Charting a Course to

STANDARDS-BASED GRADING

What to **Stop**, What to **Start**, and **Why It Matters**

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Introduction

What is wrong with this picture?

> The State Board of Education (NC) voted in October to begin the 10-point grading scale—in which scores between 90 and 100 earn an A—with the 2015–16 school year's freshman class. . . . But the State Board will discuss Wednesday whether to start it this fall for all high school students. Critics argued it was unfair to keep existing students on the seven-point scale—in which scores between 93 and 100 earn an A. (*The Charlotte Observer,* January 4, 2015)

This is a conversation that is not worth having. Ninety percent, or 93 percent, of what? A 90 in Mr. Martinez's class could, indeed, represent a much greater knowledge of important course or grade-level content and skills than a 93 percent in Ms. Lane's class, where students are awarded extra points for punctuality, turning homework in on time, and bringing in a can of green beans for the Rotary food drive. To get even a 90 in Mr. Martinez's class might require frequent demonstration of higher-order cognitive skills as well as content knowledge, whereas in Ms. Lane's class, half or more of the students receive *A*s for scoring 93 or above on tests that ask for nothing more than short-term recall of basic facts, plus responsible behavior and a can of green beans.

The discussion in North Carolina could have happened at any level in almost any state, school district, or school in the United States, and

it reveals a low level of understanding and knowledge about assessment and grading, even among professional educators. This lack of agreement about what grades should be based upon and what grades mean is not a recent phenomenon. Paul Dressel (1957) once provided educators with the following definition of a grade:

> A grade can be regarded only as an inadequate report of an inaccurate judgment by a biased and variable judge of the extent to which a student has attained an undefined level of mastery of an unknown proportion of an indefinite amount of material. (p. 6)

That tongue-in-cheek definition was put forward nearly 60 years ago, a time span longer than the career of almost any educator reading this book. Surely we have come a long way since 1957 in attaining agreement and some level of consistency regarding the purposes and practices of classroom assessment and grading, right? Not really, argues Doug Reeves:

> Neither the weight of scholarship nor common sense seems to have influenced grading policies in many schools. Practices vary greatly among teachers in the same school—and even worse, the practices best supported by research are rarely in evidence. (2008a, p. 85)

Deep and prolonged discussions about classroom assessment and grading practices in general, and about standards-based grading practices in particular, are in order in states, school districts, and schools across the United States. A lot of literature on standards-based grading is already available, much of it quite good. So why this book? Two reasons.

First, my perspective in writing *Charting a Course to Standards-Based Grading: What to Stop, What to Start, and Why It Matters* is shaped by both 30 years as a practitioner in schools and more than a decade working with schools and school districts exploring and implementing effective practices for classroom assessment and grading. As such, my aim is to provide the reader with a concrete, detailed, and practical blueprint for transitioning toward standards-based grading. This book reflects my direct experience with both the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.

Second, the approach to best practices in assessment and grading put forth in this book allows a school or district to choose which destination or destinations along a progressive continuum of options it wants to move toward, and at what pace.

An analogy drawn from my experience outside education is relevant. I am a member of my local town council, which was recently presented with a proposal to repair and enhance a 25-year-old community amphitheater. The proposal begins with a big-picture look at what might be possible over a period of a decade or more, but then breaks the project down into three distinct phases. The town has the option of choosing to pursue Phase 1, Phases 1 and 2, or all three phases, depending on a variety of factors such as available human and financial resources, fit with the town's overall master plan, and changing community preferences. Changes made during Phase 1 prepare the town to move to Phase 2 if it decides to do so but can also stand alone as significant advancements should local circumstances dictate a halt to further development along the continuum of options.

Schools and districts have unique characteristics and circumstances that determine when it is wise to move ahead with an improvement initiative, and at what pace. Political climate, community receptivity, availability of human and financial resources, topic-specific leadership capacity of teachers and administrators, the presence of a teachable moment (a controversy erupted in the community last spring over how two students vying for valedictorian were graded), and other factors affect the readiness of a school or a district to move to one point or another on the continuum of classroom assessment and grading. This book recognizes that reality and is organized accordingly.

