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How Can Standards-Based Grading be Implemented into an English Language Arts Classroom in Order to Give More Accurate Feedback of Student Achievement

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HOW CAN STANDARDS-BASED GRADING BE IMPLEMENTED
INTO AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM IN ORDER TO
GIVE MORE ACCURATE FEEDBACK OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Masters of Literacy Education

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To my loving and patient husband Joe who supported me throughout the last two years of this endeavor. I'd also like to thank my cohort, who made this whole process enjoyable! Finally, I'd like to thank my team. Thanks for all your hard work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE	6
Statements of Significance.....	7
Contest for Understanding.....	8
Rationale.....	9
Conclusion.....	10
CHAPTER TWO	11
Introduction.....	11
Traditional Grading	12
Standards-Based Grading.....	17
Benefits of Standards-Based Grading.....	20
Barriers of Standards-Based Grading.....	27
How to Implement Standards-Based Grading.....	32
Conclusion.....	43
CHAPTER THREE	44
Introduction.....	44
Setting.....	45
Participants.....	48
Methods.....	49
Summary	52
CHAPTER FOUR.....	53
Introduction.....	53
Rubrics.....	54

Brochure and Website.....	59
PowerPoint Presentation.....	62
Student-friendly Poster.....	64
Binder Insert.....	65
Summary.....	66
CHPATER FIVE.....	68
Introduction.....	68
Return to the Literature Review.....	68
Possible Implication.....	70
Limitations.....	71
Future Research Projects.....	72
Summary.....	73
APPENDICES.....	74
Appendix A.....	75
Appendix B.....	77
Appendix C.....	79
Appendix D.....	81
Appendix E.....	83
Appendix F.....	85
Appendix G.....	87
Appendix H.....	90
Appendix I.....	93

Appendix J.....	100
Appendix K.....	102
Appendix L.....	104
REFERENCES.....	107

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

All types of assessment, whether they be formative or summative are great and critical responsibilities for teachers. It seems with all the different district and state tests that measure math, science, reading and writing, teachers are getting less and less teaching time with students. Tests are becoming more and more high-stakes too. For teachers test results can be used for teacher evaluations, and in some cases even pay. These are just some of the things associated with the different tests. For students, the test results can be a determining factor for what classes they do or do not get into from year to year, as well as what colleges they are admitted into.

As a middle school language arts teacher, grading and giving feedback on assignments is an overwhelming responsibility. Students are just beginning to thoughtfully write and deeply read text, so detailed feedback is important to the students as well as to myself. I need to know where my students' misunderstandings are and adjust lessons accordingly.

I want to be able to give clear and specific grades for their work. What does a "B-" really mean to a writer or reader? What are they excelling at and what areas do they need to improve? How can parents know where their children's strengths and weaknesses are? These are the questions that have been coming up in my work as a 5th grade language arts teacher in a large urban district. I feel like I have been doing a disservice to my students and families by not giving more accurate feedback on specific reading and writing learning targets. So I ask, *how can standards-based grading be implemented into an English Language Arts classroom in order to give*

more accurate feedback of student achievement? In this chapter I will discuss the significance of my inquiry, the context for understanding, and my rationale for this topic.

Statements of Significance

I have always been very passionate about reading and writing, and view them as a vehicle for personal growth, and as an instrument to create change. I want my students to feel that same passion, but first, they need to know what their strengths are and where they need to improve. Through the art of detailed analysis, I believe standards-based grading will aid in that specific feedback and guide students in closing the gaps in their learning.

Last year was my first year at a small community school, with grades 5-8. Due to multiple factors, I experienced a different type of family involvement than I had in my prior teaching experiences.

At the end of my first year in my new school, I had a parent alarmed that her son had gotten a summer school recommendation letter in the mail, particularly to focus on his reading skills. She e-mailed and asked for my opinion on the matter. I had replied back suggesting that he attend. She was unhappy with my response because her son had received a "B or B+" in my class all year. I acknowledged that he had, but he didn't get that "B" with ease.

Throughout the year, I had worked closely with her son during writing and reading activities, helping him improve upon the more abstract tasks such as identifying theme, symbolism, and writing a strong thesis. He needed guidance on

most standards, and often redid assignments to earn a better grade. He rarely got a “B” on anything the first time, or independently.

Due to her negative response to my recommendation, I forwarded our conversation to the reading specialist for his input, since he also saw her child for reading intervention. This led to many conversations between the reading specialist and I. How could I have better communicated to the parents of this child, and every child, on the exact progress the student was having on each standard I taught? By using standards-based grading I believed I could provide more insight on each child’s reading and writing skills throughout the year. No longer would I just say that on all things English Language Arts related you’re at a “B”. It was after this experience that I realized that I needed to change the way I assess my students in order to provide more helpful and precise feedback.

Context for Understanding

The idea of standards-based grading had been discussed and pushed, in a sense, at my school since before I got there. My principal happens to be friends with Rick Wormeli, a Nationally Board Certified teacher who trains teachers on assessment and differentiation, as well as a published author on middle school teaching. As our school leader he has been encouraging and paying for staff to attend conferences about standards-based grading and teaching.

Over the 2014 summer I attended a Rick Wormli standards-based grading conference with my colleagues. From this conference I learned what challenges may arise with staff when wanting to change to standards-based grading. Challenges include the idea of test retakes, technology glitches, and the time to train staff,

students, and parents. It is suggested that it works best if a team of teachers switches over to standards-based grading rather than one teacher alone. After attending this conference and the experience I had with the “B” student, I was committed to switching over to standards-based grading, but just didn’t know exactly how to go about it.

Rationale

This question, *how can standards-based grading be implemented into an English Language Arts classroom in order to give more accurate feedback of student achievement*, is important to me because I feel like I have been underserving my learners and parents in when it comes to grading. Due to the fact that there are so many categories and standards to give feedback on within the English content, I truly believe that a standards-based grading approach will provide an avenue for English Language Arts teachers to give more detailed feedback, and grade more precisely and efficiently.

This research is not only important to me, but I feel it is important to those teachers also trying to grapple with standards-based grading. Possible roadblocks I might encounter include figuring out the right grade scale that will work within my technological parameters, and getting all English department team members to grade on standards alone, and not on participation or homework. I also think it will be challenging to teach students and parents who are not familiar with standards-based grading the concept.

Conclusion

By studying the question *how can standards-based grading be implemented into an English Language Arts classroom in order to give more accurate feedback of student achievement*, I will be able to revamp my formative and summative assessments to match a standards-based grading approach. I also hope through this capstone I am able to provide my students with more detailed and specific feedback through the rubrics that I will create.

In Chapter Two I will report the research on the history behind traditional grading in the United States. I will define standards-based grading and describe the benefits and barriers of standards-based grading from the student, parent, and teacher perspective, and how it can be implemented.

Chapter Three will discuss the methods I will use to create tools to best teach a new grading system, along with rubrics I will make for assessing. I will have standard-based formative and summative assessments created for one unit. I will also create brochures for families and staff members to better help them understand standards-based grading. I will go into detail about the district, department, school, and classroom dynamic. In Chapter Four I will discuss the tools I will be using include rubrics, presentations, a standards-based grading website section, and a brochure for parents. Finally, Chapter Five will examine the results of my entire experience with the capstone.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

How teachers grade is one of the leading topics of discussion in education today. Grading is a philosophical belief that teachers take seriously and hold close to their hearts. Not only is it a serious matter for teachers, but also for parents and students as well. Grades determine what classes a child can or cannot take, if they get into a certain college, and if they need to repeat a class or grade all together. Grades also have emotional influence, since it can make students feel successful or unsuccessful, which is why it is crucial that teachers are thoughtful and purposeful about what grades they give.

Through my research on *how can standards-based grading be implemented into an English Language Arts classroom in order to give more accurate feedback of students' achievement*, I will articulate what the research says about standards-based grading compared to traditional grading.

This chapter will be separated into five main sections: traditional grading, standards-based grading, benefits of standards-based grading, barriers of standard-based grading, and how to implement standards-based grading at the district, school, and classroom-wide levels, including how to best communicate this type of grading to parents and students.

These topics are important to understanding my research question because they compare the two types of grading systems, and guide educators to decide

whether or not they would like to implement standards-based grading into their own classroom.

Traditional Grading

Traditional grading has been around for centuries, and in many ways does a disservice to students. The purpose of traditional grading is to sort kids, establish hierarchies, and reward or punish kids, not inform them of their performance on a task (Spencer, 2012). This section defines common methods of grading, problems with traditional grading, as well as how using the zero affects the grade scale.

Common methods of traditional grading. This section will review the bell curve grading method, point system method, and percentage grading method. Reeves says, traditional grading, or norm-referenced grading, where one uses a bell curve, compares one student's scores to another, regardless of where they are according to the standard. If a student does better than his/her peers on a standard, but still does not meet the standard proficiently, they are considered to be performing in the top tier. In the real world a superior does not want to know how you compared to your peers, but rather that the job got done right (Reeves, 2002).

Guskey and Bailey go on to explain that grading on a curve was done in order to appropriately distribute grades. This was inappropriate for two reasons: first, it allowed teachers to not have to grade certain criteria, but simply do a math equation to get a student's grade. Secondly, teachers did not have to identify specific learning criteria because they believed that their grade on the curve was an accurate reflection of his/her intelligence; therefore, his/her grade would transfer to tests (2001).

A point system can also be confusing to students because it can vary from class to class (Scriffiny, 2008). In this case, students' homework, participation, and tests account for a certain number of points, and each letter grade is attached to a percentage. The most familiar scale reads as follows: 100-90% A, 89%-80 B, 79%-70 C, 69%-60 D, 50% and below F. Grading with one letter grade only gives students one idea on how they are doing, without letting the student know what they did correctly and what they need to improve. Requirements for letter grades often vary from teacher to teacher, along with other non-academic things factoring into the grade (McCillan, 1997).

For example, Shippy notes that traditional grading can also include non-standard-based items such as participation, homework, and behavior. These are items that the state does not list as something that needs to be mastered in order to show knowledge of a subject area, yet teachers include these in the grade (2013). Including these types of things in the grade can mislead students and parents to the true accuracy of mastery of the standard.

Some teachers also believe that in traditional grading when using percentages, creating a higher percentage cutoff score makes the standard higher and harder- this is not the case. Guskey says,

setting cutoff percentages for assessments and for grades is an arbitrary decision that says little about the standards or the expectations set for students' learning. A much more important consideration is the difficulty of the tasks students are asked to perform or the cognitive complexity of the questions they are required to answer (pg. 534-5, 2001).

In my experience as a teacher, I have seen all different kinds of grading, and many vary from class to class, grade to grade. Teachers grade on a point system mainly, and often include extra credit as an option for students to raise their grade. I've seen teachers give grades for being on time, behaving properly, and bringing the right supplies to class. None of these things are in any standard, though students are expected to meet these "standards".

Problems with traditional grading. Teachers realize that the grading systems put in place are not the best, but many are not sure how to fix the problem, while at the same time pleasing everyone- teachers, parents, administration, and students. Due to this, what happens is called hodgepodge grading, where the product (what the grade is), process (the path the student took to get the grade), and progress (how the student's grade changed over time) are all mixed together and unclear. Hodgepodge grading also happens because there are so many varying degrees of process. The Tierney study found that some teachers did not even use a consistent grading method during the course of the year (Guskey, 2001, Tierney et al., 2011). This only adds to the confusion of what a letter grade actually means.

Teachers also admit that they don't like grading because it takes away from what they actually find value in, which is teaching children. Grades are very time-consuming, and teachers believe that time should be spent on planning lessons rather than grading (Guskey et al., 2001).

