REDEFINING ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK
IN A RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

by

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A Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of Humboldt State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

In Education

May, 2009
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ABSTRACT

REDEFINING ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK IN A RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

JULIE ANNE GIANNINI-PREVIDE

A point or percentage based system of grading that is reported in standard letter scores has traditionally been used by most middle and high school teachers to report student achievement to students, their families, and administration. Despite large variation in point gathering policies between each teacher and volumes of research to discourage it, little has been done to develop a system of feedback that improves student learning. This thesis addresses a rural middle school’s attempt to rethink assessment, feedback, and grading to improve student learning.

It explores the process one rural middle school employed to implement a criterion referenced grading system based on state standards. The focus of the research is to understand what initiated the change; what process the school community went through in developing a unique system of feedback; and what impact these changes had on assessment, feedback, motivation, and teaching. As the use of this grading system is new, this research also attempts to qualify successes and failures of the system and make recommendations for improvement and growth.

This thesis presents a qualitative case study of how a small rural middle school staff researched, designed, and implemented a criterion referenced grading system based on state standards. This is an historical organizational case study that utilizes interviews with teachers at the school and artifact analysis.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am often surprised, in light of my considerable flaws in kindness, to be surrounded by the most amazing group of human beings, notable for their caring nature, intelligence, beauty, and generosity. I have decided that in light of my good fortune and tendency toward superstition, no amount of time, energy, or paper could be better used than in the expression of gratitude for the gifts I have received.

I’d like to give special thanks to my cohorts in the Education Program. To Nora Wynne for showing me friendship in class and unknowingly inspiring me with her beautifully written thesis. To the women of the Advanced Academic Writing Class: Alyese, Alissa, Teri, Teresa, Amber, Lorena, and Aly, who supported my writing with group therapy and party planning as needed. With special thanks to Bridget McBride who is indeed a visionary. She opened my mind to paradigms of education I did not know existed and has forever changed the foundation of my professional beliefs.

I am equally grateful to the faculty of Humboldt State University’s Education Department. To Cathleen Rafferty who showed me the qualitative way, helped me find my own answers to literacy assessment, and co-chaired my committee. To Keri Gelenian who twice, six years apart, showed me how to learn from my students.

It is with deep appreciation that I thank Ann Diver-Stamnes. She inspired me during my credential year to be the teacher that every student deserves by modeling with compassion and love. My admiration for Ann has only increased on this return visit to the Education Department. I am indebted to her for the endless amount of
valuable time she has invested in me. She is Yoda to this Jedi, sharing with me not only the power of teaching but also the need to use that power for the good of all.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the Board of Trustees of McKinleyville Union School District for their approval of an Educational Leave of Absence extended over two years to allow this mother of two young boys the time and health benefits needed to make the goal of a Master’s Degree a reality. And heartfelt thanks to the students and staff of McKinleyville Middle School who are dedicated, professional, healthy, and fun to work with. Everyday I am grateful to walk among the people of this amazing school.

An additional mention of appreciation goes to Marzanna Pietrowska for her friendship and support; as well as, Maureen Taylor, Marcy Howe, Mel McGuire, Lisa Klar, Mary Ann Sheridan, Anne Hartline, and Laura Grant for all the extra time and energy you have shared with me. I want to thank Thomas Nelson and Jennifer Adams for their patience and willingness to come along with me. I realize I came to them every day with a new idea that usually meant more work for the entire Core team. They just kept saying yes. I am grateful for their dedication to our students, their trust in me, and their friendship. And to Teri Waterhouse, who continues to push me forward to do what is best for every kid, even when that means making tough decisions.

Finally, it is my family, both birth and extended, to which I owe my deepest and most profound gratitude. I must thank my parents and grandparents who have supported education in words, actions, and funding my entire life. I want to thank
my mom, Holly and Katherine for being my mothering colleagues and for feeding, entertaining, and loving my little boys in my stead while I pursued this degree. I need to thank my siblings, Nana and Scott-o. They both finished their Master’s degrees before their older sister and helped me pull through the moments of procrastination I am prone to as only they could.

Finally, Rocco and Dominic, my amazing young boys, who define my world and inspire me to make every education one that would be worthy of them both. And a most sincere and adoring note of thanks to my husband, Errol, whose endless patience, support, and love are the only reason any part of this thesis ever hit paper. I am endlessly grateful for all you bring to my life.
DEDICATION

The most important lesson I learned about good teaching in high school was the difference one adult could have on a student. The teacher who showed me this, Brad Warze, was my advisor for Student Government and Students Exhibiting Common Sense and my teacher for Peer Counseling and Leadership Class. He and his lovely wife were also my employers, as they believed in me enough to allow me to care for their then young girls.

I am sure, as a high school student, I was desperately annoying to most everyone with my self-righteousness and enthusiasm. Mr. Warze was endlessly patient and kind. I would grab the front seat on fieldtrips, and he would listen to my outrageous ideas for lunchtime activities and rallies. He was always attentive and interested. He gave me the kind of energy that every insecure adolescent needs, and every adult must dig deep to give.

Brad Warze died too fast and too soon last year. I did not get a chance to tell him what a profound effect he had my life, both personal and professional. I have found myself unable in the months since his passing to express my gratitude; I am simply too sad to speak of him aloud.

And so, it is in this format that my appreciation finds a voice. It is to “Warz” that I dedicate this work, as he is so much a part of the teacher I have become and the teacher I still hope to be.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The report card with its single letter grades is a staple of American education. That single letter printed after each course title holds great value for students and their families; it can be the source of rewards, awards, and status, or it can cause a student to repeat an entire year of education. However, it is curious that there is no standard meaning to these letters. Educators are given great leeway in creating their own criteria for grading students that include indicators of achievement such as homework completion and tests scores as well as non-achievement factors such as behavior, attendance, and extra credit.

With the advent of No Child Left Behind, the government set a new goal of minimum proficiency for all. This, coupled with rapidly improving technology to support the use of data to make decisions, has caused some educators to question letter grades and look for methods of feedback that can provide meaningful information about student learning and, most importantly, help teachers, students, and families make sound educational decisions that move the learning forward.

At one rural California school, Redwood Middle School (RMS), the teachers have moved beyond questioning letter grades and have developed their own unique system of grades designed to better report student learning. They weathered the tribulations of changing a system widely accepted as useful and valid. For some, this process only led to more questions and a deeper search for answers.
This research focuses on the process this school went through in changing to a Standards Based Grading system at the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade level. I focus on the experiences of the teachers from RMS as they made this change as well as their recommendations for continued improvement. As a teacher at this school, I wanted to use my research to reflect on this process and to identify potential solutions to the issues that arose from this single school reform.

*Operational Definition*

Standards based grading is the term that the teachers at Redwood Middle School have come to use for their unique system of grading. It is based on California State Standards; however, it is not a construct or requirement of the state. It is a system that scores and reports student effort and practice work separately from assessment of skills and knowledge sets.

*Organization of the Thesis*

The remaining chapters of this thesis are organized as follows. The literature review in Chapter Two is an overview of grading policies throughout educational history. It looks at the impact of recent legislation, types of education assessment, and the historical purpose of grades. The question it seeks to answer is what impact research should have on school policies and how difficult it can be for schools to challenge long held traditions.

The methodology in Chapter Three offers a detailed account of the research methods. The chapter offers a description of the school setting and background
information regarding the program to be evaluated. It details the selection of the participants as well as the interview and analysis process.

The results in Chapter Four offer the experiences of the teachers in both descriptive text and their own voices. The analysis in Chapter Five is my attempt to find meaning in what the teachers shared. Although they are my interpretations of the interviews, I have attempted to remain true to the teachers’ ideas and suggestions.

The conclusion offered in Chapter Six examines the limitations of this research. The teachers interviewed offered their experiences with Standards Based Grading, and I have attempted to offer recommendations for continued improvement of the educational program offered at Redwood Middle School.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review seeks to shed light on assessment and feedback practices used in secondary education. In spite of abundant research and literature finding formative assessment and systematic feedback practices to be vital and effective in promoting student learning, most schools, teachers, students and students’ families are deeply and culturally attached to the use of summative, teacher-graded assessment and the use of uncalibrated grading systems, namely letter grades. These token economies of work completion for a higher grade ignore research based best practice and promote a national educational climate of unaligned assessments aimed at measuring teacher accountability. No Child Left Behind legislation seems to compound the gathering of data that measures a student’s socio-economic status more effectively than their achievement of skills or knowledge.

This literature review seeks to explore why educators continue to assess learning and provide feedback at the end of the unit of study, the only moment in the learning process when no further correction or learning can take place. How can a school go about changing this traditional system to one that incorporates the systematic use of formative assessment and provide teachers and students with ample feedback on which they can base their educational decisions?
Accountability

Brown v. the Board of Education in 1954 and the Soviet’s success with Sputnik in 1957 pushed public education onto the national political scene, ushering in an era of federal involvement in educational reform (Sarason, 1995). This push to fix schools was renewed with the release of the report “A Nation at Risk,” in 1983, the call in the 1990s from business leaders to provide a more highly educated work force, and the realization by many parents that post-high school education was necessary for their children to make more than minimum wage (Wagner, 2000).

No Child Left Behind

Under President George Bush, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 with significant changes in assessment requirements and accountability to states (Linn, Baker & Betebenner, 2002). NCLB requires states to develop and administer assessments to students in Reading/Language Arts and Math annually in grades 3-8 (NCLB, 2001). This law was put in place to “ensure that all students become proficient in reading and math and to close the achievement gap that exists between students of different socio-economic backgrounds (United States Department of Education, 2004).

NCLB also requires that states develop state level performance standards on which state assessments will be based (Linn et al., 2002). As a result, test scores and state proficiency levels vary greatly (Linn et al., 2002). For example, in 2001 the percentage of 8th grade students scoring proficient or higher on the state administered
Math assessment ranged from 7% in Louisiana, to 39% in Mississippi, to 92% in Texas (Linn et al., 2002). At the same time, less than 20% of the 8th grade students taking the National Assessment of Educational Progress in Math in Texas scored at the Proficient or Above Proficient mark (Linn et al., 2002).

Standards.

California developed state reading/language arts and math standards and aligned frameworks for instruction in the late 1990s, well ahead of NCLB (Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission [CDSNC], 1999). In the 1990s, California ranked low in achievement and per-student spending and high in class size (Schultz, 1998). To deal with these trends, the state legislature authorized a Commission for the Establishment of Academic Performance and Content Standards in 1995 to create standards for what should be taught in California schools and how the state would assess learning (Schultz, 1998). These standards were developed to be world class and to repair California’s education system to its glory days of the 1960s when graduation and college attendance rates were at an all time high (Linn et al., 2002). These standards were never intended to set a minimum standards for proficiency against which all students would be held accountable (Linn et al., 2002).

Impact on children, teachers, schools.

Under NCLB, teachers work under the threat of being fired if a percentage of their students do not perform at the proficient level or above—a percentage that increases annually; by 2008 35.2% of students must score proficient or above, by
2014 the imposed goal is 100% (NCLB, 2001). For teachers and students in low performing schools, failure to meet these goals and the possibility of every teacher being fired or reassigned is a very real threat that forces them to abandon the arts, science, social studies, team-building, and hand on learning for prescriptive curriculum in Language Arts and Math (Beahm, 2007).

