within the larger community. These groups will meet once a month to engage in conversations about the district's implementation and usage of the standards-based grading system.

As stated previously, the primary purpose of these meetings will be to examine the district's implementation and usage of the standards-based grading system. Determining the policy outcomes and its impact throughout the district is necessary. Similar to Fowler (2009), the HMT Magenta Book (2011) provided a series of reflective questions that I intend to use to guide conversation during monthly collaborative meetings with stakeholders. Those questions are:

- What were the policy outcomes? Were there any observed changes, and if so by how much of a change was there from what was already in place, and how much could be said to have been caused by the policy as opposed to other factors?

- Did the policy achieve its stated objectives?

- How did any changes vary across different individuals, stakeholders, sections of society and so on, and how did they compare with what was anticipated?

- Did any outcomes occur which were not originally intended, and if so, what and how significant were they?

Taking actions to evaluate the district's implementation and usage of the standards-based grading system will provide me with the opportunity to determine the impact of this policy on student achievement efforts. During this evaluation, I will note evidence of both intended and unintended impacts on student achievement efforts. Additionally, I will use the data obtained to make decisions about the continued implementation of the standards-based grading system or to inform future changes to current policy to produce improved outcomes.

Policy Accountability Plan

American Heritage Dictionary defines "accountability" as "the quality or state of being accountable; an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility for one's actions, products, decisions, and policies." Within the educational arena, aspects of accountability have always been in existence; however, in the early 1990s, the accountability movement became the focus of many discussions on educational accountability throughout the nation. During this time, former President George H.W. Bush and Governor Bill Clinton encouraged national leaders to support efforts to

implement more rigorous assessments to measure student performance. These leaders
supported regular means of examining students to see if they were meeting higher
expectations and to ensure that students could succeed in our expanding global society
and in emerging knowledge based careers. In my professional opinion, this was the birth
of the standards and accountability movement, which quickly gained momentum
throughout the nation and resulted in major changes within the educational arena.

I believe the aim of school accountability is to improve student achievement and
to ensure the success of all students. Additionally, I believe that ongoing measures for
assessing student learning were developed to ensure intended outcomes are achieved.
Whether preparing students for college, careers, or living a good life, educational systems
must provide students with the necessary tools to help them succeed and develop and use
valid measures to determine levels of success.

As indicated in section one of this document, the philosophy of standards-based
grading systems aligns with the thinking associated with the standards and accountability
movement. Therefore, it is imperative that measures are developed to determine the
impact of the standards-based grading policy. Guskey (2010) shared several essential
components for the successful implementation of a standards-based grading system.
According to Guskey, these essential components serve as the foundation for educators'
beliefs and practice. Of the components shared, the one that resonated with me focused
on standards.

Guskey (1994) emphasized the need for professional educators to truly understand
the standards and to identify specific learning targets necessary for the success of
students. Knowing what students should know and demonstrate must be evident as

students work to make evident their ability to master content specific standards. It is a common practice for school districts to outline required curriculum standards and to provide educators with the necessary supports and resources to master them. Additionally, it is a common practice to hold teachers' accountable for doing the work needed to ensure the success of students.

Giving educators the opportunity to engage in high quality professional development is also imperative to the successful use of any standards-based accountability program. This professional development must highlight best practices that link all aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. It is no secret that the success of educational reform is contingent upon what happens within classrooms.

Senge (1990) indicated that to transform an organization one must depend on the support of those on the ground level to ensure success. Actions that occur at the ground level are essential. Therefore, actively involving teachers in the change process with ongoing professional development and support must happen for standards-based grading to be successfully implemented. A clear and detailed model must be used to determine success. The framework or model used should help teachers determine whether or not students are able to demonstrate mastery of content specific standards.