Grades don't accurately tell us what the students have mastered. Simply giving one letter grade that means so much shows we need to rethink how we grade (Wormeli, 2006).

There are too many components that go into one single grade, and the grade does not end up clearly communicating all of the graded components very well (Guskey, 2004). Grades have been inconsistent across grade levels, teachers, and subjects for a long time. This is partly due to the lack of training and no universal agreement for teachers on how to best grade (Guskey et al, 2011).

Guskey (2006) goes on to say that teachers use many different pieces of evidence that vary across all contents and grade levels, anywhere from 2-16 different pieces of evidence. Due to the varying amount of assessment designs, communicating a score that represent a percentage correctly is misleading (Guskey, 2001). Again, this makes the idea of giving and using one grade very complex. He continues to state that with traditional grading there are different setbacks because there is uncertainty in the purpose of the grade, and also there are different formats for reporting the grade. This causes confusion when trying to determine what a student knows in each content area (Guskey, 2006).

Due to the amount of criticism that education gets, and the increase of skepticisms, people are requesting more transparent grades. They want a clearer idea of the success students are or are not having (Guskey et al, 2001). When it comes down to it, how teachers grade matter (Tierney et al, 2011).

Zero points and the traditional grade. Guskey is also against using zeros in the grade book. He believes the use of zeros in the grade book is for teachers to

exert control over the student. Zeros are used for punishing students who have not put effort towards the task at hand, or who have not demonstrated responsibility (2004).

He goes on to say that a zero does not truthfully reflect what a student has learned. If it is to show how they achieved on the assignment, it “missed the mark.” Also, if teachers are averaging the score, then it drastically brings the average of the grade down, once again, not accurately portraying what the student knows. “A single zero has more influence on an average than any other score in the group” (pg. 3, 2004).

For teachers who use zeros as a punishment, no studies show that it is an effective strategy. Actually, students are more likely to disengage from the class. Students are also likely to find the zero meaningless; and therefore, not work towards improving the grade.

An alternative to using a zero in the grade book is to mark the assignment as incomplete, along with requiring the student to make up the missing work. This will entail that the student be provided an extra study time either with the teacher or during Saturday school. One problem with this solution is that there needs to be that extra time allotted by the school or teacher, along with extra funding for the person holding the class in order for this to work effectively (Guskey, 2004).

Guskey (2004) says that schools who implement this policy find that they save money in the long run because students realize that teachers are holding them to high standards, and in turn students work towards those high standards and end up with fewer incompletes in their report card. This means that they do not need to

attend the extra class the school may allot for students, and in turn the school can save money by holding fewer make-up classes.

I believe what Guskey says to be true in my own experience. Grading is an art, and doing it right is very challenging, yet very important. I see many teachers grade how they were graded as students, and at the same time have to go into great explanation when telling a student or parent why the student received a "C", and what extra work can he/she do to get an "A". It's a process where the student collects points, rather than reflects and improves upon what he or she already knows.

Summary. Traditional grading, or norm-referenced grading is when students are graded on a bell curve and compared to their peers. This means that they are not compared to where they are at when graded against the standard. Percentage grading is also a form of traditional grading, where students must reach a certain percentage to obtain a grade. Teachers struggle to grade due to lack of training, while students struggle with grades because of the varying grading scales from class to class. Putting in a zero for a score is misleading because it does not truly reflect how a student is doing in the class. Many teachers use zeros as leverage and punishment. There are many alternatives teachers can practice instead of using a zero. In my next section I will address what standards-based grading is, what it can look like, and how it is different than traditional grading.

Standards-based grading

Grading is a complex issue because it incorporates so many aspects: our history, policies, beliefs, and politics (Shippy, 2013). Standards-based grading falls

under the term of criterion-referenced grading. This is where the student's performance is graded against the performance descriptors, or standards, and then the student receives a score based on how they perform against that standard. A student's performance is *not* compared to peers (Guskey, 2001).

Tierney et al. states that the motive behind standards-based grading is to compare student work to the grade-level standard that needs to be met. Therefore, students are not compared to one another, but simply to the standard they are to master (2011). Standards-based grading simply measures the mastery of the content (Shippy, 2013).

Shippy goes on to quote Hirst in explaining that it is a human's right to know what they will be assessed on, how they will be assessed, how they will need to show the knowledge they have on the subject, and what is an acceptable score. (2013). Standards-based grading is a way to better communicate what the child is learning, it will help student achievement, and it allows the teachers to grade the child against the standard, and nothing else (Sherer, 2001; Guskey, 2001; Schimmer, 2014).

When using standards-based grading teachers should come together to agree upon a set scale in order to create continuity across the contents and grade levels. Carr and Harris (2001), Wiggins (1998), and Guskey (2001) say that a scale, like the one below is most helpful:

- 4- exceeds standards
- 3- meets standards
- 2- partially meets standards

- 1- does not meet standards.
- N/E or I- No evidence or Incomplete

There are, of course, variations of the scale. For instance adding in a “no evidence” category if a student does not turn in the assignment, or an “I” for incomplete if the student was absent the day of the assessment.

Standards-based grading is different from traditional grading because it solely reflects how a student masters, or does not master, a standard. Teachers end up using only formative and summative assessments to communicate the knowledge of the student; things such as homework and participation do not factor into the grade. Students and parents have a clear idea of where they stand on each standard when teachers use standards-based grading.

Learning targets are used as well in standards-based grading. A learning target is what standard the child is learning in that class. It guides their focus. To allow a student to retest simply means they get a chance to move their score up if they are not pleased with the results. Doing this allows the student to learn from their mistakes and meet, or master, the appropriate grade-level standard.

Another way standards-based grading is different is because the one hundred percent point scale is split up into quarters, giving students a larger range of achievement. Whereas traditional grading uses the same scale, but smaller ranges for success; 100%-50% for four possible passing grades, and a 50% range for failing (see Appendix A).

Now that there is a common understanding of standards-based grading, it is important to understand the benefits for the teacher, student, and parent perspective.

Benefits of Standards-Based Grading.

There are many benefits to standards-based grading that support and help students, teachers, and parents. Key benefits will be outlined for each of the stakeholders.

Benefits to teachers. Benefits teachers experience when using standards based grading is abundant. Standards-based grading requires teachers to give specific feedback, and tells teachers the difference between students' product, process, and progress (Guskey et al, 2011). Teachers also greatly benefit from switching from a traditional grading scale to a standards-based assessment system because when teachers can assess better, they can teach better. This system provides teachers with richer information and data on their students. (Scriffiny, 2008; Guskey, 2001,).

Due to the nature that standards-based grading is very clear and detailed, it is useful for data collection and analysis of student growth, as teachers watch progression of each standard over time (Guskey and Bailey, 2001; Sherer, 2001). Many standards could be assessed multiple times throughout a school year, giving the teacher the feedback he/she needs in order to see how a child progresses. For example in Language Arts, students will continually work on their writing skills throughout the year, progressing as it goes on.

Educators are also thinking more deeply about what the grade they give a student means. We do not need to separate kids into “learners” and “non-learners”, but we do need to make sure every student is learning (Brookhart, 2011).

In districts that have adopted standards-based grading, teachers were able to tell how varied the assessments were, and were able to tell how well each student was doing for each assessment. This provided the detailed analysis they needed to direct their instruction. In this case, the teachers felt that the standards-based grading system was better for students as it provided more guidance for their teaching. They also knew how students were doing immediately after the task was assessed (Colby, 1999).

High stakes tests wouldn't have as much stress because standards-based grading would allow teachers to see patterns over time, and address the areas of growth head on (Sherer, 2001). For example, as teachers keep track of the areas students are struggling in, they can teach those learning targets more often; therefore, it allows for more success on state tests.

The standards-based scale also helps teachers identify what basic, proficient, and advanced learning looks like in their classrooms- something some educators have not been able to do in the past. Trying to teach too many standards made the grades disorganized and incoherent, resulting in not giving accurate feedback to students. For instance, teachers sometimes include far too many standards into one project, making it difficult to give an accurate grade. The teacher should break down standards so it is clear how the student is doing on each one, rather than jumble them together into one large project.

In Reeves' study, a district worked with teachers in reteaching concepts, mainly by giving them time to do so. By teachers using the "less is more" idea, they were able to give more in depth feedback and allowed for more redos. If the majority of the class is failing a particular standard, this informs the teacher that they need to reteach or hone in on that standard, rather than hold it against the students by giving a bad grade. Reeves believes that each child will be able to learn, and that they are not just a place on the bell curve (2002).

According to the Proulx et al. study, in areas where standards-based grading has been practiced, teachers felt that it was fairer than traditional grading because the reporting of performance of standards is consistent throughout subject areas (2010). Teachers preferred the standards-based report card because of the details it provided, which communicated better to students and parents as to how the child was learning (Spencer, 2012). In one area, two schools were using many different report cards, 17 to be exact- how would that not be confusing to parents and students? It is understandable why they supported the "unified" report card (Carr and Harris, 2001).

Using the standards-based system also saves times for teachers because they are not grading homework, participation, attendance, group work, and notebooks. They only need to assess what is exactly necessary, the standards themselves. Scriffiny believes that homework should be used more as an aid to help kids be successful. Students should do homework when they need to improve on a certain standard (Scriffiny, 2008; Shippy, 2013).

Benefits to parents. Parents also experience a wide range of benefits when educators choose the standards-based grading model. The main benefit that parents experience from standards-based grading is increased clear communication on the report card. Through the reporting of standards-based grading, the feedback is more specific to parents, therefore, they get more information about their child's learning. Many researchers believe that standards-based grading report cards are a more effective way to communicate the child's progress because it says so much more than what a B+ or B- can say. The report card gives an overall grade, but also how well the student mastered each standard. Nonacademic parts count for very little or none of the grade (Guskey et al., 2011; Spencer, 2012; Proulx et al., 2012).

Benefits to students. Students experience many benefits to the standards-based grading system. One of the main benefits to standards-based grading is that the formative and summative assessments give more accurate feedback on the students' achievement (Sherer, 2001). For example, a teacher will only assess certain criteria on each given formative or summative assessment. There would be no need to include things like attendance, behavior, or timeliness- the assessments simply grade whether the child knows or does not know the standard.

Students can also see their progression over time regarding specific concepts or standards (Shippy, 2013). Standards-based grading also allows students to have a better understanding of where they're at and allows them to produce higher quality work (Scriffiny, 2008). For instance, if a student scores at "partially meets standard" on the introduction of an essay, but "meets standard" on every other category, the

student knows they need to improve only on the introduction, rather than the entire essay.

Standards-based grading provides everyone with a “college and career readiness than previously done” (Proulx et al., 2012). This is to say that each child will graduate high school ready to enter college or a professional career. Students of all levels benefit from this because advanced students can go deeper in their learning, while special education and English learner students are able to retest and try mastering learning targets throughout the year (Scriffiny, 2008; Shippy, 2013).

With traditional grading, students have a twenty-five percent chance of showing mastery on a topic by guessing on a multiple-choice test versus actually demonstrating proficiency on a test that does not require multiple-choice. Rather than having the week of anxiety during finals, teachers assess every week, always revamping their lessons and analyzing the learning that is happening. Computer based tests, and even teachers who give tests that only have one right answer, are denying the fact that a problem or question could be answered correctly in more than one way. If we want children to learn how to fill in a bubble with the right answer that was created by someone who does not teach our curriculum, then traditional assessment is valid. If we want our children to show proficiency on standards that connect to the real world, then standards-based grading is the way to go (Guskey, 2001).

