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# A Collaborative & Strategic Approach To Improve School Achievement Through The Advocacy Of An Effective Grading, Promotion And Reporting Policy

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A COLLABORATIVE & STRATEGIC APPROACH TO IMPROVE SCHOOL  
ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH THE ADVOCACY OF AN EFFECTIVE GRADING,  
PROMOTION AND REPORTING POLICY

Héctor Luis Freytas

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

Of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

In the Foster G. McGraw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University

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## DIGITAL COMMONS DOCUMENT ORIGINATION STATEMENT

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 Ed.D. 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 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).

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## **ABSTRACT**

This policy advocacy study examined the current grade and promotion policy on record for Mountain West School District (MWSD) as it relates to mastery of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Illinois Learning Standards (ILS), the academic targets identified for students to be successful in colleges and careers. Furthermore, this study recommended changes to the existing policy at MWHS so as to report grades from coursework and those at the end of marking periods as accurately and fairly as possible, with specific skills-based feedback related to the mastery (or lack thereof) of both local and national standards that may better prepare students for performance on standardized examinations, foster more accurate grade point averages (GPAs) and prepare students for colleges and careers.

This study concluded that MWSD's grading/promotion policy bestowed upon the superintendent (or designee) the authority to implement *any* system of grading/promotion, so long as it is fair, accurate, and equitable, as stated in the Illinois School Code (ISC). Thus, the superintendent or designee may implement any grading/promotion system possible as long as it complies with school code graduation requirements.

Moreover, the current policy allows for administrators to intervene in grading/reporting if it is deemed that the grade(s) reported by the teacher is inaccurate or erroneous. What is more, the policy does not advocate for any particular grading system. However, in practice, schools in MWSD use the traditional grading system to report satisfactory performance and promotion to further areas: A through F, with percentages and points aggregation. The policy does not make any reference to grading

practices/reporting being aligned to national or local standards. Lastly, the policy suggests that schools have the autonomy to pursue a grading system that the local leader/principal deems appropriate for a school's pupils.

## **PREFACE**

Conducting a policy advocacy document supported my growth as a school administrator in a plethora of ways. Oftentimes, school leaders hastily suggest and/or implement policy without thoughtful approaches to educational policy development, reflective practices, and ethical balance; they may not seek input from all stakeholders or even determine if the policy change is aligned to desired outcomes. Engaging in the process of coanalyzing effective grading and grade promotion policies has helped me understand the importance of bringing people together when deciding to make a change that affects all stakeholders. Stakeholders want to be heard, and the best way to foster change is to include them from the beginning.

This policy advocacy study was extremely meaningful, because the entire process was cocreated with the input of all stakeholders: parents, teachers, students, administrators, and local leaders. In addition, the policy advocacy supports the district's vision of moving to a standards-based grading and reporting system and its commitment to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

This process also prepared me to be a central office administrator in two ways. First, it helped me understand that policy adoption, enforcement, and development is the fundamental role of board members and superintendents. A policy reflects the beliefs and values of a community. Changing policies necessitates changing procedures, and changing procedures may lead to positive results.

In addition, earning support for change requires advocates to intentionally educate those who may be impacted through ongoing forums, meetings, or social media.



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## **SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT**

### **Introduction**

In this section, the policy awareness, critical issues, and policy recommendations are explored. This is done to create a vision that advocates for a grading system and policy that promote an accurate grading system that is supportive of learning and free of traditional grading errors.

### **Policy Awareness**

While cocreating an effective, multiyear change plan for the exploration and possible implementation of a standards-based grading and reporting (SBGR) system, it occurred to me that in order to make any effective changes to current practices, change efforts must manifest themselves through district policy—the manual of what schools should be doing to support student learning as it relates to operations, grading, attendance, discipline, academic opportunities, extracurricular activities, and personnel (Burgett, 2013).

Policies are the principles, beliefs, and values of all stakeholders in a system (Burgett, 2013). Policies guide and inform procedures to be implemented by school leaders (Burgett, 2013). Policies are what educationalists must uphold and embody daily in schools. Effective policy development and implementation may lead to positive and accurate student performance (Burgett, 2013). Effective policy development and creation is what should drive the work of all members of the Board of Education.

The grade and promotion policy of Mountain West School District (MWSD) is concise and general, and allows for the superintendent or designee to decide what grading system to use. (This designee could be an individual or even a committee.) However, the

policy is not aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or the Illinois State Learning Standards (ILS), which MWSD has chosen to adopt (MWSD, 2017).

Also, the policy does not make reference to a research-based grading system. However, it does allow for the superintendent or designee to implement an effective system if the existing one misreports students grades (see Appendix A).

### **Critical Issues**

The critical issue with the grading and promotion policy under study is that it indirectly fosters the traditional letter grading system—A–F, sometimes E, 0 to 100%, with points accumulation—and does not take into account the CCSSs or even local standards in the evaluation and reporting of student performance.

The traditional grading system is inappropriate because it is inequitable, antiquated, based on limited research, and inclusive of nonacademic factors such as attendance and behavior (Wormeli, 2006; Dueck, 2011; O’Connor, 2011; Dueck, 2014; Guskey, 2015; Vatterott, 2015; Schimmer, 2016). The traditional grading system distorts and misreports a student’s actual level of performance because low and high grades are averaged together, behavior and attendance may be included, and criteria for success on assignments can be unclear and not linked to standards (Wormeli, 2006; Dueck, 2011; O’Connor, 2011; Dueck, 2014; Guskey, 2015; Vatterott, 2015; Schimmer, 2016).

