

# Creating a More Equitable Grading System

By: Bill Pitcock, Westlane Middle School

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## **Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:**

Grading at Westlane Middle School has always been uneven and inequitable in both the Scale and in the practices of accepting late work and the purpose of giving homework in general. The virtual environment in which we worked this year really showed where are problems were and gave us the impetus to begin to look at changes.

As we began to look at inequities as a Equity Committee, grading was on of the first things that came to mind. That expanded to re-takes and then further to the purpose of our homework.

## **Statement of Your Team's Wondering:**

The main purpose of our action inquiry was to examine the entire grading system we have here at Westlane Middle School. To that end we wanted to look at the number of failing grades and find out the causes. We wanted to also look at our homework structure. Finally, we wanted to look at what happens if a students were allowed to re-do assignments and assessments after a poor grade.

With this purpose, we wondered what changes the staff could make here at Westlane to create a more equitable grading practices.

This also included determining the purpose behind our grades and what we wanted them to mean.

Finally, what did our work mean? Why were we giving assignments? What was the purpose of our assessments? This really led to some great conversations with each other and our students.

## **Methods/Procedures:**

To start, we did a lot of reading and research about equitable practices in grading. The majority of our research was based on the Equitable Grading writings of Joe Feldman. We looked at TG2 (Teachers Going Gradeless) and Teachers Throwing out Grades Facebook groups. We had assorted other readings and research about Standards-Based Grading.

We did not give a lot of guidance as to what the practices had to be. We wanted our teachers to be creative and try things out they were passionate about. We challenged our teachers to think about their own grading practices. We did encourage them to have mathematical equity in the fact that if they kept 100% grading practices, then 50% should be their floor.

We were very transparent that we did not have all of the answers for this problem. We understood that several teachers trying different strategies would mean a lot of adjustments for the students. However, the inconsistency of our current grading practices meant that the students already had to make a lot of adjustments from teacher to teacher.

As we began, much of our data was qualitative. It was simply teachers sharing stories of what they were doing. Many were examining Standards-Based Grading. Several teachers took away penalties for late work being turned in. Teachers also gave 50% for work that was not handed in. Others talked of learning targets and retakes. As we progressed, we gave a survey of teachers and students.

### **Stating Your Team's Learning and Supporting it with Data:**

In looking at our data, there are many inequities in our grading system that are in our grading system. Our survey listed many examples that fit into the categories we were looking at.

Our data also showed that our teachers are willing to examine our practices to create more equitable practices.

The teachers are aware of the inequities in our grading systems. They don't agree on what is the root cause, but they can name practices that need to be changed going forward. They are also aware that students don't understand the current grading system, and the students tell us they don't.

There needs to be a training on grading to our teachers. For too long, we have not given training for different grading practices because, as Joe Feldman states, teachers' grading practices are the last area of education that they feel they have control over.

One thing that our teachers brought up was that whatever we come up with, our new grading practices need to be consistently applied across classes. One of the main inequities we named was the inconsistency in grading practices. We are putting some other things in place to help with consistency.

### **Providing Concluding Thoughts:**

There is still work to be done in convincing teachers about the mathematical inequity of giving zeroes. It is also apparent that some of the grading processes is going to have to be decided and teachers will need to be trained on the why and how we do things. We definitely have a path forward. We are going to need to look at our overall systems and see what can be changed.

The data shows that Standards-Based grading may be in our future. That is definitely something that we are looking at next school year.

### **References:**

Feldman, Joe. (2015). Grading for Equity: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How It Can Transform Schools and Classrooms / Edition 1

Common Goal Systems (2021). What is Standards-Based Grading?



# “Creating a More Equitable Grading System”

**Westlane Middle School**

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# Purpose

**Grading at our school has always been uneven and inequitable in both the Scale and in the practices of accepting late work and the purpose of giving homework in general. The virtual environment in which we worked this year really showed where are problems were and gave us the impetus to begin to look at changes.**

# Purpose

**As we began to look at inequities as a Equity Committee, grading was on of the first things that came to mind. That expanded to re-takes and then further to the purpose of our homework.**

# Purpose of This Inquiry

The main purpose of our action inquiry was to examine the entire grading system we have here at Westlane Middle School. To that end we wanted *to look at the number of failing grades and find out the causes*. We wanted to also *look at our homework structure*. Finally, we wanted to look at *what happens if a students were allowed to re-do assignments and assessments after a poor grade*.