Upon reflecting on the model's process that will be used to evaluate the implementation of the standards-based grading policy and to help policy maker's account for the outcomes associated with this policy, the public health framework created by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) appealed to me.
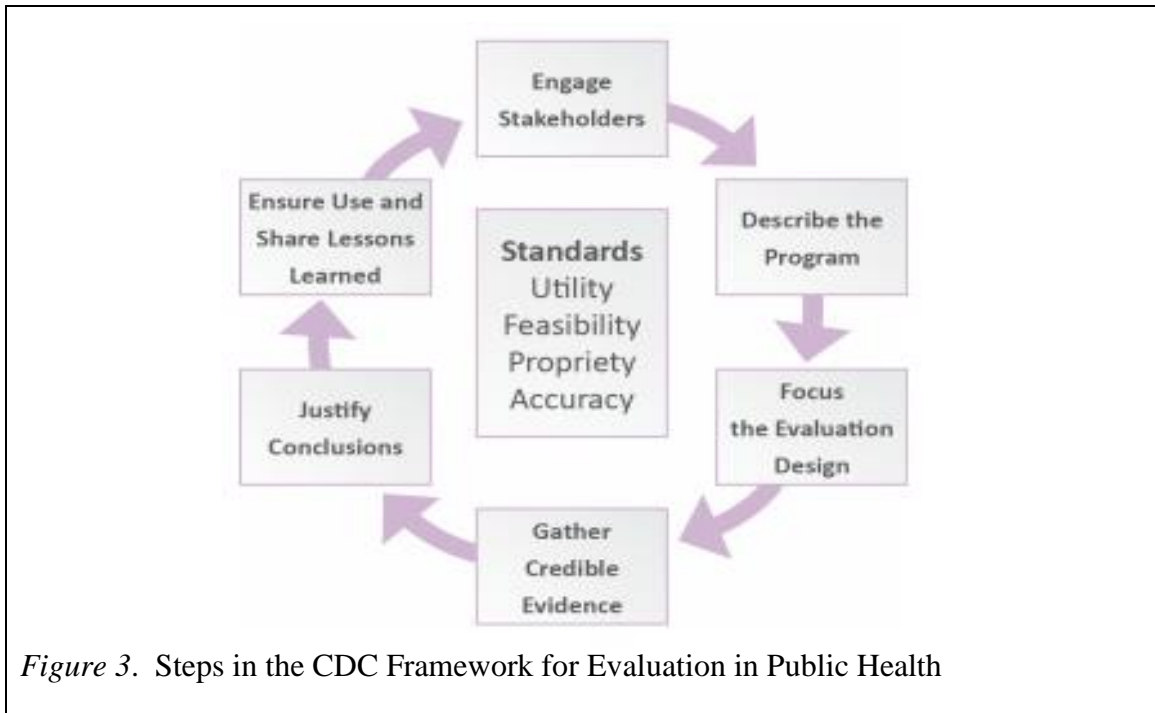
Figure 3. Steps in the CDC Framework for Evaluation in Public Health

While there are many different frameworks that can be used, the CDC Framework in Figure 3 appears to be easy to follow. Not only does this framework highlight an ongoing six step process for program and policy evaluation, it also provides a guide for implementing a thorough evaluation that includes built in accountability measures.

Steps in Program Evaluation

Step 1: Engaging Stakeholders

As reported by the CDC (1999), Step 1 of the program evaluation process must start with the engagement of persons who have an invested interest in success of the organization. These stakeholders must be actively engaged to ensure all elements of a program's objectives, operations, and outcomes are addressed. As a result of their involvement, stakeholders within the organization can help implement the remaining steps.

Step 2: Describing the Program

Step 2 of the program evaluation process involves the development and communication of a detailed description of the program, which must include the goals and strategies of the program. According to the CDC, the capacity to effect change must be clearly articulated and aligned to fit into the larger organization and community (CDC, 1999).

Step 3: Focusing the Evaluation Design

Step 3 is designed to ensure that the evaluation process is focused on the most important issues. The goal is to assess the issues of greatest concern and to ensure resources are used as efficiently as possible. Simply stated, the purpose must be clear and actions must align with the purpose. In many ways, this step could prevent an organization from making premature decisions regarding how the evaluation should be conducted (CDC, 1999).

Step 4: Gathering Credible Evidence

Step 4 indicates that the evaluation must strive to collect data that will clearly communicate an accurate picture of the program. This accurate picture is needed so the primary users see the data as credible information that informs practices and decisions. It is no secret that having credible information strengthens evaluation judgments and the recommendations that follow from them (CDC, 1999).

Step 5: Justifying Conclusions

Step 5 involves the justification of the evaluation conclusions as they are linked to the collected evidence. The evidence collected must be evaluated to determine if it measures up against the values or standards agreed upon by the stakeholders at the start

of the evaluation process. This is an essential action that must take place before

stakeholders can conclude that they can use the evaluation results with confidence (CDC,

1999).