Grades determine elementary and middle school students’ eligibility to get promoted to the next grade level, join an honors program, participate in extracurricular activities, and receive in-school privileges and rewards. For high school students, grades open or close access to extracurricular activities, scholarships/grants, internships, honors programs, in-school privileges/rewards, higher-paying careers, and university admission

(Guskey, 2006; Andrew & Barnes & Gibbs, 2016). One misrepresented grade could have irreparable consequences that last a lifetime. That's why grading must be used as an *evaluative* tool that authentically measures student proficiency on specific language arts and math skills aligned to the CCSS, rather than a *comparative* tool that pits one student's performance against the other.

In addition, scholars who have examined the traditional letter/percentage grading system have found inconsistencies across the board (Iamarino, 2014; Vatterott, 2015; Schimmer, 2016). In a classic study, 142 different English teachers from several schools and districts scored common English exams. When compared, the scores on those exams ranged from 64 to 98%; scores on another ranged from 50 to 97% (Vatterott, 2015). The same study also demonstrated even further inconsistency in grades on geometry exams, with scores ranging from 28 to 95% (Vatterott, 2015). In terms of letter grades, the exams ranged from failing grades to As.

This inconsistency suggests that teachers have critical professional disagreements in grading students' performance and need a grading system that bridges those wide gaps. Also, this lack of consistent grading practice across common subject areas surely had led to grade inflation or deflation, which again is fostered by the traditional grading system, since grades can be affected by attendance, behavior, extra credit, and the distorting power of averaging.

This professional disagreement is so important to address because grades close or open academic, social, extracurricular, and financial opportunities that may come around only once in a lifetime for any particular student.

## **Policy Recommendations**

I am recommending a policy that makes it clear that grading/reporting practices should be aligned to the mastery of standards, and promotion should only occur when a student has been able to demonstrate mastery for any particular course (e.g., U.S. history or sequenced subjects like math I, math II, or math III).

What is more, in practice, teachers would organize their gradebooks by skills or standards in this system, then decide what evidence, both formative and summative, would suffice. Teachers would also use rubrics to evaluate student work, employ discipline referrals to report attendance or behavior issues, and adopt the equitable point scale along with letters. Letter grades would no longer stand alone.

I am also recommending that MWSD adopt the Illinois Practitioners Framework for Standards-Based Reporting at the elementary and high school levels (see appendices D and E). This report card, which is aligned to standards-based grading practices, will communicate students' performance with accuracy and provide specific feedback related to the acquisition of skills needed to be successful in all subject areas.

The policy will address the issues inherent in traditional grading practices by accepting SBGR as the new grading/reporting system, one that is equitable, mindful of local and national standards, and reports accurate student performance data without including any nonacademic factors. Attendance and behavior, though important, should not be averaged or taken into consideration when talking about a student's grade. Doing so constitutes educational malpractice in the views of many leading researchers.

A policy is the law, and the only true and legal way change could be made is by changing the policy (Burgett, 2013). Also, a policy communicates the beliefs of the board

members, the elected representative of the community, as it relates to the school context (Burgett, 2013). Thus, if the Board of Education wants to communicate accurate student performance data that authentically measures and reports what students can do, then a policy that adopts SBGR as its grading system is the best way to proceed.

## **SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED**

### **Introduction**

In this section, an analysis of needs in the educational, economic, social, political, and moral areas is conducted with the hopes of highlighting the need for SBGR, a system that promotes grades for learning and mastery, holds all students accountable, and does away with behavior and attendance in calculating grades.

### **Educational Analysis**

Since 1971, almost all of schools throughout the United States have used the traditional letter grading system, even though there is little research supporting its effectiveness (Guskey, 1995). Locally, the current grading and promotion policy of MWSD does not specify or promote a specific grading system. Thus by default, an absolute majority of MWSD teachers and schools use the traditional system, with its undefined A through F letter grades, percentages, and points to indicate student performance on formative and summative assessments.

More importantly, scholars have found inconsistency in grading across the board with the traditional grading system (Iamarino, 2014; Vatterott, 2015; Schimmer, 2016). In a classic study, 142 different English teachers from several schools and districts, scored common English exams. Upon comparison, the scores on the exams ranged from 64 to 98%; scores on a different exam ranged from 50 to 97% (Vatterott, 2015). The same study also demonstrated inconsistency in grading geometry exams, as scores ranged even further from 28 to 95% (Vatterott, 2015). Letter grades ran the gamut, from failing grades to As.



This inconsistency suggests that teachers have critical professional disagreements in grading students' performance and are in need of a grading system that bridges those wide gaps. What is more, it suggests that if provided an alternative grading system (e.g., SBGR) with clearly defined levels of mastery and targets in place, teachers may be able to bridge the professional and crucial disagreements on grading and reporting. Doing so would create more common practice and a stronger professional learning community (PLC), a framework for collaboration proven to increase student performance (Dufour, Dufour & Eaker, 2009).

The traditional grading system is foundationally inaccurate, mathematically unbalanced, and too considerate of nonacademic factors such as attendance and behavior (Wormeli, 2006; Dueck, 2011; O'Connor, 2011; Dueck, 2014; Guskey, 2015; Vatterott, 2015; Schimmer, 2016). That's why schools and districts that are truly committed to improving student achievement and reporting accurate grades should consider policies that promote and foster SBGR.

### **Economic Analysis**

Changing a school process like the grading and promotion system, which has been in place at MWSD for 46 years, may have an economic impact. To begin with, if MWSD decides to print a standards-based report card (SBRC) on paper, it will cost more than the traditional report card, because most SBRCs involve multiple pages of reporting, and more pages equals more paper cost. (See Appendix D for a sample elementary SBRC and Appendix E for a middle school/high school sample.) To offset the cost, it may be advantageous to produce the report card digitally, with access via email and smartphone.