# Our Wondering

**With this purpose, we wondered what changes the staff could make here at Westlane to create a more equitable grading practices.**

**This also included determining the purpose behind our grades and what we wanted them to mean.**

**Finally, what did our work mean? Why were we giving assignments? What was the purpose of our assessments? This really led to some great conversations with each other and our students.**



# Our Actions

**To start, we did a lot of reading and research about equitable practices in grading. The majority of our research was based on the Equitable Grading writings of Joe Feldman. We looked at TG2 (Teachers Going Gradeless) and Teachers Throwing out Grades Facebook groups. We had assorted other readings and research about Standards-Based Grading.**



# Our Actions

**We did not give a lot of guidance as to what the practices had to be. We wanted our teachers to be creative and try things out they were passionate about. We challenged our teachers to think about their own grading practices. We did encourage them to have mathematical equity in the fact that if they kept 100% grading practices, then 50% should be their floor.**



# Our Actions

**We were very transparent that we did not have all of the answers for this problem. We understood that several teachers trying different strategies would mean a lot of adjustments for the students. However, the inconsistency of our current grading practices meant that the students already had to make a lot of adjustments from teacher to teacher.**



# Data Collection

As we began, much of our data was qualitative. It was simply teachers sharing stories of what they were doing. Many were examining Standards-Based Grading. Several teachers took away penalties for late work being turned in. Teachers also gave 50% for work that was not handed in. Others talked of learning targets and retakes. As we progressed, we gave a survey of teachers and students.

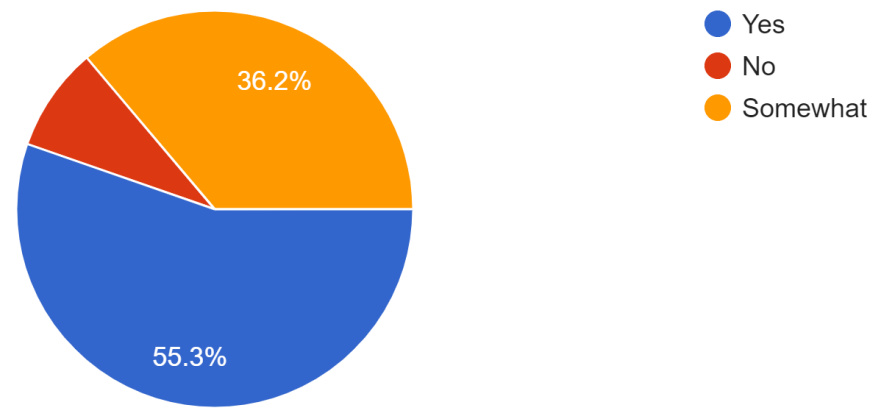


# Our Data

## Number of students that understand the Grading System

I understand how grading works in this class. (percentages, points, formative assessments, summative assessments)

94 responses



# Our Data

One thing the majority of teachers stated was the need to communicate the grading system, whatever it was, to the students, as they did not understand it. Also, 6<sup>th</sup> grade is the first year that students get a GPA, so these data points fit nicely.

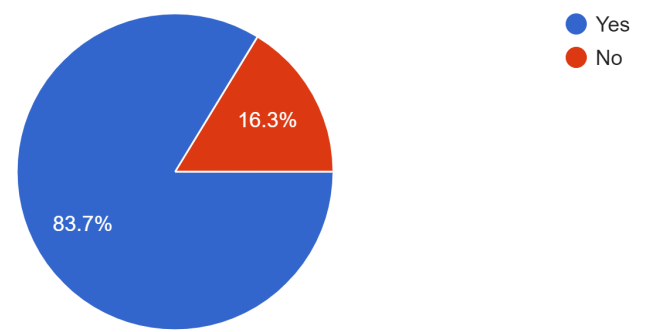




# Our Data

## 36 of our 43 teachers tried a grading process change to work for equity

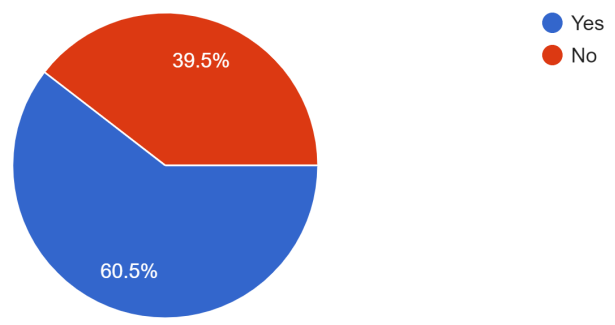
Did you make any changes to your grading system after our equitable grading PD at Westlane?  
43 responses



