Effective and Equitable Secondary Grading Practices for U46

Produced by
The U-46 Grading Committee
for Secondary Schools

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Section 1.0

Introduction

A call to committee was placed by the principal of Streamwood High School, Elgin Teachers Association, and U-46 leadership in early November 2010 to all middle and high school teachers, administrators, and members of the community for representation to review and develop guidelines for effective and equitable grading practices. A Grading Committee for Secondary Schools comprised of teachers, administrators, and members of the community was formed and first met in January 2011.

1.1 Expected Outcomes for Grading Committee

The expected outcomes for the Grading Committee for Secondary Schools include:

- A review of current U-46 grading policy and practices,

- Recommendations (substantiated with research) for specific guidelines for effective and equitable grading practices that align with the Common Core State Standards/Illinois English Language Learners Proficiency Standards (IELPS) and the District's 2010-2011 Improvement Plan,

- Pilot studies supported by action research,

- A timeline for the next steps toward the implementation of a secondary schools grading policy accompanied by district-wide professional development.

1.2   Summary of Content

This document contains an overview of current grading policies and practices in U-46 secondary schools, which includes the current district policy and individual school policies on grading, and the results of the survey from secondary teachers in District U-46 around current grading practices. Also included is a discussion of the following guidelines for fair and effective grading practices as supported by current research:

- Grades should reflect proficiency in well-defined standards-based learning targets that are clear to all stakeholders
- Grades should be based solely on academic performance using formative and summative assessments.
- Grading scales should be devised to give equal incremental value to each grade division.
- Students should be expected to complete work for credit (late work accepted).
- Students should be given a variety of ways to demonstrate their knowledge.
- Feedback should be timely, specific, and related to learning targets.
- Student should be given multiple opportunities to reach proficiency on specific standard-based concepts and skills.

In addition, this document provides guidelines for professional learning that supports the implementation of effective and equitable grading practices, action research on new grading practices; and a timeline for next steps toward implementation of policy.

Section 2.0

Overview of Current Grading Policies and Practices.

To determine current grading policies and practices in U-46, the Grading Committee for Secondary Schools identified current Board policy, surveyed secondary teachers, and reviewed secondary school's handbooks. Current grading systems in U-46 are varied and diverse.

2.1 Current District Policy

The current Board of Education Policy Manual includes the following sections/policies related to grades:

Section 6.280—Grading System—

Letter grades will be used in the secondary schools. In addition to special letter grades, symbols and terms appropriate to the elementary programs may be used to indicate student progress in grades K-6. Grading will be on a nine week basis (except when classes are conducted on a twelve week basis). The nine-week grade will be based on many factors, such as: basal text assignments, both oral and written; class participation; special assignments; research; various types of activities; special contributions. The final grade assigned by the teacher cannot be changed by a District administrator without notifying the teacher. Reasons for changing a student's final grade include:

- a miscalculation of test scores;

- a technical error in assigning a particular grade or score;

- teacher agreement to allow the student to do extra work that impacts the grade;

- an inappropriate grading system was used to determine the grade; or

- an inappropriate grade was based on an appropriate grading system.

Should a grade change be made, the administrator making the change must assume responsibility for determining the grade or evaluation, and shall initial such change.

Grading is not to be influenced by pressure from parents and it is not to be used by staff for disciplinary purposes.

LEGAL REF.: 105 ILCS 5/23.64, 5/10-20.9a, 5/10-21.8, 5/27-27

23 Ill. Admin. Code §1.440

CROSS REF.: Administrative Procedure Handbook – Section 21.1-.4; 21.7

Section 6.281—Student Progress—

The philosophy of the Board of Education concerning academic achievement, as well as student social growth and development, is based on the premise that students have diverse capabilities and individual patterns of growth and learning. Therefore, it is important that teachers have accurate knowledge of each student in order to assess student needs and to develop instructional plans for the student. A sharing of information among parent, teacher, and student is essential. Staff is encouraged to continue to seek better ways to measure and report student progress.