What is more, districts may have to invest funds into the expansion or replacement of data system capabilities. One option can be Skyward, a data management system that tracks student grades, attendance, discipline, and demographic information for a cost of about \$120,000 per year. This system could be used to support SBGR. Another system that could serve as a platform for standards based assessments, both formative and summative, is Mastery Connect, a system that tracks grades, common assessment, and mastery tracking for a cost of \$5,650 for a school of 450 or fewer students and 6 hours of PD for one year, with an annual renewal cost of \$5,000 (Mastery Connect, 2017). Also, consultation with the data management system company may be needed; schools may incur cost depending on the agreements between the data management system and school district.

Moreover, to implement a standards-based grading and reporting system with accuracy and fidelity, continuous professional development needs to be prioritized, both through instructional coaches and leaders within the district and from experts brought in to provide teaching. Expert presenters may cost upwards of \$2,000 to 5,000 per full day, and multiple visits may be necessary. This money could be allocated from Title I funding, a federal government grant given to schools at which 40% or more of the student population receives free and reduced lunch or are in low-income housing.

When budgeting, considering students' needs should take priority, according to Marguerite Roza, a leading expert in school finance. SBGR puts those needs first. It highlights what students should be able to do to be successful in a particular class and beyond. Students need and deserve to be graded accurately and fairly so they can learn the areas in which they must improve. Schooling is a linear journey with no return; at age

21, unless a student has special needs, a free and appropriate education is over. One cannot just do high school all over again, and misrepresented grades may jeopardize the very lives educators are trying to mold and impact.

Lastly, SBGR also may lead to improved academic performance, a goal of many districts and schools. If done right, SBGR requires students to master concepts at the first effort or after multiple tries, and is centered on specific feedback given through rubrics or teacher narratives. Unlike with the traditional grading system, students cannot skip tasks, or earn a 0, and neither can teachers. Mastery is the only option.

### **Social Analysis**

Student performance, as reported through grades, either opens or closes opportunities. These opportunities may have an enormous social impact. First, accurate grading may reduce the number of remedial courses needed for students after high school. Approximately 1.7 million students nationwide are enrolled in developmental courses (Vatterott, 2015). In other words, about one-third of high school graduates who earn college admission are enrolled in classes that are not transferrable and are gatekeepers to introductory level college coursework (DuFour, 2015; Vatterott, 2015). Many of these students had high GPAs in high school and were considered the top of their classes; college entrance exams proved otherwise. This suggests the existence of a major gap between traditional grading practices and the mastery of skills needed to be successful in college-level courses.

Locally, according to the Illinois Interactive Report Card (IIRC), 50.8% of the MWHs class of 2014 (30 students) and 65.7% of the class of 2013 (23 students) were enrolled in remedial courses at community colleges not counting toward college credit,

slightly higher than the state average of 49%. In my eyes, this is unacceptable. It prolongs the already arduous journey of obtaining degrees, forcing students and families to incur additional expenses and potentially limiting students' financial mobility (IIRC, 2016).

In 2011–2012, remediation cost students and families \$1.5 billion in direct expense and \$380 million in loans (Barry & Dannenberg, 2016). In other words, students who received good enough grades to obtain admission to local, private, and state universities somehow ended up taking remedial or high school level courses that didn't count toward graduation. Thus, there is a major gap between high school performance measures and college preparedness.

### **Political Analysis**

Eliminating the traditional grading system that has been in place for 100 years may have enormous political repercussions. Unions may organize and try to fight changes to current grading practices, because they could appear to reduce autonomy in how teachers evaluate student performance. Potential disagreements between union members and administrators could lead to division among stakeholders, toxicity of culture, or even a strike. However, the local policy clearly indicates that the superintendent or designee(s) has exclusive rights on deciding what grading system to use. Thus, teachers will have to obey the mandate.

Effective change should be implemented in a collaborative manner, so I am not suggesting a top-down directive, even though the policy clearly states that is feasible. However, doing what's best for students should take precedent over personal or group desires.

## **Moral and Ethical Analysis**

Reporting accurate student performance is the right and moral thing to do when it comes to grading. Distorting grades by including nonacademic factors such as behavior and attendance or having a missed assignment drastically change a student's grade is just plain wrong. Grades can open or close opportunities. Schools should strive to prepare students to be successful in colleges and careers, and I believe the best way to do that is by having a grading system aligned to standards, oriented in specific feedback that obliges students to do the work until it's done right, rather than get away with a 0.

Earning a 0 is the "academic death penalty," according to Guskey (1995). When averaged in a grade, it can have devastating consequences for that particular student and class. A 0 on a major test makes it almost impossible for a student to earn an A for the quarter or semester, even though that student may have demonstrated mastery of a particular standard in a formative or summative assessment (Guskey, 1995). With standards-based grading, the 0 is eliminated and students are encouraged to do the work.

## **SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT**

### **Introduction**

In this section, the goals, objectives, needs, values, and preferences of the policy are discussed. Having clear goals that reflect the values of all stakeholders is key in implementing a grading and reporting policy that directly or indirectly affects all of the members of a school community.

### **Policy Goals and Objectives**

The policy goals and objectives are to advocate for an accurate and equitable grading, promotion, and reporting system that is mindful of the skills needed to meet local and national standards so as to better prepare students for colleges and careers.

The grading and promotion system would adopt a number of SBGR approaches: rubrics based on standards, equal interval grading, defined letter grades (if used), redoing of assessments for mastery, and reporting grades based on skills instead of averaging.

In addition, a goal of the policy would be to formally report grades using a SBGRC (see appendices D and E). This is an addition to the policy, considering that it does not make reference to how grades should be reported or communicated.