“Good” teachers are the ones who teach to the test, rather than those who employ creativity, excitement and positive learning environment. At my school, a specialist has created a rigorous “bell-to bell” schedule, in which each minute of our day is mapped out. We are told what and how to teach, what to put on our walls, and what interventions to provide. All assemblies and fieldtrips have been banned. (Beahm, 2007, p. 1)

High stakes testing can lead teachers to teach to the test in an effort to boost scores in order to meet Annual Yearly Progress goals (an individual state’s measure of progress toward the goal of 100 percent of students scoring proficient or above proficient on state assessments in at least reading/language arts and math) (Linn et al., 2002). Teaching to a test that is well written and broad in the skills and knowledge that it covers is paramount to good teaching; the problem arises for students and schools when the tests narrowly cover subject areas, using only information that can be assessed in a multiple choice format or ignoring subject areas completely, as is the case for the arts (Linn et al., 2002). “Narrowing the focus within a content area to material tested can result in an impoverished definition of reading, writing, or mathematics” (Linn et al, 2002, p. x.).
These tests hold schools and teachers accountable based on the concept of an ideal test taker (Ryan, Ryan, Arbuthnot & Samuels, 2007). Real test takers’ motivations are affected by their academic self-concept, their goals, and their perception of the importance of the test (Ryan et al., 2007). The validity of these tests is questionable as an incorrect answer may not be an indication of lack of understanding but rather a language barrier, a difference of subject area vocabulary, or even a student being tired after a late night (William & Black, 1996).

In summary, global and national issues have pushed public education into the political arena. As politicians push for accountability, teachers struggle to meet their demands and pass state assessments or deal with punitive consequences. The following section addresses the forms of assessment being used in education.

*Educational Assessment*

The need to motivate students to stay on task led to the use of competition, punishment, and rewards in educational assessment throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Wilbrink, 1997). The move in the 14th century to a system of prizes for the best student led to a need for both prize policies and a system of point keeping to ensure fair reward (Wilbrink, 1997). This ranking of students seems to have led to other less savory aspects of educational rewards, namely cheating (Wilbrink, 1997). In the 18th and 19th centuries, an unexplained shift from ranking of students to marking of student assessment occurs; this attempt to objectify the assessment of student learning also leads to the narrowing of curriculum to that which can be measured (Wilbrink, 1997).
Another important development in the 18th and 19th centuries was the move by the state to involve itself in higher education as a way of procuring civil servants based on merit, not simply family social standing, leading to exams that determined careers and lifelong earning potential. Chinese Mandarin exams played a similar role and influenced the use of competitive assessment in Europe; they allowed anyone to achieve the prestigious and profitable civil servant position if they could prove themselves via objective assessment based on the classics (Wilbrink, 1997). Have educators, as Wilbrink suggests, accepted these forms and purposes of assessment based on tradition rather than on practices proven to improve learning (Wilbrink, 1997)?

*Summative assessment.*

Summative assessment can be defined as evaluation that takes place at the end of a unit or study, a semester of study, even the entire course and is meant to show student understanding of content taught (Marzano, 2006). These types of assessments do not change the format of instruction for current students, but rather may change course content or teaching strategies for the next group, as the teacher is the only one who will encounter the material again (Marzano, 2006).

Summative assessment can also be considered in terms of its function in education, namely to make a final determination of student understanding (William & Black, 1996). If viewed on a continuum, one would see formative assessment at the far right and throughout the middle and summative assessment at the far left, fulfilling its function as a method of final evaluation (William & Black, 1996).
Formative assessment.

The consistent use of formative assessments by teachers to guide instruction and by students to guide learning allow for an inactively designed individual program that more clearly meets students’ needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986). Formative assessment is “all those activities undertaken by teachers and/or by students which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they engage” (Black & William, 1998, pp. 7-8). Furthermore, utilizing ongoing formative assessment in conjunction with applied behavior analysis, specifically reinforcement (the use of reward to reinforce or encourage the person to continue the behavior), shows an even larger effect on student achievement (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986).

The primary purpose of feedback is error correction (Bangert-Drowns, Kulik, Kulik & Morgan, 1991). However, the type of task and feedback provided make a significant difference in the positive effect of feedback on student achievement (Bangert-Drowns et al., 1991). When the task is simple, feedback does not considerably affect performance. However, as task complexity increases, so does the need for thoughtful and complex feedback (Bangert-Drowns et al., 1991). Simply providing the correct answer can encourage students to copy and to cognitively disengage, while providing an explanation of the correct answer and opportunities to repeat the task for mastery can significantly improve student achievement (Bangert-Drowns et al., 1991).
In summary, assessment has been used historically to motivate students to work and to compare student acquisition of knowledge. While formative assessment in on-going and provides feedback for educational decisions and mastery, summative assessment occurs at the end of an educational episode and gives snapshot of student understanding. The following section addresses the use of grades in our educational system as a function of assessment and the problems this uncalibrated system presents.

Grading

While there is some debate as to which institution of education first assigned letters as grades for course work, there is little debate that it is an unscientific measurement. As early as 1913, I. E. Finkelstein worried that “school administrators have been using with confidence as absolutely uncalibrated instrument” (Durm, 1993, p. XX).

Most secondary teachers assign a grade based on multiple criteria; grade criteria vary greatly even in the same school and at the same grade level (MacMillian, 2001). While achievement of stated course objectives is usually one of these criteria, it is not the only measure or even the most heavily weighed measure for most secondary teachers (MacMillian, 2001). Many secondary teachers also include some of the following criteria when determining the final grade: ability, effort, participation, attention, behavior, and improvement (MacMillian, 2001).

The criteria seem to vary by course difficulty. Teachers know that essay questions and opportunities to write about knowledge allow students to show more
advanced understanding of material (MacMillian, 2001). In practice, this opportunity is given in higher ability classrooms and advanced placement coursework; expectations for lower ability students are often for rote memorization and high effort (MacMillian, 2001). Effort is weighted more heavily when students’ abilities is low; high ability students are more likely to be judged on their achievement (Brookhart, 1993). Low ability students are also likely to be given extra credit opportunities than their higher ability peers (MacMillian, 2001).

While this system goes against most measurement models of best practice, teachers continue to grade non-achievement factors because they believe this will help to motivate students to engage and because they want all students to succeed (MacMillian, 2001). Additionally, “grades seem to be used in a kind of academic token economy, and they function in classroom management as the reward for work done” (Brookhart, 1993, p. 139).

Grades do not give an accurate indication of what students can do, what they still need help understanding, or where they should go next in their education (Kohn, 1999). Grading systems are as individual as the teacher designing them and final grades given to any one assignment can vary widely based on this same individuality (Kohn, 1999). While grades are often used to motivate students to pay attention and work hard, they often shift the focus from real learning and engagement to a focus on how well they might be doing against the imposed grade scale (Kohn, 1999).

In summary, grades are widely used and accepted by teachers, students, and their parents; however, they are subjective and individual, and they often provide no
real understanding of what a student knows or can do. The following section addresses the issues surrounding successful school change.

*School Change*

While there are many aspects to successful school change, top-down change initiated by the state or local administration without direct teacher involvement is not effective at the classroom level (Sarason, 1995). Teachers often respond with hostility when this type of top-down change is implemented, further breaking down the system it attempts to change (Sarason, 1995). Additionally, the change society seeks to find for the education system in unclear; the goal is not explicitly defined and is therefore impossible to achieve (Wagner, 2000).

No perfect formula for educational reform exists; however, successful schools that are able to meet student needs and maintain flexibility to weather outside influences share a number of characteristics (Wagner, 2000).

There are three essential, interrelated components to a successful school improvement process; establishing clear academic goals based on developing and assessing students competencies rather than on “covering” subjects; creating a caring community with explicit core values; and encouraging many forms of collaboration between teachers and with students, parents and community members. When one or more of these components is missing, change is thwarted. And when all three are strong, schools can and do transform themselves – though such systemic change is neither quick nor easy (Wagner, 2000, p. 235).
In summary, schools must first deal with climate issues before they can hope for successful change of traditional practices. Additionally, stakeholders must be involved in the process if meaningful change is desired. The next chapter will explore how such change took place at a rural middle school in response to the question: What is the process a school goes through to implement a school-wide criterion-referenced assessment and reporting system?
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This research project is a case study that examines the process by which one middle school moved from the traditional use of summative assessment and letter grades to planning and implementing formative assessment techniques and a standards-based grading system. Through the analysis of artifacts that help document the process and staff interviews, a rich narrative was generated to shed light on this single school reform. Unlike much qualitative research, a single case study does not allow for wide generalizations about education. The importance of this study is the possibility for change in a practice that is deeply entrenched in American education.

Key Assumptions

This research is based on two key assumptions. First, traditional letter grades provide status, reward, and motivation for some students; however, they fail to provide valid data regarding student learning. Americans are culturally attached to this token economy of points and letter grades. Students work hard and turn in professional looking products, and they very well may get the A. We have attached status to letter grades in the form of academic awards, bumper stickers for the parents of straight-A students, and even discounts on car insurance for those with a high grade point average. However, these grading systems are uncalibrated even
within a single grade or subject area at the same school. Like many aspects of our educational system, teachers develop their own formula behind closed doors. This leads to the second assumption, that learning must be guided by information. Practice must be separate from assessment; one skill must be assessed separately from each other skill, and grading practices must be aligned so that the data provided by grades is useful to teachers, students, and students’ families. Without valid information to guide learning, educators provide little more than an assembly line of facts, never stopping to check understanding or change course should students show signs they are not engaged.

Many educators in this study agree with these assumptions. However, they are human teachers who often get mired in the minutia of middle school, too busy putting out fires to implement the kind of change that ensures that all kids learn. With little time to step back and look at the big picture, they continue to work hard for their students, often feeling like they have failed despite their efforts. It is a cycle that leads to burnout, cynicism, and counting days until retirement.

Setting

The subject middle school is located in rural, coastal section of the Pacific Northwest. It is an area of steep topography and mild climate renowned for its natural beauty and the offer of a slower pace of life. This middle school serves an unincorporated area that has grown into a mid-sized bedroom community for the neighboring county seat and local university. While the town’s long-standing reputation is one of poverty, it has recently attained an additional population of
professionals drawn by better home values. As a result, the school’s clientele is now socioeconomically diverse.

This middle school serves sixth through eighth graders coming in from two K-5 elementary schools. The first elementary school is located far from the town center and has a community reputation as the upper crust school, while the second elementary is located near the town center in a densely populated area of apartments and low-income housing. The second elementary school initiated a Spanish Immersion Program in 2000. It has been a controversial program that has brought the school both much success and much strife. For example, some in the community see this program as innovative and a real step toward a more global education; others see the program as elitist. The local teacher’s union worries about English-only teachers losing jobs to Spanish speaking teachers. Additionally, all new students, including the most transient of our students, must be placed in the limited traditional classrooms at each grade level should they arrive after Kindergarten. This causes the few traditional classrooms to deal with endless disruptions caused by new and departing students. The Board of Trustees has approved a strategic planning recommendation to reconfigure the schools to deal with these issues. Beginning in the fall of 2009, the Immersion school will house only immersion classrooms, and all traditional classrooms will be housed together at the more rural site. This decision ends the current east-side/west-side districting lines although whether it will change long held attitudes is unknown.
The middle school configuration is the result of strategic planning. Until 1998, the school was a hybrid junior high that housed all the district kindergarteners and the 7th and 8th graders. In 1998, the kindergarten classes were split between the two elementary schools, and the sixth graders moved to the newly named middle school. During this monumental shift, the middle school principal and teachers were given opportunities for extensive team building and the freedom to design the site model. Half of the current staff was part of this original team of teachers; as a result, there is a strong sense of community and vision amongst the staff.