Destination 1, the first stop on the continuum, is for schools or districts that are just beginning to have the conversation about classroom assessment and grading and for the time being just want to "tighten up" a fairly traditional grading system. Six commonly employed practices and one widely shared belief about assessment and grading are exposed for what they are—counterproductive. Schools and districts that chart a course

to move from an "everybody do their own thing" approach to common expectations based on best practice will significantly increase the accuracy and fairness of student grades and will have taken a significant step toward developing a system that encourages effort and rewards continued learning. Although probably best conducted districtwide, advancements toward Destination 1 can be made at the school or even individual classroom level.

For some districts the target is to move beyond the limitations of traditional assessment and grading practices to an adopted package of beliefs and practices that actually drive changes in classroom instruction. Earl (2003) reminds us that significant changes in classroom assessment and grading practices have the potential to change virtually every aspect of teaching and learning in schools if we have the vision to use them to do so:

> Changing classroom assessment is the beginning of a revolution—a revolution in classroom practices of all kinds. . . . Getting classroom assessment right is not a simplistic, either-or situation. It is a complex mix of challenging personal beliefs, rethinking instruction, and learning new ways to assess for different purposes. (pp. 15–16)

Destination 2 wraps changes in classroom assessment and grading into the broader context of a district-adopted guaranteed and viable curriculum. Stated simply, a district with a well-developed guaranteed and viable curriculum has identified a limited number of nonnegotiable topics and corresponding leveled performance expectations for every grading period of every grade-level subject (e.g., 5th grade science) and course (e.g., 10th grade biology). Classroom assessments and grades are then built on this structure.

Districts choosing to move toward Destination 2 will need to either first make a stop at Destination 1 or incorporate a discussion of effective and counterproductive assessment and grading practices into their Destination 2 plans. Charting a course to Destination 2 and beyond includes ensuring the presence of organizational conditions necessary to sustain significant change, understanding and executing the steps necessary to

create a guaranteed and viable curriculum, and developing a clear vision of what success looks like.

Because Destination 2 involves curricular commitments that extend beyond the influence of individual teachers and schools, this destination and those that follow must be undertaken districtwide. All destinations on our continuum of options for assessment and grading systems call for effective leadership and support; but because Destination 2 requires rethinking, repackaging, and redeveloping curriculum, instruction, and assessment rather than merely tuning up existing practices, a commitment must be made by both administrators and teacher leaders to provide specific supports to those charged with development and implementation. Chapter 11 details those supports.

Destination 3 takes change visibly and directly to the parent community by reporting student achievement by standard rather than, or in addition to, traditional letter grades. At this destination, grade books and report cards look very different from those that students and parents grew up with. As such, community engagement and effective communication—important at every destination—become crucial. Likewise, developing a multiyear plan for moving from a district's starting point through Destinations 1 and 2 and on to Destination 3 becomes absolutely essential. Chapters in the Destination 3 section of this book explore what an implementation plan might include and offer tips on engaging key stakeholder groups in understanding and supporting the central components of a grading and reporting system that is standards based and grounded in a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

Destination 4, competency-based education, is described in Chapter 15. In short, with competency-based education, students advance by demonstrating competency on individual standards or related clusters of standards rather than by passing courses. Course grades are no longer relevant. This is the last stop on the continuum of effective assessment and grading, and it requires a total rethinking of the purposes, nature, and structure of schooling. Competency-based education, a small but growing movement, offers a way to truly individualize education for students.

A clarification is in order here regarding the use in this book of the terms "standards-based grading" and "standards-based education." Here the terms are used to refer to any system of classroom assessment and grading that corresponds to the specifications of Destinations 2 through 4 as described in this book. My argument is that any assessment and grading system bearing a close resemblance to Destinations 2 through 4 must have state or national standards as its starting point—thus making it standards-based.

As referred to in this book, standards-based grading is one component of standards-based education, along with descriptive scoring scales, frequent formative assessment, opportunities for reassessment, trend scoring, the separation of academic achievement and work habits, and valid and reliable assessment tasks, among other research-based, high-probability strategies and practices. Obviously the two terms—"standards-based grading" and "standards-based education"—are given more technical definitions by some researchers and are used somewhat differently by different writers.

This book can be used by individual teachers or teams of teachers to improve day-to-day classroom assessment and grading practices, which is the essence of Destination 1. But the intended primary audiences are school and district leadership teams—teams of teachers and administrators charged with leading and supporting a journey to systemic change. *Charting a Course to Standards-Based Grading* serves as a guidebook for that journey.

