

From: Thomas Guskey <guskey@uky.edu>

Subject: Re: Follow-up to your talk at Wilmette D39

Date: January 17, 2019 at 5:02:40 PM EST

To: Dzmitry Asinski <dasinski@gmail.com>

Cc: Ray Lechner <lechnerr@wilmette39.org>, Kelly Jackson <jacksonk@wilmette39.org>, Lee Katie <leek@wilmette39.org>, steenm@wilmette39.org, panzicaf@wilmette39.org, sternwee@wilmette39.org, schaffa@wilmette39.org, cesaretj@wilmette39.org, fabesl@wilmette39.org, keameyt@wilmette39.org, Olena Chyruk <olena.chyruk@gmail.com>

Hi Dzmitry,

Thanks for your note and for taking the time to offer your perspectives. I'm delighted you took part in our session and provided your reactions to the ideas we discussed.

It's difficult in such a short session to present all of the details and evidence regarding any of the ideas we shared. Regarding the number of categories and precision, I have written a more detailed paper on this topic that I believe addresses your concerns. You can download that paper on my website at: <http://tguskey.com/wp-content/uploads/Grading-2-The-Case-Against-Percentage-Grades.pdf>. I hope you find it helpful.

As to letter grades, I stressed in my presentation that there is nothing incompatible with letter grades and a standards-based approach to grading and reporting. Letters are simply labels we attach to different categories of students' performance. Whether we use letters, numbers, words, or even emojis makes no difference. All that a standards-based approach tries to do is bring clearer meaning and accuracy to the levels of student performance those labels describe. A blog I wrote about this also can be found on my website at: <http://tguskey.com/dont-get-rid-grades-change-meaning-consequences/>

The teachers and school leaders in Wilmette are deeply committed to ensuring your children have the very best educational experience possible. They are doing their best to ensure the information communicated to parents and families about students' performance in school is not only accurate and meaningful, but also useful in efforts to help students improve. The changes they have made in grading and reporting have all been made for that important purpose. As with any significant change, refinements along the way are necessary, and those are being made. The input of parents and families is vital in making those refinements. In addition to offering parents and families background information on our knowledge base of effective practices, our meeting served to gather that input as well. I believe it was helpful in that way.

Again, my thanks for your note. I hope this additional information helps clarify the issues you raised.

Best wishes,

Tom

Thomas R. Guskey, Ph.D.

Senior Research Scholar, University of Louisville

Professor Emeritus, University of Kentucky

2108 Shelton Road, Lexington, KY 40515 USA

Phone: +1-859-221-0077



www.tguskey.com | Email: guskey@uky.edu | Twitter: [@tguskey](https://twitter.com/tguskey)

On Thu, Jan 17, 2019 at 4:07 PM Dzmitry Asinski <dasinski@gmail.com> wrote:
Prof. Guskey,

I want to thank you for speaking to us yesterday about the issues in grading. Although the thoughts below are my own, I think there are other parents in the district who think along the same lines.

There were several themes to your talk yesterday. I think the district will find it much easier to convince parents of some of these compared to others. For instance, splitting of reporting into separate rubrics, such as achievement (tests), progress (change in achievement over the course of a semester), and process (including behavior), is generally a positive thing since it provides parents and children with more detailed information instead of blending all these elements into one grade. Your 1-1-1-1-4-4 example is well taken. As is your argument that teachers' professional judgement should play a larger role. There is no single right answer to what the overall grade should be, and many reasonable people may disagree. (Although I am personally in favor of penalizing children for not submitting mandatory homework (or submitting it late), I can certainly enforce that at home, as a parent, since the necessary information will be available to me.)

However, I personally don't find your arguments about "less granular reporting is generally better" very persuasive. You justified it yesterday in part by discussing subjectivity. However, you neglected to mention a cost to less granular reporting, which is loss of precision. I still don't know what "Meets Expectations" means in our district, but let's assume for a second that it means anything between 70% and 100%. I would argue that such a metric is next to useless simply because it would assign the same level to a kid who's barely hanging in there with 72% and a star student completely on top of everything with 98%. Yes, it is true that the ever-present subjectivity will play less of a role, but that is true simply because the target area is so wide that it is impossible to miss. At the end of the day, this is a line drawing exercise and different people would prefer to draw the line at different number of grade levels. But I think the impetus for the vocal opposition from parents over the summer was driven primarily by how inadequate 3-level MPE reporting currently implemented in our primary schools has been.

You also criticized the arbitrary nature of letter grade cut-offs (using sports statistics as an example). I personally don't understand this argument for several reasons. First, I don't see how the currently proposed MPE system is any better in this regard. Teachers would still have to decide who gets an "M" and who get a "P", in the same way teachers decide who gets an "A", "B", or "C". Second, your sport statistics argument feels a little like a straw-man. Obviously, if shooting percentage never reaches X%, any teacher can easily adjust the scale so that max possible score becomes 100%. Third, subjectivity can play a bigger role. I don't know how one can argue that allowing the teacher to subjectively decide on the score and the cut-off is less subjective than allowing the teacher to decide on the score alone. Again, I'm not arguing against teachers' professional judgement. I completely agree that teachers should have more freedom in deciding grades since they have the most information and they are professionals who have the kids' best interest in mind. But parents and children need to know what this decision is based on.