The middle school has a free and reduced lunch ratio of 40%. For purposes of state accountability reporting, the school has small populations of Hispanic or Latino, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Students with Disabilities. The school was designated a CalSTaT (California Services for Technical Assistance and Training) leadership site in 2000 for the collaborative Special Education model. This Leadership Site Award program, as part of California’s second federally funded state improvement grant, recognized 28 schools between 2004 and 2007 for best practices in the area of literacy, behavior collaboration, transition, and family partnerships. It has also been recognized as a California Distinguished School in the last two rotations. Additionally, the school was recognized by the California Department of Education, the California League of Middle Schools, and their partners as a School to Watch in 2001 for its innovative and reproducible programs.
**Background**

In the fall of 2004, a teacher, Jeffery, brought a new idea to his team of colleagues. He had had a conversation with the parent of a student the previous spring that made him question the use of letter grades and the meaning behind them. The parent had asked for tips to help his son prepare for high school over the summer. Jeffery suggested to the parent that his son struggled with comprehension of grade level text and could benefit from practice reading passages and summarizing that reading. The parent, also an educator, was shocked and asked how his son had received an A- in reading if he couldn’t comprehend grade level text. A careful look at the student’s progress report showed that exemplary homework, classwork, and extra credit scores masked the student’s inability to pass the tests. Jeffery struggled to answer these questions and spent his summer searching for answers. After reading a few books and attending an Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) conference, he told the staff that he was interested in piloting what he called “Standards-Based Grading.”

Jeffery developed a hybrid system of grading that separated out “Effort” and “Achievement.” The “Effort” portion of the progress report provided information about each student’s daily work, participation, and level of engagement in class. The “Achievement” portion was delineated by the California State Standards for each subject and grade level and provided information regarding each student’s attainment of the grade level standards. He also convinced the sole proprietor and programmer for a small digital grade book program company to modify his program to fit the
needs of the new assessment program. While still giving a letter grade at the end of the trimester, Jeffery reported student progress toward grade level standards to families every three weeks based on his new system.

Within weeks, Jeffery had convinced a small group of teachers to expand the pilot during final trimester of the year. That spring and into the next year, six teachers joined the pilot. By the fall of 2006, letter grades had been officially abandoned. While most teachers embraced the change, a few were reluctant. Some were worried about the additional workload, and others were nervous about the implications of such a shift on students and families used to traditional letter grades.

Program Description

This middle school utilizes a system of grading that separates out “Effort” from “Achievement.” The Effort portion of the student’s score is meant to document practice work, both in class and homework, class participation, and the level of effort a student puts forth into understanding the curriculum and working toward understanding for each class. In early discussions, the staff spent many meetings attempting to determine what the Effort portion should be called. There was much debate about whether or not a teacher could fairly judge the effort put forth by student. Other potential labels for this category of feedback included Practice Work, Classwork, and Homework. In the end, it was decided that as long as the term Effort was consistently defined, the label was negotiable. The Effort portion is reported to students in two ways. Students are given a +, ✓, -, X, or a Mi on their assignments. These symbols represent the following labels and percentages:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>80-100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi</td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student grades are not to be reported in percentages. In fact, many teachers do not rely on the percentages but rather the descriptors. The percentages are utilized by the grade book program to give an average Effort score on the progress report. The symbols are used as shorthand on the actual assignment, to provide more immediate feedback to students.

The Achievement or Assessment score is meant to document the student’s progress toward and/or achievement of the grade level standard skills or knowledge. This score is based on a variety of classroom assessments. Scores are given in number form and represent the following labels and levels of understanding:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.5-4.0</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5-3.49</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5-2.49</td>
<td>Below Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0-1.49</td>
<td>Far Below Basic or Missing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student scores are reported on progress reports as both individual assessment scores and an overall score in each strand and each subject. The averaged subject area scores are used for the purpose of determining athletic eligibility, academic awards, and graduation.

This system of Standards Based Grading has weathered family, student, and teacher confusion and frustration. Grading in this manner has been a paradigm shift for teachers from adding up points and percentages to judging student understanding. The computer based grade book that was designed specifically for this site is significantly different than other percentage based programs. It requires teachers to carefully consider the skills used for each assessment and then alternate between screens to be sure to record student progress in each area. Families and students were overwhelmed by the amount of information provided on each progress report and often asked to have it translated into a single letter grade again. After many additional trainings and explanations, as well time to really think about the changes, Standards Based Grading has come to be widely accepted by the entire school community. However, it is essentially the same system put in place by a single teacher four years ago. For a number of teachers, much has changed in the way they plan, teach, and assess. Standards based grading has focused and challenged many teachers on this staff to think about teaching and learning in new ways. For example, they are more focused on standards, and many have eliminated projects or movie days that do not relate directly to the agreed upon curriculum. Most teachers are rewriting assessments to reflect student learning of explicit teaching, and all have
abandoned the traditional practices of keeping tests secret or trying to trick students with difficult questions. Many teachers report being ready for the next step in the process of change; however, finding time to discuss and achieve consensus is challenging.

*Opportunity*

In the fall of 2007, I re-started graduate studies at Humboldt State University with the express desire to better understand this system of grading and feedback. Through my research and coursework, my interests have grown to include assessment, feedback, grading, and student motivation in relation to the system in use at this site. I see a clear desire amongst the staff to continue to improve the assessment and feedback provided to both students and their families. There is also a growing need to more clearly understand what it is that is being taught, learned, and assessed. Relying on the traditions of grading is no longer an option, and most teachers want to provide a more cohesive and well-conceived program for their students.

*Participants*

This section will provide a description of the process used to choose artifacts for inclusion. It will also describe the process by which interviewees were chosen and a brief biographical account of each interviewee.

The process of change occurred in a tiered manner. The first tier was a single staff member who initiated a closer look at letter grades and an individual pilot of the
standards based grading system. He seemed an obvious starting place as his thinking has heavily influenced all of the early decisions.

The second tier was the pilot committee. This group consisted of six additional teachers who volunteered to pilot the new grading system. This group met regularly and communicated often regarding the benefits and challenges of the new system of feedback. From this group, I chose teachers who represented a wide range of grade levels and subject areas.

Finally, I chose a few staff members who purposefully did not join the pilot group. These were teachers who either did not teach a core academic area with state standards or did not want to try standards based grading for a variety of personal reasons. Their individual interviews address their specific reasons for waiting to attempt this change until Standards Based Grading was mandated school wide.

Using purposeful sampling, seven teachers and one former teacher turned administrator were contacted in person and via email to participate in the interviews. All agreed to participate. Interviews were scheduled at the participant’s convenience.

In an attempt to protect the participants from any negative outcomes, I clearly discussed the purposes of the research and clarified the form of my final write-up. Each participant was given an informed consent and signed it before the interview began. As an additional precaution, each participant was given a copy of his or her interview transcript to review and approve before I began the coding
process. All participants are referred to by pseudonyms, although teaching assignments make their identities to other staff members obvious.

Jeffery.

Jeffery started his career in Central California teaching middle school for three years before moving to Northern California. He has taught Core (a three period block consisting of Reading, Writing, and Social Studies) at Redwood Middle School (RMS) since 1997. Jeffery is a teacher leader. His own background as a child with a non-traditional family and as a parent of a special needs child, seem to motivate him to look for alternative methods that might better meet students’ needs. His role on campus is that of a powerful persuader. Some might feel pestered by his nearly dogmatic insistence on his latest idea, but he is able to bring people on board with many instances of success in his career in middle school education. He also has a strong interest in technology and is often the first to utilize new gadgets or programs. This was important in the move to standards based grading, as it required a new grading program and someone to trouble shoot when problems arose.

Mary.

Mary started teaching in her late thirties after a career in the private sector. She taught eighth grade Core and sixth grade Reading Intervention at RMS for 14 years before taking the position as principal. Her role on campus is that of tireless advocate for students and learning. Her dedication is unmatched and is demonstrated by the 16-hour days she regularly invests in her job. In her last two years as a teacher, she made the change to Standards Based Grading. While she provided
important information about the changes Standards Based Grading brought to the classroom, it was her administrative perspective that was especially enlightening to this research.

*Molly.*

Molly started her teaching career as a part time teacher in the Bay Area. She moved north in 1994 and taught at a nearby middle school until 1998 when she accepted a position at RMS as a Core teacher. Her role on campus is that of an advocate for high expectations for students, especially in writing. She has been a tireless leader in the local Writing Project and continually brings new ideas for improving writing curriculum to the Core team.

*Ruby.*

Like Mary, Ruby started teaching after many other life experiences. She began teaching Math at RMS after one year of substitute teaching in local schools. Her role on campus is the voice of great life experience and personal calm. She brings her peaceful ways to her classroom and her professional dealings. She is an advocate for the whole child when her colleagues get bogged down in educational jargon and external accountability.

*Valerie.*

Valerie taught middle school math and technology for thirteen years in the Bay Area. She spent two years as a university supervisor for student teachers. She moved north and took a position as seventh grade math teacher at RMS in 1996. Her role on campus is that of tireless student supporter. She is driven to help kids. She
calls parents and gives up her breakfasts, lunches, and Saturdays to help seventh graders understand math. She is dedicated and outspoken. She is also the member of the staff most likely to publically question change. She often challenges her colleagues to slow down and carefully consider a change before they excitedly jump off the edge.

_Gwen._

Gwen was hired to teach sixth grade at one of the elementary sites the year before the middle school was created. She moved to the middle school in 1996 to teach sixth grade Core. She added technology as an elective to her schedule in 2001. In 2006 she moved to eighth grade Core. Her role on campus is that of task completer. She is masterful at getting her students involved in her Writer’s Workshop and has a reputation for keeping her classroom moving along at an invigorating rate. She is in charge of the yearbook and rallies, helps with cheerleading, is on the Site Council, and co-hosts the school social committee. Although she wears many hats, she consistently follows through and meets her deadlines.

_Zoe._

Zoe taught a self-contained fifth/sixth combination class at a local elementary for one year before joining the staff at RMS. She has taught sixth grade math at RMS since 1998. Her role on campus is that of organizer and enforcer. She is logical, organized, hard working, and professional. In her personal life, she treasures
her role as grandmother, and it shows in the way she loves the students in her classes and works hard to help them succeed.

*Michele.*

Michele taught for one year at an elementary site before joining the RMS staff in 1994. She may have one of the most diverse teaching histories on campus; she has taught eighth grade Core, technology, building skills, academic support, math, and sixth grade Core. Her role on campus is that of willing student supporter. She jumps in wherever needed including managing the after school tutorial program, being a liaison for staff to many district wide committees, organizing staff committees, acting as secretary of the local teachers union, and even coaching multiple sports.

*Julie.*

Like the participants in this study, I teach at this rural middle school. I was a coach and instructional aide at RMS during my college years. I did my student teaching at this site. I taught for one year at a middle school out of the area before I realized my heart was still in this little town. I moved back and taught for one year at a local high school before landing my dream job back at RMS in 1999 teaching 8th grade Core. My role on campus is one of pushing reform and looking for solutions. It is this role that led me back to the university in search of answers to my new grading questions.
Research Methodology

The following provides a description of the methods used in carrying out this research.

Interview guide.

The interview guide was arranged into six themes: Initiation, timeline, positives, negatives, changes, and reform (see Appendix A for Open Interview Guidelines).

The first theme was the initiation and was aimed only at Jeffery, as he is the single educator who initiated the change from traditional letter based grading to a Standards Based system. The purpose of these questions was to understand what specific experiences and challenges forced Jeffery to look for a different way to provide feedback to his students. These questions focused on the research and selection method for this specific system design. This section also included information about the challenges to other possible feedback models and the ways in which a decision may have been influenced by a lack of resources.

The remaining themes were addressed with all participants. The timeline section included questions about when the participant began using standards based grading and why they chose to either join the pilot committee or wait for schoolwide implementation.

The positives section included information about the participant’s experience with Standards Based Grading and any positive effects it had on their teaching, their students, relationships with families, or school wide systems. The negatives section
included information about challenges and negative aspects of the change from letter grades that the teacher witnessed or experienced.