DESTINATION

Addressing Seven Counterproductive Assessment and Grading Practices and Beliefs

Classroom assessment and grading practices in the United States are buttressed by fervently held, time-honored practices and beliefs. Furthermore, they are autonomous in the sense that, in many schools and districts, at least, they are left to the judgment of individual teachers, outside the purview of colleagues and supervisors save a few generalities such as treating everyone the same.

And it is not just teachers who regard selecting assessment and grading practices as individual professional prerogatives. For the most part, students and parents accept this ingrained enfranchisement. What the teacher says goes, provided she shows no favoritism, can provide numerical data supporting a grade, and is at least somewhat within the bounds of what adults experienced when they were in school. In many school districts, board policies and negotiated contracts support the accepted norm of the teacher as the sole determiner of student grades, arrived at by whatever method and means she deems appropriate.

Teachers—not administrators, students, or parents—*should* be the final determiners of student grades. After all, teachers observe and evaluate their students' academic performance every day for an entire grading period. No one else has gathered as much data upon which to base a conclusion about student mastery of identified content and skills as has a student's teacher.

Likewise, classroom assessment and grading should be grounded in practices and beliefs that are transparent, shared, and supported by research. And therein lies the problem—in too many U.S. classrooms, grades are determined by practices that are ill defined, unique to individual teachers, and counterproductive. In too many U.S. schools, it can be said that a student's grade depends, to a significant degree, upon which teacher the computer assigns that student to.

Destination 1 exposes seven counterproductive assessment and grading practices and beliefs prevalent—and in some cases accepted without question—in U.S. classrooms and schools. Improving accuracy, fairness, and student learning while maintaining many traditional grading practices is the goal of charting a course to Destination 1.

The Zero

At a conference in San Antonio in 2007, Doug Reeves asked participants to determine the unit or topic grade a student should receive given the data in Figure 1.1, using each of three grading scales. The grades in Figure 1.1 are all on the same topic or skill, all comprehensive, and all of the same weight (all tests, or all labs, or all demonstrations). Note that under Method 1, the method most often used in the United States, the student receives a failing grade in spite of strong performances near the culmination of the unit or grading period. On the other hand, by changing nothing but the intervals between scores (Method 2), the student receives a *C*– for the same level of performance.

It should be obvious that for students in this or similar situations, the scale the teacher uses to calculate a final topic grade makes the difference between passing and failing the topic—and perhaps between graduating or dropping out of school. If your son or daughter were in this class and struggling, would it be OK with you if the computer assigned him or her to a teacher using Method 1 when a teacher of the same course across the hall used Method 2—and if the principal defended the process in the name of academic freedom for teachers?

Using your teacher judgment (Method 3), what final topic grade would you give this student, unencumbered by a district-mandated grading scale, if the criterion were assigning a grade that best reflects the student's

FIGURE 1.1
Topic Grades as Determined by Various Grading Methods

Grades in Chronological Order	Method 1 70 (*D*), 80 (*C*), 90 (*B*), 100 (*A*)	Method 2 0 (*F*), 1 (*D*), 2 (*C*), 3 (*B*), 4 (*A*)	Method 3 Teacher Judgment
C	80	2	
C	80	2	
MA	0	0	
D	70	1	
C	80	2	
B	90	3	
MA	0	0	
MA	0	0	
B	90	3	
A	100	4	
Topic Grade	59% (*F*)	1.7 (*C*–)	?

MA = missing assignment
Source: From *Elements of Grading: A Guide to Effective Practice* (2nd ed.), by D. Reeves, 2016, Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree. Copyright 2016 by Solution Tree. Reprinted with permission.

demonstrated mastery of topic content and skills at the end of instruction? Posing this question to thousands of teachers and administrators at workshops and conferences over the last decade consistently yields results of more than half of each group indicating a grade of *A* or *B* based on the student's growth and performance at the conclusion of instruction.

Depending on the scale and method of grading chosen by individual teachers, a student could earn anything from an *A* to an *F* for the same academic performance. So much for the accuracy, objectivity, and fairness of traditional grading practices.

Why do we insist on using an assessment and grading system that yields results that fly in the face of teacher judgment?

It is common practice in U.S. schools for teachers to enter zeros into the grade book for missing assignments. The effects of this practice on students' grades vary considerably depending on the type of grading scale used, but the most counterproductive effects accompany the most commonly used scale—the 100-point or percentage scale.

The Zero's Deadly Effects

In addition to the problems associated with mixing academic performance with work ethic (a topic covered in Chapter 3), there are at least three reasons why using zeros for missing work on the 100-point scale is counterproductive.