# Our Data

**One concern for later is that our staff is still somewhat divided on whether or not 50% is the floor of a 100% Grading Scale**

In a 100% Grading Scale, 50% should be the lowest grade for an F  
43 responses





# Our Data



**In looking at our data, there are many inequities in our grading system that are in our grading system. Our survey listed many examples that fit into the categories we were looking at.**

**Our data also showed that our teachers are willing to examine our practices to create more equitable practices**

# Our Discoveries

**Discovery 1 – The teachers are aware of the inequities in our grading systems. They don't agree on what is the root cause, but they can name practices that need to be changed going forward. They are also aware that students don't understand the current grading system, and the students tell us they don't**



# Our Discoveries

**Discovery 2 – There needs to be a training on grading to our teachers. For too long, we have not given training for different grading practices because, as Joe Feldman states, teachers’ grading practices are the last area of education that they feel they have control over.**



# Our Discoveries

**Discovery 3 – One thing that our teachers brought up was that whatever we come up with, our new grading practices need to be consistently applied across classes. One of the main inequities we named was the inconsistency in grading practices. We are putting some other things in place to help with consistency**



# Where We Are Heading Next

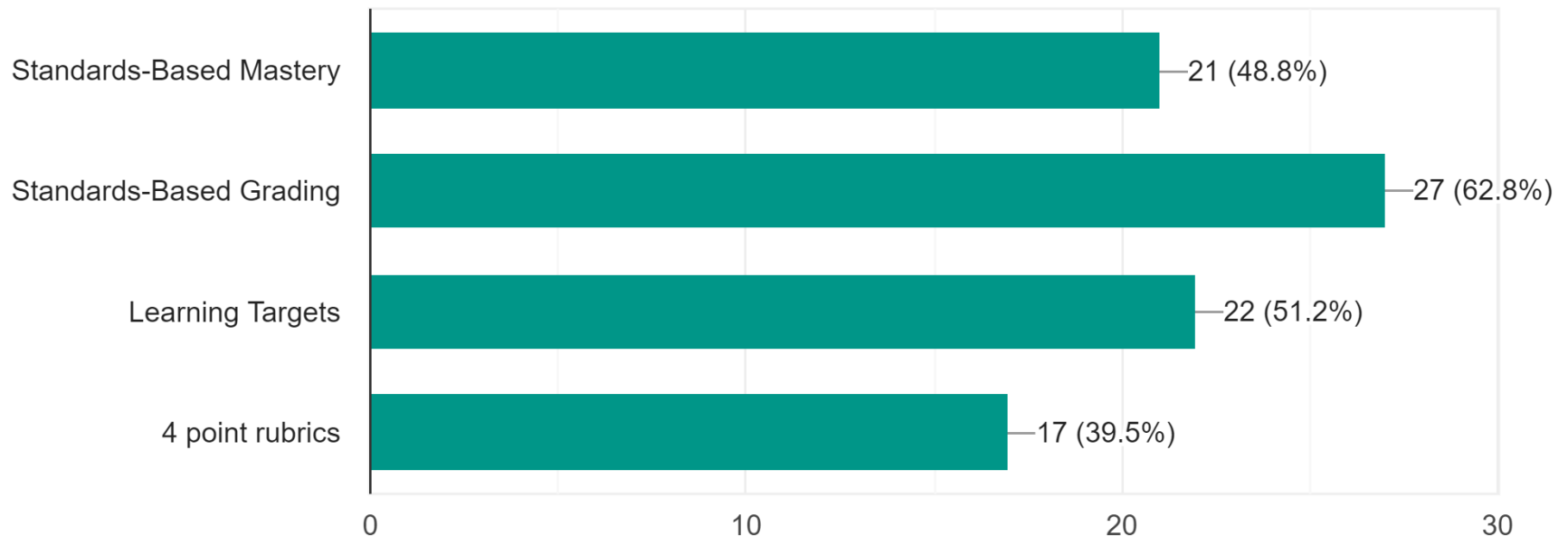
**There is still work to be done in convincing teachers about the mathematical inequity of giving zeroes. It is also apparent that some of the grading processes is going to have to be decided and teachers will need to be trained on the why and how we do things.**

# Where We Are Heading Next



What would you like to learn more about in the next school year?

43 responses



# Bibliography

- **Feldman, Joe. (2015). Grading for Equity: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How It Can Transform Schools and Classrooms / Edition 1**
- **Common Goal Systems (2021). What is Standards-Based Grading?**

