**Session 4: Assessment Strategies that Motivate Students, Part 2**

**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 promote teacher reflection about grading practices that provide opportunities to recover from failure.

**Guiding Question**

How can grading systems help motivate students to exert the effort needed to grow in mastery of course learning objectives?

**At a Glance**

* Introduction
* Table Discussion of “Retesting” Excerpt
* Four Corners Activity – My Own High School Experience
* Considering How We Provide Opportunities to Recover from Failure
* Teacher Reflection Time

**Facilitator Notes**

This session asks teachers to consider an idea that many of them will disagree with – providing “retesting” opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of course material that they have not previously mastered. There may be passive or even active resistance to the activities during the session. If teachers resist reading the short excerpts, you may have to remind teachers that this experience may help them understand their students’ reactions to their own classroom experiences. Some teachers may rebel against the “silent discussion” and you may need to be flexible about allowing traditional discussion. You may need a back-up plan for large group discussion about why teachers do not want to engage in activities and/or discuss alternative grading ideas.

**Materials**

Handout 4.1 (“Retesting” excerpt from *Grading Smarter, Not Harder*)

Handout 4.2 (Four A’s Text Protocol)

Handout 4.3 (Silent Discussion Directions)

Handout 4.4 (Diamond’s Story and Table Questions)

Handout 4.5 (Table Discussion Questions for use if excluding Diamond’s Story component)

Handout 4.6 (Teacher Reflection Questions)

**Procedure**

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

**Introduction (5 minutes)**

Facilitator introduces guiding question (above) and the three critical questions students should be able to answer during any learning phase: Where am I going? Where am I now? How can I close the gap? Facilitator reviews how the “Learning Target Roadmap” from Session 2 helps students answer “Where am I going?” and notes the importance of formative assessment to help students understand “Where am I now?” To answer the question about closing the gap, facilitator introduces an activity to promote discussion of the concept of “Retesting.”

**Table Discussion of “Retesting” (15-20 minutes)**

Facilitator directs teachers in groups of 3-4 to read individually the “Retesting” excerpt from *Grading Smarter, Not Harder* and review the 4 A’s Discussion Protocol to structure their thinking as they read.

* What Assumptions does the author of the text hold?
* What do you Agree with in the text?
* What do you want to Argue with in the text?
* What parts of the text do you want to Aspire to?

Facilitator points out that teachers can use the 4 A’s Protocol in their own classroom discussions with students as well.

Once teachers are close to finishing reading, facilitator explains that they will engage in a “silent discussion” to experience an activity they can try out in their own classrooms. Facilitator calls attention to the “Instructions for Silent Discussion” handout and emphasizes that teachers can start their own writing with any of the 4 A’s. Use chime or similar timer to alert teachers to pass their writing and comment on what they receive in turn. Continue until the text makes a complete round of the table’s participants (and continue a couple of more times if desired). Allow enough time for teachers to debrief the experience for several minutes. Conduct a quick group poll on “retesting.”

**Four Corners Activity – My Own High School Experience (5 minutes)**

This is a short “break” type activity to get people moving and chatting briefly. Direct teachers to move to pre-numbered corners of the room as shown on Slide 13. Once they have done this, they can regroup at tables (in different groups if desired) and discuss questions on Slide 15.

**Considering How We Provide Opportunities to Recover from Failure (15 minutes)**

Facilitator introduces questions on Slide 16 and directs teachers to read the short excerpt “Diamond’s Story” and discuss the questions on the handout with their table group. (Depending on time constraints, there is another version of the discussion handout that does not require reading of the Diamond’s Story text.)

As time allows, provide for large group debriefing of conclusions from table discussions.

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

Facilitator summarizes session briefly and asks teacher to spend a few minutes individually reflecting on questions on Teacher Reflection Questions.