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Implementing Standards-Based Grading In A Suburban Middle School: A Change Leadership Plan

Cody Huisman
National Louis University

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IMPLEMENTING STANDARDS-BASED GRADING IN A SUBURBAN MIDDLE
SCHOOL: A CHANGE LEADERSHIP PLAN

Cody Huisman

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

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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).

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the Change Leadership Plan was to describe a current issue facing a school district, creating a vision of change to end that obstacle. In the case of this particular change plan, the problem is the traditional grading system at a suburban middle school. The plan advocates for a change to a standards-based grading system. Several steps describing change are examined: describing the current situation, conducting research to support change, and designing a vision of what success will look like after standards-based grading is established. The research conducted was done through both surveys and group interviews. Research participants in the survey and group interviews were entirely teachers. The recommendation of this change plan is to switch from a traditional grading system to a standards-based system.

PREFACE

Change is difficult for humans, particularly in a large organization. Schools are no different; however, change in schools has a great impact on students. This change plan has the purpose of improving student learning, which is why schools exist. The experience of developing a change plan has given me a chance to enhance certain essential leadership skills. Focusing on a set of goals, learning how to delegate leadership roles to others, and communicating a vision are three areas that were essential for the implementation of this change plan.

Using standards to report student achievement is a necessary change that will benefit students, parents, and teachers. This change plan takes on an educational value that many teachers are passionate about—and that is grading. Keeping the process focused on short- and long-term goals is essential if the change plan is to be implemented effectively. Focus is one of my strongest leadership areas. For a change plan to be successful, a vision of success must be established. Once everyone knows what final success looks like, it becomes easy to write goals, both short- and long-term. Keeping everyone focused on the final product can be challenging, and a great leader must rely on teacher leadership to take or share leadership roles in some areas.

Delegating and developing leadership skills is not an easy task; it requires a lot of trust by the leader. I have always wanted to control the success of any endeavor by doing as much as possible to complete the task. One must trust others greatly in order to let go of control. Making a change from a traditional grading system to a standards-based system is large-scale procedure for schools to complete. A team is needed to successfully complete the change, especially in areas such as: assessment writing, selecting standards to report to parents, aligning standards to assessments, communicating to the community,

and selecting a new report card. The help of teacher leaders is indispensable in each of these categories. Relationship building is at the root of delegating leadership roles to teachers. A school leader must have great relationships if teachers are to take on the role of leading assessment writing or standard selection. Once people are in place to help guide each of these areas, the school leader can focus on communicating a vision for success.

One must effectively communicate a vision to all stakeholders in order for people to understand why a change is necessary. This communication needs to be made frequently, and it must be done with great purpose. Teachers are the most important group that a school leader must reach first. Once teachers understand why change is needed, they can quickly help communicate the vision to parents and students. Whenever school business is being discussed, the vision for success must be present in some way. Great leaders inspire and mobilize people when they effectively communicate. That is now clearer to me than ever after completing this change plan.

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this change plan is to create a grading system that is more consistent and focused on individual learning standards. Assessments should be written to provide reliable information that can be broken down by standard (O'Connor, 2002). Standards-based grading is a system that is learning-focused; the system reports what students know about learning standards in an individual subject. Each subject generally has multiple standards that are reported. Effort and behavior are reported separately (Brookhart, 2011). The score in a standards-based system communicates the student's knowledge of a specific standard. A change from traditional letter-grade designations to standards-based grading will furnish students and parents with more information to help students be successful academically. If implemented correctly, standards-based grading has the potential to provide individual students and parents with a clear representation of what students have mastered and where they need additional support. Current grading practices offer students only a letter grade based on criteria that can vary greatly in meaning from teacher to teacher. Moreover, standards-based grading lends itself to differentiation in the classroom by showing strengths and areas of concern for each learner. The increase of specific learning evidence regarding each student allows teachers to more easily create lessons based on the individual need of each learner. The goal of this change plan is to communicate with greater accuracy what academic standards students have mastered.

Rationale

Lee Middle School's current grading system is considered by many to be subjective and can be confusing for students, parents, and even teachers. Grading has become a subjective practice based on teachers' beliefs, values, backgrounds, philosophy of learning, and past experiences (Guskey, 2009). A typical student may have to navigate a different grading system for every teacher they have. Many classrooms use non-academic factors when assigning grades to students (Vatterott, 2015). These non-academic factors can distort a grade, and the final mark may not be reflective of the learning for each student (Vatterott, 2015). Standards-based grading is a system that puts more emphasis on what the students know (Guskey, 2009). Standards-based grading uses assessments to show mastery of the academic material. Rubrics are used to grade student work in an attempt to make grading more objective. Standards-based grading detaches behaviors and effort as factors in a grade that should only represent knowledge of content (Marzano, 2000). This is beneficial for students and their families as teachers and schools make changes to ensure a more standardized grading system.

The results of surveys and group interviews with both teachers and students led the staff of Lee Middle School to the conclusion that problems existed with the current grading system (Huisman, 2015). Some students who scored at or above grade level based on expertise of standards, for example, still failed classes because of failure to complete homework assignments. Some students were required to attend summer school, and some were retained at their current grade level rather than advancing with their peers. Grading practices like these can lead to a family's false interpretation of a student's actual ability and potential for positive academic progress. It is my opinion that students

who can prove mastery of standards on a set of summative assessments in a subject should not fail a class.

A number of students pass classes, or even achieve honor roll status, at Lee Middle School when they have not mastered the standards. Factors that contribute to this include: 1) full and on-time completion of homework assignments, 2) completion of extra credit when offered. Parents may believe their children are doing well in school and learning all of the material when they are, in fact, attaining passing or higher grades based on effort and compliance. Standards-based grading can help to reduce this miscommunication by separating academic achievement from non-academic factors. Grades can be communicated more accurately, and parents can understand what their child does and does not know. This focused communication of content knowledge will cultivate an increase in student learning.

A change from traditional to standards-based grading creates an assessment system that is concentrated on individual learning. This change benefits students, parents, and teachers. Specifically, students have the opportunity to take ownership of their learning. They are informed of the standards they have mastered and those they need to address more fully. There are no longer single letter grades; students will receive specific information on multiple learning standards for each subject. Thus, standards-based grading can report to parents with greater accuracy more detailed information about their child's grasp of academic material. This system allows parents to give or receive assistance for their child that is better targeted to their gaps in learning. This change also gives teachers more information than they have had with previous grading systems.

Data-driven instruction is used by successful schools at all levels (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Instruction that is guided by data gathered from well-written assessments is an essential tool for great schools (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Assessments must be aligned to individual standards so they can be broken down to give teachers multiple frames of reference to realize the progression of each student in their class. As opposed to a traditional number or letter grade, teachers will have a more detailed description of each student in a system aligned to standards. Standards-based grading puts the emphasis on growth and mastery of content.

Goals

The goals for this change plan are to:

- Implement a reporting and assessment system that is more reflective of the content that students are learning.
- Identify the priority standards on which the district will report (Heflebower, Hoegh, & Warrick, 2014).

The change from traditional grading to standards-based evaluation will take time to plan and execute. Professional development of staff and communication with parents are significant aspects that must occur over time for this transition to move smoothly. At Lee Middle School, we always operate within a framework that emphasizes student learning. Our administrative team is confident that a move to standards-based grading promises to reduce the unfairness in grading. This system will be more objective, providing parents and teachers with a more consistent interpretation of what students know and where they need further assistance.

Demographics

Maple Creek Consolidated School District #93 (MCCSD #93) is comprised of students from a diverse community with a rich history in a large metropolitan area. There are approximately 2,800 students enrolled in the district. Of the 93 students currently enrolled at Lee Middle School, 47% are white, 45% are Hispanic, 4% are black, and 3% are Asian. The student poverty rate of 48% is calculated as the percentage of students in the school who receive free and reduced lunch. Sixteen percent of the students are reported as living with a disability, and 5% are English language learners. Schools use standardized tests as a gauge to report their academic progress. Forty-seven percent of the Lee Middle School students met or exceeded the state standard on the reading portion of the most recent administration of the state standardized test in 2015, and 34% met or exceeded the math portion.

SECTION TWO: ASSESSING THE 4 C'S

In *Change Leadership: A Practical Guide to Transforming our Schools*, Wagner and Kegan put forth the “4 C’s” as a guide to working through change in schools and school districts (2006). The 4 C’s are context, conditions, culture, and competencies. Each of these components allows leaders to focus on what needs to be done to achieve the change they have set out to do (Wagner & Kegan, 2006).

