

Minnesota Principals Academy – Action Learning Project
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Implementing Building-Wide Grading Practices
Grading for Learning

Abstract

This Action Learning Project was originally initiated due to lack of consistent grading through the building. Individual departments and/or teachers had begun implementing effective grading practices, but there was not a defined building grading system.

Vision:

The vision of this project was to develop a building-wide philosophy of grading with agreed upon grading practices. However, once initial data was gathered about current grading practices, it became evident that the majority of teachers had very thoughtful and substantive rationale about their current department or course grading practices. At that time, the project focus quickly shifted to supporting teachers in better defining the differences among grading practices, aligning philosophical purpose of grading, and, primarily, engaging in learning about Standards Based Grading.

Background / Context:

Woodbury High School is a traditional comprehensive high school serving approximately 2000 students in grades 9-12. The school serves a growing diverse student body: 17% FRL; 35% students of color; 10% special education; and 3% ELL. There are approximately 100 teachers. Individual departments and/or teachers have begun implementing effective grading practices, but there is not a defined building-wide system of grading. At the time of project implementation,

there was also not a current practice that identified or included mastery of standards.

We have made much progress in the use of zeros to penalize students (many teachers simply indicate a missing assignment in his/her grade book, but do not calculate a zero into the overall grade). We have also made substantial progress in accepting late work (although there is often a penalty) and allowing re-takes. Many teachers have re-take policies already in place, which is indicative of the movement toward grading for learning practices.

What we did:

We focused our professional development and PLC efforts on two primary standards-based practices. First, we implemented a new system of reporting student course failure data. All teachers were required to complete a document indicating which standards were not mastered, which was indicative of the student not mastering enough content knowledge to earn a credit in the course.

Second, we initiated a district-wide initiative toward standards based grading that began with aligning standards, unpacking benchmarks, and developing units to include essential questions and success criteria. Assessments were then developed to measure identified success criteria.

What we found out:

The work around success criteria was the most impactful to teachers in their understanding of how Standards Based Grading might look in the future. This work was the most beneficial as we transition to consistent grading practices throughout the building as the teachers now have a common framework of understanding in how students are evaluated.

We also saw a noted shift in teacher gradebook reporting beginning Spring 2016 when they were asked to identify standards, not merely assignments, the student needed to master to earn a credit. Teachers gradebooks became more descriptive of the learning and organization by content.

Implications for practice:

Following the project, I came away with a greater understanding of how to effectively implement sustainable, consistent grading practices. Although it would have been easier to establish a taskforce to develop, initiate, and enforce consistent grading policies, the direction we have taken has the possibility to completely transform grading instead. As we continue to develop units with success criteria, we will need a process to report student achievement more effectively via the gradebook.