The Board requires that:

1. Parents are to be informed regularly about the progress their children are making in school through Progress Reports as well as Report Cards. When grades are given, the school staff will take particular care to explain the meaning of marks and symbols to parents.

2. Parents will be alerted and conferred with as soon as possible when a student's performance or attitude becomes unsatisfactory or shows marked or sudden deterioration. Insofar as possible, distinctions will be made between a student's attitude and his/her academic performance.

3. At comparable levels, the school district will strive for consistency in grading and reporting except when it is inappropriate for certain classes or certain students.

CROSS REF.: Administrative Procedure Handbook – Section 21.1-.4

Section 6.282 —Student Social and Emotional Development—

Initiatives to foster social and emotional learning shall be incorporated into the District's educational program, in accordance with the Illinois Learning Standard regarding students' social and emotional development.

Such initiatives shall include:

1. Classroom and school-wide programming which implement scientifically based, age and culturally appropriate strategies that teach social and emotional skills, promote optimal mental health, and prevent risk behaviors for all students;

2. Staff development and training for school personnel regarding age-appropriate social, emotional and academic learning;

3. Programs and learning opportunities for parents related to the importance of students' optimal social and emotional development;

4. Community partnerships with mental health agencies and organizations to provide a coordinated approach to addressing the social and emotional needs of students;

5. A system of early identification and intervention for students at risk for social, emotional or mental health problems that impact learning;

6. A system for referral and follow-up to provide clinical services for students, if necessary, utilizing student and family support service programs, school-based behavioral health services, and school-community linked services and supports; and

7. A system to assess and report baseline information regarding students' social-emotional development and its impact on their learning abilities.

The Superintendent or designee shall develop procedures to implement this policy as needed.

LEGAL REF.: Children's Mental Health Act of 2003, 405 ILCS 49/I *et seq.*

Sections 6.283 —Promotion Retention—

The Board of Education is dedicated to the maximum development of each student. The professional staff is expected to place students at the grade level most appropriate for them. Students will normally progress annually from grade to grade. Exceptions may be made when, in the judgment of the professional staff, such exceptions are in the best educational interest of the students involved. Parental involvement will be part of this process. Exceptions will be made after prior notification and explanation has been given to each student's parents/guardian, but the final decision will rest with the school authorities.

The decision to promote a student to the next grade level shall be based on academic success. Factors to consider will include, but are not limited to, satisfactory completion of curriculum, attendance, ability, emotional development and state and local goals or requirements. No student shall be promoted to the next grade level based solely upon age or other social reasons not related to the student's academic performance. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students shall not be retained solely because they are Limited English Proficient. The administration shall develop and maintain appropriate intervention programs for students who are deemed not qualified for promotion to the next grade level. Promotion of a student having an Individual Education Plan (IEP), or receiving reasonable accommodations pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, shall be determined by the student's education team.

LEGAL REF.: Illinois School Code: 105 ILCS 5/10-21.4a, 5/10-20.9(a), PA 90-548

Section 6.290 —Homework—

The term "homework" refers to an assignment to be prepared during a period of supervised study in class or outside of class or which requires individual work in a study hall or home. The purposes of homework are to improve the learning processes, to aid in the mastery of skills, and to create and stimulate interest on the part of the student. Homework is not to be used as a form of punishment. The amount of homework given each day and the time required to complete the homework should be consistent so that a pattern of meaningful homework can be established by the teacher and the student.

2.2 School Policies

The committee examined secondary school handbooks for policy consistency in assessment of student growth and achievement. Current practices are inconsistent and in some cases are not reflective of an established district-wide policy.

The table on the next page illustrates current practice at each U-46 secondary school in the 2009-2010 school year. If the column is blank, then the information is not found in that school's handbook.

2.3 Questionnaire Results

In March, 2011, all U-46 secondary teachers received a questionnaire through Survey Monkey entitled *10 Questions about Grading Practices.* The results are in the table below.