Context

The context of any organization must be clearly understood before change can be implemented. Context consists of all the factors that exist in the school or district that affect student learning (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). Change affects parents, teachers, community members—and most importantly, students. At Lee Middle School, our stakeholders reside in a community comprised of several cultures. The school is 92% Hispanic and white, with an almost even split between the two. Within the white population, many of the students are second-generation Americans from Eastern Europe. This diversity is celebrated by the individual schools and throughout the district. Along with racial diversity, there is an economic difference among the students. Half the student body comes from families that receive free and reduced lunch. Both of these are important factors for teachers and administrators to remember when making decisions in the school. Decisions about field trips, extra-curricular activity participation, and assignments required to be completed at home are made with socioeconomic status in mind. The Lee staff participated in a study group on teaching students living in poverty during the 2013–14 school year. Administrators presented four separate sessions that provided the staff with strategies to support students living in poverty. This professional

development gave the staff a better explanation about the lives of many of the students. This information has enhanced the work that staff is doing with teaching students in the classroom by raising awareness to challenges that a life in poverty can bring children in the classroom.

Teachers at Lee have completely aligned their curriculum to the standards. Before this was done, many teachers were teaching topics they enjoyed teaching, other teachers were teaching topics directly from their textbooks which were not necessarily linked to standards. Similar to most schools, once the state adopted Common Core State Standards, Lee Middle School aligned their instruction in the classroom to the standards listed in the Common Core. The math department has been directly teaching the standards for five years, and the other departments fully aligned their curriculum during the 2013–14 school year. The instruction is aligned to the standards, however, the assessments given in class do not report specifically about learning standards. The faculty has a low turnover rate, with only one teacher leaving (due to retirement) in the last five years.

Conditions

Wagner and Kegan (2006) define conditions as all of the external factors that surround student learning. Today data is readily available to people in nearly every profession in ways that it has never been before, it has become an integral part of instructional decisions made in schools. The current use of data at Lee Middle School concentrates on standardized tests that are nationally normed. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers test—and the Measurement of Academic Progress tests are the two major avenues for teachers to gather data. The MAP test is used to distinguish students for intervention, placement in leveled classes, and

decisions in Special Education. It is rarely used to adjust instruction, since these standardized tests are not aligned with the curriculum. Classroom-based data that can be broken down by standards for each individual student is arguably the best way to support learning (Marzano, 2010). The current decision making conditions at Lee are not built on classroom-level assessments.

Overall, assessments need to be written collaboratively within each department, starting with the prioritized standards selected by the school and district. It is essential when writing assessments to start with what students should know (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Assessments need to be common across grade levels and departments, and should be directly linked to the standards in each subject. Once assessments exist in common, teachers can have real conversations centering on what students do or do not know; this is when educators can start making meaningful changes to instruction (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004). There is an inconsistency in the establishment and usage of common assessments at Lee. Assessment writing will be a key prerequisite to standards-based reporting. Teachers have one hour a week to work together as a subject area department, though they do not have common plan time during the school day with their subject area colleagues. An example of a subject area department would be all of the English Language Arts teachers, or all of the Science teachers.

Once the conditions surrounding data are shifted to the reporting of standards, everyone will have a clearer picture of what a student is learning. The current condition of reporting grades to families is inconsistent. The math department is an exception in this area. There the instructors have spent several years doing everything listed above. The standardized tests scores in math have exceeded the language arts scores at Lee for

several years. Once the entire school makes the shift to formulating decisions based on common assessments that are constructed using learning standards, students and parents will know more about their academic progress than they ever have before.

Culture

Wagner and Kegan (2006) describe school culture as the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students and learning. At Lee the staff enjoys working together, as evidenced by the lack of turnover. Collaboration among adults is productive and done with the students' best interests in mind. Topics such as instruction, grading, and assessment are rarely discussed among faculty members, and if they are, it is usually in low-stakes conversations. Major changes to grading policies took place during the spring of 2015. Those changes were led by a committee made up of teachers and administrators from all subject areas.

Teachers at Lee have high expectations for students. All staff members care about students, but some students are not pushed as hard because they are perceived by teachers to "have a tough home life," they have a learning disability, or they are living in poverty. The current system of receiving a single letter grade has variability among teachers, and it is challenging to know exactly what makes up a single number grade. Parent-and-teacher conversations currently highlight on a student's letter grade more than on learning standards.

Competencies

Competencies are a repertoire of skills and knowledge that influences student learning (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). The staff at Lee Middle School recognizes what good instruction looks like. Teachers use best practice instructional strategies as defined by the

Charlotte Danielson “Framework for Great Teaching” (Danielson, 2007). Staff members make decisions with the intention of doing what they believe is best for the overall development of students. Decisions about grading, homework, classroom assignments and lessons are made with the best intentions, and teachers are doing what they believe will benefit their students’ the most. The staff knows what students need additional help with, and they do their best to give it to those who need it. Staff members communicate about student progress in meetings and many teachers work with students during their plan period, their lunch, or after school.

The autonomous policy for grading and reporting produces a wide variety of policies throughout the school. Because of this autonomy and different policies for grading, conversations about students are challenging. It is difficult to discuss the progress of a student when everyone grades differently. A student may be taking two classes that are reading-content based, such as language arts and history, and even though they are putting out the same effort with the same abilities, the student may have two different grades based on the grading policies of the teachers. Another problem with variance in grading is that teachers cannot work efficiently as a community of professionals to discuss and learn from student work artifacts.

Lee Middle School staff uses nationally normed standardized tests to guide instruction. This usually means that teachers adjust instruction based on the average score that the whole class earns from MAP tests. Because of this whole class model of adjusting instruction, teachers do not have reliable data with which to make decisions about individual students. The current state of professional collaboration between teachers is that adults are getting together to talk about general classroom procedures and

student progress. Collaboration is a strength at Lee; however, it rarely centers on curriculum and instruction. Typical topics at team and staff meetings are upcoming schedule changes, field trips, fundraising, compliance actions, and activities that take place during advisory. Many teachers are uncomfortable challenging each other about high-stakes topics, specifically when others suggest that something they are doing is not working.

The process of moving the 4 C's to a state where everything is in place to support standards-based grading will not happen immediately. It will take time, as it should if it is to be done well. Teachers and administrators need patience to ensure that changes are made properly and comfortably. Erratic changes without collaboration will only lead to problems; those problems caused by lack of direction as a staff will ultimately affect students. Once the changes are made appropriately, everyone will have a clearer picture of what students know and learning will flourish.

SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

The data collected for this change plan is being used as data to support the need for change to a standards-based grading system by building the understanding of staff and faculty. Data must tell the story to justify that the change is needed (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). A teacher survey was undertaken to discover the awareness that teachers have about standards-based grading and reporting. The survey was offered to all the teachers in MCCSD #93. The survey data guided most of the questions that were asked in a group interview conducted with teachers. The purpose of the group interview was to have the teachers explain survey answers in greater detail. This data was coupled with a document analysis that looked at honor roll students from 2014-15, comparing their overall grades with their in-class assessment averages. The combination of these three pieces of evidence shows why a change to standards-based grading is warranted.

Participants

Participants in the study are teachers in MCCSD #93 as a whole. The survey was sent to a total of 215 faculty members in the district. That group is made up of teachers from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade, with a total of five schools in the district. The teacher group interview consisted of staff members, who were invited to be a part of the interview. The teachers in the group interview were a mix of grade levels. There were four teacher's total, one from the elementary level, two from the middle level, and one high school teacher.

Every teacher in the school district had an opportunity to participate in the online survey conducted through Survey Monkey. Two hundred fifteen faculty members were

sent the survey through an email that described the change plan and the objectives of the research. The survey was not mandatory; 96 teachers completed the survey.

Teachers were asked to volunteer to participate in the group interview. They were asked to identify themselves by a letter assigned to them and encouraged not to use any other teacher's name at any time. Teachers from different academic subjects (English language arts, math, and social studies) were represented as well as one special education teacher. The group met in the assistant principal's office at Lee Middle School for one hour.

Data Collection Techniques

Data was collected through document analysis, an online survey, as well as group interviews. There is a mix of qualitative and quantitative data.

Individual student grade and assessment reports

Using student grades from the past is the most accurate way to detect how and why the current system for reporting grades to parents is not the best way. Using PowerSchool, an online grading program used in many schools, an analysis of students who failed three or more classes in the 2013–14 school year at Lee Middle School revealed that half of those students were meeting standards in those particular subjects (Huisman, 2015). For this change plan, individual grade reports for seventh grade students who were on the honor roll at Lee in 2014-15 were broken down looking at the overall grade compared with their assessment grade. There were a total of 63 students whose individual grade reports were pulled and analyzed in four different subjects.

Surveys

Individual surveys were sent out to every teacher in MCCSD #93 to be completed voluntarily. The survey was administered using Survey Monkey. Teachers answered questions about standards-based grading and their level of familiarity with standards-based grading. They were asked how much they know about the aspects that make up standards-based grading, such as learning objectives, standards-based assessments, avoidance of grade averaging, and test retakes. The survey had a comment section for each question in order to give participants the opportunity to add information to their answers. (See appendix A for the teacher survey.)

Group interview

A group of four teachers were selected to be a part of the group interview. The group was intentionally selected to obtain representation from several grade levels as well as from several different subject areas. The objective of the group interview was to search for patterns in teachers' perceptions of the purpose of grading. The questions centered on why schools grade and the type of information that is most beneficial for teachers to know. (See appendix B for interview questions.)