### **Needs, Values, and Preferences of Policy**

The core of this policy advocacy concerns opportunities for students within and beyond the classroom, as well as the values of the CCSS national consortium, consisting of educational leaders from across the country (CCSS, 2017). Students need specific feedback in order to master local and national standards, which will inevitably earn them credit in the class grade promotion, graduation, and an accurate record, one that will ideally reflect their mastery of the skills needed to be successful in college and careers.

Also, implementing grading and reporting practices that reference standards clearly sends the message that MWSD is committed to implementing the ILSs and CCSSs. This is what's needed for the United States to compete with the highest-performing countries that have strong national curriculums, such as Finland and Singapore (Schimmer, 2016).

### **Validation of Goals and Objectives**

On the basis of statistically significant studies, current standards in place in other schools/districts, and the expertise of authors with experience in K–12 education, these goals are appropriate and good. SBGR has been proven to predict results on standardized testing and give a more precise report of students' actual skills.

In Haptonstall (2011), the investigatory work examined the correlation between the grades a student earned in core subject areas and their scores on the Colorado Student Assessment Program tests in reading, writing, math, and science. The study also examined the mean scores of varying subgroups to determine if certain ones demonstrated higher means based on their school districts. While all the districts that participated in the study demonstrated a significant level of correlation between grades and test scores, Roaring Fork School District Re-1, using a standards-based grading model, demonstrated both higher correlations and higher mean scores and grades across the overall population and subgroups (Haptonstall, 2011). In other words, SBGR is a strong predictor of student performance on standardized testing.

## **SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT**

### **Introduction**

In this section, benefits and drawbacks of the policy are clearly defined, efficiently explained, and thoughtfully detailed. Including both viewpoints helps set an even tone that is aware of all stakeholders; this may help the transition and give dissenters a voice. Traditional practices are not wrong, but they are just not pedagogically valid in an era of standards.

### **Pros of the Policy**

The policy I am promoting adopts a standards-based grading and reporting (SBGR) system as the sole grading and grade reporting methodology in MWSD. The adoption of one common methodology throughout grade levels ensures that grading and reporting look the same for teachers across grade levels and content areas, thus vertically aligning grading and reporting practices for better grade validation and accuracy. This also supports the work of PLCs. Moreover, SBGR requires an equitable approach to calculating grades by having even intervals of mastery using a four- or five-point scale, using defined mastery terms such as *mastery*, *needs improvement*, and *not met* assigned to a particular skill or standard, allowing redos of assessments until mastery is achieved, and not counting homework as a grade (Reeves, 2002). What is more, reporting grades using a SBRC will give teachers, students, and parents specific and accurate information on areas of strength and growth.

As described above, the pros of the policy are student-centered and focus on an equitable system of reporting accurate performance. However, to some, this policy would impact current and inherited practices that have seemed to work for a long time.



### **Cons of the Policy**

The policy I am promoting refocuses grading from an individual endeavor to a collective endeavor. This collective endeavor, though it seems to take away from the professional autonomy sought by many educators, actually strives to create common grading practices that may solve the problems of grade inflation and grading discrepancies among teachers of all grades and content areas.

Professional autonomy is important for growth and performance (Senge, 2005). Research suggests that professional autonomy is a key indicator in getting the most out of a staff, and the policy I am advocating for may seem to take away some of that autonomy. However, the manner by which teachers teach will be completely up to them; all I am asking is for is a universal grading procedure that will benefit all, since students transfer from class to class on a regular basis for a variety of needs (Senge, 2005).

What is more, if teachers are not used to grading using rubrics that clearly state what a student must accomplish in order to meet standards, more work could be expected. Homework or formative assessments could not count toward a final grade; if such assessments *are* graded, they should count for no more than 10%. This number would allow students to still earn the highest grade possible without blurring the true meaning of the overall grade (Wormeli, 2006).

## **SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

To adopt the policy I am advocating for—in effect, SBGR—the following would need to be considered: needed educational activities, staff development plans, time schedules, program budget, and program monitoring activities.

### **Needed Educational Activities**

To establish a policy that adopts SBGR as its grading system, it would be advantageous for all stakeholders—board members, administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members—to create a committee that meets at least once a month to discuss current literature about SBGR and the Illinois School Code, specifically the grading and grade level promotion section (see references). This committee should also cocreate the action plan related to draft and implement the policy. Reading current literature from a variety of writers will help inform stakeholders of key terms and practices related to SBGR that have been vetted by professionals.

Moreover, visiting other high-performing schools that have made the transition from traditional grading practices to SBGR can help in this process. Seeing SBGR in practice and learning about the journey other schools have taken could serve as a guide for MWSD on what helped and hindered implementation. What is more, SBGR artifacts should be obtained from these visits to be studied and considered.

In addition, internal and external advocates should plan to present the purpose of SBGR, including what it looks like and how to implement it successfully, at parent nights, staff meetings, and community forums.

### **Staff Development Plans**

Continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities should be planned throughout the year. They could take place at weekly staff meetings, during quarterly institute days, or even days dedicated to PD without student attendance. Internal and external experts, similar to instructional coaches and consultants, should be identified.

### **Time Schedules**

The needed educational activities will take approximately one to three years, depending on the urgency, support, and buy-in of all stakeholders. The first year is for building capacity, for all stakeholders to grow their knowledge of SBGR. This will be achieved through common readings, committee work, presentations, pilot programs, and surveys related to the effectiveness and use of SBGR.

An initial survey should illustrate stakeholders' current understanding and identify gaps of knowledge to fill in during the initial year of exploration. Ideally, after the end of the first year, it can be determined whether to adopt a standards-based grading and reporting (SBGR) policy. The year of implementation is a supportive year, during which meetings can provide staff with assistance on any issues with SBGR.