Table 2

10 Questions about Grading Policies

SURVEY Questions and Results		Response Percent	Response Count
I am	A middle school teacher	35.1	168
	A high school teacher	64.5	309
	Community member	.4	2
TOTAL			**479**
2. What kind of grading scale do you use?	90-100%=A; 80-89%=B; 70-79%=c 60-69%=D less than 59% =E	94.2	451
	1=E; 2=D; 3=C;4=B; 5=A	1.9	9
	OTHER	4.0	19
TOTAL			**479**
3. Do you accept "late work"?	ALWAYS	50.7	243
	SOMETIMES	41.8	200
	NEVER	5.6	27
	OTHER	1.9	9
TOTAL			**479**
4. Do you give credit for late work?	FULL CREDIT	22.5	107
	PARTIAL CREDIT	70.6	336
	NO CREDIT	6.9	33
TOTAL			**477**
5. Do you give credit/extra credit for non-academic items?	YES	36.5	174
	NO	63.5	303
TOTAL			**477**
6. About how many graded assignments do you give a quarter?	1-5	3.4	16
	6-10	13.4	64
	11-15	21.1	101
	16 OR MORE	62.1	296
TOTAL			**477**
SURVEY Questions and Results		Response Percent	Response Count
7. Do students have the opportunity to re-take/re-do assignments for improved grades?	ALWAYS	19.7	93
	SOMETIMES	57.1	269
	NEVER	23.1	109
TOTAL			**471**
8. Do students have the opportunity to re-do tests for an improved grade?	ALWAYS	17.8	85

	SOMETIMES	49.2	235
	NEVER	33.1	158
TOTAL			**478**
9. Do you adjust student grades based on student classroom behavior such as making it an individual assignment or add/deduct points to an existing assignment?	ALWAYS	6.5	31
	SOMETIMES	25.4	120
	NEVER	68.0	321
TOTAL			**472**
10. For assignment(s) students do not turn in to be graded (missing assignments) is it calculated as a zero?	ALWAYS	78.3	375
	SOMETIMES	16.9	81
	NEVER	4.8	23
TOTAL			479

The chart is illustrative of the divergent assessment practices existing in secondary schools in U-46. These results indicate the need for the development of a consistent U-46 secondary grading policy aligned with the Common Core State Standards and Illinois English Language Learner Standards.

Section 3

Guideline for Fair and Effective Grading Practices

Introduction

Grades should reflect mastery of academic standards or student learning rather than elements of behavior and activities not directly related to student academic growth. As noted in *Elements of Grading*, "most teachers, parents, and school administrators assume that the major influence on the grades a student receives is the performance of the individual student. At first glance, such an assumption seems reasonable… However, a variety of other influences including the ways that computerized grading programs, ancient administrative policies, accidental error, idiosyncratic judgment of teachers and

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administrators determine student grades" (Reeves p.4). Therefore, the Secondary

Grading Committee has proposed the following seven guidelines that will, when fully

implemented with fidelity, promote fairness and equity in grading practices.

3.1 Grades should reflect proficiency in well-defined standards-based learning targets that are clear to all stakeholders

"Grades are broken when they are not directly based on standards and do not give

information about achievement of standards. Fixing this requires the use of standards-

based curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and collecting and reporting student

achievement by standards" (O'Connor, 60). Learning targets must be clearly defined by

teacher teams who are familiar with the district curricula and the standards upon which

those are based through ongoing professional development. Teacher teams would need

to develop standards-based learning targets, which would be based on Illinois Common

Core State Standards/IELPS, district curriculum, roadmaps, and national standards.

It is essential that teachers be able to synthesize the standards-based learning

targets guiding instructional choices and formative and summative assessments. As part

of the recommended policy ongoing review should be part of the *Destination 2015*: *A

Five year Accountability Plan for Continuous Improvement for School District U-46*

3.2 Grades should be based solely on academic performance using formative and summative assessments.

Grades should be based solely on academic performance. Student behavior

although relevant to student success and understanding should not be part of the

academic grade, and should be communicated in a distinct and separate manner to all

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stakeholders. U-46 School Board Policy Code: 6.281 states in part, "Insofar as possible, distinctions will be made between a student's attitude and his/her academic performance."   Grades should only reflect academic achievement (O'Connor, 2011).