Data Analysis Techniques

Three different types of data—individual student grade and assessment reports, teacher survey results, and group interview data—have been analyzed in order to summarize the current state of reporting student learning at Lee Middle School and MCCSD #93. The analysis was used to guide the change plan as a recommendation to a new grading system is made.

Individual student grade and assessment reports

Student grade reports were analyzed to determine the correlation between a student's final semester grade and her average assessment score in the class. The purpose of the analysis was to ascertain whether assessment scores in classes match the final semester grades that students are earning in school. In an analysis done in 2013–14, some students who were passing assessments in a class were being required to attend summer school or even being held back from promotion to the next grade level. The grade of each individual student who received a semester F was broken down by subject. Looking at all of a student's assessments, an average was created and compared to the student's overall grade in that class (Huisman, 2015). This grade analysis looked for students who scored low on classroom assessments but earned A's and B's in class. Both of these situations may signal a concern for the type of grades being reported to parents and students. At Lee Middle School, compliance and behavior are currently factors in grading, potentially affecting students both positively and negatively.

Surveys

Teacher surveys were conducted through Survey Monkey. Quantitative data was compiled and sorted for patterns. All of the data was organized and calculated through the online program, Survey Monkey. The literature review and current research on standards-based grading were used to create the teacher survey questions.

Group interviews

Teacher group interviews helped to identify common themes emerging from the teacher survey responses. The group interview gave four teachers the opportunity to elaborate on some of the questions from the survey. Selective coding was used by

searching for statements that fit preselected themes (James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam, 2008).

SECTION FOUR: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review examines recent research about standards-based grading from scholars and practitioners in the field of education. This literature will be used to guide grading changes that will be proposed at Lee Middle School.

Major change should not be implemented in a school system without comparing the current state of affairs to research-based practices. The goal of the change plan is to select a grading system that is guided by learning standards, with individual criterion-based learning being the primary goal. It is important to first gain an awareness of the accuracy of current grading practices at reporting the individual student's mastery of academic material. Another factor to be considered is the purpose of grading and reporting those grades to students and parents. We must look at the research-based benefits of standards-based grading and its merits for improving student learning. Standards-based grading is complex and will require time to implement fully. Although many different components make up standards-based grading, classroom assessments are key. All of these factors will be addressed in the literature review.

In this section, research on grading and standards-based grading is identified and its method of supporting student learning is discussed. Relevant literature is organized around the following topics: problems with grading, the purpose of grading, benefits of standards-based grading, the purpose of learning objectives, assessments in standards-based grading, data-driven instruction, and test retakes. The last section will summarize the manner in which the system of standards-based grading can be used to better communicate with parents and help them support their student's learning.

Problems with Traditional Grading

Grading has been a subject of debate in American education for decades (DiSibio, 1971; Marzano, 2000; Vatterott, 2015). The current number-grade system was based on an early practice started at Harvard more than a hundred years ago. Students received a number up to 100, the first percentage grade. The purpose of the grade was to sort and rank students (Vatterott, 2015). Elementary and middle schools followed the lead of the secondary schools by using this method. Today, this routine is still a major part of our education system, even though ranking and sorting is not the main priority of schools. Most school mission statements do not mention sorting students for higher education, but they do cite student learning. Schools and educators have placed great importance on grades, and parents and students are more grade-focused than they are learning-focused (Vatterott, 2015). The traditional number grade is made up of multiple factors, many of which do not include knowledge of content.

The general single number grade that a student earns at the end of a marking period is usually made up of content-knowledge, participation during class, organization of materials, effort, and compliance. Some grades even take into account attendance (O'Connor, 2002; Vatterott, 2015). When all or many of these factors are part of a grade, it is difficult for the student, the parents, and even the school to know whether or not the student is learning the material. Teaching and reporting these behaviors may be important, but they should be recorded without distorting the process of evaluating whether the curriculum has been mastered (Wormeli, 2006; Vatterott, 2015). Such a grading system also creates substantial variations among different schools and their grading methods.

When individual teachers and schools have great autonomy over grading, it allows for extensive disparity among the possible experiences of each student. Grading is subjective, imprecise, and differs so much that it becomes difficult to understand the significance of a student's final number grade (DiSibio, 1971; Marzano, 2000). Some of the everyday practices with the greatest effect on grades include teacher and school procedures for handling work that is turned in late, giving zeroes for missing work, and scoring rubrics. A student who does no homework can earn a high grade at one school and fail at another (Fisher, Frey, & Pumpian, 2011). These policies not only distort grades in a negative direction, but they can also distort grades in a positive direction, beyond a student's true knowledge of the material, a distortion that is equally harmful. Many hard-working students complete all their homework and use it as a grade cushion to elevate their grade or to protect against poor test scores (Dueck, 2014). Parents may misinterpret, thinking their child is performing at or above grade level. This disparity in grade and actual knowledge is created when students are able to elevate their grade by compliance and obedience in class (Guskey, 2009). Grading practices differ among districts and schools—and frequently from teacher to teacher, depending on their beliefs, values, background, philosophy, and experience in school (Guskey, 2009). In short, grading is an imprecise practice that needs to be reconsidered.

The Purpose of Grading

Grading has a valuable purpose in schools, and most schools or teachers intend what is best for students when they implement a system. Most schools use grades to promote students and to give them a chance to accumulate credits to graduate (Airasian, 1994; Marzano, 2000). Marzano (2000) believes that educators primarily use grades for

1) administrative purposes, 2) feedback to students about their progress and achievement, 3) guidance to students about future coursework, 4) guidance to teachers for instructional planning, and 5) student motivation. Opinions differ greatly regarding which elements should make up a grade. However, improving student learning is usually a key component in objectives for grading. It is difficult to dispute Robert Marzano's five aspects of grading, but each one can be used and implemented in different ways. Standards-based grading is an effective way to carry out each of the primary uses for grades as stated by Marzano.

The purpose of standards-based grading is to compare individual student performance to established levels of proficiency. That proficiency will display the learning of standards selected by the district (Guskey, 2009). When students are assessed and monitored against multiple competencies, their motivation increases as they see their progress against known standards to be mastered (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011; Shippy, Washer, & Perrin, 2013). Some argue that giving zeroes is a way to motivate students to do better work, but this practice can be damaging when teachers average the zeroes into the overall grade since the final grade will not reflect the student's level of understanding (Guskey, 2009). Standards-based grading can still report lack of compliance on assignments; however, the main purpose is to report student achievement, which is done separately (Marzano, 2000).

Academic achievement is knowledge of specific subject matter, thinking and reasoning skills, and general communication skills (Marzano, 2000). Standards-based grading is centered on learning, with teachers providing accurate, specific, and timely feedback designed to improve student performance (Marzano, 2000; O'Connor, 2007;

Heflebower et al., 2014). All stakeholders have a better grasp of an individual's acquisition of academic material in a standards-based system. Parents and teachers will be able to better assist students when they are aware of what a student knows.

Benefits of Standards-Based Grading

As discussed in the previous section, the purpose of standards-based grading is to report student achievement. That achievement is based on a grading system that concentrates on multiple standards by subject (Marzano, 2000). This objective results in a reporting system that gives students, parents, and teachers an assortment of information that points out what each student knows. A student may think he is achieving at a high level, but standards-based grading could point out that he is struggling to learn the standards, thereby allowing him to get help (Scriffiny, 2008). In a traditional system, a student who complies with all assigned work may have an inflated grade that does not reflect true ability. A standards-based system is not about accumulating points from nonacademic behaviors or about completing homework assignments; it is about learning academic material to succeed on assessments (Brookhart, 2011; Vatterott, 2015).

Standards-based grading is improved in that lessons are designed using learning standards. When standards are articulated by schools and districts, communication between all grade levels about what is being taught is improved. Memorization of facts and dates is no longer an essential learning skill. Curriculum is based on what students can do with what they know (Vatterott, 2015). The emphasis on learning standards gives students a clearer picture of what needs to be learned and what successful learning means (Guskey, 2009). Knowing what is expected of them motivates students to take ownership of their learning. Instead of a being pressured to make sure that they do not miss a single

assignment, students will see improvement as they recognize that assignments are designed as practice leading up to summative assessments. Students are more likely to enjoy and participate in learning when the stakes are not always high (Heflebower et al., 2014).

Teaching and grading work based on standards creates a consistency within and among schools. Grades will reflect what students know according to how they perform on assessments. This reduces the subjectivity in grading that arises from teachers with autonomy over the grade book (Welsh, D'Agostino, & Kaniskan, 2013). Reducing personal judgment in grading is a benefit for everyone. The fate of a student's academic success should not depend on the grading philosophy of the particular teacher drawn by a student's schedule. A consistent grading system that derives from learning standards can help reduce the subjectivity that comes from grading.