Finally, I completely agree with your overall assessment that understanding the goals of grading should come before any design of specific grading policy. While you had many potential goals in one of your slides, I think you omitted one important goal, which is to prepare children for ABCDF grading system, which, as you pointed out, is used in absolute majority of US schools and colleges (and importantly, in 100% of high schools our district feeds into). Kids simply must know what it takes to get an A well before they reach high school where consequences of not knowing and not being prepared are very real.

Sincerely,
Dzmitry Asinski (parent of one high school freshman and two fifth graders)

From: Ray Lechner <lechnerr@wilmette39.org>
Subject: Re: Follow-up to your talk at Wilmette D39
Date: January 17, 2019 at 4:14:24 PM EST
To: Dzmitry Asinski <dasinski@gmail.com>

Mr. Asinski,

Thank you for sharing these thoughts with me. And we both agree that preparing students for NTHS is a necessary focus. Personally, I see advantages to both grading systems; I believe we could give parents both forms in a report card (grades and standards). That is an effort D39 has been researching this year... aligning both reporting systems. I will be sure to share this email with the new Superintendent later in the year.

Ray

On Jan 17, 2019, at 4:06 PM, Dzmitry Asinski <dasinski@gmail.com> wrote:

Prof. Guskey,

I want to thank you for speaking to us yesterday about the issues in grading. Although the thoughts below are my own, I think there are other parents in the district who think along the same lines.

There were several themes to your talk yesterday. I think the district will find it much easier to convince parents of some of these compared to others. For instance, splitting of reporting into separate rubrics, such as achievement (tests), progress (change in achievement over the course of a semester), and process (including behavior), is generally a positive thing since it provides parents and children with more detailed information instead of blending all these elements into one grade. Your 1-1-1-1-4-4 example is well taken. As is your argument that teachers' professional judgement should play a larger role. There is no single right answer to what the overall grade should be, and many reasonable people may disagree. (Although I am personally in favor of penalizing children for not submitting mandatory homework (or submitting it late), I can certainly enforce that at home, as a parent, since the necessary information will be available to me.)

However, I personally don't find your arguments about "less granular reporting is generally better" very persuasive. You justified it yesterday in part by discussing subjectivity. However, you neglected to mention a cost to less granular reporting, which is loss of precision. I still don't know what "Meets Expectations" means in our district, but let's assume for a second that it means anything between 70% and 100%. I would argue that such a metric is next to useless simply because it would assign the same level to a kid who's barely hanging in there with 72% and a star student completely on top of everything with 98%. Yes, it is true that the ever-present subjectivity will play less of a role, but that is true simply because the target area is so wide that it is impossible to miss. At the end of the day, this is a line drawing exercise and different people would prefer to draw the line at different number of grade levels. But I think the impetus for the vocal opposition from parents over the summer was driven primarily by how inadequate 3-level MPE reporting currently implemented in our primary schools has been.

You also criticized the arbitrary nature of letter grade cut-offs (using sports statistics as an example). I personally don't understand this argument for several reasons. First, I don't see how the currently proposed MPE system is any better in this regard. Teachers would still have to decide who gets an "M" and who get a "P", in the same way teachers decide who gets an "A", "B", or "C". Second, your sport statistics argument feels a little like a straw-man. Obviously, if shooting percentage never reaches X%, any teacher can easily adjust the scale so that max possible score becomes 100%. Third, subjectivity can play a bigger role. I don't know how one can argue that allowing the teacher to subjectively decide on the score and the cut-off is less subjective than allowing the teacher to decide on the score alone. Again, I'm not arguing against teachers' professional judgement. I completely agree that teachers should have more freedom in deciding grades since they have the most information and they are professionals who have the kids' best interest in mind. But parents and children need to know what this decision is based on.

Finally, I completely agree with your overall assessment that understanding the goals of grading should come before any design of specific grading policy. While you had many potential goals in one of your slides, I think you omitted one important goal, which is to prepare children for ABCDF grading system, which, as you pointed out, is used in absolute majority of US schools and colleges (and importantly, in 100% of high schools our district feeds into). Kids simply must know what it takes to get an A well before they reach high school where consequences of not knowing and not being prepared are very real.

Sincerely,
Dzmitry Asinski (parent of one high school freshman and two fifth graders)

Good morning Ms. Levine,

Thank you for sharing your views on the upcoming levy. Here is the link to tonight's Agenda where you can find the necessary information: http://www.wilmette39.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_360846/File/Board%20of%20Ed/publicpacket/2018-12-17.html

Thanks,



Dr. Ray Lechner
Superintendent
Wilmette Public Schools District 39
www.wilmette39.org | 847.512.6030

On Dec 17, 2018, at 7:42 AM, Cindy Levine <levlamm@gmail.com> wrote:

Hello D39 BOE,

Although I could not find tonight's agenda on-line I am aware that the Levy vote is tonight. While I cannot attend tonight's meeting, I would like to weigh in in support of extending the levy to align with inflation and I'd urge D39 to continue to maintain responsible reserves... which the BOE carefully reconsidered several years ago.

We need to continue to support public education in Wilmette and not set ourselves up for the gradual starving of funding for our most important resources - our young students. The failure to keep pace with CPI would negatively impact the quality of public education in Wilmette.

Thank you for your consideration and thank you for your service.

Regards,
Cindy Levine

--

Cindy Levine (Lamm)
847-256-5249 (H)
312-296-7754 (C)