In some content areas when student participation is part of an identified learning standard, it is appropriate to give credit for said behavior. For instance, the Illinois State Foreign Language Goal 28.B.3.a states that a student responds to open-ended questions and initiates communication in various situations.

Academic performance is measured by a balanced assessment system which includes a combination of both summative and formative assessments. Rick Wormeli (2006) defines formative assessment as "frequent and ongoing, completed en route to mastery; ongoing assessment could be considered as checkpoints on students' progress and the foundation for feedback given – the most useful assessment teachers can provide for students and their own teaching decisions (p.200)". The formative process involves a series of learning experiences through which students have multiple opportunities to gain mastery of concepts and skills (Kamm, 2012).   For example, formative assessments may include the following practices: observing and recording student interactions and discussions in small groups, questioning students in large and small groups noting individual responses, providing opportunities for students to peer assess and provide feedback to one another, or collecting exit slips/learning logs from individual learners.

The results of formative assessments are shared with students in a timely manner so that students can self assess their performance and develop skills which are lacking. Formative assessment can encourage positive student engagement because of timely and individualized feedback. In addition, formative assessment can provide teachers with

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information that can be used to adapt ongoing lesson planning and guide instructional

choices (Nicol, 2006).

A summative assessment is a reflection of the mastery of learning standards and

provides feedback to the teacher to improve future instruction. Summative assessments

are given at the end of learning, and measure key outcomes of benchmarks that are

essential and enduring as identified by *Destination 2015*. Wormeli defines summative

assessments as "completed after the learning experiences; usually requires students to

demonstrate mastery of all essential understandings" (p.200). Traditionally, this would

be a test at the end of the chapter, a semester final, or a unit project or presentation.

3.3   Grading scales should be devised to give equal incremental value to each grade division to effectively measure student learning and skills.

Assigning zeros by instructors is acceptable, however, it is suggested that when a zero is

assigned, an incremental scale is used rather than a 100-point scale as seen in tables 4 and

5. In an effort to have grades reflect mastery of concepts, the traditional 100 point

grading scale unfairly penalizes students because an E can represent 60 out of 100 points.

> "Consider the intervals for each grade in the 100 point scale. In many classrooms, an A ranges from ninety to one hundred, a distance of eleven points. B's, C's, and D's have almost the same-range, ten points each. When it comes to an E however, there is a sixty point range of possibility. A zero has an undeserved and devastating influence, so much that no matter what the student does, the grade distorts the final grade as a true indicator of mastery" (Wormeli, 137-8).

The following chart further demonstrates the inequity of a 100 point scale.

Table 3: Johnny's Grades

Actual percentage	100 Point scale	4 Point scale
89	89	3.0
95	95	3.6
72	72	1.3
85	85	2.6
Missing-Homework	0	0
79	79	2.0
90	90	3.1
94	94	3.5
65	65	0.6
Missing-Written assignment	0	0
98	98	3.9
95	95	3.6
92	92	3.3
Missing—research paper	0	0
Average Percentage	68.1	2.2
Overall Letter Grade	68% D	81% B

Looking at table 3, depending on which scale was used, Johnny could earn a D or a B. Grades need to more accurately represent actual mastery of concepts, therefore the 4 point scale that was used better reflects his achievement. Keep in mind that assignments are any or all of formative/summative/weighted.

The following tables (4 and 5) show how a teacher could implement an equally incremental value for their rubric, while still holding students accountable for completing the work. As you can see by the following examples of grading scales, a zero may be given for assignments not completed.

Tables 4 and 5, along with the 4 point scale from Table 3, are merely three examples of equitable grading scales that could be used. The important goal is for teachers to utilize rubrics and grading policies that reflect equivalent incremental values.