The changes section included information about the changes in thinking for the teacher. This section focused on how teaching and learning are different since the switch to Standards Based Grading.

Finally, the reform section included information on possible improvement or areas of concern. Each educator had general concerns as well as subject-area specific concerns related to needed improvements.

Participants were open and forthcoming. There were no incidents of obvious discomfort, all participants responded to all given questions. Participants seemed eager to share their experiences and ideas. One interviewee specifically asked for feedback about the relevance of her answers but did not seem to be inhibited in her responses.

The interviews were 12 to 25 minute conversations. Each was recorded using a laptop and Garage Band digital recording software. After recording, the files were converted to audio files and transferred to iTunes where they could be played, stored on an iPod, or burned onto back-up CDs.

Each interview was scheduled at the participant’s convenience. Most interviews took place during teacher prep periods. One interview took place on a Saturday morning before another scheduled meeting. The Saturday interview was conducted in my classroom as that teacher and I meet there regularly and were both comfortable in that setting. The rest of the interviews were conducted in the
participants’ classrooms. The use of a cordless laptop allowed us to sit wherever the participant’s suggested: sometimes at a grouping of desks, often at a larger table. As long time colleagues, comfort and trust were well established and required little attention. As the topic was not student specific or otherwise confidential, most participants chose not to lock their doors. Many interviews were briefly interrupted by students or phone calls, but none seemed to have a negative effect on the tenor of the interviews.

The interviews were conducted and recorded during the week of February 9-16, 2009. Once the interviews were completed and backed up, I transcribed each one. Listening to each interview on an iPod, I transcribed each interview into a Word document using a table to record interviewee name, questions, responses, and my own comments. Although the transcription process was long and arduous, the process allowed me to reconsider the participants’ responses word by word. Significant non-verbal communication was noted on a piece of paper during each interview. These notes, amounting to less than a dozen notations, were transcribed in the comments column during the transcription process. Other sounds and non-verbal communication, such as sighs and laughter, were noted in parenthesis in the text of the transcription.

Coding began during the transcription process. As I was listening and transcribing my voice into one column, the participant’s into another, I also used a third column to jot down comments and codes. When all of the interviews had been transcribed, I wrote down my initial thoughts about the interviews. I then reread
each interview, coding more carefully and charting key statements in outline format under headings from my codebook.

No participant was asked for a second interview. After the interviews, I sent each participant a hand written thank you note. I did email a number of the participants with brief questions for clarification. I continued to express my gratitude in each of these emails.

I have known and worked with each participant for many years. It was with this familiarity and high personal regard that I entered each interview. However, I was aware that I was asking each participant to share his or her personal views. As such, I was careful to behave in a professional manner. Additionally, I provided participants with a copy of their transcribed interview to allow them to check for any potentially embarrassing material. I also asked each participant to choose his or her own pseudonym for the final thesis. Overall, there was great enthusiasm for my work. For all of my attempts to foster trust, I was the one who left each encounter feeling inspired.

I started each interview with a brief explanation of my research and a list of questions. I was sure to inform participants know that I wanted to know what they thought about Standards Based Grading and that we were not tied to the questions. While many got off track on occasion, they all seemed eager to make sure that each question was answered and that I got all the information I needed. They would often ask, “Did that answer your question?” or “Was that what you meant?” The bell at the end of the period was the only limitation to each interview. While each interview
was finished well ahead of the bell, I have no doubt that years of training in completing their tasks in the 48 minutes allotted was behind these tidy endings.

Each interview was transcribed using a Word Document and Table. The table had five columns headed as follows: CODE, PERSON BEING INTERVIEWED, QUESTIONS, RESPONSES, and COMMENTS. The code column was used later with a pen or pencil as I reread the interviews. The participant’s name was copied and pasted down the person being interviewed column. This was helpful later when I physically cut some of the transcriptions up and rearranged them by question. I recorded all formal questions in the question column, including clarification. Incidental comments or positive fillers in my voice were recorded in brackets within the text of the Responses column. The participants’ words were recorded in the Responses column. I transcribed them verbatim, including many repeated words and phrases. I included sounds, such as laughter, and movements, such as slapping the desk, in parenthesis. The comment column was used to record clarifying questions, ah-ha moments or phrases, or other thoughts I had as I read and reread the interviews. I printed the transcribed interviews and continued to code them using the first column of the table. I later cut the copies up into strips and rearranged them by questions/topic and later by code.

Coding took place in two stages. At first, I found myself developing a new code every few lines. After coding half of the first interview, I realized I was developing codes that were far too specific. I went back to my interview question guide and decided to use the questions as the main code categories. As this was a
single case study of a process and possibly because I teach history, a chronological approach seemed logical. I decided to organize my information by the initial thoughts, the initial positives and negatives, the changes that occurred over a longer period of time, and the participant’s thoughts for the future. I further delineated this information by three categories of interviewees: the initiator, the pilot committee, and those who joined later. Within this framework, I was able to find educational themes around cultural attachment to grades, curricular focus, assessment, feedback, and reporting of grades.

I will present the results in the next chapter and utilize quotes from the participants for illustrative purposes. I edited the quotations to alleviate tangential comments that didn’t directly relate to the question. I did not use an ellipsis to denote that I did not include text so as to keep the flow of the textual materials smooth.

Conclusion

The interviews provided the insight needed to clearly understand the process of questioning a long held educational tradition, researching alternatives, and developing a tiered implementation of a new system. The next chapter provides results of those interviews in the following sections: 1) initial thoughts about Standards Based Grading, 2) initial challenges of making the change to Standards Based Grading, 3) student response to Standards Based Grading, 4) perceived family response to Standards Based Grading, 5) changes in teaching practices and
philosophies as a result, 6) teacher reflection and suggestions for continued improvement of the grading system.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

_I do the very best I know how, the very best I can, and I mean to keep doing so until the end._

-Abraham Lincoln

Introduction

This research sought to understand the process that one rural middle school underwent in an attempt to develop a system of grading that better reported student achievement. I specifically focused on the experiences of veteran teachers and the ways they perceived this change in grading systems to have affected their own teaching, their students’ learning, and the students’ families’ understanding of the students’ progress. The central themes of this research were the cultural attachment that all stakeholders had to the traditional grading system and the difficulties this presented to embracing the research-based system of reporting student achievement. I was particularly interested in the challenges this team faced in abandoning letter grades and the fundamental changes in thinking that occurred as a result.

Few question the use of letter grades based on points or percentages. In one rural California middle school, Redwood Middle School, a simple conversation between a parent and a teacher initiated a change that has had far-reaching effects for all teachers, students, and families. The gradual shift from traditional grades to a Standards Based system did more than provide additional feedback on progress reports; it changed many
classrooms in fundamental ways. It is in this context that I interviewed nine teachers about the process and resulting changes in their thinking and teaching.

This chapter presents the results of qualitative interviews of nine middle school teachers. Qualitative data were collected to provide a more extensive array of teachers’ experiences and growth. The data are separated into the following five sections: 1) initial thoughts about Standards Based Grading, 2) initial benefits of making the change to Standards Based Grading, 3) initial challenges of making the change to Standards Based Grading, 4) changes in teaching practices and philosophies as a result, and 5) teacher reflection and suggestions for continued improvement of the grading system.

During the interviews, I asked a series of questions designed to prompt teachers to elaborate on their experiences with Standards Based Grading. I attempted to get responses that made clear what each teacher initially thought of the new system of grading, how it had worked for their students and the students’ families, and if and how the shift had changed their own teaching or teaching philosophies. The teachers responded thoughtfully and in great detail. They all seemed willing to share their experiences and opinions. While many external experiences were similar, the internal level of understanding and application varied greatly.

Initial Thoughts

The teachers had different reasons for making the change from letter grades to a Standards Based System. Jeffery initiated the entire shift. He was driven to
look for answers after an exchange with a parent. The parent had come in at the end of the school year to see what he could do to help his son over the summer. Jeffery described the rest of the conversation like this:

You might try reading some small little pieces with him, and work on having him restate in his own words what he read because he has a lot of difficulty with reading comprehension.” And the father said, “Whoa, hold on, what do you mean? My son doesn’t understand what he reads?” I told him, “Well sometimes...that is a problem for him.” He looked at me and said, “Then answer this question for me, Jeffery, why is he getting an A- in reading?”

Jeffery was taken aback by this question and spent his summer reading what he could find on the topic of grading. He specifically cited Marzano’s *Classroom Assessment and Grading that Works* and O’Conner’s *How to Grade for Learning*. After attending a conference the next fall, Jeffery started making changes to rubrics for individual assignments. He explained it this way,

I made the scores on my rubrics based on the standards and then still gave an overall score because that’s what we were doing, because I didn’t have any other way to do it. But at least I had a way to show the scores were based on how they did in certain standards.

Jeffery began to realize the computerized grading programs most teachers used would not support standards based grading, and so he called the owner and programmer of his favorite grading program, Mike. While Mike was initially hesitant, he eventually developed a test version based on the grading system Jeffery
had described. After getting permission from the principal, Jeffery decided to give the new system a try in the last trimester of the year. He had designed a system that separated out homework and classwork from assessments. It also broke down assessments by standards. Jeffery reported all this information to students and their families but ultimately reported the final grade as a letter grade based on a formula that averaged all the scores.

Other teachers were recruited by Jeffery to pilot the new system the next fall. With the support of the administration, this initial pilot committee met a number of times in the late spring. They were all given copies of Marzano and O’Conner’s books to read over the summer. They spent a significant amount of time meeting about the new grading system over the course of that first year. One member of the pilot committee, Ruby, who teaches eighth grade math, remembered it this way:

> It made a lot of sense to me. I think looking at Marzano’s book, just, it made sense to talk about each standard and how the students were doing. So they could see their strengths. It made sense, much more so than an overall grade of a B- and I was excited.

All four of the interviewees who explicitly described their reasons for joining the pilot stated they had either been dissatisfied with the traditional system of letter grades or became dissatisfied after reading Marzano and O’Conner. Nora, who teaches Sixth grade Core, described her reasoning this way: “I was dissatisfied with the old grading system, and I didn’t think it was doing its job, it wasn’t really accurately reporting where a student is, is performing in subject areas.”
One member of the pilot committee, Molly, who teaches seventh grade Core, was not only dissatisfied by the traditional system, but after reading the two books described her disappointment that neither she nor her teacher preparation program had ever questioned letter grades,

It made me realize I wish I had been doing this all along; I wish somebody had talked about this long ago. And I realized how out of touch it is to grade just the way I had been graded just because that is what is assumed you do.

The first year, Jeffery tried the program with his class. The second year, the pilot committee used Jeffery’s system of Standards based grading but still provided students with a final letter grade on their report card. The third year, the administration mandated that the entire staff make the shift away from letter grades to Standards Based Grading, and the official report cards that students and their families received reported scores for effort and achievement separately.

The final group of interviewees did not begin using Standards Based Grading until it was required. They had a variety of reasons for not joining the pilot committee. For Michele, the sixth grade Building Skills classes she was teaching did not have state standards, and she decided to wait. When she did join, she had to create her own standards. She used the following process,

So I asked my team and the seventh and eighth grade teams; I put an email out, “What would you like to see this program be about? What should be the main focus?” From there I created the standards.
One of the other teachers, Valerie, who teaches seventh grade Math was honest about the reason she did not join the pilot committee,

I think it was just timing for me. When it first came up, it just felt like there was so much new stuff we were doing as a school, and I just felt like I was burned. I couldn’t do one more new thing.

While the level of excitement for Standards Based Grading was varied, all interviewees described it as a positive change. They all reported understanding the need for a different system of grading, and many were excited about the benefits to all parties such a change might bring.

