**Equitable Grading Letter to Parents-Caregivers**

**by Dr. Josh Kunnath**

As an 11th grade English teacher using equitable grading practices (including a four-point scale, standards-based grading, report grades created exclusively from summative assessment, and a comprehensive retake policy), I recognize it’s my responsibility to inform students, parents, administrators, counselors, and other teachers about these practices that can differ greatly from traditional grading. From past mistakes, I realize that failing to adequately communicate these practices will result not only in misunderstandings and various conflicts, but also in my limited effectiveness to inform students and parents about students’ academic achievement (which is my goal when reporting report card grades). So I plan ahead by creating a grading communication plan to address each group within my intended audience––with particular focus on students and parents.

When it comes to communicating with parents about my grading practices, my first contact comes at the beginning of the school year in the form of the online syllabus and a short explanatory video. But I know this won’t reach everyone, and even if it did, parents, like students, generally lack significant interest in the specifics of my grading practices until the first time grades are sent home. For this reason, I send my initial parent email explaining my grading practices a couple of days before the first progress report is sent out. The email, [shown below], introduces four key ideas: my classroom grading purpose, the 100% summative assessment policy, the purpose of homework and classwork, and my retake policy. I also send similar emails before the first and third quarter report cards, which include steps that students can take to improve their grades (connecting back to the retake process).

Overall, the parent response has been overwhelmingly positive. The vast majority of parents that I hear from are thankful for the communication and embrace the focus on learning over the obsession with point collection. But occasionally, a parent of a student with a low grade will push back on these changes from traditional grading practices. Although I was once frustrated by these interactions, I now look at these infrequent events as opportunities to engage in dialogue about the importance of the standards for their student’s future success and how my grading practices aim to communicate the student’s current progress in the learning progression. And I’ve yet to talk to a parent who isn’t receptive to my goal of creating grades exclusively about learning along with providing students with necessary supports and multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery.

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I’m excited to have your student in my English class this year! I’m emailing to inform you of some of the grading practices and policies I use so you can better interpret your child’s report card grades in my class throughout the school year.

More than anything, I’d like you to know that the purpose of grades in all of my classes is to represent student learning of priority standards. These come from the AP or Common Core State Standards (depending on the course), and they are what I feel are the most important skills that students must learn in the course.

Because I want to ensure grades are fair and accurate, they are created 100% from students’ performance on summative assessments. That means things like effort, behavior, and homework/classwork are not part of the grade because like I mentioned above, I want their grades to *only* represent student learning.

But don’t worry: Just because I don’t grade practice doesn’t mean students won’t be doing any. Students will be practicing English skills everyday in class and sometimes outside of class to improve their skills and eventually display those skills on summative assessments. I record practices as *complete* or *incomplete* in Canvas (often with feedback) so that you can see how much they’ve been practicing preparing for success on the summative assessments.

Finally, I’d like to inform you that I realize students don’t always learn at the same rate and that sometimes they need extra time and practice to be successful. That is why I allow all students to retake any assessment without a penalty if they are unsatisfied with their results until the end of the semester. Of course, a big part of retakes is learning from mistakes, so feedback and additional practice will be a big part of this process.

I’m excited to work alongside your student to help them attain success in my class. I’m confident that these grading practices and policies will help this to happen in a meaningful way. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Josh Kunnath, Ed.D.