Table 4—Sample Conversion of a Traditional
100-point scale to a 12-point Equal Increment scale

Grade	Point Value	Percentage
A	11	100-95
A-	10	94-90
B+	9	89-87
B	8	86-83
B-	7	82-80
C+	6	79-77
C	5	76-73
C-	4	72-70
D+	3	69-67
D	2	66-63
D-	1	62-60
E	0	59 & below

Table 5— Sample Conversion of a Traditional 100-point scale to a 5-point Equal Increment scale

Grade	Point Value	Percentage
A+	5.0	100
A	4.9	99
A	4.8	98
A	4.7	97
A	4.6	96
A	4.5	95
A	4.4	94
A	4.3	93
A	4.2	92
A-	4.1	91
A-	4.0	90
B+	3.9	89
B	3.8	88
B	3.7	87
B	3.6	86
B	3.5	85
B	3.4	84
B	3.3	83
B	3.2	82
B-	3.1	81
B-	3.0	80
C+	2.9	79
C	2.8	78
C	2.7	77
C	2.6	76
C	2.5	75
C	2.4	74
C	2.3	73
C	2.2	72
C-	2.1	71
C-	2.0	70
D+	1.9	69
D	1.8	68
D	1.7	67
D	1.6	66
D	1.5	65
D	1.4	64
D	1.3	63
D	1.2	62
D-	1.1	61
D-	1.0	60
E	0	59 & below

3.4 Students should be expected to complete work for credit (late work accepted)

Meaningful homework, lab reports, projects and other academic assignments are designed to give students needed opportunities to practice skills and develop/demonstrate mastery. For many students a grade of zero impedes the opportunity to reach a benchmark's key outcome (Reeves, 2011). This may result in lost learning opportunities. Best practice at the level of the classroom suggests that teachers accept late work. An alternate approach is for teachers to accept late work for credit, with the accompanying expectation that students will complete all such work. To ensure that a teacher's flexibility is not stretched to the breaking point, reasonable date specific deadlines can be set at the beginning of the term between teacher and students. Furthermore, effective grading policies indicate that additional student support structures will be helpful. Some support structures include: peer tutoring, APEX, after school programs, RtI, or other programs offered by respective buildings.

3.5 Students should be given a variety of ways to demonstrate their knowledge.

Feedback to students or their grade should be an authentic reflection of what they have learned and to what extent they have mastered the concept. For example, in Science a student might be able to draw or perform the procedures to a lab as evidence of their learning. When planning learning activities for students, teachers need to consider how they can vary content, process, or product in order to help students reach the learning target.

- To differentiate content in reading, groups of students could be allowed to choose reading materials based on their interests and/or reading levels.

- To differentiate process in reading, students could be given the choice of reading silently in class, using audio books as an aid, or reading materials independently at home while working on other assignments during class time.

- To differentiate product in reading, students could be given the option of demonstrating their comprehension by completing written assignments, creating Power Point presentations, or having a private conference with the teacher.

3.6 Feedback should be timely, specific, and related to learning targets

In John Hattie's book *Visible Learning* (2009), his research emphasizes that students need immediate feedback to ensure they are on the right path to successfully meet the challenge/task. His findings were also consistent with Marzano's conclusion that "accurate, specific, and timely feedback is linked to student learning" (Reeves, p. 13). Research from Luger and DeNisi (1996) showed that "when feedback focused on what the person needed to improve or how he or she could go about making such improvements, learning improved considerably" (Clymer & Wiliam, p.36-42). Students need more detailed feedback with specific recommendations for improvement. In activities, coaches and sponsors give constant feedback as they try to improve students' performance, and that needs to be applied to the classroom.