The Purpose of Learning Objectives

Compared to previous state standards, Common Core State Standards contain fewer standards; they are clearer; and they encourage students to use higher-level thinking (Marzano, 2013). Standards-based grading creates a culture in which standards drive curriculum and instruction. Teachers use learning objectives to link assessments with their daily instruction. The objectives serve as a motivator for students: they feel empowered by knowing the direction in which their learning is going. Specific objectives provide goals and motivation for students and parents, as they see what it will take to succeed (Phillips & Phillips, 2010). More specific goals give students a clearer direction of desired performance, increasing motivation for students (Marzano 2009; Heflebower

et al., 2014). Students learn more when they comprehend their learning objectives (O'Connor, 2007, Dueck, 2014).

A common detractor from motivation is student questioning about what they are doing in school. The use of learning objectives gives the curriculum a clear purpose. Students' confidence may increase if they have a better understanding of objectives and the power to control their own learning (Dueck, 2014; Vatterott, 2015). Teachers who frequently communicate learning objectives provide expectations for the information to be covered in class and students know what learning means (Guskey, 2001; Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2012). The communication of learning objectives in the short and long term is not only beneficial for students, but teachers benefit also. If the objectives mirror the common assessments that are written for the school, the teacher lesson design will be based on the standards that have been identified as a priority for the school or the district. If teachers are assessing students on precise objectives, they will be more likely to focus their instruction on those objectives (Guskey, 2009). Teachers will benefit from designing their short- and long-term lessons around learning objectives.

Assessment in Standards-Based Grading

Assessments are an essential element in standards-based grading. They are the driving force behind student learning (Heflebower et al., 2014). Assessments do not serve to rank and sort students in a standards-based system. They are designed to report student mastery of learning standards for teachers and students to use. Summative assessments are written using prioritized standards selected by the district and designed in a manner in which teachers and schools can analyze the tests by learning standard. Unit tests should not contain surprise material for students; they should only contain content that was

taught by the teachers (Dueck, 2014). The purpose of a quality assessment is for the student and teacher to use the material to improve instruction as students try to demonstrate mastery of standards (Heflebower et al., 2014).

Summative assessments are the final step to prove a student's summary of learning, but teachers use formative assessments to measure the progress of their classes in the process of learning a concept. Cathy Vatterott (2015) points out that formative assessment provides feedback to students while they are still learning; summative assessments show the level of mastery at the end of the learning cycle. Formative assessments give teachers the opportunity to receive feedback from students on what they are learning; usually, this feedback provides teachers with information about areas that need improvement (Wininger, 2005). Formative assessments are a low-stakes way of finding out what students know, and they should reflect the standards that are used to design the summative assessments. Classroom assessments must be aligned to selected standards to ensure that they are measuring the learning that the school has selected as a priority (Heflebower et al., 2014). Teachers are preparing students to be able to master the academic standards that guide the creation of summative assessments. This shows the value of formative assessments to both the teacher and the student about the progress of learning (Wininger, 2005).

It is beneficial for teachers to communicate learning objectives with students before and during the learning process. Both student engagement and learning increase when students can see that assessments are matched with specific learning goals (O'Connor, 2002). In a standards-based system, teachers communicate the end goal to students frequently. There are no surprises for students in this system. When students

know how they will be evaluated and on what they will be evaluated, learning is their own responsibility, and teachers do not have to be concerned with student cheating (Vatterott, 2015). Overall, parents, students, and teachers see great benefits when learning objectives are the driving force toward the mastery of standards (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011; Shippy et al., 2013).

Data-Driven Instruction

Using data to drive instruction to inform major educational decisions can help a school identify needs that will help push individuals, as well as the whole school forward (Parrett & Budge, 2012). One method that teachers use to give and receive feedback quickly is formative assessments. Formative assessments are ongoing evaluations that inform teachers about student progress and assist in teaching decisions (Wormeli, 2006; Dirksen, 2011). If done properly, formative assessments can drive student learning as measured by knowledge of learning standards (Marzano, 2010). The key to retaining the academic material is that teachers must apply the information they gain from these assessments to change instruction and give specific feedback to students about their performance (Dirksen, 2011). Formative assessment is not only used to directly enhance student learning, but it can also be used to guide teachers. As teachers and students progress through a unit, they can gather information that will guide them to move more quickly or slow down. This guidance can be used to adjust individual activities, or teachers may find out that they need to accelerate the whole class beyond the current standard if the whole class has mastered it. A well-executed formative assessment can identify areas in which one or more students need to relearn the information or skills (Dirksen, 2011).

Formative assessments drive instruction in the short term, but summative assessment data is just as important for long-term decisions. The data that comes from summative assessments should be analyzed from several angles. Summative assessments allow data to be broken down by individual, by class, and by questions. Summative assessments are given when there will be no more learning on a particular topic or unit (O'Connor, 2002; Marzano, 2010). Using summative assessments in grading has been a practice that has been used in schools for many years. However, the primary purpose of summative assessments is to inform teaching and to improve learning, not simply to assign a grade (McTighe & Ferrara, 2000; Heflebower et al., 2014). Upon completion the data gathered should be used to determine how the curriculum will be delivered in future semesters (Dirksen, 2011). This can only happen if instructors are clear about which standards they are measuring after students were taught the material.

Summative data can be used to make big-picture decisions such as planning for future instruction at a single grade level or a set of grades vertically within a school or district. This can only happen when teachers plan and write common assessments. Common assessments are most effective when teams of teachers analyze the results and determine actions to be taken in class. Groups of teachers analyzing similar assessments can also identify and compare results to provide support and interventions for students who need them (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Heflebower et al., 2014).

Test Retakes

The purpose of schools is to educate students and maximize the learning potential of each student. Standards-based grading and reporting provides an opportunity for students to gain more information about their learning than they currently have,

specifically broken down by learning standards (Scriffiny, 2008). When students struggle on a portion or most of their summative assessment, teachers could move on or give them an opportunity to improve or relearn the material they did not know. Reassessing allows students to continue to learn if they do not attain mastery on the first assessment (Heflebower et al., 2014). Some teachers may choose to force students to reassess if they do not prove mastery. This reaffirms high expectations from teachers who do not accept failure and who force students to relearn the material (Wormeli, 2001). Retakes must be administered with a plan, as opposed to just giving a student the same test if he fails.

Students should never be allowed to retest without showing additional evidence that they have done something to master the material that they struggled with the first time they took the assessment. Retakes are typically only given for the standard that was not mastered, as opposed to the whole test (Vatterott, 2015). Teachers should write their summative assessments so they can be broken down efficiently by individual learning standards. Some teachers require students to document the steps they have taken to learn the material before they are allowed to take the assessment for a second time (Vatterott, 2015).

Reporting and Parent Communication

Parent participation in their student's education provides another piece of support for young learners to succeed in schools. Not only can parents support students in getting better grades, they can also serve as a significant influence through adolescence and early adulthood by helping youth see how their current endeavors fit their long-term goals (Welsh et al., 2013). Even more specifically, parenting practices during middle school have been related to educational aspirations in high school (Hill & Wang, 2015).

Standards-based grading increases the amount of information that parents can obtain about their child's education. Traditional grading practices only give parents a single number and letter grade that is made up of a variety of factors that differ from school to school and from teacher to teacher. Communicating standards and learning objectives to parents helps them become engaged in what their children are learning (Dean et al., 2012). Parents gain an understanding of what their child is learning with standards-based reporting, and they will be able to better judge their child's academic performance and assist their child's progress (Guskey, 2004; Guskey, 2009).

Any parent who wishes to assist his or her child in learning will now have a report card that shows mastery of numerous standards and reports compliance and behaviors separately. To increase the communicative value of standards-based report cards, we need to ensure that parents and others comprehend the information included (Guskey, 2001; Guskey, 2004). Students will benefit greatly if communication between parents and school can be increased. Schools must support the parents in learning a standards-based report card. When parents know the intent of a standard-based report card and can absorb the information, they are better able to work as partners with the school (Guskey, 2004).

Summary

Standards-based grading has become more prevalent since states adopted standards-based curricula. More researchers and authors are studying the effectiveness of standards-based grading. A sample of four teachers in MCCSD #93 whose own children attend schools that have changed to standards-based grading report that they appreciate having communication that is guided by direct student mastery, as opposed to a grade made up of multiple factors.

This review of the literature shows that standards-based grading puts a spotlight on what a student knows, and it reduces the extent of teacher judgment that goes into a grade. State standards drive the curriculum in schools; standards-based grading uses assessments that are written using those standards. Formative and summative assessments provide data for students to improve mastery of academic material, and they provide data for teachers to inform future instruction. This clearer picture of individual student learning makes it easier for everyone to identify areas of learning that need support. The communication between schools and parents will be simplified and strengthened as parents are provided with more detail about their child's progress. The effects of standard-based grading are still being studied, but many believe that standards-based grading is a more learner-centered form of grading than the traditional single-number system used by many schools.

SECTION FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

This analysis is being done using multiple forms of data. Surveys were completed by teachers in MCCSD #93, a group interview was conducted, and student grade reports were broken down by category of work. The main goal of this change plan is to implement a reporting and assessment system that is more reflective of the content that students are learning. The compilation of all three forms of data provides us with an assessment of the effectiveness of the traditional letter-grade system and an opportunity to determine whether a change to a standards-based grading system would enhance student learning.