What is better than a test? Real student products are better because the teacher gets a more detailed and accurate reflection of where students are succeeding and needing more guidance. Most teachers, especially those who teach

English Language Arts, get more data on their students from student product than a state test.

Assessments should not be a secret to anyone. Parents, students, and teachers should know what the expectations are and all understand the performance outcome. There should be no surprises, and assessments should not be used to put fear in students' minds (Reeves, 2002).

Another important benefit to using standards-based grading is for special education students. Guskey and Bailey state, "While product goals holds great importance in most standards-based environments, progress goals often become a major focus in evaluating the performance needs of students with special needs" (pg. 159, 2010).

Jung and Guskey (2010) go on to say that students with disabilities and English learners can be challenging for teachers to grade due to the fact that assigning a failing grade to a student who has not met state requirements but has worked hard seems unfair, while passing a student who has not met the state requirements at that grade levels also seems wrong. A grading system needs to have two main components: one, it has clearly articulated standards that are addressing a specific skill set. For example, "How well did the student master the ability to identify the plot, setting, and characters in reading passages?" Secondly, it has three criteria addressing product, process, and progress (pg. 1-2).

This type of grading system is supportive to special education students and English learners because it gives adequate feedback on where the students are at on "grade-level standards as well as essential information on behavior and progress"

(pg. 2, 2010).” It also aids in the decision making process for intervention placements.

Jung (2009) created the Five-Step Inclusive Model in order to meet the legal requirements for students with Individual Learning Plans. They are as followed:

establish clear standards for student learning that distinguish product, process, and progress goals; for each standard, determine if it needs to be adapted for the student; if adaptation is needed, determine if that adaptation requires accommodation or modification; if modification is required, develop an appropriate modified standard and assign a grade or mark based on the modified standard; note on the report card which standards have been modified.” (pg. 160-3, 2010).

How does a teacher use standards-based grading for those students who are gifted and talented, if they will clearly go above and beyond the grade level standards? A supplemental report should be done for gifted and talented students in order to accurately communicate to parents where their child is performing (Guskey and Baliey, 2010).

Guskey and Bailey say that the gifted and talented report card should have four main components, including a clear description of the learning goals, an outline of the learning tasks, a list of criteria used to evaluate students’ achievement, and a record of students’ current level of progress (pg. 166, 2010).

Summary. It is clear there are many benefits to teachers, students, and parents when using standards-based grading. The benefits to standards-based grading include a more thorough report on how a child is doing compared to the

standards. Report cards are much more detailed in order to communicate this information. Other benefits are that grades are not used as punishment or reward, and teachers think more deeply about how they grade students and plan lessons. Teachers also save time because they are grading less work- they only grade formative and summative assessments. Students are also able to show their knowledge of the standard over time and retest/redo work if need be. However, along with these benefits come some definite challenges.

Next I will discuss the barriers of standards-based grading that teachers, parents, and students face.

Barriers of Standards-Based Grading.

Teachers and parents face more struggles with standards-based grading than students because they need to have the larger mind-shift, since they have been exposed to traditional grading far longer than students have. In order to start thinking and talking about standards-based grading, schools need to be ready to discuss a teacher's entire philosophy on learning, educating, and grading (Brookhart, 2011). This in itself can be a daunting task.

Barriers for teachers. The main set backs with standards-based grading are the steps that are suggested to implement the grading system bring increased stress level due to the extra work for teachers and staff members. The time commitment can be overwhelming for educators to learn, as they already have a lot on their plates (Guskey and Baliey, 2001; Gusky, 2001; Spencer, 2012). The way standards-based grading is reported out can be challenging as well due to the amount of information that needs to be communicated (Guskey, 2001).

Many teachers do not have adequate training or knowledge of grading and effective grading practices (Guskey, 2004). Training teachers on all aspects of standards-based grading is crucial, and must be done before the school year begins. Training should include the philosophy and research behind standards-based grading as well as the specifics for implementation. In the Proulx et al. study, teachers who were trained after the year began were more engaged with the trainings. Trainings should continue throughout the year, and there should also be a point person to chat with about teachers' struggles. There also needs to be time and support for administrators and teachers so that implementation does not become inconsistent (2012).

What teachers need in order to be successful with standards-based grading are assessment strategies that allow for different ways to assess learning, coaching strategies that allow teachers and administration to help one another in this process, differentiation to adjust assessments that meet the needs of all students, and modification of standards in order to adapt standards to meet all students, above and below grade level (Brookheart, 2011).

According to Proulx et al. (2012) some teachers did not like standards-based grading because they could not use grades to punish or reward students. This made teachers change the way they planned lessons, and the teaching became more meaningful to students. Though this was classified as a barrier to those teachers, it ends up being a benefit to the students.

Some teachers also did not like giving students multiple times to master a standard. Guskey et al. (2011) noted that standards-based grading does not include

behavior on the report card, but educators felt it should be mentioned somewhere in the report.

Technology compatibility has also been a problem in some cases. In a study that took place in Kentucky, teachers were not able to fully implement standards-based grading because the technology did not support the report card (Guskey et al., 2011). Another school reported that in standards-based grading trend scoring (using the mode rather than the median) is more accurate, but the grade book system did not allow proper and clear communication. Once proper software is in place, they plan on using it (Proulx et al., 2012; O'Connor, 2002).

Barriers for parents and students. The report card can also be an issue for parents and students when implementing standards-based grading. First off, the report card can be very complex. It can become too much for parents and students to read (Guskey, 2001). For example, an English Language Arts card can be divided into four sections, and there can be up to five individual reports for one class depending on the standards being assessed (Guskey et al., 2011). Teachers could divide the report card into the four overarching standards- reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Then, within each category, there fall several specific standards. Unless one is familiar with *all* the standards, this can be overwhelming.

Students and parents need time to adjust to and understand the new grading system (Scriffiny, 2008). According to Guskey, parents were overwhelmed with the amount of information on the report card. Parents did not like how overwhelming it was to read a standards-based report card with all different grades for one class.

Part of the problem is that the Common Core State Standards are written comprehensively and need to be reworded on the report card (2001).

The report card might not communicate the accurate score in the parents' and students' minds if there has not been training that teaches the breakdown of the standards-based report card. For example, 1s and 2s might alarm parents in the beginning of the year, but with standards-based grading, most students will not be at or above grade level on many standards as they just entered the grade (Guskey, 2001). When using the four point scale, parents believe that their child should be scoring high (3s and 4s) in all areas all the time, and feel that their child is not doing well if they score in the 1s or 2s in the beginning of the year. However, it is quite accurate for a student to score this way in the beginning of the year since they are just learning the standard. One way to change this mindset is to explain to parents that the grades indicate progress toward an end-of-year learning standard and is done over time (Guskey and Baliey, 2011).

Guskey and Bailey claim that parents need to know how the level of performance represented compares to the learning expectations that have been established for that particular grade level (2011). This means that parents have to do some extra work to understand how their child is performing, which could be frustrating as it takes time.

Another thing that makes it hard for parents to understand a standards-based report card is they were graded with norm-referenced grading as students, and do not understand any other system. Some parents have suggested that the

standards be linked to a percentage in order to better understand the 4-point grade scale (Guskey, 2011).

A third issue on the report card is that it may not accurately say how the student is performing. Parents need to understand, “the level of achievement compared to the learning expectation for the grade” (Guskey, 2011, pg. 26).

Communication and planning with parents should happen in the beginning of the school year, and then throughout as needed. There should also be a place where parents can express their thoughts and questions. Because standards-based grading should be communicated through newsletters, conferences, and family nights, this takes more time for teachers to plan and implement, and also time for parents to understand and reflect upon (Proulx et al., 2012).

Another thing parents did not like, and some teachers agree with, was that students were allowed to retest too much. They felt that in the real world that might not always be the case. They also wanted homework graded, and in a standards-based classroom teachers do not grade homework since it is considered practice toward the standard (Spencer, 2012).

Summary The barriers of standards-based grading mainly revolve around the time necessary to implement and understand the system. Since many parents and teachers themselves were graded the traditional way, learning this new system takes time. Some have complained about the intensity of the report card, and that it is too difficult to read due to the amount of information on the report. Some parents and teachers did not like the fact that students could redo work in order to meet the standard. Some also felt that homework and participation should be a part of

students' grades. Lastly, technology can be a problem if systems cannot report out standards-based grading clearly. In the following section I will discuss how to implement standards-based grading at the district, school, and classroom levels.

How to Implement Standards-Based Grading

Districts and schools that are interested in moving to standards-based grading have a large challenge facing them as they implement this new idea. In an ideal world, this implementation would start at the district level, which will have a firm understanding of standards-based grading and be supportive, and then go school-wide to classroom-wide.

There is something for everyone to partake in, including superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, and students. Educators need to contemplate three questions before considering standards-based grading:

- Do the standards embody the skills and knowledge that we would like our students to have?
- Are teachers consistently using standards to guide classroom instruction?
- Are assessments purposefully aligned with standards and instruction?

(Colby, 1999, pg. 52)

The following sections will articulate what the district, principals, and classroom teachers can do in order to successfully implement standards-based grading.

District-wide. There are many ways that the district can support schools and teachers in the implementation of standards-based grading. All stake holders in education need to work together to make it a successful implementation (Guskey, 2001).

One way that the district can ensure that standards-based grading works successfully is having it be a part of the conversation when hiring new people to the district- all the way from superintendent to teachers (Reeves, 2002). Reeves also states that a pilot program is a way to get standards-based grading rolling, and it is implemented most effectively when it comes from the teachers, parents, and principals, with the support of the superintendent (2002). "The use of pilot programs gives the district leadership the opportunity to provide public recognition and rewards for those who are leaders in the standards movement" (Reeves, 2002, pg.66).

Reeves (2002) also mentions that having a pilot program allows bugs to be worked out, which in turn lowers the costs due to errors in the long run. The superintendent needs to allot time for principals and teachers to meet two to four hours monthly outside their planning or prep time in order to successfully implement the program.

The superintendent, as the educational leader, should also be able to clearly articulate what standards-based grading is. Ideally this leader would also take time in the classroom and be able to teach a standards-based lesson or two (Reeves, 2002).

Proulx et al. (2012) says another way the district can help is that the union should be involved with the implementation process. This way they can aid in the training and support for teachers and students.

In one study where standards-based grading was implemented, the district worked with teachers understanding and developing the concept of reteaching,

mainly giving them time to do so. By teachers using the “less is more” idea, they were able to give more in depth feedback and allowed for more redos. The district needs to support teachers in doing this (Proulx et al., 2012).

School-wide. There are several steps that a principal can do to support standards-based grading in their school. Administrators can support by observing teachers using the new grading system in their classroom. They should be observing what is happening, and remember what it is like to be a teacher. By doing this, he/she may remember what is important, and know that teachers work hard to get their kids to where they need to be. They are suggested to get mentors for teachers who are struggling or resisting to this new method of grading. This implementation process is something that takes teamwork (Colby, 1999; Reeves, 2002).

Reeves also gives a long list of suggestions to help a principal implement standards-based grading at his/her school. First, he suggests that the principal become familiar with the standards at their school. They also need to encourage staff to be familiar with the standards and those grade levels above and below the ones they teach at. Where do they expect the students to be when they enter their room? Where do they want them to be? What will exemplary look like? Principals also need to share the standards with the parents.

Principals should identify strong and trustworthy faculty leaders to head up the standards-based change that is going to happen at the school. These people do not need to be the ones who usually lead professional development, but rather teachers who are looked up to by other staff members. If there are extra funds, pay them. They will most definitely need collaboration time. The principal also needs to

make sure that he/she is showing his/her appreciation for those members (Reeves, 2002).

