

Grading Practices Committee Meeting Minutes
February 18, 2010 – Administration Center

Assistant Superintendent Greg Zinn opened the session by welcoming everyone and thanking them for their time and willingness to be involved in looking at the District's grading practices. He reiterated that the main goal of the group is to develop a communication tool to be available to teachers, parents, and community members this spring. The tool will provide information on what balanced grading is and how it affects student learning. The timeline of spring was chosen so teachers would have this information before they begin to make their grading plans for next fall. Greg noted in particular that the purpose of the committee is not to formulate a single grading program that must be used by every teacher in the District. He acknowledged that there are many balanced grading systems already in place and said the idea is that teachers will use the balanced grading information to formulate a system that works best for them.

Liberty High Assistant Principal Andy Croley provided a Power Point presentation that graphically illustrated the variety of grading systems currently used by different teachers in the same grade level and school. Entitled "A Day in the Life of a Current 9th Grade Student," Andy showed that a typical 9th grader at Liberty, enrolled in a typical schedule of 7 courses, could be graded differently in each class. Each teacher had his/her own grading scale and each was different from the rest. Group questions included the following:

- As a student or parent, how would you make sense of this variety of scales?
- Is this situation currently happening in your school?
- What does a balanced grading scale look like? Do the scales presented appear to be balanced?

Liberty math teacher Stefan Ledgerwood presented a grading scale that he has adapted to work with the eSIS Gradebook program. (This program is currently being piloted at Liberty.) Stefan gave an online demo of his grading scale, including real-life examples from his classes. A primary element of his scale is that it is based on 100 points and 5 grades (A,B,C,D,F). Each grade is therefore 1/5 of 100, or 20 points, so a student who received 80-100 points would receive an A, etc. Questions from the committee included the following:

- Can other schools have access to the eSIS program? (It should be an option for other schools next fall).
- How did students react to his grading scale? (Stefan explained the scale to them, showing how it was fair to all students, and he has had no complaints.)
- What basic changes did Stefan make when he began using this scale? (The changes primarily were a mindset. Tests and quizzes remained the same).
- How did parents react to the grading scale? (The most important thing when talking to parents is to be clear, know what score equates to a letter grade, and then show how this system is fair.)
- Can the eSIS Gradebook program be changed away from the 100 point scale? (No, the code in the program is written based on percentages, so the 100 point scale is embedded in the program).

Greg Zinn stated that Oregon universities have expressed an interest in proficiency-based teaching and learning because GPAs alone may not report what can do or know.

Century High School Health teacher Kristin Grazer gave a presentation on the proficiency-based grading system she uses in her classroom. Kristin pairs each health concept being taught with a health skill for each unit. Concept knowledge is assessed on unit tests and the skill performance is assessed on unit projects. All work can be re-done for a higher assessment score, which helps students increase their learning and skills and rewards them for continuing to learn and improve. Kristin noted a major challenge to her style of proficiency grading is a lack of compatible grading software. Programs based on percentages don't necessarily match proficiency marks. Kristin noted that she has spent a great deal of time on her grading scale and that it continues to evolve.

A group discussion of the characteristics of a balanced grading scale followed. Each table reported one main characteristic of a balanced grading system. The recorded results indicate that a balanced grading system would:

- Be equidistant between grades
- Reduce miscommunication of numbers
- Be equity-based
- Build consistency
- Give students the opportunity for recovery.

Group questions included the following:

- How is behavior accounted for in the grade, or should it be a separate grade?
- Should teachers skip the balanced grading scale discussion and concentrate on developing proficiency-based grading in their classrooms?
- Is balanced grading just a new name for an old system?
- Will the committee develop a menu of balanced grading options from which teachers may choose?

Challenges noted:

- To provide clear, accurate information on what is expected to teachers, parents, students, and community members.
- To replace rumors and misinformation with the above.
- To alleviate fear and anger on the part of teachers.
- To develop clear definitions, with detailed examples, of what a balanced grading scale is and what proficiency-based grading is.
- To reassure teachers that their work is valued and their expertise is acknowledged, and they will not be asked to reinvent the wheel in everything they do.

Next Steps:

- Volunteers to work on a sub-group to develop the communication piece that will go out to all schools in the spring.
- Volunteers for a group to go out to each school in the spring with the communication piece, to ensure that everyone receives the same message and all concerns and questions are noted and addressed.
- The minutes of this meeting and all subsequent meetings will be posted on the Web, and the communication piece will also be made public when it is finished.