**Diamond’s Story (From *Failing at School*\*)**

Diamond told me she was surprised by her low grades [in 9th grade]. “I was, like, wow. I don't know how to feel, it was kind of confused, kind of sad, kind of mad, it was mixed feelings. 'Cause it was like, I did a lot of work, I really tried hard, and then, it was like, dang! I'm failing all my classes.” Diamond's first inclination was to give up, a feeling shared by many other failing students. "At first I was like, I'm not doing it anymore 'cause I'm not about to keep trying and I keep failing." This sentiment lasted for a few months, during which time her grades continued to fall. This only added to her frustration: "Every time I did something it seemed like, I fall back down. Ugh. I'm *done* trying." She thought if she transferred to another school, "I wouldn't have these problems." Diamond said the thing that made school difficult was the work itself. 'Cause if I don't understand something I'm just going to give up and be like, I'm not doing it." But that response would then "slow me down and knock me off my track." By the end of the year, she was too far behind to pass most of her classes. She had to go to summer school in the hopes of not having to repeat the ninth grade. Diamond said the thought of going to summer school "was embarrassing, and it made me sad.”

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Diamond earned only one credit in her second year of high school, for a total of

2.5 credits as of August 2008 [after 2 years in 9th grade]. Her family moved out of state and her new school had contacted Devon High to transfer her records. Assuming this new school uses a traditional grading and credit system, the school will likely recognize only her 2.5 earned credits and Diamond will again have to repeat the ninth grade.

\*Camille Farrington, *Failing at School: Lessons for Redesigning Urban High Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2014.

**TABLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

How did Diamond react to failing courses? What was the result?

How many students like Diamond do you think we have at our school? What happens to them?

How useful is this kind of failure experience in their lives? Is it the same kind of failure as things we’ve experienced (like failing to make a team or production cast, or get into a selective college)? Or is it qualitatively different?

Is seeking to reduce our failure rate a good goal – and if so, what steps could we take to help prevent course failure? In particular – how can adapted grading practices help students to recover before they fail a course?