According to Reeves, the professional development that is led around standards-based grading needs to be run by the teachers on the team. There is not a one-size-fits-all professional development, but rather, there should be different levels of it based on how much knowledge and experience teachers have doing it. The standards-based training needs to be differentiated for teachers, just like teachers do in their own classrooms. After two years of staff training, everyone should have had a good start to all the standards-based grading (2002).

Finally, Reeves (2002) suggests that principals need to give teachers one month to administer a standards-based assessment, and then incorporate that into the professional development. If schools want to show policy makers, parents, and other stakeholders that they do not need to standardize tests in April, then demonstrate how standards-based assessments work year-round, and supports student learning. Also, this will eliminate the “week of terror” that is associated with weeklong tests, or finals.

Carr and Harris (2001) have a thirteen-step process that the principal should do to successfully implement a standards-based grading report card:

- Create a committee at the school that is going to work on creating standards-based reporting system. The committee should include 6-10 people.
- Give professionals 3-5 full days in order to revamp the report card. Once the report card has been revamped, pilot it. During the piloting time, set aside meeting times throughout the process to discuss and continue revamping.

- Create norms for the meetings.
- Figure out what will qualify as an acceptable report card. What do you want in it? How will you know it works?
- Figure as a team what the report card is to communicate to parents, students, and teachers themselves. Remember, the report card gives the students success compared against the standard, not others.
- Decide what is positive about the current report card and extrapolate those positives from the current system and see if it doesn't fit with the new idea. Take a look at standards-based report cards from other districts and find the positives from those report cards. From all the observations made, make a list of the qualities that are important to your school. Also, consider making a list of things that people do not want on their report card.
- Design a mock up of the report card. List pros and cons of the mock up.
- Summarize standards to be scored. The report card does not need to include all the standards listed, as it should be a summary. Other standards not on the report card can be communicated a different way.
- Figure out what you want the report to include- percentages, letters, comment section, etc. The standards-based report card is a place to report more information to the students and parent on their learning. The scale suggested is because “students do not meet the standards for several years”:
 - 4= consistently exceeds expectations related to the standard
 - 3= Meets expectations related to the standard

- 2= Progressing towards meeting expectations related to the standard
- 1= Does not meet expectations related to the standard (page 109)
- Share the report card with others on the standards-based committee (parents, staff, administrators, about 10 other people). Their feedback should connect to the success list that was created in step 4. Make adjustments as needed from this step.
- Pilot the report card. Perhaps only the standards-based committee will pilot it, or the whole school at once will. In addition to piloting the new report card, more time needs to be allotted for teachers to fill it out, parents/students to give feedback, and for technological issues to be worked out.
- Allocate time for last revisions.
- Reflect on the process. Think about how to move forward. What will happen when technological issues arise? The main goal is to keep communication open between all participants, and participation from all involved.

Overall, educators need to decide what they want their grades to say before they choose a system (Guskey, 2001).

Professional development needs to shift from what the teachers need to what the students need. Student work should be a part of the professional development, as the analysis of their work will drive what the professional development will be about. The school needs to decide who is in charge, who will make sure the work gets done, and who is responsible for quality control (Carr and Harris, 2001).

Principals should also recognize those teachers who are going above and beyond and really getting kids engaged in education. The more they recognize teachers, the more power they are giving to those teachers. The best way to move forward is to look to see how far the staff has come, and use that to encourage everyone to keep going. Articulate your expectations and know that the first steps could be long, but are still rewarding (Reeves, 2002).

Finally, Guskey and Bailey (2001) suggest four steps for teachers to do as a department or grade-level team to incorporate standards-based grading. First, teachers should decide at each grade level and within each content what they want the students to achieve. These goals often come from the Common Core State Standards. Second, teachers need to decide what evidence is going to be gathered to show how students are performing. Third, teachers need to create different levels of quality work that show how the students are performing against the benchmarks. This shows how the students are achieving towards the standard. Finally, teachers should choose a communication tool to explain how a student is achieving at each standard.

Classroom-wide. Once the school has an idea of how they want to implement standards-based grading, teachers can do several things. One way teachers communicated how to understand standards-based grading was at Back to School night and also through newsletters (Colby, 1999).

In the beginning of the year, teachers need to do a handful of tasks to prepare them for the standards-based grading model. Schimmer (2014) states that if a teacher is still using percentage increments, then standards-based grading has not

been set in place. Teachers must first begin with changing their mindsets if they want to reform grading. Grading reform begins from within, then works its way out. If teachers do not want it to work, they will not let it be successful. Changing over to this new grading style becomes less daunting if the mind is already set to do it. In fact, a school or technology does not need to be standards-based “friendly” for a teacher to begin this grading process (pg. 11).

Some teachers start standards-based grading before the rest of the school has implemented it. Educators should not get caught up with details about standards-based grading, but rather think about the main issue- what do you want the grade to say? (Brookhart, 2011).

Teachers need the right tools in order to successfully implement standards-based grading (Sherer, 2001). Sherer also states that there is not enough time to teach all the standards that are required for each content, at each grade level. There needs to be a system created to help teachers communicate the standards being assessed. She believes that standards-based grading will help us do this (2001).

Teachers can start by using the learning targets to guide their teaching. Connecting standards to the report card will be more valuable for parents, students, and teachers (Shippy, 2013; Carr & Harris, 2001).

I have seen this first-hand at my school. Teachers are working together to grade the standards-based way, but the grade book system is not even close to being ready for full implementation. Teachers are getting creative on how they can communicate what they want the grade to say by creating their own grade scales.

It is important to start the year by giving details about the verbiage of categories of a standards-based report card using the 1-4 scale in order to be clear. It's important to have similar reporting across grades and contents in order to avoid confusion amongst the students. It's helpful to also have a section for comments, Guskey suggests (2001).

Throughout the year, teachers can do several things to keep standards-based grading afloat and well developed for students and parents. Shimmer states that if teachers want students to show that they are meeting the standards to high expectations, then teachers need to be a part of the assessment process. Once assessments linked with standards are in place, teachers can then modify what they need for each student. This should be going on year-round (2014).

Teachers should not include things that are not related to the standards because then grades lose their meaning to the student. This creates a learning-only mindset. Teachers should give students full credit on assignments no matter how long it took them to finish the work. We are not grading on learning *and* speed. We need to value when students have gained new knowledge, and new knowledge has replaced the old, so this should be accepted (Guskey, 2001).

Homework then becomes more formative rather than summative, and practice for students (Guskey, 2001). Reassessment should also take place, as learning can always grow. Learning should never be optional; therefore, the old process of making certain things punitive (late work, zeroes, etc.) does not work. Teachers can create a separate column to show how students are being responsible.

Guskey and Baliey (2001) state that rather than using solely product, process, or progress criteria, teachers should report all parts of a child's education, but separately. That being, skill, work ethic, or behavior is separate from assessments. Again, this is done throughout the school year (see Appendix B).

In another instance, a study by Prouix et al., analyzed how grades changed when switching over to standards-based grading. The grades decreased because extra credit was no longer allowed and assessments became more rigorous. As time went on everyone became more comfortable with standards-based grading, and grades became more meaningful and accurate (2012).

Because standards-based grading is more effective and authentic, students begin to gain confidence in the feedback, practices, and learnings they are experiencing. If we persist with the old practices in grading, comparing students to one another rather than to the standard, we will never build up confidence in children as learners (Shimmer, 2014).

Reeves (2001) says that in order to implement standards-based grading teachers need to be piloting their ideas in the classrooms, and then meeting with colleagues to discuss their findings. One-stop workshops are not the answer- the teachers need to be the ones leading the professional development and learning from one another. It's important to see how students are understanding and dealing with a new grading system as well. Teams should meet quarterly to discuss the progress, thus the professional development is ongoing and fluid.

Once grading time is underway, there are tasks teachers need to remember in order to successfully implement standards-based grading. Wormeli says that

when teachers start working within the grade book that they should record an F or S to distinguish which assessments are formative or summative. This way all involved can see how the student did leading up to the summative assignment. If the assignment covers more than one standard, the teacher can put the grade in twice under two different standards. This gives the students more specific feedback for each standards met (2006).

Teachers also need to decide how they are going to record scores for the students. The codes are done to assign what type of assessments will be done, and how each assessment will be coded with proficiency, in progress, or not yet demonstrated proficiency (Colby, 1999).

Some teachers still marked for separate categories like work habits, responsibility, and behavior (Guskey et al. 2011). In one instance, the grade was formed where one box informs of the grade for the content, and within that box teachers can give up to 6 grades for each standards. There is another box that shows non-academic grades like homework, tardiness, etc. Overall, teachers wanted to reward kids for gaining knowledge on a topic no matter the time it took (Spencer, 2012).

Easy access to students' reports is important, as teachers should be assessing (formally and informally) throughout each class period. When implementing a new grading system, it's important to be observant and make changes and adjustments along the way, since at times things may not work out (Colby, 1999).

Summary When implementing standards-based grading, there are steps that should be taken at the district level, school level, and classroom level. The best way

to go about tackling this large task is to set up a committee of teachers, administrators, and parents who are genuinely interested in the endeavor. From there, there should be constant adjusting, communicating, and processing with the new system. Teachers should lead the professional development once the new report card and system has been piloted. Administrators should expect that all staff be trained over a two-year time span.

Conclusion

Traditional grading has been a way of assessing students for years, but as research shows is not the best approach to accurately grading students on their knowledge of the content or standards. Through standards-based grading students, families, and educators can more accurately provide feedback on how students perform on each content standard.

Though switching over to this grading scale is quite the endeavor, in the long run it provides better feedback for students, and allows them to master standards in a more fair and principled way. Superintendents, principals, teachers, and families need to work together in order for a successful implementation of standards-based grading to work. Doing so is in the best interest of the students and teachers.

In Chapter Three I will discuss the methods I will use in creating tools around standards-based grading. I will discuss the setting, participants, and methods that will need to be in place in order to be clear on what standards-based grading is, and how it can look in a middle school English Language Arts classroom.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Introduction

The question, *how can standards-based grading be implemented into an English Language Arts classroom in order to give more accurate feedback of students' achievement*, came to me after I was unable to clearly communicate why I felt a student should attend summer school, even though they received a “B” in my class. After many discussions with colleagues who use standards-based grading, I decided it was time I look further into this new way of grading.

My research on standards-based grading versus traditional grading led me to many findings. Guskey states that standards-based grading is where the student's performance is graded against the performance descriptors, or standards, and then the student receives a score based on how they perform against the standard (2001). I discovered that a teacher does not need to wait for his/her school or district to implement this novel way of grading, but can start it within his/her own classroom. The amount of time that a teacher should expect to implement standards-based grading is a few years, as it takes time to work out all the complications that may arise, things such as technology, communication, and accuracy. Reeves suggests that it takes up to two years to implement standards-based grading affectively in order to train staff appropriately (2002).

In this chapter I will describe the setting where I teach. This description will outline the school I teach in as well as my own classroom. My goal is to design tools that will support standards-based grading. Some of the tools that I designed are the

formative and summative assessments for one of my primary units in my 5th grade classroom; this unit centers around the novel *Tuck Everlasting*. I also created a brochure and PowerPoint presentation to help staff, parents, and students better understand standards-based grading. The presentation will also be used for curriculum night that happens each fall at my school, to further explain how grading is done in the Language Arts class. Finally, I also included a new tab on my website that will inform anyone who wishes to explore this grading style further.