Initial Benefits

Providing more effective information to teachers, students, and their families was the most often cited benefit to Standards Based Grading. Teachers were able to understand more clearly what a student understood and where they still needed instruction or individual assistance. Zoe, a sixth grade math teacher, described it in this way: “For me, it was being able to see right where kids were, like where they were failing. Sometimes across the board, sometimes it was just one or two areas where I could give them some extra help.” Ruby was also impressed with the new information she had about the effectiveness of her own teaching which she described as follows,

I noticed where my strengths in teaching were as well, because if they did, if the whole class did really well on something, I went, oh, I did a good job on
that! And the same with places I didn’t do well. If the whole class bombed, I went, Oh! I need to work on that one.

I asked the teachers what they perceived to be the benefits to students. Jeffery sited the following example,

That first year I had this one student who was such a hard working student. She was, you know, I looked back in her cumulative file and she was a straight A student. She was failing my class. What it was, was all during her schooling, her hard work and her effort and her ethics and her attitude about school really got her through. But when it came down to assessments. When it came down to writing, showing her understanding of anything in a written form, she couldn’t do it. She couldn’t do it…that’s when I realized with her that there was like a huge learning disability going on there…but she wasn’t getting the help she needed because we weren’t able to see her weaknesses because our system masked her weaknesses.

Jeffery then described the additional academic screening he was able to initiate as a result of the information provided by Standards Based Grading.

In addition to providing information for services or interventions, other teachers felt that the new grading system provided a focus on mastery for students and gave them information they could use to increase their learning, not just their grade point average. Mary, a Core Teacher turned administrator, described it this way: “I think also it was a little bit less about what I gave them and a little bit more
about what they knew and what they understood and where they were going. I like
to think that.”

A number of teachers found the Standards Based Grading to be more positive
for students. Students were able to see their strengths and their weaknesses as
information about what was next for them instead of as failure. Gwen, an eighth
grade Core teacher described it this way,

The positives are that it delineates student skills between their strengths and
weaknesses. So students in a particular subject matter can see what they can
and …what they can’t do well and then where they need to work. So it’s a
real easy way to say, you can read and comprehend really well but
vocabulary is something that is new or that you struggle with. It really made
students more aware of what they can and can’t do so they could apply
themselves where they needed more easily.

Ruby further elaborated on this idea. She saw a difference in the way a student
might interpret the score on a test, “I would put the standard, and they could see their
score for it. And they could see, ‘Wow! I did pretty good on that, even though I
didn’t do well on that.’ And if that had been a regular test it would have been a C-
maybe, a D.”

Valerie found the new system to be more sensitive to the special emotional
needs of the middle school student. “I do think it is easier for them to go back and
study too-- because then it doesn’t feel so overwhelming to them, the middle school
kid. You know, like ‘Oh, I got all 35 problems wrong?’ No, you really only got these seven, right here."

Every teacher interviewed discussed the benefits of additional information for families. Teachers discussed the separation of practice work and class participation from assessments, the increased understanding of how to help a student, the superior nature of the feedback for all students, and the focus on the whole student provided by Standards Based Grading.

By separating practice work from the assessment of understanding, the new grading system provided additional information for families. While this information was difficult for many to decipher at first, the teachers used the bi-annual Student-Led Conferences to help train families. Zoe, dealing with new sixth grade families, described it this way,

I talked to them at conferences, and I really explained, look, here your child can really do the algebra, but here they are really having trouble in the number sense area, with maybe fractions or decimals, or something. I mean, you could really see; this is really giving you a better picture of where your student is and what is going well for them or what difficulties they are having. I think most parents, when you explained it that way, were pretty receptive to that and felt that was good.

Additionally, multiple teachers reported families appreciating the additional information for the assistance it provided when attempting to help their child at
home. For some families, this was ultimately the selling point for the new grading system. Valerie related the following anecdote:

And I had a mom who was totally against it. She was really loud about that. We were talking about that and Dad finally said, ‘Look, look at this. I know my daughter doesn’t know how to multiply decimals, that’s the piece she doesn’t understand. I can teach her how to multiply decimals. If this was imbedded all in one test, we maybe would have figured that out, but it’s really clear here to us right now.’ So the feedback is clearer. I think it breaks it down for parents.

Two teachers mentioned the additional information provided for high achieving students and their families. While many had received straight A report cards for years, the new system provided additional information about what was next for students already working above grade level. Gwen, who provided Standards Based Grades first as a sixth grade Core teacher and later as an eighth grade Core teacher described it this way:

When they get a progress report that is broken out by abilities or skills, then they can both praise their children for what they do well, but then they have more feedback to help their kids at home. Say, for example, if they need to be doing more advanced thinking, thinking out of the box. I have parents ask me all the time. well what do we need to increase our reading ability? A) Read more and B) focus on thinking more out of their shoes and more in the character’s shoes or author’s shoes. So it helps them know what their kids’
strengths and weaknesses are. It’s just more feedback, more specific feedback, more than just saying, your kid is doing great.

Jeffery echoed this. He was also impressed with more complete picture the new grading system painted of the whole student. Specifically for high achieving students, it showed more specifically what a student could do, “as opposed to these kids that are always getting straight As all through their lives and,’ so its just kind of nice, it shows the whole student.”

All of the teachers interviewed cited multiple initial benefits to Standards Based Grading. At the same time, the new system provided many challenges as any fundamental shift might.

Initial Challenges

The change from letter grades to Standards Based Grading brought with it a number of challenges. Some, like resistance to change, frustration with a new system, and extra time on the teacher’s part were expected. Others, like the need to explain and train families individually, were not. Still others, like limited student metacognition and a lack of supportive technology, were both surprising and disappointing.

The most common cited challenge to Standards Based Grading discussed by the teachers interviewed was fundamental: it was new. One of the biggest challenges faced by all parties was the fact that the grading system was disjointed at a district level. Students are given a Standards Based Report card in Kindergarten through third grade. They were, at the time of the middle schools shift to Standards
Based Grading, given letter grades in fourth and fifth grades. Then, parents and students were asked to shift back to Standards Based Grading for sixth through eighth. Additionally, but beyond the control of this elementary district, the local high school provides letter grades. This was confusing for families until the district mandated a change in fourth and fifth grade to a Standards Based Report card. Nora, as a sixth grade teacher and parent of a student in the district, was especially cognizant of this inconsistency: “I mean, they made the change at fourth grade where they had to look at a different kind of report card now, and in sixth grade they’re having to look at a different kind of report card again.”

The new system of standards based grading also challenged the status quo. This led to frustration, discomfort, and in some cases, anger from both teachers and families. Jeffery remembered:

The biggest struggle I had was acceptance from the staff. Change, change is hard, and I think it is sometimes harder on teachers. We get into these modes—you know I still get into them in a lot of ways—but that was the biggest difficulty, and you know, it still is. As a program we haven’t changed it a whole lot since we started it, and I think it needs change, but people are like, well we’ve already changed it. And they get set in this way, and you know there is no perfect system; it needs to evolve just like we evolve.

Ruby also recalled the difficulties of change from letter grades to a number representing proficiency for all parties in this way:
The numbers were so different from the letters, and people said, ‘But we’ve been doing letters for hundreds of years.’ It was a huge change; change was really hard. People were resistant to that. So, getting everybody on board, and I think people really like it now, but the changeover was difficult, for all of us.

Every teacher cited the additional time any new system takes and specifically cited the additional time necessary to provide such detailed and extensive feedback. Many, like Gwen alluded to the additional depth required of their teaching,

   It’s difficult. It’s a lot of work. It is. It is a lot of work to plan curriculum when you—you know, I’m a Core teacher—so reading and writing. Instead of just reading a story and answering some questions, it is more about the different layers of the story. Making sure to address all of the different learning modes with a story and different skill sets that you have. Though it is a little more work, it’s more effective.

In addition to more planning time, many found their old assessments to be useless for the new grading system that required results to be reported by standard. Valerie discussed it in this way:

   Creating a test was difficult for me at the initially, because I wanted to make sure that I grouped all the specific standards together. I don’t necessarily do that now. But it felt important for me to do it that way. And so, reorganizing all my tests and having the standards up there for them, it just felt like it was
a lot. It was hard work. I couldn’t use any of the tests I had before; I had to re-do them.

Teachers also cited the need to train students and their families to interpret the new reports as one of the initial challenges. Regardless of many letters sent home and administrative offers for group training, most students and their families required multiple one-on-one conversations before they seemed to grasp the new system and the increased information it provided. Gwen described it this way:

The grading system is really difficult to decipher at first. Initially, until students are trained, I do think the reporting system is more difficult to read and understand. They are young. And I think it takes just a lot of teaching for them to understand what they are being assessed on and how to read the reports. And also I think the hard thing is making the time when you have a class of 30 kids to touch base with 30 kids and say, ‘Hey, your strengths and weaknesses are…’ That’s a real difficult thing. They can see it on paper, but then they see, ‘Oh, I’m not doing very well on literary response and analysis, what does that mean?’ So until you have those in-depth conversations with them, as a whole group and then individually, some of them just might not get it.

An unexpected challenge met by two of the teachers interviewed was one of omission. They were surprised that motivation and metacognition did not seem to increase in their students. Jeffery said,
I’ll admit it, when I first got into this, I think I was a little naïve. I was thinking that students would care more about how they are doing in individual levels. That hasn’t turned out to be the case. They’re still just looking at the end score.

Zoe also mentioned metacognition; however, she was reflective of her own perceived shortcomings in that area.

You know, I think for kids too, because I think they could see that they didn’t really understand the fraction part. And that is probably where I think that’s something I don’t do enough. That we are really working in the algebra standard, or we’re only working on this part of the algebra standard. I don’t know that I always say that to sixth graders or make it clear to them. That is probably one of my weaknesses that I probably could work on.

Another challenge the teachers met was the lack of technology to support the change to Standards Based Grading. Jeffery, in the initial change, found a willing programmer to develop a grade book program. However, that program did not export to the school’s student information system, a fact that necessitated individual entering of final grades each trimester. Additionally, some felt the progress reports generated added to family confusion and frustration. Michele described it this way, “I think the negatives stem from the grading program itself because of the way it puts the information out.” She added later in the same response after a lengthy example, “So I think that the way the grading program is set up and how we can generate our responses about how their child is doing isn’t as clear as it could be.”
While many expected such a fundamental shift to be challenging, some of the issues teachers had to face were surprising. Next, the teachers shared the most important shifts in their own thinking about their profession and practice that resulted from this change in grading policy.

*Teacher Shifts*

Traditional Letter Grades based on a point system have been the norm at Redwood Middle School longer than any current staff member has been teaching at the school. Considering the interwoven nature of curriculum development, instruction, assessment, and grading, it was not surprising that many teachers felt that other practices, strategies, and philosophies shifted along with their grading policies. Teachers reported changes in curricular focus and use of the standards, a necessity for different planning strategies, changes as a result of being asked to judge student proficiency, a new focus on learning, and a change in assessment design practices. All teachers found these changes in their thinking about their own teaching to be positive but still in flux.

All of the interviewees who still teach in the classroom specifically discussed the increased curricular focus Standards Based Grading forced them to develop. Molly, described her focus relative to student growth, “It has become much more focused, much more deliberate. I reflect so much more on what individual kids need now as far as their skill level and where I want them to go next. I think overall it has really made me a much better teacher.” Gwen discussed her improved focus relative to her own lesson objectives, stating:
It streamlines teaching because you decide what you really want kids to learn and be good at. Because there are so many tiny, little things, you could spend years within one piece of curriculum. So it does, I feel like it focused curriculum and also allowed me to go more in depth with certain things. And so, I teach things more focused, but better.