The first reason is mathematical. For example, with a grading scale that uses intervals of 60–69, 70–79, 80–89, and 90–100, there is a 60-point gap between a zero and a *D,* whereas a gap of only 10 points separates a *D* and a *C,* a *C* and a *B,* and a *B* and an *A*. The effect of that difference in range is to give missing assignments considerably more weight in determining a final grade than assignments of the same type (test for test, homework for homework, paper for paper, etc.) that were completed. Expressed another way, after receiving a zero it takes a whole lot of 100s to get the cumulative grade up to a *D*–.

A teacher using this approach might be advised to announce to students and parents at the beginning of each term that, although the course is titled Algebra 1, for example, the grading methods employed expose the fact that it is really a work-ethic course—missing work counts for much more than work turned in demonstrating mastery of course content and skills. "We do a little algebra in here, but this course is mostly about work ethic."

The second reason why entering zeros for missing work on the 100-point scale is counterproductive has to do with the effect of that practice on student motivation. As just noted, it can be very difficult to recover,

gradewise, from a single zero, let alone multiple zeros. The result is that students facing such a situation often give up, having figured out that even if they work hard for the remainder of the term they will still end up failing the class. The math is against them. The result is disengagement and absenteeism at best, behavior problems and dropping out of school at worst.

Teachers sometimes communicate the hopelessness of the situation directly to students. High school counselors have experienced situations in which a student comes to the office, often fairly early in the grading period, asking to be dropped from a class, stating, "The teacher says there is no way I can pass the class, so I might as well drop out." Such a request is a sad statement and counterproductive to our goals as educators.

Finally, including zeros in the calculation reduces the validity of grades and misrepresents actual student proficiency, thereby eroding the accuracy of grades as indicators of knowledge of subject or course content and skills proficiency. It is unlikely that a student knows absolutely nothing—zero—about the content or skills under study. In fact, good teachers believe that it would be impossible given their expert instruction for a student who attends class even part-time to learn absolutely nothing—"I'm too good for that." A zero for missing work undermines the validity of any cumulative grade of which it is a part in that it measures something other than mastery of course content and skills.

Alternatives to the Zero

So, what alternatives are available for dealing with missing assignments besides recording and counting zeros in a 100-point, percentage system?

The percentage system usually entails lumping all points earned during a grading period together and dividing by the total points possible to arrive at a term-average percentage that is then converted to a letter grade. Arithmetic averages or mean scores are disproportionately affected by extreme scores, and a zero in a 100-point system is an extreme

score because of the disproportionate range between it and the lowest passing grade, as discussed earlier.

One alternative is to calculate the median and mode scores for a unit of instruction, perhaps in addition to the mean score, to see which measure of central tendency best represents students' demonstrated knowledge of identified subject or course content and skills. Median and mode scores are not as sensitive to extreme scores as is the mean.

A second option is to assign a range-equivalent score to missing work instead of a zero. For example, in the *D*-to-*A* scale of 60 to 100 points, a score of 50 could be entered into the grade book for missing assignments, which has the effect of weighting missing assignments the same as completed assignments of the same type. This approach addresses the mathematical issue associated with zeros in the 100-point system—unequal intervals between grades. The problem with this approach, and the reason I do not recommend it, is that it does not play well politically. Districts that have floated this approach to missing work (for example, Dallas and Nashville) have often faced a backlash from teachers, parents, and board members. "What? Students are given 50 percent for doing nothing?" Although the approach is mathematically justifiable, awarding students points for work not done, even if the point value recorded is below failing, just doesn't feel right.

A third option is to jettison the 100-point scale in favor of a scale with equal intervals. For example, instead of the percentage system, assessment tasks could be scored on a 0-to-4 scale tied to a corresponding descriptive scoring scale, with uniform intervals between scores and zeros used for missing work. This is the scale I recommend and a topic explored in detail in Destination 2. Figure 1.2 shows how an urban district in the Midwest transitioned from a 100-point scale to an equal-interval scale, in this case with points ranging from 0 to 12. Note that students still receive zeros for missing work—there is no free lunch here. The difference between this scale and the 100-point scale is that of equal intervals.