### **Program Budget**

This policy carries an obvious need for a dedicated budget. Teachers will have to visit other schools to learn about SBGR. Substitutes can cost anywhere from \$100 to 195 a day. Furthermore, books about SBGR can range from \$10 to 100, depending on the number purchased.

School resources are usually found online or shared by cooperating schools upon request. However, printing present additional costs. According to Lyra (2017) research, one single black-and-white page may cost anywhere from 5 to 15 cents.

### **Program Monitoring Activities**

The standards-based grading and reporting practices and policy should be monitored at professional learning community (PLC) meetings and at monthly committee meetings. Traditionally, PLC meetings are held at schools once a week, in department or grade levels. An effective PLC team would look at data representative of mastery of standards, inform their practice, and create formative experiences for students to meet the standards.

In addition, having peers review each other's grade books to ensure the correct usage categories can prove helpful. What is more, the use of partial standards-based report cards can be implemented to measure the program's progress. The report cards will serve as evidence of SBGR efficacy.

## **SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN**

### **Introduction**

In this section, I discuss a policy assessment plan, which involves progress monitoring, persons responsible, procedures, and outcomes. Such a plan holds everyone accountable so as to better implement the policy with fidelity.

First, for the policy to be effective, it must be codrafted so as to be inclusive in its inception. The drafting should occur in an SBGR committee meeting. Once that step is complete, the policy should be discussed by the public at board meetings or school-wide events and modified if necessary. Then, it must be officially ratified by the Board of Education at the earliest possible meeting, preferably before the beginning of a new school year. Once the policy is approved and set as the law of the land, administrators would begin the process of preparing professional development around transforming teacher's traditional grading practices to SBGR.

Teachers would begin to transform their traditional gradebooks to reflect standards-based categories and practices. This setup would be very important; administrators would need to support teachers at the beginning of the year, so the gradebook is set right from the start. Moreover, MWSD would need to establish no less than one full-day institute event for teachers, with time for learning, reading literature, seeing examples, and having time to practice.

### **Stakeholders' responsibilities**

- Teachers would be responsible for the standards-based grading and reporting gradebook.

- Administrators' responsibilities would include professional development on how to transition the gradebook from traditional practices to SBGR.
- The Board of Education and the superintendent would need to handle funding of the policy's implementation.
- Parents would need to provide support and enforcement.
- Students would need to demonstrate compliance and provide reflection on SBGR in practice.

## **SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT**

In this section, the appropriateness of the policy, as well as the values, vision, needs, and concerns of stakeholders will be discussed. This is needed to summarize the impact of the policy advocated and clearly present how it centers on the current needs of stakeholders—especially students.

### **Appropriateness of Policy**

This is the best and most appropriate policy because it facilitates common and equitable grading practices among all teachers and subjects throughout the entire school and district. Moreover, this policy eliminates traditional grading practices, such as averaging scores, including behavior in grades, and giving undefined letters. Establishing common grading practices may allow teachers to grade more accurately, give specific feedback, and facilitate continuity of grades from one class to another, one teacher to another, and one school or district to another (Wormeli, 2006; Dueck, 2011; O'Connor, 2011; Dueck, 2014; Guskey, 2015; Vatterott, 2015; Schimmer, 2016). The policy advocated takes into account the CCSSs and ILSs, the targets that education leaders have determined will better prepare our students for colleges and careers.

In an era of unfair grading, rife with long-held professional disagreements, this policy puts students' success at the forefront and fosters solidarity, with common practices shown to increase student achievement.

### **Values at the Center of the Policy**

The values of all of the leaders nationwide who worked tirelessly to cocreate the CCSSs and ILSs are at the center of the policy. In addition, the policy reflects the values of all stakeholders who support a fair and equitable grading system. Effective policy

should be developed and adopted based on the work and values of experts, practioneers, and educational leaders. Politicians, both local and national, should take their work into consideration at all times when drafting education policy.

### **Vision-Centered Policy**

The implementation of the policy is consistent with the vision behind it: to adopt a grading and promotion system that is based on standards, reports students' true performance, and uses grading for learning (O'Connor, 2009). If schools are to live the vision of "all students can learn," then SBGR is one of the few systems that holds all students and stakeholders accountable. The implementation policy, as outlined in Section Five, makes sure that at the end of the process, an SBGR system is adopted.

### **Needs and Concerns of Stakeholders**

I believe that the needs and concerns of all stakeholders must be included and sufficiently addressed. Consistency, fairness, accuracy, and timely feedback are values supported by all stakeholders: teachers, students, parents, administrators, and the local community. That's why SBGR is the best choice.

More important, if adopted, teachers gain a grading framework that aligns practices at every grade level and content area, whether it is core, remedial, or advanced placement. The future of students and teachers depends on policies that put everyone in a common field, using common tools for one common goal: "all students succeed."



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# APPENDIX A: MOUNTAIN WEST SCHOOL DISTRICT GRADING AND PROMOTION POLICY

Illinois

6:280

## Instruction

### Grading and Promotion

The Superintendent or designee shall establish a system of grading and reporting academic achievement to students and their parents/guardians. The system shall also determine when promotion and graduation requirements are met. The decision to promote a student to the next grade level shall be based on successful completion of the curriculum, attendance, and performance on the Illinois *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers* (PARCC) and/or other assessments. A student shall not be promoted based upon age or any other social reason not related to academic performance. The administration shall determine remedial assistance for a student who is not promoted.

Every teacher shall maintain an evaluation record for each student in the teacher's classroom. A District administrator cannot change the final grade assigned by the teacher without notifying the teacher. Reasons for changing a student's final grade include:

- A miscalculation of test scores,
- A technical error in assigning a particular grade or score,
- The teacher agrees to allow the student to do extra work that may impact the grade,
- An inappropriate grading system used to determine the grade, or
- An inappropriate grade based on an appropriate grading system.