Setting

I teach in a large urban district that is made up of 35,373 students and 3,113 teachers. There are forty-two elementary/K-8 schools, seven middle schools, and nine high schools. The demographics of the district are: 36.9% Black, 33.1% White, 18.5% Hispanic, 7.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 4.3% American Indian/Alaska Native. It's clear from these statistics that the district is very diverse, as is true of most urban districts. The number of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch is at 64%.

Currently, the district is going through some major leadership changes that have greatly affected teachers, specifically the Information Technology Services (ITS) department, and the secondary English Language Arts (ELA) department. In the last two years the IT department was mostly "fresh started" when a new Chief Executive restructured the department. Many professionals were let go or left the district, leaving teachers and media specialists with little technology guidance and assistance. That Chief Executive stepped down this fall, leaving the district with a temporary executive.

The secondary ELA department leads have changed each year for the last three years. Many leads created and recreated parts of the new curriculum that is to be implemented across district called Focused Instruction. Communication within and across the department district-wide has been non-existent, leaving many teachers frustrated with the district's expectations of them and their students. Currently, there are three novice teachers who have never taught in the district running the secondary ELA department. The reading department leads also left, which resulted in the combining of secondary English Languages Arts department and the K-12 Reading department.

Most recently, the superintendent stepped down mid-year, putting a temporary person in place for the remainder of the year. There is no known information as to who will take that position next year, along with the new ITS lead position. I mention these three leadership changes as they have direct impact on my work in implementing standards-based grading in my language arts curriculum.

Student test scores from 2014 MCA-III in reading district-wide are 42.4% were proficient, while 76.8% were proficient in reading at my school. The state's level of proficiency in reading is 58.8%.

There is currently one school in the district that has a mandate by the principal to use standards-based grading. All other schools and teachers use it at their discretion. This school was started after a fresh start, and the principal was able to create his own criteria. It is a 1:1 iPad school, which will also become a Community Partnership School.

The school where I work, which is a 5-8 middle school, has the following demographics: 71.5% White, 16.1% Black, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 5.4% Hispanic, and 1% American Indian/Alaska Native. By special population we have 1.7% English Learners, 14.8% special education, and 21% free and reduced lunch.

The staff make up of the school is: 55.1% teachers, 1.9% media specialists, 9.1% other licensed professionals, 4.7% administration, and 11.2% other staff including non-licensed employees. Of the teacher make up, 78.8% have their Master's degree and 21.3% have a Bachelor's degree. 72.4% of teachers have ten or more years experience, 22.4% have 3-10 years experience, and 5.2% have three or less years of experience. At the school there are 24 total licensed teachers and 30 total staff (including non-licensed).

In addition to the core classes, our school has a strong music program that a majority of students participate in during the school day. We offer Spanish, French, and World Cultures classes for the teaching of foreign languages, but as a specialist class. Specialists also include art, media technology, physical education, and AVID. Each student in the school is also enrolled in an intervention class for math and reading called Basic Enrichment Skills Time (BEST). Whether the student is above, at, or below grade level, one hour a day they work on improving their math and reading skills. This class switches between an "A" and "B" day.

Our principal has offered a handful of opportunities to staff since I have worked there to learn more about standards-based grading. Since he is actively involved in the Minnesota Middle School Association, he has provided funding and substitutes for teachers to attend conferences throughout the school year and

summer. Many of these conferences are around standards-based grading. He also purchased the text *How to Grade for Learning* by Ken O'Connor for the staff in order to better understand this grading model. Because of this support, many teachers have adjusted their grading to meet some of the requirements of standards-based grading. No teacher is required to use this model, and currently, several teachers have created a hybrid model of traditional grading and standards-based grading. Presently, no teacher on my 5th grade team is using standards-based grading with fidelity.

Participants

I teach four sections of 5th grade English Language Arts, and one section of a reading intervention class, or the BEST class. My English Language Arts class is a 54-minute daily block where each day varies depending on the unit that is being taught.

I teach four units throughout the year: tall tales, *Locomotion* by Jacqueline Woodson, *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt, and *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowery. In the past I have also taught other novels, so my units are not tied to these specific texts, but rather a scaffolding of the standards. The units are created around the Common Core State Standards, along with the district's disciplinary literacy model that I was trained in years ago. I include reading, writing, speaking, and listening into all units. I also use some type of technology in each unit- mainly ChromeBooks as that is the cart our department was given. Other resources that I use in each unit are shared inquiry discussions (some from *Great Books*), *Write Source*, and *Reader's Handbook*.

In the reading intervention class I see two different groups that rotate on a “black” and “teal” schedule, similar to an “A”/ “B” day. My core classes range from 30-36 students, while my intervention class is between 24-26 students. In the intervention class, or BEST class, I teach the “at grade level” students (or “proficient”), and try to move them into the “exceeding” standards.

In my classes I have a total of 130 students; 104 are White, 21 Black, 3 Asian, and 1 Native American/Pacific Islander. There are a total of 4 EL students, 57 Gifted and Talented students, and 12 Special Education students.

Methods

I created tools to better assess my students on where they are at for each standard in the unit that centers around the novel *Tuck Everlasting*. The rubrics are based on standards-based grading. A large part of my created work is informational, and many components have been translated into student-friendly language. I want students and parents to fully understand the rubrics I will be using and be able to explain it to someone else. The idea is to provide families and students with better feedback on the standards that are being targeted for each unit. Wiggings (1998) says,

Feedback is information about how a person did in light of what he or she attempted- intent versus effect, actual versus ideal performance...feedback is evidence that confirms or disconfirms the correctness of actions. The best feedback is highly specific, directly revealing or highly descriptive of what actually resulted, clear to the performer, and available or offered in terms of specific targets and standards (pg. 46).

I also built a new tab on my website titled “standards-based grading” which explains the research and benefits of this grading style. I also revamped my grade book so that it allows me to better communicate standards-based grading to parents and students. Finally, I made a brochure and presentation that will be used during Back to School night and conferences to help parents understand this new grading system. This is my main focus since my other 5th grade team members will not be grading using standards-based grading.

Rubrics. Wiggins states that a rubric is a tool with guidelines used to assess student work. Being specific in the rubric is crucial so students know what they will be assessed on. Rubrics should have criteria that are meaningful and should be based off the standards. Finally, Wiggins reminds teachers that student self-assessment can be done much easier with a rubric, as students are able to judge where they fall on each standard (Wiggins, 1998).

Brochure and Website. The brochures are to be taken home so parents can read more on standards-based instruction. I included benefits to the system, the grading scale and descriptors, along with research that supports this grading model. These will be given out at Back to School night, conferences, curriculum night, and available for download on my website.

On my website I created an additional tab titled “standards-based grading.” This tab has a variety of research, including research and a presentation by Rick Wormeli. I have also included what learning targets I will be assessing throughout the year, the grading scale, and information on the Student Action Retake Plan. All handouts are also available for download.

PowerPoint presentation. I created a short presentation about six minutes long that hit the major points regarding standards-based grading. This was developed with curriculum night in mind; this is a one-time event in September where parents come and practice their child's schedule, and sit in each class for seven minutes. In each class parents learn about the grading scale, curriculum, and other "need to knows" for that classroom. For my presentation I will include why I am doing this, research that supports it, and grade scale visuals.

Since I am the only one on my grade level team who has committed to the use of standards-based grading, I need to make this presentation quick and to the point so parents don't feel in the dark when it comes to reading the report card for English Language Arts. This presentation will also be posted on my website for future reference.

Student-friendly posters. I designed student-friendly posters and will post them in the room. These posters will enable students to use them as a quick reference. I believe that the first time students get a grade back on a formal assessment, they will need a reference point to understand what the number they receive means.

Binder inserts. At our school we practice AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), so binder organization is checked, and students are held to a high standard for an organized binder. I created an insert that will go in the English Language Arts section, which students can refer back to if they are unsure of what a grade means. They will keep this in their binder year round.

Summary

I teach in a large urban district that serves thousands of students. Currently the district is going through some considerable leadership changes, which have affected my content. My school is not an accurate reflection of the district, as we are not as diverse. My classes are large, ranging from 30-36 students, and I teach four sections of 5th grade English Language Arts and one intervention class.

I created tools around standards-based grading, and will develop rubrics, a brochure, a PowerPoint presentation, a poster, and binder inserts in order to support teachers, parents, and students on the understanding of standards-based grading. I also plan on adding a section to my website that will explain what it is along with research. All the tools I created I will upload to my website.

These tools should help answer my question, *how can standards-based grading be implemented into an English Language Arts classroom in order to give more accurate feedback of students' achievement*. In Chapter Four I will display the created tools to help move my standards-based assessment forward.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

My research on standards-based grading led me to examine the issues with traditional grading. For example, if a student does better than his/her peer on a standard, but still does not meet the standard proficiently, they are considered to be performing in the top tier (Reeves, 2002). Further research on the benefits and challenges to standards-based grading lead me to the question *how can standards-based grading be implemented into an English Language Arts classroom in order to give more accurate feedback of students' achievement*. The literature review proved that though switching over to a standards-based grading scale can be challenging, it is better because it provides better feedback for students, and allows them to master standards in a fair and principle way. Because of this, I became inspired to create tools for my classroom for when I am ready for implementation.

In the following sections I will discuss the tools I created for my classroom around standards-based grading, and items made specifically for my unit on *Tuck Everlasting*. These include rubrics, a brochure, a PowerPoint presentation, a student-friendly poster, and a binder insert. All of these tools have been developed for implementation in the fall of the 2015-2016 school year.

As I worked on this project, I thought about what I was teaching during the *Tuck Everlasting* unit, and created four standards-based rubrics that I would need in order to accurately articulate to students what qualified as meeting standards at grade level, what was exceeding, and what was not meeting.

The other tools that I created were communication tools that will help my students and parents who are unfamiliar with standards-based grading. These tools are intended to provide a better idea of what it is, why I use this type of grading, and what they need to know about the grading process. The PowerPoint presentation and the brochure will be discussed and handed out at Back-to-School night as well as Curriculum Night. Since there will not be enough time for me to answer questions for each parent at each of these events, I also designed a standards-based grading tab on my website allowing parents to explore further. On the website I will have specifics about standards-based grading that pertain to my classroom, as well as research and articles on why it is used. In the following sections I will discuss each tool, its purpose, and the rationale behind it, as well as my thoughts about the process.

Rubrics

I created four standards-based rubrics for the *Tuck Everlasting* unit. These rubrics are centered around three formative assessments and one summative assessment that I teach throughout the unit. The three formative assessments are vocabulary word work (Appendix C), response to literature (Appendix D), and propaganda project (Appendix E), while the summative assessment is a choice project where students are to compare and contrast characters, settings, or events from the text (Appendix F). Each rubric will contain the standard at the top written as a student-friendly learning target. Shippy (2013) and Carr and Harris (2001) state that teachers can start by using the learning targets to guide their teaching. The rubrics are just one part of the assignment; the students also received a

handout with directions on what to do for each assignment. Rubrics are stapled to the final work. Connecting the standards to the assignments will be more valuable for parents, students, and teachers.

Vocabulary word work. Vocabulary word work (Appendix C) is done throughout this unit in order to meet the standards 5.10.4.4(a) “Use context as clue to the meaning of a word or phrase” and 5.10.6.6. “Acquire and use accurately grade appropriate general academic and domain specific words and phrases, including those that signal contrast, addition, and other logical relationships.” This standard is written as a learning target: I can use 5th grade vocabulary appropriately with context clues.