The teacher survey plays a key role in the interpretation data. Ninety-six teachers across all grade levels completed the survey about standards-based grading. The questions addressed the principles of standards-based grading, and many had two options: mirroring the principles of traditional grading and standards-based grading. The survey results provide insight into how well teachers in this school district believe the current grading system guides student learning and provides information to parents and teachers to help them assist students. The group interview questions were written using a combination of the survey results along with the review of literature.

Data Findings

Defining a system for accurate reporting of student learning is a goal of this change plan. A survey and group interview reveal what individual teachers perceive as the current state of reporting in their respective classrooms, not the whole school. Analyzing student data that comes from an individual teacher's grade book shows the

current state of reporting in a school. All the student data was retrieved from middle school students at Lee Middle School in 2014–15. The data does not include teacher or student names. However, the data are actual grade book scores for individual students from four different subjects.

Individual student grade and assessment reports

One significant problem identified by many researchers and theorists is that homework and in-class work inflates grades in schools, a term known as “grade inflation” (Dueck, 2014). When students comply with deadlines, and do all of their work on time, they receive high marks on assignments. High grades on out-of-class work are beneficial to a student’s grade in a traditional grading system. The student may score poorly on assessments, but his grade may still be elevated due to work completion (Guskey, 2009). Grade inflation thus does not accurately portray what a student actually knows. A standards-based grading system reports what the student knows and can prove on assessments, not homework assignments (Brookhart, 2011; Vatterott, 2015).

The purpose of analyzing individual student grade reports is to identify possible grade inflation. There is no established number to determine what is considered grade inflation. Lee Middle School uses the 100-point grading scale that correlates with a letter grade. The scale is as follows:

- A 90–100
- B 80–89
- C 70–79
- D 60–69
- F 0–59

A difference of five points between an assessment average and an overall grade may not seem like a significant number, but it can move a student’s letter grade higher. A

difference of ten points is significant as it will move a student's letter grade no matter what the assessment average is. Therefore, this research identified three different categories when looking at grade inflation:

- 1) The final semester grade is 4 points or less above the final assessment average;
- 2) The final semester grade is 5–9 points above the final assessment average;
- 3) The final semester grade is 10 or more points above the final assessment average.

If a student's final semester grade is 10 points or more above the final assessment average, that is an indication that the grade was greatly boosted by grades other than assessments. This could be due to high homework grades, in-class assignments, or extra credit. The problem with this situation is that parents and students see high marks in a class, even though the student perhaps does not comprehend the academic material at the same level that his grade indicates, leaving both parents and student with a false interpretation of the level of the student's actual knowledge. The results at Lee Middle School are inconclusive as to whether grade inflation is occurring.

After separating 231 different individual subject grades for 63 honor roll students last year, the numbers show a mix. Some students' grades were inflated 10 points or more, some students' grades were inflated 5 to 9 points, and most students' grades were not inflated.

The exact numbers are as follows:

Final grade 4 points or less above assessment average	145
Final grade 5–9 points above assessment average	43
Final grade 10 points or more above assessment average	43
Total number of individual grades analyzed	231

These data demonstrate that grade inflation does occur, but that it occurs with all students. Effort and compliance are distorting grades and obscuring evidence of the acquisition of the learning objectives for at least a number of number of students who received overall final grades at least 10 points higher than their assessment average. Effort and compliance are valuable categories to report to parents, but they can be reported separately from the academic grade (Marzano, 2000).

Teacher Survey Data

A survey about standards-based grading was sent to 215 teachers in MCCSD #93. Teachers from grades pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade participated. The survey was conducted online using Survey Monkey. Ninety-six faculty members volunteered to complete the survey: 37 pre-kindergarten or elementary teachers, 24 middle-school teachers, 32 high school teachers, and 3 who chose not to identify the level they teach. One limitation to the survey results is the possibility that people who chose to take a survey on standards-based grading may have an interest in the topic, which could skew the results in favor of a change to a standards-based grading system. The survey consisted of 22 questions (See appendix A), using a Likert scale for all but one of the questions. The final question offered ranking options.

Teachers' Perceptions of Grading and Standards-Based Grading in MCCSD #93

Table 1: *Student assessment methods should be flexible to represent what a student knows, understands, and can do.*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	52	54%	
Agree	40	42%	96%
No Opinion	2	2%	98%
Disagree	2	2%	100%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	100%
N = 96			

The goal of an assessment is to determine what a student knows—not just how well that student can perform on the format of the assessment he is taking. Teachers communicate with their students learning objectives that are derived from learning standards. The goal for each student is to learn the objective and demonstrate that learning on an assessment. The teachers in District #93 consistently supported flexible assessment methods. If a student cannot communicate her understanding of a learning objective on a paper-and-pencil test, but she can describe the answer in a different format, she still proves she has learned the material. One teacher stated, “There are several ways to assess the same set of skills and knowledge.” In standards-based grading, teachers use any assessment instrument they have in order to ascertain the student’s level of mastery of curriculum that has been taught (Vatterott, 2015).

Table 2: *The reporting of students' academic success might include behavioral performances such as conduct, attendance, promptness, etc.*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	36	38%	
Agree	32	33%	71%
No Opinion	5	5%	76%
Disagree	15	16%	92%
Strongly Disagree	8	8%	100%
N = 96			

A standards-based system reports conduct, attendance, and work ethic separately from academic grades. This gives parents and students a sounder description of every aspect of the students' classroom performance. The survey results show that teachers believe that one or more of these behavioral aspects might be included in a student's grade, and 71% of the teachers agree that a grade may contain behavioral performance. However, Wormeli (2006) and Vatterott (2015) assert that when these components are factored into a grade, it is difficult for the parents and students to know whether learning is taking place.

One student's grade may be inflated by work completion, effort, compliance, and promptness, whereas another student may have his grade deflated by these same factors. This creates confusion regarding the actual importance of the reported grade. While many parents and teachers still find a record of behavior and character traits helpful, that information can be reported separately; standards-based grading can still uncover a lack

of compliance with separate categories for behavior and effort. However, the main purpose of the grading system is to report student achievement (Marzano, 2000).

Table 3: *Students should be permitted to be re-assessed to demonstrate an accurate representation of what they know, understand, and can do.*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	21	22%	
Agree	47	50%	72%
No Opinion	6	6%	78%
Disagree	17	18%	96%
Strongly Disagree	4	4%	100%
N = 95			

Standards-based grading is a learning-focused system, not a system based on accumulation of points to end with a high grade (Brookhart, 2011; Vatterott, 2015). If a student can learn something and demonstrate it on an assessment even though they did not display it the first time they took the assessment, that attainment of new information can be reported apart from the first assessment grade. Seventy-two percent of teachers feel students should be given the opportunity to be re-assessed. As one teacher commented, “We can always retake a driving test or college class, why not a middle school assessment.” As shown by the chart, many people agree with re-takes, but not without doing something to prove the additional learning.

Survey comments indicate that many teachers agree with current literature that a student must do additional research, receive extra instruction, or redo work that was

previously assigned in order to be eligible to retake an assessment. A re-take should not be allowed unless one or more of these steps are completed (Vatterott, 2015). One survey respondent re-iterated this point, “They should do something extra to earn this right.” Not everyone is in agreement when it comes to getting the opportunity to re-take, one respondent stated, “If a student knows they can re-take a test, then why study the first time around? Retesting does not prepare them for high school.” Teachers who disagreed with giving retakes cited the lack of accountability in preparing for the assessment the first time it was given.

Table 4: *Non-academic extra credit (e.g. bringing in can goods for food drive, attending a school function) should not be calculated into a student’s grade.*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	48	50%	
Agree	27	28%	78%
No Opinion	8	8%	86%
Disagree	10	10%	97%
Strongly Disagree	3	3%	100%
N = 96			

Extra credit gives students the opportunity to raise their grade, with non-essential feedback. Standards-based grading targets learning, with teachers providing accurate, specific, and timely feedback designed to improve student performance (Marzano, 2000; O’Connor, 2007). Some teachers give extra credit for doing more problems or completing an additional assignment, however some teachers will permit students to gain extra credit

for bringing in supplies, not using hall passes, or showing up to events outside of school. Thus, grades inflated by non-academic extra credit are inaccurate.

Teachers at different grade levels disagree about the use of extra credit. Eighty-nine percent of elementary and middle school teachers agreed that students should not receive non-academic extra credit, whereas only 56% of high school teachers agreed. One high school teacher stated, “High school teachers may provide the extra credit to make sure students pass.” There is little research on the topic. One survey respondent commented that “Teachers give fake points in order to get better grades.” Extra credit distorts a grade making it difficult to accurately communicate what a student knows in that subject.

Table 5: *The current letter grade method for reporting student achievement is effective and informative for all stakeholders.*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	3	3%	
Agree	30	31%	34%
No Opinion	9	9%	43%
Disagree	35	36%	80%
Strongly Disagree	19	20%	100%
N = 96			

There was no consensus about the efficiency of traditional grading methods. However, over half of the teachers did not agree that the current system is useful for reporting academic achievement. It is worth questioning current practices when 56% of

the faculty does not agree with its value. Many of these teachers' perceptions corresponded with current research previously (cited in section four) indicated that grading is too subjective. One survey participant commented, "Grades can be subjective depending on the teacher grading, especially assessments such as essays."