Should a grade change be made, the administrator making the change must sign the changed record.

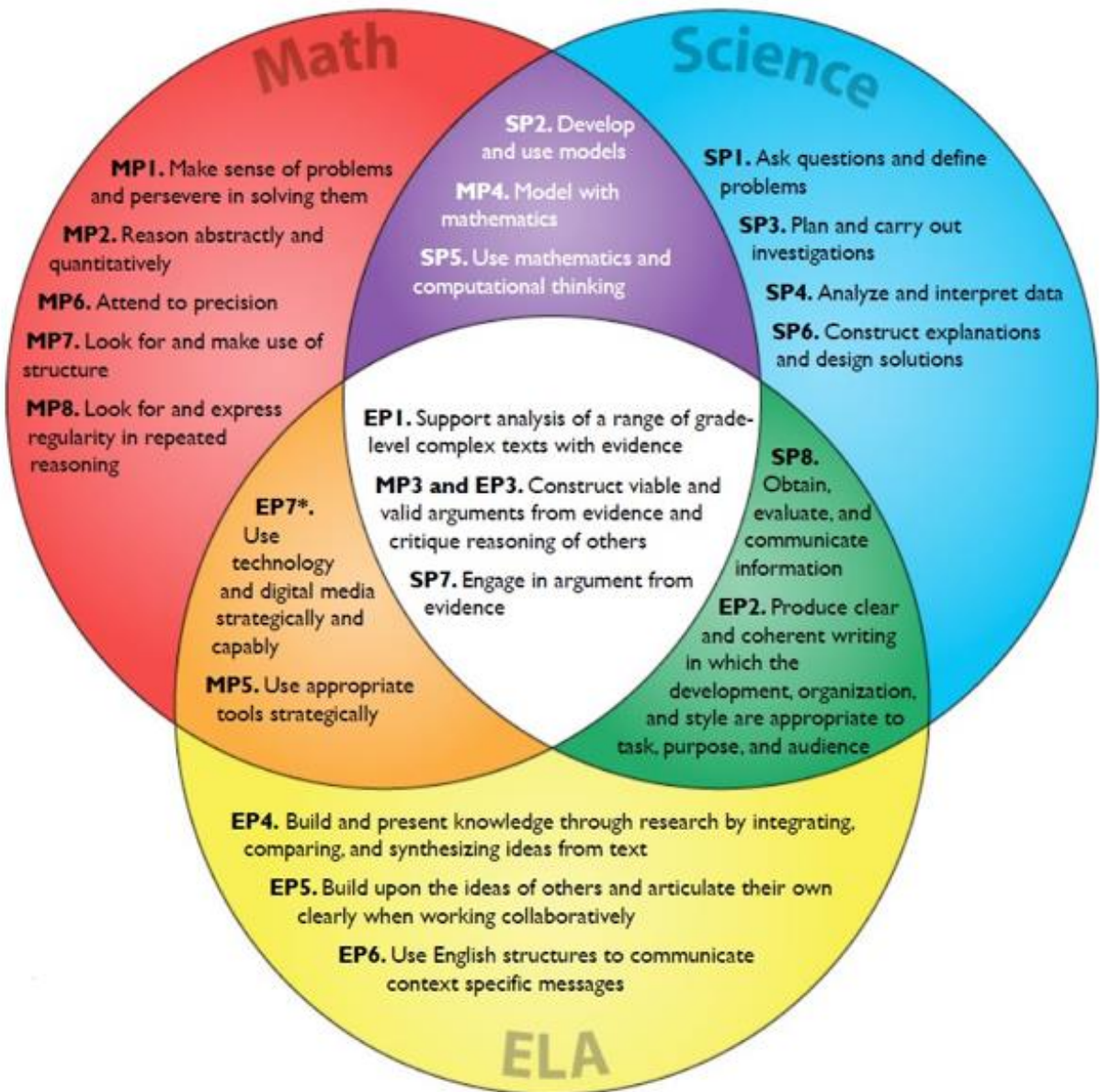
LEGAL REF.: 105 ILCS 5/2-3.64a-5, 5/10-20.9a, 5/10-21.8, and 5/27-27.

CROSS REF.: 6:110 (Programs for Students At Risk of Academic Failure and/or Dropping Out of School and Graduation Incentives Program), 6:300 (Graduation Requirements), 6:340 (Student Testing and Assessment Program), 7:50 (School Admissions and Student Transfers To and From Non-District Schools)

ADOPTED: July 27, 2004

REVISED: April 28, 2015  
February 23, 2016

## APPENDIX B: COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS (CCSS) EXAMPLE



**APPENDIX C: ILLINOIS SCHOOL CODE SEC. 10-20.9A FINAL GRADE;  
PROMOTION**

(105 ILCS 5/10-20.9a) (from Ch. 122, par. 10-20.9a)  
Sec. 10-20.9a. Final grade; promotion.

(a) Teachers shall administer the approved marking system or other approved means of evaluating pupil progress. The teacher shall maintain the responsibility and right to determine grades and other evaluations of students within the grading policies of the district based upon his or her professional judgment of available criteria pertinent to any given subject area or activity for which he or she is responsible. District policy shall provide the procedure and reasons by and for which a grade may be changed; provided that no grade or evaluation shall be changed without notification to the teacher concerning the nature and reasons for such change. If such a change is made, the person making the change shall assume such responsibility for determining the grade or evaluation, and shall initial such change.