The process I use to choose the vocabulary is I pick eight to ten words from about five chapters that are challenging words for 5th grade. There are five different vocabulary assignments that are chunked by chapters: prologue through Chapter Four, Chapter Five through Chapter Eight, Chapter Nine through Chapter Twelve, Chapter Thirteen through Chapter Twenty-One, and Chapter Twenty-Two through Epilogue.

I give the students either a comic book template or a short story template, where they are to use the words in a story, giving context clues either with pictures or words. In order to receive a four on the assignment, students are to use all words correctly with context clues. A three is students use six words correctly with context clues. A two is that students use five or less words with context clues, though some clues do not make sense. A one would be that the student did not use the correct number of words and no context clues are given. This assignment is done as

homework, and students who need more support attend a study hall time during advisory for direct instruction.

The rubric helps students know exactly how they can achieve the grade they want, along with using the words correctly and include context clues. I enjoyed making this rubric because it is one I can use throughout the school year, not just during this particular unit.

Response to literature. This assignment (Appendix D) meets the standards 5.1.1.1 “Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing on inferences from the text, 5.6.1.1 “Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information”, and 5.10.2.2 “Demonstrate command of the conventions of standards English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.” The main goal of this activity is to get students citing evidence from the text to support their opinions. The student-friendly learning target is: I can cite evidence from the text to support my opinion.

There are two responses to literature assignments in this unit, which use the same rubric. The two questions students must answer are, “Did Mae handle the situation in Chapter Nineteen appropriately? Use evidence from the text to support your opinion”, which is complete after Chapter Nineteen is read. After students complete this response to literature, we participate in a shared inquiry discussion on the topic. Another prompt is, “What symbol in *Tuck Everlasting* is most important to understanding the story, and why? Use Evidence from the text to support your opinion”, which is completed at the end of the story.

At this point in the year most students are able to complete both responses to literature independently. I have been teaching responding to literature throughout the first two units as a whole group, giving explicit instruction as to how a reader goes about pulling appropriate evidence from the text, and combining that with their opinions. In the unit prior to *Tuck Everlasting*, students had four responses to literature where they received a template that provided much more guidance with organization and how to cite evidence from the text. During this unit's responses to literature, I pulled a small group of students who I knew needed additional support, and guided them on how to complete the task. The small group consisted of about four special education students in each class.

I find this particular rubric valuable to my teaching because, like the vocabulary word work unit, I can use it for any response to literature during any unit. By quarter three, when this unit is taught, students are familiar with the expectations of how a writer should respond to literature, combining their opinions with evidence from the text.

Propaganda project. The propaganda project (Appendix E) is an extension of the *Tuck Everlasting* unit. This project covers the standard 5.8.7.7. (a) "Make informed judgments about messages promoted in the mass media (e.g. film, television, radio, magazines, advertisements, newspapers). I have connected this standard with this unit because of the connect it has to the plot of *Tuck Everlasting*. The character of the man in the yellow suit wants to sell the immortality water in order to make money, so I teach how propaganda is used in today's time. Students learn about seven different propaganda techniques, and then they are to find a piece

of real propaganda in their own lives- print, commercial, or radio. They then describe the ad, what type of propaganda is used, and make a personal connection to the ad.

Summative compare and contrast essay. This summative assessment comes at the very end of the *Tuck Everlasting* unit, and is the final project (Appendix F). This assessment is centered around the standard 5.1.3.3 “Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text.” Other standards that are also assessed are, 5.6.4.4 “Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience, 5.6.5.5 “Use guidance and support of peers and adults, use a writing process to develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, drafting, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying new approach, 5.6.9.9 “Draw evidence from literary or information texts to support analysis, reflection, and research” and 5.10.2.2 “Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.”

Students are given small check-points to complete before the final draft is due, including a brainstorm, outline of the essay, peer edit, and then final publication. I make myself available for small group instruction for the duration of this assignment. I open the group up to any student who would like specific questions answered or guidance throughout the writing process. I prefer this method because I get an array of students each day, not just students who perform below standards.

Conclusion. All rubrics are very important to the teaching of each standard in the unit because they help guide students to success. Students are able to decide which grade they are aiming for, exceeds standards or meets standards. At the same time students are skilled in identifying missing elements of their work if they received a two or one on any particular standard. This then leads the student to complete a Student Action Retake Plan, and improve upon the missing elements of their work. The rubric work I have done for this unit encourages me to do the same for the other three units I teach throughout the year because of success students can achieve with clear expectations.

Brochure and Website

The brochure (Appendix G) is a take-home-tool for parents to have in order to better understand standards-based grading. During open house and Curriculum Night I have very little time to talk to each family about specific questions regarding my course content, so providing parents/guardians with a brochure allows me to give out more information to a larger body of attendants, and at the same time make sure I talk to each family that comes to each event.

The first leaflet discusses what the research says about standards-based grading. I have decided to use the Tierney et al. study that states that the motive behind standards-based grading is to compare student work to the grade-level standard that needs to be met. Therefore, students are not compared to one another, but simply to the standard they are to master (2011). I have also cited Shippy (2013) who says that standards-based grading simply measures the mastery of the content. Guskey (2001) also mentions that if we want our children to show

proficiency on standards that connect to the real world, then standards-based grading is the way to go. Finally, the last piece of research that I included in the brochure states that through the reporting of standards-based grading, the feedback is more specific to parents, therefore, they get more information about their child's learning. Many researchers believe that standards-based grading report cards are a more effective way to communicate the child's progress because it says so much more than what a "B+" or "B-" can say. The report card gives an overall grade, but also how well the student mastered each standard. Nonacademic parts count for very little or none of the grade (Guskey, et al., 2011; Spencer, 2012; Proulx et al., 2012). All of this research comes from my literature review, and sums up nicely what standards-based grading is and why teachers use it.

Inside the brochure is a question and answer section that address common questions people new to standards-based grading have. The five questions addressed are "What is standards-based grading", "Why use standards-based grading?", "Who benefits from it?", "Who are some researchers who support it?", and "Can my child redo any assignment?" I answered these questions with short and to-the-point responses that came from my research.

I also included the English Language Arts Standards-Based Grading Scale in the centerfold as an easy access tool for parents to refer back to. This breaks the 100-point grade scale down into the five categories students can fall into: exceeds, meets, partially meets, does not meet, or no evidence.

Lastly, on the back of the brochure is my website address that provides further reading material for any parent interested in knowing more about

standards-based grading. Along with the brochure being available on Curriculum Night, I plan on having the brochures available at conferences, when I have more time with families.

I also plan on sharing this with the department so they have this resource on standards-based grading during the same school-wide events. The brochure can be shared across grade levels as it is simply explaining what it is, why it is used, and how it affects the students and parents at our school within the English Language Arts department.

My website (Appendix H) has also been updated with a new tab labeled “SBG” for standards-based grading. The website is referred to in the brochure as a resource for parents to read more on this grading system if they have more inquiries.

The “SBG” tab consists of the language arts grade scale, the ten learning targets that will be assessed throughout the year, and the student action retake policy and form for download. These resources are discussed with parents during the Back to School night, Curriculum Night, and conferences.

I also have included additional research that I found valuable for the understanding of standards-based grading. Young Teacher Love’s blog is linked which provides easy-to-understand explanation and breakdowns of standard-based grading for 5th grade specifically. I included a write up and little video from the website Teach Train Love, which gives an overview with visuals on what standards-based grading is. There is also an article from ASCD.org titled “Seven Reasons for Standards-based Grading” by Patricia L. Scriffny that provides parents with reasons to support this type of grading. Another resource is a video clip from Stenhouse

Publishers where Rick Wormeli discusses standards-based grading. This video is a nice summary on the same information I received at the conference I went to with my colleagues the summer of 2013. Finally, the last resource I put on my website is an article from Dr. Wilda, an educator who wrote a blog post titled, "The Use of Standards-Based Grading is Growing." This particular article is pertinent to my website because it discusses a school in my district who has switched over fully to this type grading system. I also like that it discusses some cons to standards-based grading, because I want parents to be aware that there will be some snafus along the way.

I am especially excited to have these tools available during Back to School night, Curriculum Night, and conferences because I know how little time I will have, and how many questions there will be since I am the only teacher on the team using this grading system. Since standards-based grading is somewhat similar to how students are graded in elementary school, I think more parents will be open to the process. The parents who are unfamiliar with standards-based grading or who are new to the district will have many resources to read on their own time, which will free up more time for me to address other questions about curriculum or other student concerns that need to be addressed during these times.

PowerPoint Presentation

This presentation (Appendix I) is geared towards parents and guardians who will attend the Curriculum Night our middle school hosts at the end of September. Curriculum Night is meant to give parents a better idea of what they can expect from the teachers of their child throughout the year. Since many students attend up to ten

classes a week, with ten different teachers, it is important that the student and parents/guardians know what the expectations are for each class.

The parents will follow the schedule of their child rotating through seven periods. Because of this, I have seven minutes to share my curriculum. Since I am the only fifth grade teacher who will use standards-based grading, I feel it is pertinent to share exactly what it is and how it will look in the English Language Arts classroom. This should not be too unfamiliar to families as the elementary grading model is similar to standards-based grading. Along with explaining what standards-based grading is and why I will use it, I also show how the grading scale is broken down, what learning targets will be assessed throughout the year.

The first slide lets parents know what class they are in and who the teacher is, along with a welcome note. Next, I will go over four points that explain what standards-based grading is. Shippy (2013) says that standards-based grading simply measures the mastery of the content. The next slide is why I use standards-based grading. Tierney et al., states that the motive behind standards-based grading is to compare student work to the grade-level standard that needs to be met. Therefore, students are not compared to one another, but simply to the standard that are to master (2011). I will also summarizing other research from my literature review about how standards-based grading gives an accurate reflection on the student's performance. Following the background information, I will move on to discuss the language arts class specifically. The next slide shows the ten learning targets that will be assessed throughout the year, and the slide following that will show the language arts grade scale. Finally, the last slide shows my website address

where parents can read more information about standards-based grading if they so desire.

These items were decided to be put into the slide show for Curriculum Night because they are what I predict I will have the most questions about- what is standards-based grading, why do I use it, and how does it look in my classroom? I kept the slides concise and to the point in order to avoid confusion on the topic.

In addition to the PowerPoint presentation I will go over the “Student Retake Action Plan” (Appendix J) that night. This action plan is for any student to complete if they are unsatisfied with their grade and want to improve their overall score. This action plan can be completed for the improvement of a particular category on the rubric, or the entire project.

Finally, if time allots, I will allow for questions at the end, and provide information on my website where families can read more about standards-based grading.

Student-Friendly Poster

I created a student-friendly poster (Appendix K) that will be put up in the classroom as a quick reference during discussions on grades and expectations. Guskey (2001) recommends that a 1,2,3,4 scale be used to represent the different categories. The poster will show a level 1, 2, 3, and 4, and an explanation of each level in student-friendly language. I will pair a visual with each level that compares it to making a pizza.

Level one states that the student does not meet standards explaining that the student has the materials they need to meet the standards, but do not know how to

go about meeting it. The visual that pairs with this is a handful of ingredients to make a pizza, but no pizza.

Level two states that the student partially meets standards explaining that the student has the materials they need to meet the standard, but need assistance from someone to meet it. An image of children and an adult making a pizza is paired with level two.

Level three states that the student meets the standards citing that the student has the materials to meet grade level standards, and is able to do this successfully. A delicious pepperoni pizza is matched with level three.

Finally, the level four declares that the student exceeds standards saying the student has the materials needed to meet grade level standards, and then some. They are able to go beyond the grade-level expectations and add more to the assignment than required. The picture that goes with this is a supreme pizza.