Step 6: Ensuring Use and Sharing Lessons Learned

Step 6 is a critical component that must be included in any process used to

implement change within an organization. Stakeholders must take the necessary time to

reflect on lessons learned, determine what worked or did not work, and take appropriate

actions to achieve success. To achieve success, deliberate and intentional efforts must be

in place to ensure that the evaluation processes and findings are used appropriately. This

includes ensuring that information is communicated to all stakeholders (CDC, 1999).

In assessing the implementation for the standards-based grading system within the

school district, it is my belief that through the use of self-reflection and self-assessment

processes natural improvements will occur. Additionally, it is my belief that this method

of reflection and assessment must involve all stakeholders within the district as everyone

within the district has a vital role to play in educational reform and student achievement

initiatives. All reflection and assessment efforts associated with the implementation of

standards-based grading within the district will be led by those identified as members of

the guiding coalition. Again, this is a group of persons working to lead change within the

organization. All evaluation notions are essential to success of the policy.

The above evaluation process aligns perfectly with the process that is often used

within school districts specific to strategic thinking. Kabacoff (2014) defines strategic

thinking as a process which examines how people think about, examine, view, and create

future opportunities for success for the stakeholders within the organization. Without a

doubt, many within the education profession have found this to be an extremely effective and valuable process.

Conclusion

The Center for Disease Control described policy evaluation as the process used to examine the content and impact of a policy. Simply stated, this method of policy evaluation was created to determine the usefulness, merit, and worth of a policy. As indicated in section one of my policy advocacy document, I am planning to implement a standards-based grading system within the district. While planning to implement this new method of grading within the district, I think it is imperative to take steps to ensure proper evaluation of the implementation of this policy. Beyond the determination of a system to evaluate implementation of this policy, I must ensure that measures of accountability are enacted to safeguard stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, district leaders, and school board members. As indicated within the steps outlined above specific to the CDC Framework for Evaluation, all stakeholders have a role to play in order to ensure successful implementation of the standards based grading system. Steps 1 and 5 specifically address accountability measures that must be in place for all stakeholder groups.

Lastly, it is my belief that the framework created by the Center for Disease Control appears to be an excellent model to use during the implementation of my recommended policy. This framework for evaluation has built in metrics that could be used to hold policy makers accountable for their actions. Additionally, it has metrics that enables leaders within the district to develop a deeper understanding of the merit and worth of the standard based grading policy.

SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

It is my belief that establishing a policy to implement standards-based grading within the school district is a step in the right direction. As indicated in section one of this policy advocacy document, during the 2015-2016 academic school year the school district in my study implemented personalized learning within several schools. This instructional approach was designed to tailor all learning experiences to each student's individual needs, skills, and interests. This approach to learning empowers students to work with teachers to develop specific learning experiences and goals based on content specific standards within each course. As a result of this personalization of instruction and learning, there is a need to implement a grading policy that assesses student performance on content specific standards. Currently, the traditional grading system used within the district does not provide the information needed to determine if students are able to master content specific standards. Therefore, without this policy it would be difficult to adequately track student learning and to determine if students can demonstrate mastery of content specific standards.

Appropriateness of the Policy

As indicated throughout this document, standards-based grading is a system designed to assess students based on their mastery of content specific standards. Through the use of this method of grading, teachers have the opportunity to provide specific feedback on a student's academic performance. It also gives teachers the capacity to develop interventions to support students who fail to demonstrate mastery of those standards. Additionally, students have multiple opportunities to refine their skills as they work towards demonstrating mastery of the standards.

When reflecting on what makes this policy on standards-based grading the best policy, it is imperative to understand the thinking behind the usage of this method of grading. Dappolone (2011) identified the following reasons, which led to the implementation of these systems:

- This method of grading allows teachers to provide students with targeted and specific feedback about their learning.

- This method of grading allows students to focus on their learning instead of stressing over the effect of their performance on a summative test. During the progression of learning, students know exactly what to expect.

- This method of grading allows students' performance to be assessed based on their ability to demonstrate mastery of content specific standards.