This is another question that sees great differences based on grade levels. Pre-K through 6th grade teachers feel that the current system is not working with 84% labeling it as "ineffective". In contrast, 46% of the middle school teachers disagree that it is favorable, and only 34% of the high school teachers. This suggests that high school teachers are less willing to deviate from the traditional grading system. Perhaps this is because colleges request grade point averages and class ranks. Even with the discrepancy, the numbers at the secondary level indicate that 2 out of 5 secondary teachers feel the current system is not working.

Table 6: *Reporting student achievement by learning standards is effective and informative for all stakeholders.*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	17	18%	
Agree	50	53%	71%
No Opinion	12	13%	84%
Disagree	14	15%	98%
Strongly Disagree	2	2%	100%
N = 95			

Seventy-one percent of teachers in District 93 agree that reporting student achievement by learning standards is effective for everyone. Eight-one percent of elementary teachers, 83% of middle school teachers, and half of the high school teachers agreed that reporting by standards would be valuable for everyone. The possible change to standards-based grading is strengthened by analyzing this question along with the previous one. Over half of the teachers agree the traditional system is ineffective and three-fourths of the faculty stated that reporting by learning standards is effective and informative. The beliefs of the teachers in District 93 coincide with current research. Grading concentrated on standards communicates student learning more successfully than a traditional system (Marzano, 2000. Guskey, 2009).

Survey comments in table 6 point out the challenges that may arise during a system change. Respondents pointed out that before a change to standards-based grading is implemented parents must be educated. One teacher stated, “Parents, teachers, and students must work through the learning curve of understanding how to read the standards in order for this to be effective.” The concern for the college admission process was highlighted again in this question. One high school teacher cautioned a change to standards-based grading, “It could be difficult for college admissions to go through transcripts that differ from school to school. This could unfairly put some students at a disadvantage.” The answers and comments to this question show that people believe that standards-based grading is positive, but it will be challenging to implement.

Table 7: *The current letter grade method for reporting student success provides parents with accurate feedback regarding what a student knows, understands, and can do.*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	2	2%	
Agree	28	30%	32%
No Opinion	4	4%	36%
Disagree	39	41%	78%
Strongly Disagree	21	22%	100%
N = 94			

Sixty-three percent of the teachers surveyed stated that the current method for reporting grades to parents is not informative. This number raises concerns. Parents serve as a significant part of a student’s academic life. They are influential in helping their children see how education can fit into their long-term goals (Welsh et al., 2013). The teachers at the elementary level feel more strongly about this with 78% of them saying the current method is not informative. One teacher pointed out, “Unless comments are given with every assignment, a letter grade really does not deliver much proof of any understanding.” Some of the teachers raised concerns that a change to standards-based grading might be problematic due to parent’s unfamiliarity with the topic. A teacher commented, “Parents understand the letter grade system.” This correlates with research. Guskey (2001, 2004) asserts that parents must comprehend the information included on a standards-based report card.

Table 8: *The current letter grade method for reporting student achievement gives teachers the opportunity to direct further instruction.*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	1	1%	
Agree	35	37%	38%
No Opinion	13	14%	52%
Disagree	38	40%	92%
Strongly Disagree	8	8%	100%
N = 95			

Research frequently shows that the classroom teacher is the most important factor in student learning (Dean et al., 2012). Effective teachers use data and information to guide their instruction (Heflebower et al., 2014). These assessments are used to change instruction and give specific feedback to students about their performance. Survey results indicate that the current letter-grade method works for about half the teachers, and half feel that it is not useful. Some of the respondents commented that the current grade system is driven by behavior and work completion which makes it difficult to accurately show what students know.

Table 9: *Reporting student achievement by learning standards gives teachers the opportunity to direct further instruction.*

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	19	20%	
Agree	62	65%	85%
No Opinion	7	7%	93%
Disagree	7	7%	100%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	100%
N = 95			

Eighty-five percent of the teachers believe that reporting by learning standards is an informative way to direct instruction. Teachers in MCCSD #93 believe that instruction can be better guided by using a standards-based grading system rather than the current letter-grade method. Directing further instruction is an essential part of a teacher’s repertoire. Using data to drive instruction to inform educational decisions helps identify individual student needs (Parrett & Budge, 2012). The data from the previous two questions show that teachers support a change to standards-based grading.

Themes of the Teacher Group Interview

Two major themes emerged from the teacher group interview and dominated the majority of the dialogue during the interview. Concerns about the current grading system continued to be raised during the interview; these concerns addressed both fairness and the difficulty of consistency. The benefits of standards-based grading principles surfaced in addressing several questions.

Theme 1: Grading is inconsistent.

Inconsistencies and difficulties in grading make it difficult to communicate the student's knowledge of a subject. Teachers in the interview echoed the survey responses: The current, traditional grading system in District #93 does not communicate what a student knows. One of the biggest problems distorting the reporting of student learning is grading effort and behavior. Some teachers penalize students heavily for turning work in late, and others do not penalize at all. Teachers evaluate homework differently as a percentage of a student's final grade. Teachers from the group interview made the following remarks about effort:

Teacher C: If the purpose of the grade is to show content knowledge, then it has nothing to do with turning in homework. Now, when you start counting homework in, now the grade is not just knowledge, it is effort based. I have changed as I have gone on as a teacher. I have turned away from effort as part of a grade and focused more on content.

One teacher pointed out that it is difficult for her to not reward a student who puts out great effort in class.

Teacher B: You know, like a kid who can't read at a certain level, but they can work hard, I am going to figure out a way for them to get a higher grade in my class. And I think it is always in their favor. I think a lot of teachers are okay with that.

Effort as a factor in grading is usually thought to be contributing detrimentally to a student's grade; however, as pointed out by Teacher C, effort can create a grade inflation for students who always do their work. Homework can boost a grade higher than

what is demonstrated on assessments. This creates the illusion that the student is more knowledgeable in a subject.

Teacher C: Sometimes when coming up with a grade, you find that kid that tried real hard; he did this, he did that, and you kind of want to slip him a low B. The reality is, content-wise he is probably a low C or a high D, but he turns his homework in every day.

Teacher B: If anything, I think there is an inflation of grades (from effort assignments), which is not necessarily something I am really sure is a bad thing.

The letter-grade system based on the 100-point scale was raised several times as a challenge that teachers found difficult. One specific reservation was the need to assign students into categories based on letter grades.

Teacher B: The consequence of my giving them a C or a D is a life sentence into a certain kind of track in high school that I am not comfortable with.

Teacher C: If the grade means something different to each teacher, than who am I to hurt this kid's chances to get into college?

Low or failing grades below 50 percent on individual assignments can pull a grade closer to zero when all the desirable letter grades are in the top 25 percent of the 100-point grading scale. One teacher spoke of this problem:

Teacher D: I think the 100-point grading scale is a challenge. You don't allow students a way out if they cannot demonstrate mastery of a skill. You took a test, you did poorly on it, you have a grade that falls below 50 percent and because of the law of averages, it is going to be hard for the kid to pull his grade back up.

Theme 2: Standards-based grading improves learning.

“Student learning” is commonly found in school mission statements; however, the practice is not supported by a subjective grading system where the grade is more important than learning. Standards-based grading focuses on student learning and reports learning with greater detail, while separating effort and behavior from the academic grade (Marzano, 2000). Although MCCSD #93 does not report grades in a standards-based method, the participants in the group interview employ some of the principles of standards-based grading in their classrooms. Teacher D taught in a school district that used standards-based grading, so she is familiar with the system. Every participant in the group interview uses assessment retakes in their classrooms, but this tactic must be used a certain way:

Teacher D: We should have a reassessment policy. But a policy needs to be both ways. There needs to be a different teaching component, or a reinstruction component that is different, that is above, and that is a different modality than the original that was put into place. Reassessment policies can start to fall apart if students can come in and take a test without having to redo any additional practice and teachers can give a retest without any additional teaching, and parents can ask for a reassessment without spending any time going over the homework or going over the work with their child.

The group interview illuminated problems in the traditional system, especially with counting effort as a grade. One teacher discussed the benefit of reporting academic knowledge separately from effort.

Teacher B: I wish I could give a separate effort grade. Like, look, here is your work ethic, it is excellent, and then here is your content knowledge. I would like to tell a parent, “You should not be yelling at him, he is trying hard; his effort is an A, but he does not know his content knowledge.”

Standards-based grading allows for a more individualized grading system that provides flexibility in reporting. Students are judged against themselves and their own grasp of learning standards. Teacher D (who worked in a standards-based grading system) points out this opportunity for differentiation.

Teacher D: Really, if the kids are not on the same playing field, then the grading systems should not be the same either. That is where standards-based grading comes in, because it allows for a more differentiated style of grading and demonstrating mastery of concepts.