The process for creating this poster was very tedious and daunting. Though it is quite basic and simple, the time it took to make was more than any other tool. Though it took work, this tool is valuable to me because students will be able to reference it when in the class. This will be useful for when kids get assignments back and are not sure what each number represents- I can just point to the poster and let kids reread the categories.

Binder Insert

A binder insert (Appendix L) is something that students will keep in their English Language Arts section of their binder as a quick reference for them to refer to whenever they need reminders on what standards-based grading is. The insert is

two-sided. On one side are the English Language Arts grade scale and the break down for each level- 1, 2, 3, and 4. There is also an explanation of the “Student Retake Action Plan” and the expectations for the process to redo an assignment.

On the reverse side is the same pizza metaphor that is used on the student-friendly poster that hangs in the room. This reminds students as to what each level represents.

This tool was easy to create as I just copy and pasted different aspects from other tools to this document. I am excited to have this tool for students, as I know many questions will come up that can be answered quickly with this binder insert.

Summary

The results of this capstone led me to create a plethora of tools to use in my classroom to better explain and help students and families understand what standards-based grading is, and why I use it in the classroom. I’ve created rubrics, a brochure, a PowerPoint presentation, a student-friendly poster, a binder insert, and updated my website in order to aid comprehension on this topic.

The most difficult tool to create was the student friendly poster because it was tedious and time consuming. While the formatting was difficult, I am excited to use this tool to better aid students in this grading process. The tool I am most eager to have available is the website tab on standards-based grading. Anyone- parents, students, and staff, can use this tool. There is all of the information from the PowerPoint presentation, brochure, and student handouts on this tab, which makes it easy for all to access. As a teacher it will save me extensive time because I can

direct anyone with questions, or a student who needs another copy of something to just go to my website and download what they need.

In Chapter Five I will discuss the review of the literature, possible implications for my future practice, the limitations I faced, and future research projects.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Introduction

The goal of my paper on *how can standards-based grading be implemented into an English Language Arts classroom in order to give more accurate feedback of students' achievement* was to find the best way to communicate what standards-based grading is, how it compares to traditional grading, and what could it look like in my classroom. I arrived at this question because of my experience with a family who did not support my decision to send their child to summer school, even though the student received a "B" in my class. Due to this experience, I decided to dig deeper into how I graded and assessed. I wondered how I could better articulate a student's grade to families so they understood what encompassed a "B". The best way for me to do this was to start thinking about switching to standards-based grading.

This chapter will discuss what the research said about standards-based grading. I will also discuss the implications of my findings and curriculum that was created. Finally, I will cover the limitations I faced during my research and ones that may arise as I implement standards-based grading in my room, along with what the next steps will be.

Return to the Literature Review

Throughout my research I found that there were several ideas repeated and supported by many different scholars. Standard-based grading allows for a clearer and accurate representation on how a child is developing in the many standards of

English Language Arts. Scriffiny (2008) states that standards-based grading allows students to have a better understanding of where they are at and allows them to produce higher quality work. Instead of just giving a “B” for English Language Arts, a teacher can give a grade for each standard, so students and parents can see where a child excels and where the child needs improvement with that subject area. The biggest set-back to standards-based grading is the preparation and explaining of the grading, which is why I wanted to create the curriculum around it for parents, students, and colleagues, so it is clear why I do it, how it will be done, and how it will affect students.

Another big part of standards-based grading is the philosophy that it involves. I believe, and research supports, that if one were to show a student’s academic success in the class, standards-based grading is the best approach as it does not include non-academic items such as attendance, tardiness, late work, and participation. Those are the social skills of schooling, not academic measures seen in the state standards. Shippy notes that these items are things that the state does not list as something that needs to be mastered in order to show knowledge of a subject area, yet teachers include these in the grade (2013).

Another common point made for standards-based grading was the idea of retesting or redoing assignments. The whole idea of this kind of grading is to measure growth against the standard, so why not let the student improve their knowledge on standards as they progress through the unit or school year?

A strong point that disagreed with the literature was the time and effort it takes to implement standards-based grading, and how it is best done when there is

support from the district and the principal. If a school plans on switching over completely, it will take an enormous amount of effort to make that happen- administration, teachers, and families need to work together to create a successful model of standards-based grading. The research from the district in Kentucky that piloted this said it was challenging and there were mainly technological issues that arose, but the people working together made it happen.

One thing I found from the research in the literature that I would have liked to of read more about was how to make standards-based grading work if you are the only teacher doing it. Brookhart says that some teachers start standards-based grading before the rest of the school has implemented it. Educators should not get caught up with details about standards-based grading, but rather think about the main issue- what do you want the grade to say? (2011). Though this is encouraging, I would have liked to read a teacher's perspective who tried this more on their own. This is what I am planning on doing for next year, so having that perspective would be valuable.

Possible Implications

My findings from the research encourage me to be positive and excited about implementing standards-based grading into my curriculum next year. I am fully on board with the philosophy behind grading students solely on academics, and leaving all the other components such as attendance, late work, participation, as a separate grade in the grade book, or not including them at all. I believe those social skills can be worked on in the classroom by building strong relationships with students and helping them learn the value in them, especially in middle school. Not every child is

capable of that success right away in middle school, so I do not see it as ethical to make learning those skills punitive.

I am excited to also share this with parents because I think once they understand the benefits of standards-based grading to their child's academic career, they will be excited to see specifically where their child excels and where they need support. This is especially important for a student in their first year of middle school because I find that many parents are slightly misled about their child's academic success based on an elementary perspective. Many parents tell me their child is gifted, or exceeding standards, but when they are assessed on each specific learning target or standard, the child does not show that success. I think providing this information to students and families will help that child learn more about their skill set as an English Language Arts learner.

I am also eager to work with my department this summer and into the fall on moving forward with implementing standards-based grading as a department. If my team supports my research, then we can get the department on board for piloting the grade book to show standards-based grading rather than traditional grading. We can plan on how to prepare students and families on how that implementation would look at each grade level, along with what items can be used across grade level.

Limitations

The findings from this research are limited due to the fact that the district policy's restrictions would not allow me to do an action research plan and implement the curriculum as I created it. Because of that, I could not determine right

away what issues will arise with technology, which is my biggest concern. I also would have liked to get more parent feedback on the tools that will affect them, such as the brochure, PowerPoint presentation, and website information, but again was not able to implement the curriculum.

Another limitation I suspect to have this summer once I begin working on this is problems with the grade book technology system. I know one school in the district uses standards-based grading, but the technology system does not allow us to use their already-created standards-based grading scale. I will have to collaborate with those teachers and get assistance in setting up my grade book.

I believe another limitation that could arise is that not all teachers within the department will want to switch over to the new grade scale. I know two of us are on board, but the other two are closer to retirement and not fully invested in trying something new late into their career. Hopefully we can work together as a team and create a consistent and cohesive grading system for students.

Future Research Projects

If I were to do this study again I would have of course liked to implement the curriculum as I created it. Moving forward I am planning on implementing the standards-based grading tools into my curriculum next year. Future research will revolve around how to best set up my grade book to accurately reflect standards-based grading. I will also need to take notes on how the implementation of each tool for standards-based curriculum works; what are the pros and cons of each, and how can I fine-tune it and make it better for the next time.

I believe that all the tools I created should be retained as part of the curriculum; all of them are valuable and need to be a part of my instruction next year, for students, parents, and hopefully other teachers in my building.

One thing I would be interested in is arranging collaboration times with colleagues who are also developing standards-based grading and create a committee to exchange ideas and troubleshoot. If there were a group of teachers who banded together to report the problems that may occur, then I think the district would be more willing to support us in the endeavor.

Summary

This year has been an exiting and challenging journey expanding on my passion to help students as readers and writers. Standards-based grading is a way I believe I can support students in becoming stronger students and scholars because I will be able to clearly articulate where their gaps are, while drawing on their strengths.

Through my research I have discovered what it takes to fully implement standards-based grading, and the benefits of it to teachers, students, and parents. I am excited to implement the curriculum I created next year and start figuring out next steps for the future. I also look forward to working with the English Language Arts department to begin brainstorming how this will look at our middle school.

I truly believe that standards-based grading will change the way students see themselves as learners, and aid them in becoming stronger readers and writers by encouraging them to always improve and show them what it takes to meet grade level standards.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Traditional Grade Scale

Letter	Traditional Grading Scale
A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	Below 60

Adapted from O'Connor, 2009

APPENDIX B

Standards-Based Report Card Example

2-2	08:05AM -02:35PM	1000 - 2	LANGUAGE ARTS 5	KOLBINGER, TAUNYA	AZ	2	83.30	3	1	0	1	0
LT1: Cite evidence from text		Weight:	Score: 4.00	Points: 4.00	Average: 100.00	Grade: 4						
Due Date	Description	Score	Points	Weight	%	Grade	Code					
02/05/2015 - Thu	Response to Literature #1 (symbolism)	4	4	1.00	100.00	4						
LT2: Analyze elements of a text		Weight:	Score: 41.00	Points: 50.00	Average: 82.00	Grade: 3						
Due Date	Description	Score	Points	Weight	%	Grade	Code					
01/28/2015 - Wed	One Pager	3	3	1.00	100.00	4						
02/26/2015 - Thu	Plot Diagram	3	3	1.00	100.00	4						
03/02/2015 - Mon	Annotations	3	4	1.00	75.00	3						
03/10/2015 - Tue	Tuck Summative Assessment	32	40	1.00	80.00	3						
LT4: Write info text and creati...		Weight:	Score: 9.00	Points: 12.00	Average: 75.00	Grade: 3						
Due Date	Description	Score	Points	Weight	%	Grade	Code					
03/12/2015 - Thu	Propaganda	9	12	1.00	75.00	3						
LT6: Engage effectively in disc...		Weight:	Score: 3.00	Points: 3.00	Average: 100.00	Grade: 4						
Due Date	Description	Score	Points	Weight	%	Grade	Code					
02/17/2015 - Tue	Shared Inquiry Discussion	3	3	1.00	100.00	4						
LT9: Use 5th grade appropriat...		Weight:	Score: 26.30	Points: 31.00	Average: 84.84	Grade: 3						
Due Date	Description	Score	Points	Weight	%	Grade	Code					
01/26/2015 - Mon	Vocab Ch. 1-4	3	4	1.00	75.00	3						
01/26/2015 - Mon	Vocab Ch. 5-8	3	4	1.00	75.00	3						
02/04/2015 - Wed	Ch.9-12	3	4	1.00	75.00	3						

Adapted from Taunya Kolbinger's grade book

APPENDIX C

Vocabulary Word Work Rubric

Vocabulary Word Work

Student Name: _____ Period: _____

Standards: I can use 5th grade vocabulary appropriately with context clues

I can show command of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Use of 5th Grade vocabulary appropriately with context clues	Student used all vocabulary words with correct context clues	Student used 6 or more vocabulary words with correct context clues	Student used 5 or less vocabulary words with context clues, though some clues caused confusion	The student did not use context clues to aid in understanding of the vocabulary words OR they used 2 or less vocabulary words

Created by Taunya Kolbinger

APPENDIX D

Response to Literature Rubric

Response to Literature

Student Name: _____ Period: _____

Standards: I can quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says and when drawing inferences from the text
 I can write my opinion about a topic and support my point of view with reasons and information
 I can show command of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Citing Evidence	Student cites three or more quotes from the text supporting his/her opinion	Student cites two quotes from the text supporting his/her opinion	Student cites one piece of evidence from the text supporting his/her opinion	Student does not cite any textual evidence to support his/her opinion
Punctuation	There are no punctuation mistakes. Quotes and page numbers are done correctly.	There is 1 error in punctuation, either in the use of quotation marks or citing page number.	The student did not use quotation marks correctly OR did not cite a page number.	The student did not use quotation marks AND did not cite the page number. Both are missing.
Identifies Opinions	Student accurately gives his/her opinions and gives a clear explanation of why these opinions connect to the text	Student accurately gives his/her opinions and gives a reasonable explanation of why these opinions connect to the text	Student accurately gives his/ her opinions in the response. Explanation is weak.	Student has difficulty articulating opinions.