As previously mentioned, it also provides teachers, students, and parents with a wealth of information to help determine instructional adjustments needed to ensure student success. Students are not penalized for needing extended time to demonstrate mastery of content specific standards. Additionally, by using this method of grading, teachers can more easily accommodate and meet the unique and specific needs of each student.

When reflecting on the values associated with the need to implement standards-based grading practices within the district, one must understand that grading and the reporting of grades to stakeholders (parents, students, community members, and teachers) have been critical components of student evaluation within the educational arena for years. Additionally, one must understand the level of accountability placed on educational institutions to ensure that students are equipped to compete for continuing education and

career opportunities emerging in the twenty-first century. Therefore, there is an increasing need for professional educators to ensure that grades assigned to students are meaningful. In order to make grades more meaningful, professional educators must address both the purpose of grades and the format used to report grades to students and parents.

One purpose of grading is to represent evaluations of a students' performance during or after instruction has taken place. Pre-assessments may be done to guide instruction as well but are not necessarily accountability measures. The reporting of grades communicates the results of students' formative or summative evaluations. Among the ethical values applicable to professional educators, there is a need to ensure that grading and the reporting of grades are fair, meaningful, and accurate. Munoz & Guskey (2015) reported that concepts associated with grading and the reporting of grades must be valid and reliable. Validity relates to the need for the assessment measure to measure what it purports to measure. Reliability refers to the measure consistently measuring what it purports to measure. Both are important.

When reflecting on the notions of validity and reliability associated with grading and the reporting of grades, it is my belief that one must understand the purpose of grading. Brookhart (2011) indicated that the primary purpose of grading is to communicate how well students have performed on content specific standards required to demonstrate mastery of a course of study. Grades assigned to students should accurately reflect a students' performance on these measures. Therefore, it is necessary to establish and articulate clear and concise criteria for grades to make the grading method fair and equitable. This is the foundation for the implementation of and usage of the standards-based grading method.

Finally, the linkage of grading and the reporting of grades using the standards-based grading method addresses the values held by teachers, parents, and students. The first value is one of quality expectations. As outlined by Fowler (2009), the value of quality speaks to the services provided to enhance one's learning and to provide open access to high quality educational experiences.

Additionally, the social value of this policy is addressed through providing opportunities for increased collaboration between professional educators and families (parents and students) during the progression of learning (Fowler, 2009). As indicated in section one of this document, through the use of standards-based grading practices, stakeholders have specific learning outcomes about students' ability to demonstrate mastery of content specific standards. In addition, students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning. This level of ownership leads to increased levels of student engagement, which is another essential and related value to student evaluation.

Vision Supporting the Policy

I am recommending a policy that would require the use of a standards-based grading system in all schools. This method of grading would be used throughout the district. Currently, all schools are using the traditional method of grading. Implementing a standards-based grading system will provide the flexibility needed to account for the district's use of its personalized learning approach, which was implemented during the 2015-2016 academic school year. Additionally, this method of grading would allow professional educators, parents, and students to monitor students' mastery of the defined standards.

The overarching vision behind my proposed policy is to ensure higher levels of educational quality for all students within the district. More specifically it is to increase student learning. Finally, my vision includes having more accurate measures of students' mastery of knowledge and skills.

What and Whose Values are at the Center of Standards-Based Grading?

Advocating for a policy on standards-based grading is a decision that is rooted in my desire to do what is best for students within the district. This method of grading benefits students by accurately evaluating their performance on content specific standards. It also provides specific information about what students can do and what they might have to do as they progress in their learning. This method of grading provides a framework that encourages support of student learning. More importantly, the students' learning is measured only in terms of their success in meeting their own academic needs and growth goals for mastering the content specific standards outlined within the course of study.

As indicated by several researchers, it is time to ditch the traditional method of grading and reporting in our nation's schools. This is important because the current method of grading and reporting fails to provide specific information about a student's academic progress in mastering content specific standards. If we want to link students' mastery of content specific standards to grading, reporting of grades must be valid, reliable, fair, and purposeful. In support of this, Munoz & Guskey (2015) reported that standards-based grading has more to offer over the traditional method of grading. Additionally, this method of grading reinforces student learning at a much higher level than the traditional system.

I believe creating an explicit link between the curriculum standards and the grading and reporting systems must be the driving force behind educational reform. It needs to communicate accurately student performance on content specific standards. Therefore, it is my personal belief this type of system could have a major impact on efforts to close the achievement gap that is evident throughout the educational system in my study as well as other studies throughout the state and Nation.