Now look at the difference this change makes when calculating unit or topic final grades for four hypothetical students, as depicted in Figure 1.3. The grades reported in the second column of Figure 1.3 are for

FIGURE 1.2
Moving From a 100-Point to an Equal-Interval Scale

100–98	*A*+	12
97–95	*A*	11
94–93	*A*–	10
92–90	*B*+	9
89–86	*B*	8
85–84	*B*–	7
83–81	*C*+	6
80–77	*C*	5
76–75	*C*–	4
74–73	*D*+	3
72–71	*D*	2
70	*D*–	1
≤69	*F*	0

different assessments of the same standard or topic, not different topics, and are listed in chronological order, left to right. Zeros indicate missing assignments.

We do not know why the first student demonstrated a high level of mastery of the targeted measurement topic three consecutive times and then failed to complete the last assessment—and that information is important. What we do know is that almost all teachers viewing these data do not feel, at the gut level, that a grade of *D*+ best reflects that student's knowledge of the targeted material. And even fewer teachers say they would fail the second and fourth students.

FIGURE 1.3
Grading Scale Comparisons

	Grades	Cumulative Grade Based on 100-Point Grading Scale	Cumulative Grade Based on 0- to 12-Point Grading Scale
Student 1	*A*+, *A*+, *A*+, 0	*D*+ (75)	*B*+ (9)
Student 2	*C,* 0, *C, C*	*F* (60)	*C*– (3.75)
Student 3	*C, A*–, 0, *B, B, C*	*D* (72)	*C*+ (6)
Student 4	*D, D, D, D,* 0, *D, D*	*F* (62)	*D* (1.7)

Again, one wonders, *Why do we insist on using an assessment and grading system that yields results that fly in the face of teacher judgment?*

A strong argument asserts that failing to complete assigned work is a behavioral problem that should be dealt with using behavioral rather than academic consequences. Therefore, a fourth option for dealing with missing assignments is to insist that they be completed using natural consequences such as student contracts, parent involvement and sanctions, lunch detention, and Saturday school as leverage.

For too many students, getting a zero for missing work and moving on is a reward—"Thank you. I didn't want to do the work in the first place." The natural consequence for not doing your work is having to do it—at a time and place not necessarily of your liking.

The Zeros Aren't Permitted (ZAP) program is designed to increase expectations for students who repeatedly or occasionally fail to complete and turn in homework assignments or projects on time. ZAP emphasizes the belief that homework assignments and projects are important and must be completed. A number of school websites, including those of Norco Intermediate (http://www.cnusd.k12.ca.us/domain/4511), Costa Mesa High School/Middle School (http://cmhs.nmusd.us/zap), Guyer HighSchool(http://www.dentonisd.org/site/Default.aspx?PageID=6468),

and Jemez Mountain Public Schools (http://www.jmsk12.com/?page_id=1743), list ZAP strategies that teachers and schools use to enforce the expectation that choosing not to do assignments is not an option—or at least not an option without consequences.

A final alternative to averaging in zeros for missing work is trend scoring, which is now included as an option in most grading software. The central concept is to assign a final topic grade or score based on a student's growth over the course of instruction rather than averaging scores earned at the beginning of instruction with scores earned later on. The assumption is that, with effective instruction, students will experience growth over time. Of course, some students may decide to disengage and therefore will receive lower scores later in a unit of instruction, but such disengagement suggests an emotional/behavioral problem that should be dealt with using emotional/behavioral strategies. With trend scoring, data points for missing assignments may not be significant factors when assigning final topic grades or scores if enough other evidence exists to support a conclusion. Chapter 4 includes more discussion of trend scoring.

Other solutions to the zero problem are offered in literature on the topic (see, for example, Guskey, 2004; O'Connor, 2009a; Reeves, 2004; and Wormeli, 2006). Of course, every solution presents its own drawbacks. The point isn't that there is one right approach to the problem of missing work, but rather that it is wrong to simply ignore this elephant in the room.

We have an obligation to our students and to our communities to collectively study the zero issue and its possible solutions, to define a shared approach to dealing with the problem, and to communicate that approach and its supporting beliefs and values to all stakeholders. Simply making people aware of the inordinate power of the zero—and the unintended consequences—can be an eye-opener and a good first step.

Extra Credit

Extra credit is, by definition, extra. Whatever it consists of lies outside identified grade-level or course standards. If tasks associated with extra credit were directly tied to grade-level or course standards, they would not be "extra."

Including performances on tasks that assess content or skills not assigned to the associated grade level or course in topic, grade-level, or course grades negatively affects the validity of those grades. Neatly coloring in a poster is not a valid measure of reading comprehension. Therefore, extra credit has no place in a valid system of classroom assessment and grading. The situation actually becomes humorous if we are talking about standards-based grading: standards-based grades not based on course standards?