The goal of teaching is to get each individual student to meet or exceed standards. This grading style gives students, parents, and teachers a more detailed view of a student’s knowledge. This was made explicit by Teacher D.

Teacher D: Once you start scratching the surface of standards-based grading, then you are like, okay, how am I going to get all of the kids to meet standards? Then instruction goes to we need to implement different types of reading formats so all of the kids can at least read at grade level to be competitive to meet standards.

Other principle components of standards-based grading are common assessments and rubrics (Heflebower et al., 2014). Teacher C pointed out his greater level of comfort with grading, now that his school has implemented common rubrics.

Teacher C: The common rubrics make you feel like you know how the other teachers are grading. It does give a common language in our school.

Summary of Survey and Interview Findings

The survey and group interview yielded similar themes. The group interview was used to clarify answers to questions from the survey that 96 teachers completed. The majority of the teachers who took the survey and participated in the group interview have never taught in a system that uses standards-based grading; however, the majority of them use some of the principles that make up a standards-based system, such as reporting effort, allowing reassessment, and differentiating assessment methods.

Some of the challenges of grading include reporting effort or grading homework. Teachers in District 93 did not come to a consensus about counting effort as part of a student's grade. The majority of teachers surveyed reported that effort should be part of an academic grade. The comments of the interview participants were mixed as well. One person believed that effort should be part of the grade, and two teachers said it should be separate.

Participants were clear that students should be allowed to be reassessed, but only after additional learning has taken place. This view was asserted in both the comments of the survey and in the group interview. There was a near consensus among the teachers that different methods should be used to allow students to display what they know, specifically differentiating individual assessments to allow students to demonstrate knowledge. The survey and the group interview both indicate that teachers in District 93 are aware of the benefits that standards-based grading can bring to students, parents, and teachers.

SECTION SIX: A VISION OF SUCCESS (TO BE)

Standards-based grading changes a school's perspective from a focus on grades to a focus on learning and the process of learning (Brookhart, 2011). In *Change Leadership: A Practical Guide to Transforming our Schools*, Wagner and Kegan put forth the "4 C's" as a guide to working through change in schools and school districts (2006). The 4 C's are context, conditions, culture, and competencies. The final product of seeing the change through is what Wagner and Kegan call "To Be." With the implementation of standards-based grading, all the 4 C's will be strengthened to support student learning more than the current traditional grading system does.

Context

Teachers and administration in District 93 make decisions with an awareness of the students and the context of the lives they live. Fifty percent of the district are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Nearly 40 percent of the students are Latino, yet nearly the entire teaching staff is white. An entirely white teaching staff must be culturally proficient and aware of the needs of their students (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009). Teachers make culturally sensitive decisions with the intention to do whatever it takes to support individual student learning. The idea of "that is how it was when I was in school" is eliminated as we understand that everyone has unique situations. Standards-based grading personalizes learning and supports the idea that everyone is exceptional.

Students are given the opportunity to continue their quest for learning if they do not "get it" the first time. Teachers use a multitude of assessments strategies that fit a student's unique needs. Some students do not understand English well; some have learning disabilities; some do not write well; and some do not have the support at home to

prepare for summative assessments. Teachers at Lee Middle School recognize this context of students' lives and meet those needs by adjusting assessment strategies and allowing for retakes. The pressure of having to perform on a one-time assessment with no opportunity to relearn has changed: the atmosphere of high-stakes classroom testing has changed to a demonstration of knowledge acquired.

College and career readiness skills are increased in the district as teachers and staff distinguish what students need to know. Common goals are set throughout the district as specific learning standards are identified. The specific standard is the main point of each unit taught. Data is collected and reported to all stakeholders based on these specific standards. Reporting by standards gives parents a better sense of what their child knows, preparing them for college and career.

Conditions

The framework of external factors that affect learning is enhanced by the increase of student learning data that is available with standards-based grading. Data is the focal point of the current conditions. Data has been shifted from a single letter grade to a learning portfolio that is based on numerous learning standards. The increased use of data is the result of a process that teachers and administrators underwent while changing to a standards-based grading system. The process involved selecting priority standards, writing common summative assessments, meeting as subject-area departments to discuss data, and directing instruction based on assessments.

Even though the district is aligned to Common Core State Standards in some subjects, every grade level and subject area aligned their curriculum and instruction by choosing priority standards. The selection of standards has created conversation

opportunities in District 93 that did not exist previously. There is an even greater alignment of standards vertically; now each grade level knows what is being taught in the grade level above and below the one they are teaching. Each student is expected to learn the selected standards of his current grade level. Assessment data communicates the development of each student as she progresses through the district.

Common summative assessments are used to ensure that data is reliable and valid (Heflebower et al., 2014). The district spent much time and effort to write common summative assessments and rubrics that are used to grade students on their standards-based report cards. The common assessments were created based on each of the priority standards. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students now know how a student is doing in relation to their knowledge of standards, as opposed to the previous system, which communicated a number based on how the student was doing in the individual teacher's system. This new data has allowed teachers to use summative assessment data to have conversations with their colleagues about individual students, groups of students, and their own instruction. Teachers at Lee Middle School now meet often in professional learning communities to foster these conversations with a system and an agenda that directs their dialogue.

The selection of standards and the writing of assessments did take some time; however, teachers now have a reliable system of data collection that is more connected to their teaching. Previously, the district used standardized tests as a tool. The use of those scores was limited to placement of students in leveled classes, special education classes, and learning interventions. Now, the data that teachers are using in their professional learning communities come directly from their classroom instruction. Ultimately, this

means that instruction will be improved. Student learning has benefited greatly from the work done by teachers on aligning standards and assessments in the new standards-based grading system.

Culture

The implementation of a standards-based grading system has changed the focus from what students cannot do to what students can do. Teachers now believe that all students can learn and meet standards. The culture at Lee Middle School supports the idea that every student in the building can learn. Regardless of a learning disability, a language deficit, or a lack of resources at home, students are expected to perform in class, and every teacher believes that each student can meet the expectations set by the school.

The culture of collaboration has shifted from non-instructional topics to teaching and learning. Teachers do not have to challenge each other on their personal methods; rather, the school now uses common language and common assessments that were created as a group, and the system is owned by all. Teachers feel comfortable asking for help and challenging others. This is a result of eliminating the lack of knowledge of what their colleagues were teaching and assessing. Overall, this new culture of collaboration has given teachers the confidence to communicate with students and parents about student learning.

Both communication and support from parents are essential parts of learning for a middle-school student. Students can learn without parental support; however the student who receives support from his parents and teachers achieves more. Before standards-based grading was used, conversations between parents and teachers centered on homework completion. Teachers now report specifically what students know and what

they can do to improve their understanding of the learning standards. Everyone now takes responsibility for the learning of each student. School is no longer about accumulating points to get a desired letter grade. Now, parents, teachers, and students all take ownership in getting students to master learning standards. Standards-based grading has changed from a culture about getting good grades to a culture of learning.

Competencies

The faculty and staff at Lee Middle School have always possessed many talents, but implementing standards-based grading has enriched those skills. Teachers have gained a plethora of information that they have used to improve their own teaching competencies with the increase of classroom-based data. Data directly linked to their own teaching has led to conversations about becoming better teachers. Conversations in professional learning communities have helped teachers identify areas that need improvement as well as each teacher's strengths. Professional development is directly linked to what teachers need as a result of their collaboration, as opposed to a whole group or whole school style of professional development.

Assessments and learning standards are continually monitored by the professional learning communities. Since teachers were part of the creation of assessments and the selection of priority standards, they have full confidence to change assessments or to rethink which standards to emphasize. Grading and reporting is more objective now, and teachers have the confidence to suggest changes. The subjectivity and personalization of grading is gone, and teachers do not feel offended or worry about offending others when talking about grading and reporting.

The response to the intervention program at Lee Middle School is now much improved. Teachers are more assertive and justified in recommending students for special education as a result of more reliable data. Previously, teachers and administrators had to determine whether the student had learning deficits by relying on nationally normed tests. That subjectivity has been removed, and the identification of students in need of intervention has been improved, with teachers using their classroom assessments to identify students. As a result of standards-based grading and the principles that guide it, teachers are improving their ability to instruct learners; they have increased their test writing skills; and they are more confident in identifying students who need learning interventions.

Summary

Standards-based grading has elevated an already highly performing school to a greater level of teaching and learning. Standards-based grading has improved numerous aspects of the education system at Lee Middle School, and the biggest improvement has been in the reporting of the learning progress of each student. Student ownership of their own learning has increased. Students know what is expected of them, and they know what must be done to meet standards. Parents, too, have more information about student learning that is directly linked to school-wide learning goals and need not wonder why their child has a certain grade. Teachers and administrators have data that comes from assessments written by the teachers to make improvements to teaching and learning. The implementation of standards-based grading has made the teachers at Lee a stronger team with a common goal to strive for: increased student learning.

SECTION SEVEN: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR CHANGE

You know the adage “People resist change.” It is not really true. People are not stupid. People love change when they know it is a good thing. No one gives back a winning lottery ticket.

(Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009)

Introduction

Change can be difficult if it is done incorrectly. This change plan takes on a topic that is a part of teachers’ values: grading and reporting grades to parents. Most teachers and administrators grew up with the traditional letter-grade system, learned about it in college, and used it in classrooms today. The above quote from *Adaptive Leadership* (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009) shows us that people may resist change if they do not see its value. It is imperative that teachers see the goal of a specific change and understand its value (Heath & Heath, 2010). Creating a vision for success in schools is clear: do what is best for students. Although this seems simple, teachers still need to know that this change to standards-based grading will be better for students than the current grading system, and they must believe in the purpose behind the journey (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). Teachers in District 93 pointed this out through the online survey they took. They believe in a standards-based grading system, but it must be implemented well. The following are a set of strategies and actions that will lead Lee Middle School to a final destination that is best for students. (See appendix C for a graphic representation of strategies and actions.)

Strategy One: Provide Teachers with Data and Research Supporting Standards-based Grading.

The faculty will be provided with data and research outlining the benefits of standards-based grading. Abundant research demonstrates the value of standards-based

grading. The research will be more powerful and meaningful to teachers if it is about middle schools and systems that involve departmentalized systems (several teachers in one day, or where teachers only teach one subject all day long, such as math or science). The best-practice research will be shared in weekly team meetings or during once-a-week professional development sessions that are conducted during late starts. Teachers must believe in the change, and their capacity to participate in a standards-based grading system will be increased through this in-school professional development.

Strategy Two: Identify “Priority Standards” for Each Grade Level.

Academic departments will work together to select “priority standards.” Using the Common Core state standards, teachers and administrators will select those standards that the school will use to instruct students and report to parents. All Common Core state standards will be taught at some point, but they will not all be reported to parents. In order to avoid instructional gaps and redundancies, each department will collaborate with the grade levels above and below theirs to ensure that it is aware of the standards being taught at each grade level.

Strategy Three: Collaborate with Teachers to Align Assessments with “Priority Standards.”

Administrators will work with teachers to align assessments to standards. Once standards are selected, assessments will be written to ensure that each prioritized standard is being evaluated. Assessments will provide data that will communicate to students, teachers, and parents how each individual student is mastering the material that the school expects them to learn. Teachers will write the assessments together as a grade- and subject-level team. This will build ownership of the entire grading system.

Strategy Four: Provide Teachers with Time to Create Common Assessments Horizontally across Grade Levels.

Teachers will collaborate to ensure that assessments are common across grade-level departments. It is difficult to have a reliable school-wide grading system if teachers are administering different assessments. A school-wide vision can only be realized when all staff members are teaching the same standards and using the same assessment tools to monitor student learning. Similar to the standards, assessments must be aligned vertically with grade-level departments in the grades above and below. When writing the common assessments, it is essential that the documents be written so that scores can be sorted quickly in order to provide students and teachers with immediate feedback.

Strategy Five: Lead Professional Learning Communities That Will Analyze Student Data Used to Guide Instruction and Curriculum Changes.

Teachers will meet in professional learning communities to analyze data. Assessment data provides teams of teachers with information on the progress of student learning. Teachers working with each other will know whether students are learning the standards. The assessment data will lead to conversations about instruction by individual teachers. Teachers will be able to compare the progress of their classes against each other, as well as against the scores of their colleagues.

A grading and reporting system based on individual standards provides all students, parents, and teachers with learning benefits not available in the traditional grading system. Students can now be provided with more information about their academic abilities. Subjectivity in grading will be reduced, and teachers will be able to

converse with their colleagues about student data, knowing that there is a school-wide consistency in what is being measured.

Summary

Long-term change cannot be accomplished through simple managerial changes by a school administrator. Adaptive change that lasts happens with great leadership, but all teachers must understand the value of the change for their students over the system currently being used. Teachers are the key to successfully implementing change in schools; their talents must be utilized and enhanced to ensure long-term adaptive change (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Wagner and Kegan (2006) assert that leaders must be aware that school transformation is ongoing and that one size does not fit all. The teachers at Lee Middle School are capable and are ready for an ongoing challenge that will increase the engagement and learning of their students; that challenge is the transition to a standards-based grading system.

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Appendix A: Teacher Survey Questions

This survey was created by Perry Finch, a doctoral student at National Louis University in Chicago, IL.

Questions 1-13 ask about your perceptions of particular grading practices.

1. Students' academic success is accurately represented when teachers give feedback on performance related to learning standards.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

2. Student assessment methods should be flexible to represent what a student knows, understands, and can do.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

3. The reporting of students' academic success might include behavioral performances such as conduct, attendance, promptness, etc.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

4. Zeroes should be used when determining a student's grade.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

5. Assigning an "Incomplete" as a grade is a useful option for teachers until students provide evidence to demonstrate what they know, understand, or can do on a particular standard, skill, assessment, or activity.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

6. Students should be permitted to be re-assessed to demonstrate an accurate representation of that they know, understand, and can do.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

7. Teachers should arrive at a final grade by averaging performance grades over the designated period of time.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

8. Teachers should accept late work without reducing points for the assignments.
strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

9. Teachers should provide students with rubrics and work exemplars prior to independent work.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

10. Students' self-assessment and goal setting should be a part of the assessment process.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

11. Performance in group-work should be included in a student's grade.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

12. Homework should be included in a student's grade.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

13. Non-academic extra credit (e.g. bringing in can goods for food drive, attending a school function) should not be calculated into a student's grade.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

Questions 14-21 ask about your perceptions of traditional grading practices and standards-based grading practices.

14. The current letter grade method for reporting student achievement is effective and informative for all stakeholders.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

15. Reporting student achievement by learning standards is effective and informative for all stakeholders.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

16. The current letter grade method for reporting student achievement provides students with accurate feedback to increase their learning.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

17. Reporting student achievement by learning standards provides accurate feedback to students to increase their learning.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

18. The current letter grade method for reporting student successes provides parents with accurate feedback regarding what a student knows, understands, and can do.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

19. Reporting student successes by learning standards provides parents with accurate feedback regarding what a student knows, understands, and can do.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

20. The current letter grade method for reporting student achievement gives teachers the opportunity to direct further instruction.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

21. Reporting student achievement by learning standards gives teachers the opportunity to direct further instruction.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Comments:

The final five items ask about your understanding of elements of standards and assessment.

Directions: For the following items rate your level of understanding.

<i>My understanding of ...is?</i>	High	Medium	Low
...Common Core State Standards...			
...the use of formative assessment...			
...standards-based grading...			
...how to implement standards-based grading...			
...the use of rubrics in scoring student work...			

Appendix B: Group Interview Questions

1. What is the purpose of grading?
2. What are the biggest challenges in grading?
3. What are the benefits and challenges to assigning a single letter grade?
4. Almost three-fourths of the 100 teachers surveyed said students should be permitted to be re-assessed to give an accurate representation of what they know. I don't think 75% of us are doing this? Should a school or district have a re-assessment policy? Why or why not?
5. 90% of Elementary and Middle school teachers say extra credit should not be used. 56% of high school teachers feel the same. Why might nearly half of high school teachers feel extra credit is needed?
6. There is a big discrepancy between how Elementary, Middle, and High school teachers feel about the current letter grade system. 85% of PK6 teachers feel our current system is not effective, Lee is about 50/50. However, 2/3 of the high school teachers feel the current system is effective. What is the difference between the Elementary and the Secondary school?
7. 71% of teachers say reporting student achievement by standards is effective, and only 34% say the current system is informative for stakeholders. If teachers are saying this, why don't we switch to SBG as soon as possible?
8. Only 38% of our teachers said the current letter grade method helps direct further instruction. 19% at elementary, 42% at Lee, and 56% at MCHS. Please explain why this might be? How can only about 4 out of 10 of our teachers say the current system helps direct instruction further?

9. On the flip side 85% said reporting by standards would help direct instruction. Lee and MCHS teachers felt strongly too, 80%. Can you tell me why reporting by standards would direct further instruction?
10. What are the benefits of re-assessing students? Why?
11. What are the challenges of re-assessing students? Why?
12. Should compliance factors be part of a student's grade, such as homework, participation, etc.? Why?

Appendix C: Strategies and Actions chart

Strategy	Actions
Administration will provide the faculty with the data and research on the benefits of standards-based grading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gather best practice research and data that matches our school. - Share research with staff during team meetings and late starts through the year.
Departments will work together to select “priority standards”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each department will work with administration to select priority standards - The entire year of standards to be reported will be selected.
Administration will work with teachers to align our assessments to standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Departments will collaborate to align assessments to priority standards - Teachers will collaborate to make assessments meaningful, and focused.
Teachers will collaborate to ensure assessments are common across departments/grade levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Departments will collaborate to evaluate assessments to be common. - Teams will make sure assessments are vertically aligned. - Departments will make sure data can be sorted quickly after assessment is given.
Teachers will meet in professional learning communities to analyze data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classroom level common assessments will be analyzed to improve student learning. - Classroom level common assessments will be analyzed to improve teacher instruction.