(b) School districts shall not promote students to the next higher grade level based upon age or any other social reasons not related to the academic performance of the students. On or before September 1, 1998, school boards shall adopt and enforce a policy on promotion as they deem necessary to ensure that students meet local goals and objectives and can perform at the expected grade level prior to promotion. Decisions to promote or retain students in any classes shall be based on successful completion of the curriculum, attendance, performance based on the assessments required under Section 2-3.64a-5 of this Code, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, or other testing or any other criteria established by the school board. Students determined by the local district to not qualify for promotion to the next higher grade shall be provided remedial assistance, which may include, but shall not be limited to, a summer bridge program of no less than 90 hours, tutorial sessions, increased or concentrated instructional time, modifications to instructional materials, and retention in grade.

Source: P.A. 98-972, eff. 8-15-14.)

**APPENDIX D: ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION, PRACTITIONERS’  
FRAMEWORK FOR STANDARDS-BASED REPORTING AT THE ELEMENTARY  
LEVEL**



## Practitioners' Framework for Standards-Based Reporting at the Elementary Level

The purpose of the standards based report card is to inform parents of their child's progress toward meeting grade level state standards.

**Grade:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Principal Name & Contact Information:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher Name & Contact Information:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Key Achievements in Content Areas

4■Exemplary; 3■Meets Standards; 2■Approaching Standards; 1■Below Standards; NA■Not Assessed

\*Modified

Literacy	Quarter			
	1	2	3	4
Effort				
Writes Opinion, informative, explanatory, and narrative pieces for a variety of audiences				
Demonstrates understanding of Standard English conventions when writing or speaking				
Supports a point of view with reasons, details and information				
Speaks effectively for situations and audiences				
Listens and comprehends in a variety of settings				

Reading	Quarter			
	1	2	3	4
Effort				
Reads closely to determine key ideas and details in a variety of grade level text				
Uses knowledge of words to understand and analyze text				
Utilizes various print resources as well as diverse media to make connections, comparisons, and draw conclusions				
Comprehends complex grade level literary and informational texts independently				
This space could be used to indicate reading level, or other specific reading information.				

Mathematics Content	Quarter			
	1	2	3	4
Effort				
Demonstrates an understanding with numbers; generates and analyzes algebraic patterns				
Describes, compares, interprets and applies concepts of measurement and data				
Analyzes and classifies concepts of geometric shapes				
Understands and applies place value concepts				
Counts and compares numbers (Kindergarten) OR Applies fractional concepts (grades 3-5)				

Mathematics Practice	Quarter			
	1	2	3	4
Effort				
Makes sense of problems and works diligently to find an appropriate solution				
Demonstrates the ability to explain the thinking behind the solution and can evaluate the reasoning of others				
Uses appropriate math tools efficiently in problem solving				
Sees and applies patterns to mathematical reasoning				
Uses mathematics to understand and solve real-world problems and can demonstrate the relationship between the two using various modes of representation				



Social Studies	Quarter			
	1	2	3	4
Effort				
Effectively uses reading and writing strategies to demonstrate an understanding of:				
Civics				
Economic				
History				
Geography				

Music (teacher)	Quarter			
	1	2	3	4
Effort				
Demonstrates basic knowledge of music vocabulary				
Demonstrates musical knowledge and skills through creating and performing				
Demonstrates understanding of music from historical periods and world cultures				

Physical Education/Health (teacher)	Quarter			
	1	2	3	4
Effort				
Acquires movement skills and understands the concepts needed to engage in health-enhancing physical activity				
Sets goals and achieves/maintains physical fitness based on continual self-assessment				
Develops team-building skills by working with others through physical activity				
Understand basic principles of health and well-being				

Attendance	1	2	3	4
Present				
Absent				
Tardy				

Science	Quarter			
	1	2	3	4
Effort				
Understand the grade level concepts of life, physical, and earth/space science and their interconnection				
Investigates, build models and creates theories about the natural world				
Understands the links between the different domains of science				

Visual Art (teacher)	Quarter			
	1	2	3	4
Effort				
Demonstrates basic knowledge of vocabulary used in visual art				
Creates art with a variety of tools, media, and techniques				
Demonstrates an understanding of how art/artifacts convey stories about people, places, and times				

Key Behaviors: 4=Consistently;3=Usually;2=Sometimes;1=Rarely

Social/Emotional	1	2	3	4
Demonstrates self-control				
Works well with others				
Makes good decisions				

	General Comments			
1				
2				
3				
4				



**APPENDIX E: ILLINOIS PRACTITIONERS' FRAMEWORK FOR  
STANDARDS-BASED REPORTING MS/HS**





# Practitioners' Framework for Standards-Based Reporting


(Middle School/ High School)  
2014-2015

<b>Grade:</b>						<b>Marking Key – Achievement</b>						<b>Marking Key – Behavior</b>					
<b>Student Name:</b>						4-Exceeds Standard			2-Approaching Standard			4-Consistently			2-Sometimes		
						3-Meets Standard			1-Below Standard			3-Usually			1-Rarely		
<b>Attendance</b>						NA-Not Assessed						*-Modified					
	1	2	3	4	Total												
Present																	
Absent																	
Tardy																	


The purpose for this report card is to inform parents regarding their child's progress toward meeting grade level state standards. It indicates learning successes and areas where additional effort is needed.