Reeves (2011) states that the purpose of feedback should not be to calculate an average or score a final exam, but to inform students about how they can improve on their next attempt. When the only feedback a student receives is on a report card, it does not offer students the opportunity for mid-course corrections. As teachers, we need to give specific oral or written feedback to help students improve, going beyond the simple smiley face or great job comments. In addition, feedback does not always need to come

from the teacher, and professional development should include training on the use of

peer-reviews and self-reflections to help increase feedback opportunities for students.

3.7 Students should be given multiple opportunities to reach proficiency on specific standard-based concepts and skills.

As noted in Section 3.5, not all students learn the same way or at the same rate.

Some students need to have more time to develop concepts and gain mastery of skills.

As J. Clymer and D. Wiliam (2009) state, "If the interview [teacher conference with

student] reveals that the student has not mastered this material, the teacher provides the

students with additional practice and more opportunities to learn". Multiple opportunities

would be giving the students a second chance to complete assignments, extra time to

complete tasks, different assignments, re-taking of tests (Deddeh, Main, Ratzlaff

Fulkerson, 2010; Corbett & Wilson, 2009). Students might have to meet teacher defined

requirements such as: tutoring time, completion of all assignments related to the

concept/test, and/or parent communication to receive second chances to reach

proficiency.

Section 4.0
Implementation and Support

4.1 Professional Training for Guiding Principles:

The blueprint for training and implementation of a U-46 secondary grading policy

is based on the "Component of Training," as presented by Joyce and Showers (1985).

Data needs to be collected to assess the effectiveness of training. There needs to be

ongoing professional training for the new secondary grading policy.

4.2 Time line
Spring 2012

Members of the Grading Committee for Secondary Schools will meet with the

District Staff Development Committee to read this document and discuss the roll out.

2011-2012 School Year

There will be an informational presentation at Instructional Council and the

District Staff Development Committee in the Winter of 2011-12. During Spring 2012, all

secondary certified staff will receive this report.

Additional staff development may be necessary on the following topics:

- Common Core State Standards/IELP and their curricular applications

- Differences between formative and summative assessments and creating samples

  of these types of assessments

- Inter-rater reliability for grading student work

The Secondary Grading Policy Committee should continue to meet at least quarterly

to review the professional development. They will identify sites that may already be

implementing some of the principles, gather feedback and monitor progress at those sites.

They will present their work in progress to Instructional Council by Fall 2012.

4.3 School Leadership Support

The principal's role in implementation is critical for the success of school change

and thus improvement. Shirley Hord (1992) and her staff at the Southwest Educational

Development Laboratory (SEDL) reviewed the leadership and change facilitation

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literature to identify relevant research-based concepts and information that could support the development of effective facilitative leaders for school improvement projects. These concepts include the following six types of leadership functions that are essential for making change happen. These six functions include:

- Developing, articulating, and communicating a shared vision of the intended change.

- Planning and providing resources

- Investing in professional learning

- Checking on progress

- Providing continuous assistance

- Creating a context supportive of change

    Administrative leadership is necessary in the following areas:

- Developing, articulating, and communicating a shared vision of effective assessment: The principal in conjunction with school leadership teams are responsible for modeling the intended grading practice. In order for change to take place, it is essential that school leadership emphasize what the grading practices look like when implemented. Communicating the district's shared vision as developed by the Secondary Grading Policy Committee and *Destination 2015* is essential. In addition, school leadership needs to continuously monitor assessment practices and see where and how these practices connect with other initiatives such as Response to Intervention and Positive Behavior Interventions and Systems.

- <u>Planning and providing resources:</u> Schools will work to develop an implementation plan. Necessary resources to ensure success must be provided to the school by the district.

- Progress Monitoring : It is the responsibility of building administration to monitor the progress of each staff member's application of the assessment practices to ensure fidelity of implementation.

- Creating an Environment Supportive of Change: As with any other initiative it is important that all stakeholders are fully vested in the implementation of the secondary grading policy. There must be a continuous conversation surrounding the implementation of this new policy. For this to be successful teachers and administrators must engage in collaborative discourse in order to reach those goals identified in the Common Core State Standards/IELPS and *Destination 2015*.