Seven of the teachers cited increased focus in their teaching; of those, more than half went on to clarify this focus relative to the use of State Curriculum Standards. Jeffery found he was asking more questions of himself as he made curricular decisions, “I think more about what are the kids going to get out of this? What is the objective here? And I like the thought of looking at the standards and having a set of guidelines there of what we are supposed to accomplish.” Zoe felt similarly for both her own teaching and the impact it had on her students, “So I’m narrowing their focus and then also mine. And really concentrating on something, so I felt like I was really giving them more concentrated time on certain areas and skills.”

This focus in objectives led to changes in planning practices for many of the teachers. Ruby found she was asking herself new questions about instructional decisions in her math classes:

I’m really looking at problems, problems that I’ve taught for years and I’m thinking, ‘Can I teach this? Is this an eighth grade standard?’ I mean, I’m really thinking about the standards. It has really caused me to start from the back, do backwards planning. Because I’m thinking about, they need to do this, how are we going to get there?
Two teachers felt their instruction had become more meaningful. Jeffery said, “It has gotten rid of some of the fluff that as a teacher I would pad a lot of my time with.” Zoe also saw this change initially, but found a compromise as her understanding of Standards Based Grading advanced:

Initially I cut out a lot of projects that I did before, and that wasn’t just the standards Based Grading, that was also teaching to the standards because all of the sudden I was really accountable for certain things they needed to know for the test, who had time for that kind of project based, or it didn’t feel like I had time, especially in 47 minutes. So, initially it was an issue. So I kind of took those out and then as I realized, what a minute, I can bring these back in, I just need to do them differently. And I need to make sure that it is addressing the standards.

Standards Based Grading added another dimension to grading for many teachers at RMS. Letter grades had required teachers to assign each assessment item a point value and add the points up to give the student a percentage. The relationship between this percentage grade and student learning was not absolute. When the teachers moved to a four point scale of proficiency, most eventually came to utilize Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives to judge the level of thinking students were doing, a change many felt increased the association between high scores and authentic student learning. With some teachers, this change was described as a function of their new responsibility to judge student learning and thinking rather than to tally points, for others it was a manifestation of the assessment design process.
The new system gave students one of four scores on their work: 1.0 meant beginning, 2.0 meant progressing, 3.0 meant proficient, and 4.0 meant advanced. (See Appendix B for the letter sent to students’ families, which includes the table explaining the new system.)

This was a profoundly different way of looking at student work. For Gwen, the grade level proficiency was especially challenging to judge:

I feel like the proficient level is sometimes one of the hardest to determine. It’s really easy to tell the kids that are advanced and are immediately taking the curriculum elsewhere. They are taking their ideas and connecting them to the outside world and their life. And it’s also much easier to see kids that are just struggling. But the proficiency level, there are so many ups and downs with that group of kids that are right there in the middle, that they may do extremely well at one skill and be really high in an area—of any, like math, but then they are really struggling on the other side with a Language Arts focus. Or maybe they are really into one reading story but then not into another. So, it is really that middle group of kids, to me, is the hardest to determine. Because they have strengths and weaknesses and getting them to push themselves because they’ve been doing pretty good for so long and they’re comfortable. So I think that is the hardest group to identify more specifically and to pin down what they need to do to jump into the next bracket.
For most teachers, judging student achievement to be advanced became a problem because their assessments did not have leveled questions. Nora said,

I’m looking at my tests and how I create my tests. And looking at leveled questioning, you know, advanced leveled questioning for those kids who can do that. So we’re putting different levels of questioning on tests to see what kids are capable of accomplishing.

The assessment design process changed significantly for many teachers as they switched to Standards Based Grading. Teachers found that they had to design assessments differently in order to be able to judge student understanding as advanced. Zoe put it this way, “But I might have one or two problems on there that are more difficult. And so the kids that really are advanced are going to understand and manipulate that in a different way and then the other kids just don’t really see it.”

The changes teachers experienced were profound and altered their thinking about their professional practices. As a result, many had multiple suggestions for continued improvements to and because of the Standards Based Grading system at RMS.

Reflection and Suggested Improvements.

The purpose of this research was to reflect on the process of systemic change with the hope that the system could be improved. All of the teachers interviewed were confident in their approval of Standards Based Grading as a whole and their desire to see the program evolve and change to better serve their students. Teacher’s suggestions fell into three categories: technology, calibration, and assessments.
When asked if they would repeat this process, or if they wished they had stayed with letter grades, all nine teachers interviewed stated they would repeat the change. Michele, a teacher with a diverse teaching past, said, “I think it has been good, it has made me a better teacher.” Zoe was more enthusiastic, “Oh yeah! I wouldn’t want to go back.”

Many of the suggestions for improvement were related to technology and the computer generated reports sent home to communicate grades. RMS has a policy of providing students with a progress report in every class every three weeks. These reports print directly from the customized Standards Based grade book program that every teacher utilizes for classroom grading. The report shows effort/practice work scores at the top followed by a detailed list of each practice assignment and the student’s scores. The second half of the report shows overall assessment averages for each subject, averages for each standard, and a detailed list of each assessment and the student’s scores. The second half of the report shows overall assessment averages for each subject, averages for each standard, and a detailed list of each assessment and the student’s scores (See Appendix C for an example of the computer generated progress report). Trimester report cards are mailed home every 12 weeks. Teachers must take the averaged score for each subject area, both effort/practice work and assessment, and enter them manually into the school information system. Unlike the progress reports, the report card shows only two scores for each class and offers no explanation of the scores (See Appendix D for an example of the trimester report card).

Seven of the nine teachers interviewed desired a new and improved report card. Most were concerned with the limited information provided to families on the
current report card. Valerie was direct in stating, “Of course report cards, we need something that speaks clearly to parents.” They also worried about the inconsistencies between teacher generated progress reports and the official report cards. Zoe was frustrated, “First of all, I can’t stand that our report card doesn’t look similar to our grade books, so I’d like to see that changed.” Still others wished for a solution to the problem of running a classroom-grading program that is not compatible with the school information system. Molly said, “I think we need some kind of readable report card for sure. Well, I think we have done a really good job working with the Easy Grade Pro people, it would be nice to come up with workable technology to keep track of everything.”

During the initial change to Standards Based Grading, staff discussed what each score meant at length over the course of multiple staff meetings. Since then, discussion of and agreement on what constitutes progressing, proficient, or advanced scores have only happened in small curricular teams. Many teachers expressed concern over the lack of regular alignment at the site level. Molly said,

We need consistency amongst Core grades at all levels and practice work. What is acceptable? What is not? I think all those need to be more consistent, because right now we are all really inconsistent and I think that that is a problem for kids. And again, it’s like what is an A, what is a B, what is a C and it is different room to room, from grade to grade. So yeah, I think all of that articulation is really, really lacking right now.
Two teachers had specific suggestions for change in this area. Valerie recognized
the issue of calibration and thought tiered implementation might work, “I think if
we’re teaching seventh grade math, we should pretty much be together and honestly,
even the math department should be close together, the Science department, etc. I do
think that by departments across grade levels you should score assessments
consistently. And then I think we could meld the other way, across subject areas.”
As an administrator, Mary was particularly concerned with these inconsistencies.
She wondered if RMS might take note of their elementary colleagues’ practice in this
way:

    What are we meaning when we say advanced at a 4.0? You know, maybe
this is that piece where we can move more in line with what they are doing in
fourth and fifth grade where they have just the 3.0, the 2.0, the 1.0. And then
have, I think, in middle school there should be something for those kids who
go way above and beyond. I’m not convinced that every kid who gets a 4.0
is going way above and beyond in every class.

Zoe saw the lack of calibration as a function of limited time together as a staff. She
said, “I would still like to use our professional time as a group to try to get together
and keep moving forward on this, we haven’t spent enough time together talking
about it and I don’t know who other people feel about it. Where they are?”

The final group of suggestions centered on assessment design, use of rubrics
to score assessments, and the use of data collected to inform teaching. In the first
few months after changing over to Standards Based Grading, Jeffery developed a
conversion chart (see Appendix E) that allowed teachers to transfer a percentage score on a test to a Standards Based score. It was agreed by the staff that this would be a temporary measure until teachers could fully grasp developing and using Standards Based rubrics to score assessments.

Two teachers specifically mentioned the increased use of rubrics as a need for the future. Ruby was honest that she did not always use a rubric and felt she needed additional time and training to do so more often. She described it like this:

I need more training in using rubrics because I don’t really use them. And, it’s hard. It just seems like one more thing and I feel like I’m jumping into standards for the very first time. Developing a rubric for every assessment seems overwhelming to me. So that is something else that I would like to work on.

Gwen was also concerned that Standards Based rubrics were not the norm,

I think also making sure we are really truly grading on rubrics and not just transferring from points to an assessment score. I think it needs to be more, going back, more holistic and a little more, you know, annotated notes and proof. Maybe even portfolios to prove where a kid is at.

Mary was concerned that the data gathered by teachers was still only being used to grade students. As the administrator, she did not see enough evidence that all teachers were using the more specific information to guide their instructional practices. She had this to say, “I think we need to make that next move into, what do you, what is your next step as a student? I’m not seeing that happen in some cases
where teachers are actually looking at, here are the scores; this is what my next piece of my instruction should be. I’m worried about that.”

The teachers interviewed had a wide array of experiences with Standards Based Grading and the process of school change. They were forthcoming with both successes of the program and their own challenges. Every teacher interviewed felt their teaching had changed in significant ways, and none were willing to leave the program as it stands, each one of them was thoughtful and reflective as they made suggestions for continued improvement.

In the following chapter, I will offer an analysis of the results presented in this chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS

“Energy and persistence alter all things.”

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

Introduction

The staff of Redwood Middle School is special and that cannot be ignored in any analysis of the research presented here. Of the twenty-two teachers currently employed, seventeen have worked together for more than ten years. They regularly gather outside of school to socialize, play music, exercise, enjoy the arts, shop, and eat. Their spouses and children are friends as they see each other often. It is in this safe setting that much risk can be taken, that tempers can flare, and frustrations can be worked through, and it is in this setting great education can flourish.

The nine teachers interviewed for this research are representative of the dedication of the entire staff of RMS. They are strongly motivated to improve teaching and learning for the students of their rural community and take seriously the task of doing so while being sensitive to the special social, emotional, and developmental needs of their newly-adolescent students. They are interested in doing whatever it takes to make school happen for their students and that comes through clearly in this research.

This research looks to answer the broader question in education that asks: How can we change traditional educational practices, especially those to which we
are deeply and culturally attached, for researched-based best practice that maximizes learning for all students?

The teachers of RMS took on a fundamental shift in their practice by changing their system of grading from a traditional letter grade system based on points to a Standards Based Grading system based on student proficiency. This shift caused all involved to reflect on their professional practices and reevaluate the effect these had on students and their learning. It also sent a few of them searching for answers to new questions.

In this chapter, I will analyze the narratives of these teachers and shed light on the process they went through in the context of systemic change. I will also share the teachers’ recommendations for continued improvements of the current school program in light of the outcomes from the shift to standards based grading. The teachers of RMS made a decision regarding grading practices that significantly impacted all other aspects of their teaching. Many of the suggestions for improvement are a manifestation of a new grading system that does not fit the traditional planning, instruction, and assessment practices still in place.

Initial Reflections

The results from this section show us the importance of the two texts Jeffery chose to guide the shift to Standards Based Grading, Classroom Assessment Grading that Works by Robert Marzano, and How to Grade for Learning by Ken O’Conner. They also shed light on the RMS staff’s attitudes toward change and reflection.
The entire pilot committee was given copies and mentioned many times the value of the books in deepening their understanding of the problems of traditional letter grades as well as the benefits of the system proposed by Jeffery. Jeffery chose the two texts based on personal interaction with the authors at a conference. This was not a systematic search of the data. The two-part system of separately grading effort and achievement that Jeffery designed was wholly influenced by these two books, which are specifically about grading. Had he widened his search, the program may have looked different.