Wagner (2014) indicated that professional educators must not only understand what students need to know, but they must rethink their approaches to determine students' readiness to compete in the twenty-first century. This includes determining how students are best taught and assessed. Our failure to create systems to measure accurately student learning will result in an uncertain future for our students, our local communities, state, and nation. Therefore, all grading and reporting methods should start by having a clear purpose followed by an in-depth understanding of criteria used to determine student success.

How the Policy Serves Stakeholders

It is no secret that implementing change within an organization can be challenging. Therefore, it is necessary to examine closely all aspects of change prior to its implementation. With nearly twenty years of experience in education, I am aware that efforts to implement change within a school district or school has the potential to bring with it a combination of both professional and academic risks. To minimize risks associated with change, critical stakeholders within the organization should be actively involved in the decision making process.

Additionally, an honest and accurate assessment of the culture within the organization must be conducted. If it is determined that the organizational culture is one that is willing to embrace change, it will be easier to move forward. Specific to the implementation of standards-based grading, Dappolone (2011) reported the following key perspectives and related questions that must be considered prior to moving forward with the implementation of change:

- **For Superintendent, School Board Members, and District & School-based Administrators:** Do the school leaders truly understand what standard-based grading is and its impact on student achievement? Will they accept responsibility for the potential risks associated with the implementation of standards-based grading? Will they support the implementation of the policy even when parents, students and others stakeholder challenge the policy?

- **For Teachers within the system (educators):** Would teachers be interested in implementing standards-based grading? Would teachers be willing to accept that their students and parents might not buy-in to the standards-based grading method? Would teachers be willing to help educate students and parents on the benefits of this method of grading?

- **For Parents:** Will parents accept that grades assigned to students are solely computed based on students' performance on content specific standards taught within courses? Are opportunities provided to ensure that parents have a true understanding of this method of grading and the potential impact on student learning?

- **For Students:** Will students embrace such a dramatic change in grading practices? Will students have the opportunity to engage in educational discussion about changes to grading practices? Will students understand the meaning of grades earned during the progression of learning?

Analyzing and addressing the above questions from the stakeholders' perspectives will help me develop strategies to move my policy proposal closer to adoption. I believe the information obtained will give me the opportunity to address any related challenges and meet the needs of the important stakeholder groups. This in turn should increase the possibility of having sufficient numbers of key stakeholders support my proposed policy change. This then could help school based administrators, teachers, parents, and other interested stakeholders become supportive, resulting in the district staff, superintendent, and board members feeling less anxious about considering and adopting my suggested policy.

A change in grading practices requires a paradigm shift in mindset that moves beyond a revised policy or a new grading scale. This mindset shift relates to instructional practices within classrooms and how students are assessed. Creating growth mindsets within an organization is essential to the success of the organization. As indicated by Dweck (2006), a growth mindset is one in which a person continually thrives to learn and to improve. Therefore, for a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, school leaders, school board members, and superintendent, significant, deep-seated practices must change in terms of teaching, evaluating students, and grading. It involves faculty and administrators agreeing to a common purpose for grading. It must focus on providing students meaningful feedback during their progression of learning.

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The faithful and successful implementation of a standards-based grading policy requires an all hands on deck approach.

Conclusion

According to Scruffily (2008), a standards-based grading system involves measuring students' proficiency on well-defined content specific standards. It allows students to be assessed either entirely or almost entirely on how well they progress towards the mastery of content specific standards and not on other factors that are commonly found in traditional grading systems. Additionally, students are measured against the standards, not by comparison to the performance of their peers. This adds value and meaning to grades assigned to students.

Based on the research conducted on this method of grading, it is no surprise that it has gained popularity across the United States. The pros associated with my desire to implement this method of grading within the district totally outweigh the cons. The pros for this type of policy are directly linked to improving student achievement. On the other hand, the reported cons are rooted in the beliefs and experiences of individuals regarding what they are accustomed to using. The vision for success associated with this new grading policy is that students, parents, and teachers receive a more accurate measure of what a student knows at different times during a specific course of study. Creating this vision is essential to guide the process used to advocate for my proposed grading policy change for the district.

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