From Bringing in Green Beans to Watching a Play: The Many Forms of Extra Credit

Some forms of extra credit are more obvious than others. Somewhere today students are receiving extra credit in mathematics for contributing boxes of tissues to the classroom supply, for cleaning up the chemistry lab, for turning off their cell phones in English, and for bringing a can of green beans to history class in support of the school's food drive. To be sure,

there is nothing wrong with schools encouraging students to aid the less fortunate or contribute to the common good, but they should label and report such activity for what it is—"citizenship" or something else along those lines—not mathematics, or history, or science.

Other extra-credit tasks are not as easy to identify. What about credit in an English class for attending a school play? If students are asked to write a literary critique on the play and writing a literary critique is among the course standards, the assignment may not be "extra." However, if a teacher awards credit for simply attending the play because she believes going to a play is a good experience for young adults, it is green beans in a different form.

Retaining Differentiated Instruction and Reassessment

This position against extra credit does not conflict with the call for teachers to differentiate instruction to address unique student needs. Students who quickly demonstrate mastery of topic content and skills at the basic and proficient levels should be given opportunities to work at the advanced level for that grade level on that topic or standard. Such opportunities do not fall into the category of extra credit as long as the work students are asked to do is tied to the topic or standard under study. Students who are given opportunities to learn content or demonstrate skills in a way different from that presented to the whole class are not doing extra credit as long as what they are doing advances them toward mastery of one or more of the standards addressed in the unit of study.

Nor should the prohibition against extra credit be misinterpreted as opposition to providing students with opportunities for reassessment. We should be encouraging students to learn from mistakes on initial assessments and give them opportunities to demonstrate knowledge of essential content and skills at a later time. What is important is that all students learn what is being studied, not that they are all able to demonstrate that learning on the first attempt and at the exact same moment.

If particular content or skills are worth teaching and assessing the first time, they are worth reteaching and reassessing when students are not successful. Saying, "I don't have time to reteach and reassess" suggests that it is OK for some students not to demonstrate understanding of the topic, which raises the question of why the content or skill was selected for study in the first place.

Reteaching and reassessing do, indeed, take time, but students are better served by ensuring that they learn a few really critical concepts and skills well than by exposing them only superficially to many. Technology can help facilitate the reteaching and reassessment processes. For example, the software developer Educreations has apps that allow you to record your voice and capture images from your iPad screen; import documents and pictures from your photo library, Dropbox, or Google Drive; or insert a webpage to create video tutorials that students can access any time.

However, the opportunity to reassess comes with conditions. First, students must bring something to the table to earn the opportunity for a second chance to demonstrate understanding. That is, students must demonstrate that they have done something to learn the content or skills being evaluated. "Show me that you've completed all missing homework assignments for this unit, and then we'll talk about a reassessment." "Complete the computer tutorial on this topic, and then I'll let you give it another shot." "Come in for help during lunch on Tuesday, and we'll see how you do."

Students are given reassessment opportunities because we want them to learn the material, not because we want to give them an incentive to blow off initial assessments in hopes of getting lucky a second time around. Raising grades for students who have learned from earlier mistakes is a valid assessment strategy. Allowing students to "go fishing" is allowing them to game the system.

The second condition for providing reassessment opportunities is that the teacher has the right to set deadline dates, usually coinciding with the end of the unit of study or shortly thereafter. "Students, on Monday we will

finish this two-week unit on *The Great Gatsby.* All reassessments must be completed on Wednesday."

One reason setting a deadline may make sense is that, for some content in particular, genuine learning has an expiration date. We have to question the utility of attempting to demonstrate understanding in November of a concept that was part of a unit that began and ended in September.

The second reason it makes sense to set a deadline for reassessment is to make the whole reassessment process manageable for teachers. It is ludicrous to expect teachers to manage anytime, on-demand reassessment opportunities in addition to teaching and assessing the current unit of study.

People frequently raise the concern that offering reassessment opportunities does not prepare students for college and the so-called real world. "Students are not going to get to do assessments over when they get to college, and employers expect their employees to get it right the first time. We're promoting the development of false expectations." The response to this concern has several aspects.

First, the students we are talking about are elementary and secondary students, not college students or full-time adult employees. The differences in age, maturity, and mandatory versus voluntary involvement merit consideration of differences in treatment.