	<b>Language Arts – Mrs. Lee</b>																			
	<b>Achievement</b>				<b>Effort</b>				<b>Participation</b>				<b>Responsibility</b>				<b>Cooperation</b>			
	4				3				3				2				3			
	<p>Q1-This quarter we focused on personal narratives. Students read, compared and evaluated several authors' works. They then created personal narrative in the style of one of the authors, highlighting how the two works are similar. Devin participated in class discussions and group work. She wrote a quality narrative but was lax on turning in outlines and other items on time.</p> <p>Q2</p>																			
<a href="mailto:hlee@samplehs.edu">hlee@samplehs.edu</a>	Q3																			
Office Hours: 1:00-3:15	Q4																			


	<b>Reading – Mr. Burton</b>																			
	<b>Achievement</b>				<b>Effort</b>				<b>Participation</b>				<b>Responsibility</b>				<b>Cooperation</b>			
	4				4				3				3				3			
	<p>Q1-Devin accurately determines theme, analyzes characters' thoughts and feelings as a plot advances, and understands meaning and tone from an author's specific word choices. With informational texts, she sees the connection of how many authors viewpoints can assist in formulating her own ideas.</p> <p>Q2</p>																			
<a href="mailto:burton@samplehs.edu">burton@samplehs.edu</a>	Q3																			
Office Hours: 1:00-3:15	Q4																			


	Algebra – Mr. Tang															
	Achievement				Effort				Participation				Responsibility			
	2				4				4				4			
<a href="mailto:gtang@samplehs.edu">gtang@samplehs.edu</a>	Q1-Our class worked on interpreting expressions for a linear or exponential function. Devin did all her assignments and participated in class, but struggles with many concepts. I encourage her to take advantage of my after school tutoring opportunities.															
	Q2															
Office Hours: 9:00 – 10:15	Q3															
	Q4															


  


	American History – Ms. Addams															
	Achievement				Effort				Participation				Responsibility			
	4				4				4				4			
<a href="mailto:jaddams@samplehs.edu">jaddams@samplehs.edu</a>	Q1-Our focus this quarter was on the women's rights movement in the United States. Devin demonstrated great enthusiasm for the subject and did an outstanding job comparing various historical documents from the male and female perspective.															
	Q2															
Office Hours: 9:00 - 10:15	Q3															
	Q4															

	Chemistry – Mrs. Curie															
	Achievement				Effort				Participation				Responsibility			
	4				3				3				3			
<a href="mailto:mcurie@samplehs.edu">mcurie@samplehs.edu</a>	Q1-Chemical reactions were our focus this grading period. Students were expected to construct and revise an explanation for the outcome of a simple chemical reaction based on the outermost electron states of atoms, trends in the periodic table, and knowledge of the patterns of chemical properties. Devin demonstrated a strong understanding of these concepts through labs and assessments.															
	Q2															
Office Hours: 4:00 – 5:00	Q3															
	Q4															

	Visual Arts – Mr. Picasso															
	Achievement				Effort				Participation				Responsibility			
	3				3				3				3			4
	Q1-This grading period we studied the work of several artists and students interpreted the style of 2 in their own work. Devin demonstrated an understanding of the artist's work and completed projects on time, working well with others.															
	Q2															
<a href="mailto:picasso@samplmhs.edu">picasso@samplmhs.edu</a>	Q3															
Office Hours: 3:00 – 4:00	Q4															

	Physical Education – Mr. Owens															
	Achievement				Effort				Participation				Responsibility			
	2				4				3				3			4
	Q1-Students participated in various types of fitness training programs including circuit, cross and interval training. They demonstrated the knowledge of the benefits of participation in these activities in written assessments. Devin did well in the written assessments and gave a good effort with participation.															
	Q2															
<a href="mailto:jowens@samplmhs.edu">jowens@samplmhs.edu</a>	Q3															
Office Hours: 9:15 – 10:15	Q4															

	Spanish – Mr. Banderas															
	Achievement				Effort				Participation				Responsibility			
	3				4				4				3			3
	Q1-This quarter we began learning general vocabulary. Devin is a quick learner and has excellent pronunciation.															
	Q2															
<a href="mailto:abanderas@samplmhs.edu">abanderas@samplmhs.edu</a>	Q3															
Office Hours: 8:00 – 9:15	Q4															

This sample is based on an example in [Developing Standards-Based Report Cards](#) by Tom R. Guskey and Jane M. Bailey.

## APPENDIX F: POLICY ASSESMENT PLAN

**SMART Goal/ Expected Outcome: At the end of YEAR 2, MWSD have implemented standards-based grading and reporting (SBGR) and have implemented a grading and promotion policy reflective of SBGR.**

<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Person(s) Responsible</b>	<b>Deadline</b>	<b>Resources</b>	<b>Potential barriers</b>	<b>Result/Benchmark</b>
<b>Create a standards-based grading and reporting policy advocacy committee</b>	<b>Chair, Principal, Superintendent or any other leader</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> month of school year, YEAR 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting place</li> <li>• Scheduled time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting time and date conflicts</li> </ul>	<b>Agendas Attendance</b>
<b>Present SBGR research and its implementation steps to school staff</b>	<b>Internal Expert (s) and/or consultant</b>	<b>Fall of school year YEAR 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Books</li> <li>• Articles</li> <li>• Google Folders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Misunderstanding</li> <li>• Teachers not motivated to be honest</li> <li>• Alignment of Vision and SMART goal with all stakeholders</li> </ul>	<b>Meetings Meaningful exchanges</b>
<b>Host 3 Forums on Standards-Based Grading: Policies, Research and Current Artifacts</b>	<b>Internal Expert (s) and/or consultant</b>	<b>Fall Winter Spring of YEAR 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Committee</li> <li>• Google Form responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making sure we have representation from every level</li> </ul>	<b>Determine specific areas needed for PD</b>

<b>Adopt/Modify Standards Based Report Card Hybrid</b>	<b>MWSD</b>	<b>End of YEAR 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sample district system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost, more pages per report card</li> </ul>	<b>New Report Card</b>
<b>Recommend SBG System through SKYWARD: 4-0 scale, Standards instead of categories</b>	<b>MWSD</b>	<b>End of YEAR 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sample district systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buy-in</li> </ul>	<b>New System reflect on handbook of all 4 campuses</b>