The climate at RMS is one of change and hope. The staff is motivated to reflect on and change their practice to increase student success. The administration at both the site and district level, support such change.

Based on a single parent concern, Jeffery was open to questioning a deeply entrenched system of grading. His colleagues were willing to join him. The administration supported him enough to fund the pilot committee’s books and limited professional development time to move the program forward. Even teachers who did not initially join the pilot, like Michele, remained connected and found answers to their concerns from the staff.

Initial Benefits

The results from this section show us the importance of additional information and data on educational decision making and student learning. For all parties—students, families, and school—the new system of Standards Based Grading provided superior feedback.
For students, this additional information allowed them to focus their efforts on areas of curriculum that they found challenging. It also supported the fragile self-esteem of the adolescent by pointing out areas of strength separately, not watered down by a whole subject average score. For long time high achievers, the feedback was specific and helped them move forward in their learning, rather than giving them a pat on the back and yet another A. For families, this additional information also shed light on a student’s strengths. For families of low achieving students, years of failing grades had shaken their trust in the school system. Being able to see their child’s strength’s separated from effort or struggles was positive. It gave other families the ability to help their children when they could see the specific area of challenge.

For teachers, the information provided a much clearer picture of student achievement. It allowed teachers to separate hard work from understanding. In Jeffery’s case, he was able to provide support services to a student who had masked a learning difference with high effort and a positive attitude. It also allowed teachers the ability to keep high achieving students engaged and learning by reporting where they needed to go next.

Initial Challenges

The results from this section focus on the increase in teacher workload and the lack of structural supports for the new grading system.

Teachers quickly realized they would have to change organizational and assessment practices in order to report student achievement in a Standards Based
Many teachers reported needing to recreate their tests so that the standards were represented separately. This increased their workload significantly. For some teachers, adding points up at the end of the assessment was no longer acceptable. They needed to find a way to clearly articulate what students had mastered and what they still needed to work on. Their already increased workload was impacted further by the need to reflect on these issues and concerns.

However, the majority of the challenges faced were external for everyone in the school community. The school structural systems were set up to support letter grading. Although Jeffrey had procured a computerized grading program for the teachers, it was one of a kind. It required extensive training for teachers, and many found it frustrating. The reports the grade book program generated were limited and did not make student achievement as clear to students and their families as many teachers would have liked. This also added to the workload; teachers spent additional time explaining what the progress report could not address.

At the site level, the school information system did not accept the Standards Based Scores. The technology director created a stopgap report card that showed only averaged scores for each subject area. This information could not be uploaded from teacher computers; instead they had to log on to the school information system and enter these scores by hand. The resulting trimester report card provided little more than the old letter grade report cards had.
Teacher Shifts

The results from this section show that much of what changed for teachers was an increased focus on the California State Standards and the resulting questioning of their own classroom practice. They also had to rethink the way they graded student work.

The change to Standards Based Grading at RMS forced all teachers to revisit the California State Framework and Standards for their subject areas. All teachers reported an increased understanding of the standards for their courses and a greater curricular focus on the standards. They found that many of their specific classroom activities did not move students toward mastery of the standards. They also found ways to alter units and projects to better fit the goals set out by the standards. The teachers felt this newfound focus was a positive addition to their process of planning.

Teachers found that they could no longer simply add up the number of missed questions on a test and drop a percentage score in the grade book. The new system of grading required them to consider student proficiency. This was the most fundamental shift for the teachers of RMS. This required teachers to clearly understand learning goals, the steps they would use to move students forward, and then the content of proficient student work. The difficulty here seems to be a lack of teacher training in understanding student proficiency.
Reflection and Suggested Improvements

The results from this section show us that teachers saw a need for improved technological supports, calibration of the grading system, and changes to the assessment design process.

When asked what was next for the school, most teachers first gave an exasperated laugh and said, “Report cards!” The need for better technology to support this system of grading has become a constant frustration for the teachers at RMS. The lack of commercial products to meet the needs of RMS and a perennial lack of school funding only exacerbate the situation.

Another concern for the teachers was the lack of calibration. One of the initial goals of Standards Based Grading at RMS was to provide valid information to all members of the school community regarding student achievement. This brought to light the fact that all grading is individual and subjective unless measures are taken to calibrate the scoring system. The added pressure to judge proficiency made this an oft-repeated concern for RMS teachers. They saw the need for a systematic approach to creating a school culture that values calibration.

The narratives of the teachers at RMS shed light not only on the benefits and issues created by a shift to Standards Based Grading but also many issues of education in the 21st century. In the following chapter, I will offer concluding thoughts about the process the school has completed, the current situation at the school, and implications for the future for both the school and for research in this area.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSIONS

Societal Context

This research was done during a diverse era in American politics. At the beginning, the school was deeply affected by the need to meet the goals of No Child Left Behind. As the research was being completed and written up, Barack Obama was elected president and has promised dramatic changes to the educational landscape.

No Child Left Behind includes many controversial requirements. For the purposes of this research I would like to draw attention to five elements of the law. First, NCLB dramatically changed the purpose of American Education. Instead of providing a rank order of student achievement based on norm referenced testing, NCLB asked schools to be sure every student achieved a minimum level of proficiency, especially in Language Arts and Math, in essence removing the bottom of the bell curve and bringing all students into the future ready to succeed in an every changing world. This is good.

To this end, NCLB established an accountability program to make sure that no child was left behind. This also seemed good. However, the accountability system was enforced with a long list of punishments for not achieving the lofty goal of 100% proficiency by 2014. This caused many schools to focus only on bringing the lowest students up to a proficient level and only in Language Arts and Math,
thereby creating a narrow education for struggling students and virtually ignoring the most talented students who had long ago met the minimum requirements. This was bad. Unfortunately, most of the law was unfunded. This was also bad. In addition, the definition of proficient was left to each state to determine, essentially creating a system that was not calibrated and that could provide no comparable data. This was really bad.

The Obama administration took power in the months that I was completing my interviews and coding my data. He appointed Arne Duncan to be the Secretary of Education. Together they have promised changes to the American educational system that could fix many of the problems with NCLB and help move us toward the very admirable goal of making education accessible to all students regardless of socio-economic status or geography.

Obama and Duncan see the need to create well-rounded educational systems for all students. They have touted the importance of the arts, science, and physical education. They are talking about not only bringing our lowest achieving students up to a minimum level of proficiency but also pushing our talented students to increase our international competiveness. Even in these tough economic times, they have pledged substantial additional money to our schools; they are aware of the need for a well-educated work force to make our economy strong again. Finally, they have moved toward national standards and national assessments that would allow us to validly assess school success and do our best to recreate that success in other
places. It is in this climate of change and hope that I finish this research and move to implement my findings in my own classroom.

Limitations of the Research

This research, while useful to my own understanding, was limited by a number of factors. It is a case study of a single middle school with unique qualities. I have done this research with great passion but limited time. Finally, my own personal involvement certainly affected my ability to remain objective.

This research was collected from a single rural middle school. With a population of only 390 students and just 18 full time teachers, the findings are specific and difficult to generalize. My purpose was always to better understand what we had done and how we might make our school better, and in that case, the research has been a small, personal success.

Additionally, I was unable to give the research the abundant time and energy it deserved. Although I was granted an educational leave, I still taught 8th grade part-time while I completed the Master’s course work, conducted research, and wrote this thesis. When I started the MA program six years ago, that list of responsibilities might not have slowed me down, but becoming a mother did. I must be upfront about the fact that my sons almost always won when I had to choose between research and their needs. Additionally, at some point, I had to stop, or as my father-in-law advised last Christmas, “the best thing to do when you are in a hole is to stop digging.”
Finally, I am a member of the middle school I researched. I have known each of the participants for no less than a decade and consider each to be an admired colleague and friend. This certainly affected my passion to complete the research but also made me less objective.

*Our Process*

This research started when a colleague really heard a parent concern. Rather than ignore the big question about what grades really meant, he dug deeper. He questioned his own practice, looked to professional literature for answers, and worked with colleagues to fix the problem he saw. Within two years, the entire site had abandoned letter grades for a standards based system.

The question about what grades were for and the shift to Standards Based Grading were life altering for me. It led me to more questions than answers. If I was really supposed to report their proficiency, did my old tests work? If my old tests didn’t work, how could I make new ones? Where did one get training to create assessments? How could I create a classroom system in which students could show mastery? If I was the only one grading for mastery, how was this new system any different than the old? The list goes on and on. I was unsatisfied and frustrated with my inability to make sense of this new paradigm.

At that moment, I was given the gift of time. I was granted an educational leave that allowed me to work part time for two years and pursue my Master’s Degree. I had the time and structure I needed to pick up where my colleagues and I had gotten stuck and to look for answers.
What I have come to realize is that we are playing a new game but trying to run our old plays and adhere to the old rules. We changed the goal of education from one of ranking students to one of student learning and proficiency. However, that is all we changed. The goals, strategies, and assessment practices of that old system must be swapped for new ones that allow us to facilitate student learning and meet our new goal of No Child Left Behind.

At RMS, we changed our grading system. It was successful in that it forced many to rethink how they were teaching. It forced me to rethink everything about my professional life. It was unsuccessful because we only changed the output. So we had a new goal and a new output of data, but everything in the middle was old and out of date.

This is where my research meets my practice. We need to develop clear goals. Like the 50 different sets of state standards and definitions of proficient under NCLB, there is not enough thought put into what we are teaching students and why. Although we can start with the state standards, we must develop learning targets that are cohesive across grade levels and developmentally appropriate within grade levels. We can embrace elements of the state standards that work, but we must bravely challenge those that do not. These learning goals must be sensitive to our rapidly changing world. A back to the basics approach doesn’t work for our tech savvy students who will enter adulthood in less than a decade—only to find a reality vastly different from that which we are in today. Spelling tests and grammar worksheets have no place in a world that uses spell and grammar check. Our
teaching should honor these changes, not bury its head in the sand and pretend the world is as it was. Once these learning goals are chosen, we must communicate these effectively to students and their families. If they don’t know where they are going, it is silly to tell them to just get in the car and drive.

We need to rethink our assessment practices. The same teachers who create clear learning goals and communicate those goals to their students should be creating classroom assessments to monitor and report students learning. Many teachers need training to rethink the ineffective assessments of their own childhood and move toward a more balanced assessment program that includes both formative practices to move the learning process forward and summative practices to evaluate the learning process. Students need to be seen as the most important consumer of their results, and they should never be punished for their first try. Instead we need to allow them to learn from their low scores and only report their final attempt, when all instruction is complete, and their mastery can be fairly judged.

Teachers need to work together to calibrate their scoring practices. No score is useful if it is not clearly defined. We need to score work together, carefully discussing the differences and always relating the score back the learning goals. This process must be honored with time and accountability. If there is no requirement or deadline, this reflection will not take place. We need to hold ourselves accountable, rather than complain when we are held accountable by the district, the county, or the state. This will create meaningful data on which teaching and learning decisions can be based, not just evaluated. Teachers will know when to
front load information, when to reteach, and when to move on. More importantly, students can be taught to be active learners who gauge their own understanding and make choices that keep them moving forward toward their academic goals.

On a more global level, this is the level of responsibility I want for all my students and my own children. It is only when our words and actions require our youth to take responsibility for themselves that we can know they are ready to be competent adults.
Open Interview Guide

Set One
1. What are some of the reasons you moved away from traditional letter grades and toward a new grading system?

