**Session 3: Assessment Strategies that Motivate Students, Part 1**

**Introduction to Professional Development Sessions on Grading and Assessment**

These sessions address how grades motivate or fail to motivate students to exert effort for learning. They build on what we know from prior research:

* One of the most important predictors of being off-track to college-ready high school graduation is course failure in 9th grade.
* Ninth grade course failure rates are extremely high, particularly in urban areas.
* Course failure is closely related to attendance problems, but also occurs for students who do attend regularly.
* Course failure can be exacerbated by missing assignments that receive the grade of 0 on a 100 point scale.
* District- or administrator-mandated policies to reduce the failure rate have led to widespread alienation among teachers, and even to legislation forbidding such policies in Texas.
* Even when districts have policies about report card grading, teachers are largely left on their own to determine grading policies that lead to the report card grade.
* Many teachers do not understand the statistical properties of the 100 point scale and how zeros for missing assignments can lead to a failing grade on the 100 point scale (when grading on an A to F scale could lead to a passing grade).
* While there has been a sizable increase in credit recovery opportunities, these are not always effective and entail added costs to schools and districts.

The goal of these professional development sessions is to provide the opportunity for teachers to participate in guided collaborative discussion with their colleagues about issues related to grading and assessment. The sessions are aimed at changing teacher beliefs and practices so that their grading provides opportunity for recovery and success. Key principles on the agenda for discussion include:

* Whether failure on minimal requirements for successful transition into living wage employment (e.g., courses required for high school graduation) should be viewed in the same way as failure on more optional goals (making the team, getting into an elite college, etc.)
* Whether failing grades are effective in motivating students to keep exerting effort to learn
* Whether opportunities to recover from early failure might be more appropriate within the context of a particular course rather than through credit recovery after course failure.
* How zeros for missing assignments or misbehavior can negatively influence an average grade
* How different ways of grading can lead to different final course grade results
* Whether students should be required to complete missing assignments rather than simply be given a failing grade for them
* What impact opportunities to complete missing assignments and/or revise assignments for higher grades have on student learning of responsibility and postsecondary readiness

Our orientation is that teachers should not be coerced by administrators to adopt particular grading practices, but rather that teachers should be required as part of their professional practice to discuss the issues collaboratively with colleagues and consider the arguments of those who advocate more recovery opportunities in the grading process. We believe that honest consideration of these issues by teachers will lead to shifts in beliefs and practices that will help to reduce the failure rate.

Resources that have influenced the development of this session include:

Myron Dueck, Grading Smarter, Not Harder: Assessment Strategies that Motivate Kids and Help Them Learn. ASCD.

Thomas Guskey, The Case Against Percentage Grades. *Resilience and Learning*, September 2013 <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept13/vol71/num01/The-Case-Against-Percentage-Grades.aspx>

Thomas Hoerr, Good Failures. *Educational Leadership*, September 2013 <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept13/vol71/num01/Good-Failures.aspx>

Mac Iver, M.A. (2016). When minimum grading policies backfire: Who decides whether to let students fail?In M. Gottfried & G. Conchas (Eds.), *When school policies backfire* (pp. 69-84). Harvard Education Press.

Doug Reeves, Preventing 1000 Failures. *Educational Leadership*, November 2006 [http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov06/vol64/num03/Preventing-1,000-Failures.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov06/vol64/num03/Preventing-1%2C000-Failures.aspx); <http://mymassp.com/files/u1/ac07/Reeves-leadershipandlearning.pdf>

Doug Reeves, The Case Against the Zero. *Phi Delta Kappan*, December 2004. <http://www.ccresa.org/Files/Uploads/252/The_Case_Against_Zero.pdf>

Doug Reeves, Taking the Grading Conversation Public. *Educational Leadership*, November 2011 <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov11/vol69/num03/Taking-the-Grading-Conversation-Public.aspx>

**Objectives**

The goal of this session is to stimulate teacher thinking and collaborative discussion about grading and how it influences student motivation and student performance.

**Guiding Questions**

* What are our goals for giving grades?
* How do grades influence future student performance?
* Are our assessment strategies “killing motivation”?

**At a Glance**

* Introduction – session goals
* Optional poll – goals for giving grades
* Review of motivation framework
* Grading policy exercise
* Meaningful grading readings – modified jigsaw
* Large group discussion
* Large group debate activity
* Teacher reflection time

**Facilitator Notes**

This session may evoke strong reactions from teachers who have deeply held convictions about grading. The goal is to help teachers to think through their positions and see the implications of certain philosophies and practices. The mix of activities (reading and reflection, discussion and debate) is aimed at keeping the group engaged and willing to consider other views than their own.

**Materials**

Handout 3.1 (Grading Scenario)

Handout 3.2 (Text Pieces for Modified Jigsaw)

Handout 3.3 (Grading Scale)

Handout 3.4 (Instructions for Agree-Disagree Activity)

Handout 3.5 (Teacher Reflection Questions)

**Procedure**

**Set-up:** Teachers should sit at tables in groups of 4 to facilitate quick movement to first activity.

**Introduction (3 minutes)**

Facilitator introduces guiding questions (above and Slide 2).

**Grading Policy Scenario Activity (7 minutes)**

Introduce the scenario and ask teachers to individually calculate a final grade for the hypothetical student, using the information sheet provided. Then have teachers share with their table partners and discuss any differences in grading decisions noticed.

**Large Group Debrief (5 minutes)**

Facilitator takes a quick poll to see distribution of final grades. As a large group, facilitator leads teachers in discussion of: 1) what they noticed about grading differences; 2) how they determined what grade to assign; and 3) what accounts for the differences in grades across teachers.

**Modified Jigsaw** **(10 minutes)**

**Discussion of Assessment Issues (10 minutes)**

Facilitator discusses impact of grading scales, particularly noting the difference in the role of 0 in the 100 point scale and the 0 to 4 point scale.

Facilitator also notes the issues regarding whether improvement over time should be factored into final grades, and how missing or late assignments are handled.

**AGREE/DISAGREE (Modified Debate) Activity (20 minutes)**

Facilitator explains directions for the Agree-Disagree Activity (Slide 12).

Facilitator posts first statement for teachers to “vote” on with their feet (Slide 13). After teachers are in position, volunteers from each side defend their position. Teachers are able to switch sides if they are convinced by the argument.

This continues with the other three statements (Slides 14, 15, & 16).

**Individual Teacher Reflection Time (3-5 minutes)**

Facilitator summarizes session briefly and asks teacher to spend a few minutes individually reflecting on questions on Handout and Slide 19.