Created by Taunya Kolbinger

APPENDIX E

Propaganda Project Rubric

Propaganda Project

DUE:

Student Name: _____ Period _____

Standards: I can make informed judgments about messages promoted in the mass media
I can show command of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing

CATEGORY	4 - Above Standards	3 - Meets Standards	2 - Approaching Standards	1 - Below Standards
Identify Type	Explained what type of complex (from another generation) propaganda was used and why	Explained what type of propaganda was used and explained why	Somewhat explained the type of propaganda was used and why, but some parts are confusing	Did not identify the type of propaganda or why it was used
Describe Propaganda	Described the propaganda in extensive detail	Described the propaganda in detail	Somewhat described the propaganda	Did not describe the propaganda
Personal Connection	Made two or more personal connections to the propaganda	Made a personal connection to the propaganda	Made a personal connection to the propaganda, but some parts were unclear	Did not make a personal connection to the propaganda

Created by Taunya Kolbinger

APPENDIX F

Tuck Everlasting Summative Assessment

Tuck Summative Assessment

Student Name: _____

Period: _____

Standards: I can compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story
 I can produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
 I can, with guidance, use the writing process to develop and strengthen writing by planning, drafting, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach
 I can draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research
 I can show command of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Organization	Well developed project with a clear and logical format.	Generally well organized with a clear and logical format.	Some evidence of planning and organization.	Lacks planning and organization.
Support from Text	Includes 4 or more well developed examples or reasons using evidence from the text for each similarity or difference.	Includes at least 3 examples or reasons using evidence from the text for each similarity and differences.	Includes at least 2 examples or reasons using evidence from the text, but some information maybe incorrect.	Provides little if any support using evidence from the text for each similarity or difference.
Opening	Strong main idea/ topic sentence is clear, concise, and identifies character, theme or issue being compared.	Adequate main idea/ topic sentence identifies character, theme or issue being compared.	Main idea/ topic sentence is unclear and doesn't address character, theme or issue being compared.	Main idea/ Topic sentence is not evident.
Conclusion	States a thoughtful or logical conclusion based on similarities and differences.	States a conclusion based on similarities and differences.	Conclusion is evident, but does not draw on any similarities or differences.	No evidence of any conclusion or summary.
Conventions	Contains no punctuation or grammatical errors.	Contains 2-4 errors in punctuation, spelling or grammar that do not interfere with meaning.	Contains 5-6 errors in punctuation, spelling and/or grammar that interferes with meaning.	Contains many errors in punctuation, spelling and/or grammar that make the piece illegible.

Created by Taunya Kolbinger

APPENDIX G

Brochure

What's the research say?

Tierney, et al. states that the motive behind standards-based grading is to compare student work to the grade-level standard that needs to be met. Therefore, students are not compared to one another, but simply to the standard they are to master (2011). Standards-based grading simply measures the mastery of the content (Shippy, 2013).

If we want our children to show proficiency on standards that connect to the real world, then standards-based grading is the

Through the reporting of standards-based grading, the feedback is more specific to parents, therefore, they get more information about their child's learning. Many researchers believe that standards-based grading report cards are a more effective way to communicate the child's progress because it says so much more than what a B+ or B- can say. The report card gives an overall grade, but also how well the student mastered each standard. Nonacademic parts count for very little or none of the grade (Guskey, et al 2011, Spencer 2012, Proulx, et. al., 2012).

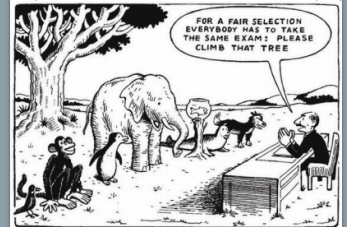
Want more information?

Please check out my website
[www.mrskolbinger
 .weebly.com](http://www.mrskolbinger.weebly.com)
 for more information and research on standards-based grading.



Mrs. Kolbinger
2015

Standards-Based Grading



Mrs. Kolbinger
5th Grade ELA



Field Middle School
Minneapolis Public
Schools
2015

Created by Taunya Kolbinger

ELA Standards-Based Grading Scale

The scale below provides a break down of each category a student can achieve on formative (smaller assessments) and summative (large, end of quarter assessments) assignments in the English Language Arts class.

One benefit to using this grade system is that the entire 100% scale is used to show levels of success, rather than the traditional model that uses 50% of the grade scale as failing, which can significantly alter the overall grade.

Symbol	Value	Description
4	88-100%	Exceeds Standards
3	63-87%	Meets Standards
2	38-62%	Partially Meets Standards
1	0-25%	Does Not Meet Standards
NE	n/a	No Evidence

Q&A

What is standards-based grading?

SBG is when a student's performance is graded against the learning target, or standard, rather than against his/her peers. SBG only measures the student's mastery of the content.

Why use standards-based grading?

Because it is a more accurate and detailed reflection of how a student is performing on each standard or learning target. It also makes it easier to analyze the student's areas of success and growth.

Who benefits from it?

Students, parents, and teachers

Who are some researchers who support it?

Thomas Guskey

Jung

Bailey

Rick Wormeli

Ken O'Connor

...and many, many, more

Can my child redo any assignment?

Yes! As long as it's done within the appropriate time frame.

APPENDIX H

Website Screenshots

Follow Me!  

[HOME](#) [ABOUT](#) [SDG](#) [CALENDAR](#) [ASSIGNMENTS](#) [MORE...](#)



Mrs. Kolbinger's
5th Grade
Language Arts
Website



"Always make new mistakes." -Ester Dyson

Click on the blogs below to better understand Standard-Based Grading

ELA Grade Scale

Symbol	Value	Description
4	88-100%	Exceeds Standards
3	63-87%	Meets Standards
2	38-62%	Partially Meets Standards
1	0-25%	Does Not Meet Standards
NE	n/a	No Evidence

Learning Targets Assessed throughout the year:

- LT1: Cite evidence from text
- LT2: Analyze elements of a text
- LT3: Make connections across text
- LT4: Write info text and creative text
- LT5: Use technology to publish/collaborate
- LT6: Engage effectively in discussion
- LT7: Use grammar/mechanic conventions
- LT8: Read/write a variety of text independently
- LT9: Use 5th grade appropriate vocabulary
- LT10: Show use of 5th grade phonics/fluency

Retake/redo policy

Student must complete a "Student Action Retake Plan" if they would like to improve his/her grade. This can be done on any assignment. After 1st quarter, students will be given **one week** to raise the score on the assignment they wish to improve.



[student_retake_action_plan.doc](#)
Download File

[Young Teacher Love's Blog](#)

- * [What is SBG?](#)
- * [What do the levels represent?](#)
- * [What do the levels look like?](#)
- * [How do the levels connect to percentages?](#)

[The Skinny on SBG](#)

[7 Reasons for SBG](#)

[Rick Wormeli Says... \(SBG guru\)](#)

[Pros/Cons of SBG](#)

APPENDIX I

Curriculum Night PowerPoint Presentation Slides

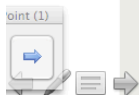
Curriculum Night

Standards-Based Grading in the ELA Classroom

T. Kolbinger, 210
5th Grade
Field Middle School



*Welcome
Families!*



What is standards-based grading?

- Student's performance is graded against the learning targets, or standards
- Student receives a score based on how they perform against that standard
- A student's performance is *not* compared to peers
- Standards-based grading simply measures the mastery of the content (Shippy, 2013).



Why use standards-based grading?

- Tierney, et al. states that the motive behind standards-based grading is to compare student work to the grade-level standard that needs to be met. Therefore, students are not compared to one another, but simply to the standard they are to master (2011).
- More accurate reflection of how student is performing on each specific target
- Easy to analyze areas of growth and success




Learning Targets Assessed

- LT1: Cite evidence from the text
 - LT2: Analyze elements of a text
 - LT3: Make connections across text
 - LT4: Write informational and creative text
 - LT5: Use technology to publish/collaborate
 - LT6: Engage effectively in discussion
 - LT7: Use grammar/ mechanic conventions
 - LT8: Read/write a variety of text independently
 - LT9: Use 5th grade appropriate vocabulary
 - PT10: Use 5th grade phonics/fluency
-

ELA Grade Scale

Symbol	Value	Description
4	88-100%	Exceeds Standards
3	63-87%	Meets Standards
2	38-62%	Partially Meets Standards
1	0-25%	Does Not Meet Standards
NE	n/a	No Evidence



Questions? Want more information?

Visit my website at
www.mrskolbinger.weebly.com
for more information



Created by Taunya Kolbinger

APPENDIX J

Student Retake Action Plan

Student Retake Action Plan

**Remember: Before you submit your retake action plan you must take time to reflect on how you will improve! You must submit your retake plan within ONE WEEK of your first attempt.*

The Basics:

Name _____

Date _____

Class Period _____

What is the learning target you would like to retest or retake?

Reflect:

Summarize why you feel your first attempt did not meet standards?

List three ways you will work to improve your understanding of the concept.

1.) _____

2.) _____

3.) _____

Attach:

- Previous quiz/test/assignment
- Corrected writing assignment
- Notes /Activities which helped you prepare for your retake

Request:

I am making a formal request to retake this test/quiz/assignment. I have worked hard to improve my understanding of this assignment.

X _____

Created by Taunya Kolbinger

APPENDIX K

Student-Friendly Poster

STANDARDS-BASED GRADING



1

Does not meet standards

Student has the materials they need to meet the standards, but do not know how to go about meeting it.



2

Partially meets standards

Student has the materials they need to meet the standard, but need assistance from someone to meet it.



3

Meets standards

Student has the materials to meet grade level standard and is able to do this successfully.



4

Exceeds standards

The student is has the materials needed to meet grade level standards, and then some. They are able to go beyond the grade-level expectations and add more to the assignment than required.

APPENDIX L

Binder Insert

How to Understand Standards-Based Grading Binder Insert

ELA Grade Scale

Symbol	Value	Description
4	88-100%	Exceeds Standards
3	63-87%	Meets Standards
2	38-62%	Partially Meets Standards
1	0-25%	Does Not Meet Standards
NE	n/a	No Evidence

Student Retake Action Plans

You are able to redo any assignment or retake any quiz in this class with the completion of a “Student Retake Action Plan”. When an assignment is returned to you, you have **one week** to complete a “Student Action Retake Plan” along with the redone assignment. When you are ready to turn it in, please staple together:

- Old assignment
- “Student Retake Action Plan”
- New/redone assignment

STANDARDS-BASED GRADING



1

Does not meet standards

Student has the materials they need to meet the standards, but do not know how to go about meeting it.



2

Partially meets standards

Student has the materials they need to meet the standard, but need assistance from someone to meet it.



3

Meets standards

Student has the materials to meet grade level standard and is able to do this successfully.



4

Exceeds standards

The student is has the materials needed to meet grade level standards, and then some. They are able to go beyond the grade-level expectations and add more to the assignment than required.

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