2. As you look back on our move to Standards Based Grading, what moment stands out to you as the one in which you thought this would be a good fit?

3. What issues did you believe Standards Based Grading would solve?

4. Do you remember considering challenges to this new system? If so, what do you remember thinking would be problematic? Try to think back to what you thought then, not what experience tells you now.

5. What do you think influenced you at the time? Were there workshops or classes you were involved in? Peers or mentors you were talking to? Books or articles you were reading?

6. I know you single handedly took this on as a pilot project that first year, what convinced you to go forth?

7. What were the initial changes to your thinking about grading and feedback? About teaching? About learning?

8. Would you be willing to share the books/documents/conversations that influenced you?

Set Two
1. Were you part of the initial pilot committee? Why did you make that decision?

2. What were the initial benefits/positives regarding Standards Based Grading for you? For your students? For their families? For Administration?

3. What were the initial challenges/negatives regarding Standards Based Grading for you? For your students? For their families? For Administration?

4. Did your teaching practice or thinking about your own teaching change as a result of the move to Standards Based Grading? If so, how?

5. Looking back, would you do it again? Do you think it was a good move for this school?
6. What is next? What work still needs to be done to fully realize the goals of this program? What needs to be done that you see now only as a result of Standards Based Grading?
APPENDIX B

LETTER SENT TO FAMILIES BY RMS ADMINISTRATION TO EXPLAIN THE NEW SYSTEM OF STANDARDS BASED GRADING:

Dear Family and Student:

As the year progresses and we move toward “report card time,” it is important that you understand our grading system. Our standards-based grading system, grounded in current educational research, is considered by many experts to be the best method of designing relevant curriculum, reporting student progress, and communicating student strengths and areas of challenge.

There are two parts to the Report Card:

The “Standards” marks indicate the level of proficiency with which your student has mastered grade level standards in each subject area. The “Overall” Standards score for each subject represents an average of the marks for individual standards assessed in that subject during the trimester. An “Overall” score of Proficient (2.50) or above means that your student is currently working at grade level in that subject area. “Standards” mark levels are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Scores</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.50 – 4.00 = Advanced</td>
<td>In-depth Competence, Superior Performance - In-depth understanding, application of knowledge and skills to develop new understanding and solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.50 – 3.49 = Proficient</td>
<td>Demonstrates Competence, Solid Academic Performance - Subject matter knowledge, applies such knowledge to real-world situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.50 – 2.49 = Progressing</td>
<td>Partial Competence - Partial success in tasks using the knowledge or skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.00 – 1.50 = Beginning</td>
<td>Limited Competence - Needs assistance or more time to apply knowledge or skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “Effort/Work Quality” marks are based on work (classwork and homework) quality/completion and class participation. The “Overall” Effort Score for each subject represents an average of the marks students receive on practice work while preparing for assessments. Effort scores can be useful in determining whether or not a student is struggling with grade level standards, has poor study skills or needs more challenging curriculum. “Effort” marks levels are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effort Scores</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At or Above Grade Level</td>
<td>3.50 – 4.00 = Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Grade Level</td>
<td>0.00 – 1.50 = Beginning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Effort/Work Quality Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effort/Work Quality Scores</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Consistently turns in quality work on time, always on task,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>follows directions the first time, participates in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Usually turns in quality work on time, usually on task,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>usually follows directions, usually participates in class,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>usually follows safety procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>Frequently turns work in late and/or work is low quality,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>often not on task, frequently needs to be re-directed, rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>participates in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Excessive missing or incomplete assignments, mostly off task,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>does not follow directions, does not participate in class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Promotion/Retention and Graduation. Students scoring in the Proficient or Advanced categories are performing at or above grade level and are progressing appropriately toward promotion to the next grade. Students performing in the Progressing and Beginning categories are NOT performing at grade level and may be considered for retention. Overall standard scores are added together each trimester and at the end of the year to determine appropriate placement the following year (see formula and example below).

**Formula:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Add all seven assessment scores from report card</th>
<th>Total must equal at least 17.5 per trimester</th>
<th>Total must equal at least 52.5 yearly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.5 (minimum standard score) x 7 (number of classes taken) = 17.5</td>
<td>2.5 x 7 x 3 (number of trimesters) = 52.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example of a student meeting minimum standards:**

**Trimester 1:**  
Math 2.5 + LA 2.0 + Reading 3.0 + SS 3.5 + PE 3.0 + Drama 3.5 + Science 2.0 = 19.5

**Trimester 2:**  
Math 2.5 + LA 2.0 + Reading 3.0 + SS 3.0 + PE 3.5 + Drama 3.0 + Science 2.0 = 19.0

**Trimester 3:**  
Math 2.5 + LA 2.5 + Reading 3.5 + SS 3.5 + PE 3.0 + Drama 3.5 + Science 2.5 = 21.0

**Year Total:**  
19.5 (tri. 1) + 19.0 (tri. 2) + 21.0 (tri. 3) = 59.5

Eligibility for Extra-Curricular Activities. To participate in extra-curricular activities – athletics, after school drama productions, etc. – students must be performing at least at a proficient level and/or earning a satisfactory effort mark in each class. Trimester’s marks will be utilized for determining initial eligibility for extra-curricular activities. Bi-weekly eligibility checks will determine continuing eligibility.
Awards.  Awards are presented at the end of each trimester in grade level assemblies. If a student is eligible for an award, his/her family will be notified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Hall of Fame</td>
<td>Student receives Principal’s List during all nine trimesters at MMS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal’s List</td>
<td>Student’s combined Assessment scores equal 3.4 or higher, and Student receives “Outstanding” Effort scores in 5 of 7 classes and no lower than “Satisfactory” in all other classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honor Roll</td>
<td>Student’s combined Assessment scores equal 3.0 to 4.0, and they are not already receiving Principal’s List.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholastic Merit</td>
<td>Student receives “Outstanding” Effort scores in 5 of 7 classes and no lower than “Satisfactory” in all other classes, and they are not already receiving Principal’s List.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Counts</td>
<td>Student is nominated by faculty and staff for consistently displaying one of our pillars of Character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect Attendance</td>
<td>Student does not miss school for any reason.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions about this reporting system? All of the teachers at RMS are happy to discuss and explain the grading system. Please feel free to email or call them with questions. The Principal, Director of Student Services, and Counselor are also available to answer general questions about this system of reporting student progress. All email addresses are available in the school Planner and on Edline. Staff and Administration can also be reached by phone, Monday through Friday, 7:30-4:00 at 555.5555. Special Note: An informational Meeting will be held Wednesday, October 11 from 6-6:30 in the RMS Library regarding Standards Based Grading.

Thank you. While this system is not what many of us grew up with, we are confident that students and families will find that this type of reporting student achievement gives much more information about students’ progress, academic strengths, and needs. This project is an educational work-in-progress to better serve our students. Thank you for your support as we continue working hard to improve the educational program for all students at Redwood Middle School.
APPENDIX C

Sample student progress report generated at the classroom level by computerized grade book program designed specifically for RMS:

STUDENT PROGRESS REPORT
Monday, May 4, 2009

Grade Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary Item</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Grade</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Term 2 Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11/4/08</td>
<td>T.T.H./M6 Practice</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11/4/08</td>
<td>1.1.4 Independent Reading</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11/4/08</td>
<td>Mrs. F/Promethea Practice</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11/8/08</td>
<td>6.0. for Final Char. Assessment</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11/15/08</td>
<td>1.1.1 Independent Reading</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>12/5/08</td>
<td>12.5 Independent Reading</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>12/8/08</td>
<td>&quot;In Trouble&quot; Work</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>12/12/08</td>
<td>12.12 Independent Reading</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>12/12/08</td>
<td>Soft Rain Practice Work</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>12/19/08</td>
<td>12.19 Independent Reading</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1/3/09</td>
<td>01.09 Independent Reading</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1/16/09</td>
<td>01.16 Independent Reading</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1/23/09</td>
<td>01.23 Independent Reading</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1/30/09</td>
<td>01.30 Independent Reading</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>2/6/09</td>
<td>02.06 Independent Reading</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2/13/09</td>
<td>02.13 Independent Reading</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reading & JGP Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>2.79/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.0 WAD: Analysis, Fluency, and Systematic Development: Includes vocabulary and concept development.</td>
<td>2.83/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. T.T.H./M6 Assessment (1/15/08)</td>
<td>3.00/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. In &quot;Trouble&quot; Assessment (12/8/08)</td>
<td>3.00/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Soft Rain Assessment (12/12/08)</td>
<td>2.50/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.0 Reading Comprehension: Includes structural features of informational materials, comprehension and analysis of grade-level appropriate text, and expository critique.</td>
<td>3.10/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. T.T.H./M6 Assessment (1/15/08)</td>
<td>2.50/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. In &quot;Trouble&quot; Assessment (12/8/08)</td>
<td>3.50/Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Soft Rain Assessment (12/12/08)</td>
<td>3.00/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. BJ Ch. 1-4 summary (1/9/09)</td>
<td>3.00/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. BJ Ch. 13-14 summaries (2/6/09)</td>
<td>3.00/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.0 Literary Response and Analysis</td>
<td>2.43/Below Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. T.T.H./M6 Assessment (1/15/08)</td>
<td>2.50/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Final Character Assessment (11/18/08)</td>
<td>1.50/Below Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. In &quot;Trouble&quot; Assessment (12/8/08)</td>
<td>2.50/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Soft Rain Assessment (12/12/08)</td>
<td>2.50/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. BJ Ch. 5-8 Responses (1/16/09)</td>
<td>3.00/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. BJ Ch. 9-12 Responses (1/23/09)</td>
<td>2.50/Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. BJ Ch. 17-20 Responses (2/9/09)</td>
<td>2.50/Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

Sample Trimester Report card generated at the administrative level by the school information system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Overall Standards Score</th>
<th>Overall Effort</th>
<th>Effort</th>
<th>Effort</th>
<th>Effort</th>
<th>Effort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundations</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>OUT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print Media</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>SAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>OUT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading 7</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>SAT</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>OUT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts 7</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>SAT</td>
<td>OUT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies 7</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>SAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science 7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>OUT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Effort Scores:
- Out = Outstanding
- Sat = Satisfactory
- Uns = Unsatisfactory
- Poor = Poor

AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV
ABS | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0
TDY | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0
ENR | 5 | 19 | 23 | 16
DEC | JAN | FEB | MAR
ABS | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0
TDY | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0
ENR | 15 | 18 | 16 | 16
APR | MAY | JUN
ABS | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0
TDY | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0
ENR | 22 | 21 | 9 | 0
APPENDIX E

The conversion chart designed to be a short term fix when Standards Based Grading was initially implemented:

**Standards Equivalents 2005-06**  
**Revised 2/16/07**

*Advanced:* Superior performance, in-depth competence

*Proficient:* Solid academic performance, demonstrates competence

*Progressing:* Partial success in tasks using knowledge or skills, partial competence

*Beginning:* Limited competence, may require assistance or more time to apply knowledge or skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>95-100</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88-94</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-87</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49 or less</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>3.50 - 4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>2.50 - 3.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressing</td>
<td>1.50 - 2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>0.10 - 1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 5 point assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>missed</th>
<th>Rubric Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8 point assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>missed</th>
<th>Rubric Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 9 point assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>missed</th>
<th>Rubric Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### 10 point assessment

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<tr>
<th>missed</th>
<th>Rubric Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6+</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 11 point assessment

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<th>Rubric Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6+</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12 point assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>missed</th>
<th>Rubric Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7+</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 13 point assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>missed</th>
<th>Rubric Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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### 50 point assessment

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### STAR Reading assessment Tri 1

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REFERENCES