The second aspect, which is related to the first, is the fact that we are preparing students to transition into postsecondary education and work, which invites consideration of a more lenient reassessment policy for younger students and a more restricted policy for high school juniors and seniors.

Third, the real world of college and work is not all that black and white. Some colleges and universities are beginning to offer features of standards-based grading in their classes. For example, classes in some institutions now include online practice quizzes (formative assessment) that students can retake if not successful on their first attempts (reassessment). Graduate students at many colleges and universities are able to run their theses past their committees for suggested improvements (formative assessment)

before the final judgment day (summative assessment). Law students can retake the bar exam until they pass (reassessment). These examples are intended to suggest not that such practices are the norm in higher education, but that classroom assessment and grading practices are evolving, even at that level.

Wormeli (2011) points out that the work world often affords adults the opportunity to keep learning until they get it right:

> The teacher who claims to be preparing students for the working world by disallowing all redos forgets that adult professionals actually flourish through redos, retakes, and do-overs. LSAT. MCAT. Praxis. Bar exam. CPA exam. Driver's licensure. Pilot's licensure. Auto mechanic certification exam. Every one of these assessments reflects the adult-level, working-world responsibilities our students will one day face. Many of them are high stakes: People's lives depend on these tests' validity as accurate measures of individual competence. All of them can be redone over and over for full credit.

On a more personal note, had I been held to a standard of "get it right the first time or else" during my 31 years as a teacher and a principal, I would have been unemployed since 1973—my first year of teaching.

Finally, even if standards-based assessment and grading practices are not mirrored at the college and university level in many cases, college admissions officers and professors continue to state that what they want from K–12 education are graduates who can read and understand complex texts, write cogently, think analytically and creatively, and demonstrate a command of discipline-specific foundational content and skills. Standards-based education done right (clear learning goals aligned with college-readiness standards, cognitively demanding performance expectations, and grades based solely on demonstrated mastery of grade-level course content and skills) can deliver such graduates. So although the specific grading practices may change, students will enter college with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful.

I offer one final note on reassessment. The reassessment score should replace the score from the earlier attempt, not be averaged with it. The reason is pretty straightforward—the reassessment score is the most accurate representation of what the student now knows or can do. An average of two or more assessment scores on the same content or skill is not representative of what the student knew or could do at any point in time.

Extra credit, no. Reassessment with conditions, yes.

Epilogue

The intent of this book is to attract and attune—to attract you to the potential of standards-based education to revolutionize teaching and learning in K–12 classrooms and to attune you to the challenges you will face and the commitment you will need to pull it off. If, having read the book, you feel a sense of great excitement and high anxiety, chances are you get it. Those two emotions tend to accompany high-impact adventures in life, and the move to standards-based education is, indeed, a high-impact adventure.

Of course, no reference book on the rationale for and processes and products of standards-based grading, no matter how well researched and thought out, is sufficient to guarantee success without competent, committed, and courageous leadership—both administrator and teacher leadership—at the school and district levels. Among the many leadership tasks involved in making a transition to standards-based grading is that of modifying the recommendations in this book to accommodate local conditions. The thoughts expressed herein represent a collection of reflections emanating from conviction and experience, not a collection of formulas subject to mathematical verification.

In the final analysis, the success or failure of standards-based education in any community must be judged by its effect on student achievement. Research on standards-based education done right strongly suggests that those who undertake it can anticipate a rich return on their investment.

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Dr. Westerberg served on the NASSP/Carnegie Foundation Commission on the Restructuring of the American High School, which produced the seminal report *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution,* and he played a significant role in the development of *Breaking Ranks II,* which was released in 2004. Other professional activities include serving as a member of ASCD's The Art and Science of Teaching professional development faculty, president of the Colorado Association of School Executives, member of the Colorado Commission for High School Improvement, and executive director of the Alliance for Quality Teaching.

Dr. Westerberg was named one of four finalists for the NASSP/Met Life Principal of the Year program in 1994 and received the Honor Administrator Award by the Colorado Music Educators Association in 1998 and the Department Service Award by the Colorado Association of Secondary School Principals in 1999. He is the author of numerous articles and two books in addition to this one: *Creating the High Schools of Our Choice* (Eye on Education, 2007) an *Becoming a Great High School: 6 Strategies and 1 Attitude That Make a Difference* (ASCD, 2009).