

Evaluating Grading Practices

3.01.11

Middle School Reporting Committee

Adapted from Rick Wormeli's 9.20.07 White River SD Differentiated Grading Presentation
And Ken O'Connor's WERA pre-conference Workshop

Paradigm Challenging Statement

- **There are two “grading practices so ineffective that they can be labeled as toxic. First is the use of zeroes for missing work [in a hundred point scale] . . . Second is the practice of using the average of all scores throughout the semester.”**

Reeves, D. “Effective Grading Practices”, *Educational Leadership*, February 2008 , Volume 65, Number 5, 85-87.

Weighing the Scales

- Consider the impact of a zero in the example below:

A 'mean' example of temperature readings—85, 87, 88, 84, 0 (missed reading). The mean=68.8 degrees.

Is this representative of what was really going on?

What does common sense say about the “mean’s” ability to paint an accurate picture of reality?

Letter to the Editor

- Toronto Globe and Mail October 15, 2003

“Whenever I hear statistics being quoted, I am reminded of the statistician who drowned while wading across a river with an average depth of three feet.”

GORDON McMANN, Campbell River, B.C.

What do the experts say about “mean” grading practices?

- “Averaging falls far short of providing an accurate description of what students have learned. . . . If the purpose of grading and reporting is to provide an accurate description of what students have learned, then *averaging* must be considered *inadequate and inappropriate*.”

Guskey, Thomas R. (Editor), *Communicating Student Learning: The 1996 ASCD Yearbook*, ASCD, Alexandria, VA, 1996, 21

What do the experts say about “mean” grading practices?

“Educators must abandon the average, or arithmetic mean, as the predominant measurement of student achievement.”

Reeves, D., “Standards are Not Enough: Essential Transformations for School Success,” *NASSP Bulletin*, Dec. 2000, 10

What do the experts say about “mean” grading practices?

“Despite evidence that grading as punishment does not work (Guskey, 2000) and the mathematical flaw in the use of the zero on a 100-point scale (Reeves, 2004), many teachers routinely maintain this policy in the mistaken belief that it will lead to improved student performance.”

Reeves, D. “Effective Grading Practices”, *Educational Leadership*, February 2008 , Volume 65, Number 5 Pages 85-87.

Weighing the Scales

- Consider this comparison between a 100 pt scale and a 4 point scale:

If a student does no work, he should get nothing, right? Agreed.

But how productive is it to tell a student that he earned 5 times less than absolute failure?

(adapted from Doug Reeve's ideas in *The Learning Leader*, ASCD, 2006)

90-100	4	A
80-90	4	B
70-80	3	C
60-70	2	D
50-60	1	F
40-50	0	
30-40	-1	
20-30	-2	
10-20	-3	
0-10	-4	

Weighing the Scales

- Or, what if we invert the proportions of the traditional 100 pt scale by making the A account for 60% of the grade scale and the F only 10%?

Clearly, in this absurd scenario, the 'A' has a huge, yet undue, inflationary effect on the overall grade. Just as we don't want an 'A' to have an inaccurate effect, we don't want an 'F' to have an inaccurate "deflationary" effect.

Pairing *permanent* zeros with *averaging* in a 100 pt scale has exactly this effect.

100-40%	A
39-30%	B
29-20%	C
19-10%	D
9-0%	F

The Irony

When used in a 100 point scale---

“We are faced with the irony that a policy that may be grounded in the belief of holding students accountable (giving zeros) actually allows some students to escape accountability for learning.”

--Ken O'Connor

“A zero has an underserved and devastating influence, so much so, that no matter what the student does, the zero distorts the final grade as a true indicator of mastery. Mathematically and ethically, it is unacceptable.”

--Rick Wormeli, 2006, pp. 137-38

Let's Be Clear

- In the no *permanent* zeros scenario, students are not getting “points” for having done nothing. The student still earns a the low score. We are simply equalizing the influence of each level in the overall grade scale and ***report in a way that will more likely lead to more learning by giving the student hope***—the goal with grades is feedback, not punishment.

How do we respond to an 'F'?

- “Once a student crosses over into D or F zones, does it really matter? We do the same two things: investigate and take corrective action.”

Weighing the Scales

Balancing the numbers: 0 or 50 (or 60) all = F

- What is the effect of each 'level' of F on a student's motivation?
- On a student's ability to recover?
- Which should we choose to use when working with students?

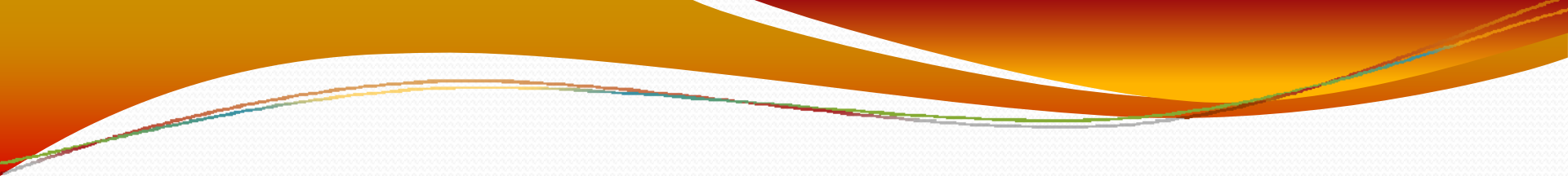
Do we need to record an 'F'?

If a student is not meeting standard, the evidence of learning should fall into one of two categories:

1. **Level 1 or 2**--There *is* sufficient evidence which shows that the student is “not there yet”
2. **Insufficient evidence**--IE (there is not *enough* evidence to make a determination of learning)

How does the student respond to an 'F'?

- How might the marks (IE, 1, & 2) communicate differently to a student than an 'F'?



As our experiences today show, grade marks communicate messages to students and parents with a powerful emotional impact. These messages can either promote learning or inhibit it. It seems then, that we should carefully and intentionally choose to communicate in ways that promote learning and foster hope.