

Re-Examining Grading Policies and Practices

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KEY PRINCIPLES

1. Grading policies should be perceived as fair and equitable
2. Grading policies should, whenever possible, have a positive effect on student learning

NEASC STANDARDS

Grading and reporting practices are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning (Standard 4 Indicator 11)

What are some examples of beliefs about learning that should impact grading policies?

Beliefs about learning that should impact grading policies

- Students learn at different rates
- Student learning should focus on both process and content
- Students can express learning in multiple ways

“Mathematics teachers feel the need to test regularly, more than any other subject, because they have come to believe that mathematics is about performance, and they usually don’t consider the role that tests play in shaping students’ views of mathematics and themselves.”

-Jo Boaler, “Aligning assessment to brain science”

Why is the idea of set grading policies so controversial?

- In an era of so many mandates from above, teachers view individual discretion in setting their own grading policies as a last bastion of autonomy in teaching

What are some grading policies that negatively impact learning?

1. Using grades as a tool for punishment
(e.g. the use of zero grades for missed work)
2. Norm-based grading (grading on a bell curve)
3. Using group grades
4. Not providing standards to be assessed or the criteria for grading before administering the assessment to be graded

Policies that promote student learning

1. Use of more than one grade to report student performance

Example: Standards-based grading

Example: Separate grades for product, process, and progress

Policies that promote student learning

2. Base grades only on summative assessments (assessments of learning)

Formative assessments are assessments for learning – their single purpose should be to help inform both teacher and student on where the student is positioned along the path to mastering the standards being taught

- Good formative assessment practices are powerful enhancers of student learning
- Constructive feedback that is timely, understandable, and specific is an essential element in the formative assessment process
- Research has found that grading formative assessments leads to lesser learning while providing constructive feedback leads to greater learning (William and Black)

- Include opportunities for student self-assessment in the process
- Make use of analytic rubrics for select formative assessments (e.g. quizzes)

3. When possible, summative assessments should be created and scored collaboratively

- May take the form of a test, paper, project, or performance task
- More apt to lead to the type of high quality assessment needed to fairly and accurately measure student achievement of the standards assessed
- Use a process that ensures that all teacher voices are heard
- Collaborative scoring increases reliability and additionally is a great form of professional development

4. Determination of proficiency should be made using the best professional judgment of local educators

- Rubrics should be about performance that indicates mastery of standards, not task completion
- Fitting raw scores on tests to conform to narrow percentage bands is artificially constraining and discourages the assessment of higher order thinking and big ideas

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