

Authentic Assessment and the Use of a Grading Floor

Committee of the Whole

February 9, 2016

Middle School Authentic Assessment Initiative

In support of Strategy 1.3.3 of the GCS Education Plan:

Develop and implement research-based formative and summative assessment protocols in all grade levels and content areas across the district to support student achievement and data-driven decision making in the classroom in grades PreK-12

a) Define and develop guidelines for implementation of interim and formative assessments

b) Define and develop guidelines for implementation of performance-based summative assessments

c) Provide exemplar assessments with technology enhancements in Rubicon Atlas

d) Provide structured guidance and training on multiple assessment models to include curriculum-based, performance-based and product-based

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- Our middle schools have made great progress, but we know this is a critical period in our students' lives and most who drop out begin to disengage and mentally drop out during the middle years.
- Each year we provide principals with data on schools from across the state with demographics similar to their own. This information is used to initiate professional conversations for the purpose of increasing student academic success, with the expectation that our schools will move to the top of their comparison group in all categories. Once that is accomplished continuous improvement is still expected.
- A committee of GCS middle school principals began considering protocols to:
 - *Ensure grades accurately reflect mastery*
 - *Require students to re-engage with material until mastery is achieved (SC Profile characteristics of perseverance, work ethic, self-direction)*

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That committee:

- Studied research to determine best practices
- Recognized that a grading floor is one component of a much larger, necessary, cultural shift at the middle level
- Sought input from the four GCS MS principals already using a floor
- Shared its recommendations and led discussion among all 19 MS principals
 - Decision to implement was unanimous
 - Set target date for full implementation by the 2016-17 school year, following principal communication and discussion with faculties

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Research provides compelling evidence of the role zeroes play in causing students to disengage and the mathematically devastating influence zeroes have on grade averages when using a 100-point scale:

- *Giving 0s or very low grades reduces the influence the teacher has with the student (Guskey and Bailey, 2001)*
- *When flooring a 0 to a 61, we are not giving kids something for nothing but rather adjusting the grade interval to make the average mathematically justifiable (Wormeli, 2006)*
- *Flooring to 61 adjusts the grade interval so that any grade we determine from the pattern of grades is a more valid indicator of mastery (if a student scores 85-87-87-86 and then receives a 0, the average drops to 69, an F; utilizing a 61 in place of the 0 equates to an 81.2 average)*
- *A zero has a devastating influence, so much so that no matter what the student does, the grade distorts the final grade as a true indicator of mastery-this is mathematically and ethically unacceptable (Wormeli, 2006)*
- *Zeros and low grades motivate students to quit (Bower, 2013)*

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Middle School is the most critical juncture relative to a student's future ability to graduate.

*“When children come to school well-behaved and academically inclined, it makes a teacher's job easier; and when they don't, it makes a teacher's job more important. We can give a child a zero or we can help them learn—but we can't do both.”
(Bower, 2013)*

“Assigning a score of zero to work that is late, missed, or neglected does not accurately depict students' learning. Is the teacher certain the student has learned absolutely nothing, or is the zero assigned to punish students for not displaying appropriate responsibility?” (Guskey, 1996)

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From the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) presentation, *“Effective Grading Practices: 12 Fixes for Broken Grades”*

Weaknesses in current grading systems include:

- *Students can earn an A in a course and never complete anything but basic level work*
- *Teachers lack effective ways to get students to complete work at high levels; teachers grade and record whatever work is turned in*
- *Current grading systems provide students with the option of not doing their assignments at all*
- *Most grading policies assess behaviors instead of level of achievement or proficiency*

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When fully implemented in its present form:

- *All assessments that fall below a 61 on a 100-point scale will receive an initial score of 61 or be marked as NHI (Not Handed In)*
- *A floored grade or NHI would set in motion a series of tiered supports unique in each school. These supports would require the student to re-engage with the material in an effort to achieve mastery*
- *These tiers of support require cooperation on the part of teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and students*
- *Grades will only be finalized once a student has proceeded through all the tiers of support*
- *Ongoing conversation will determine if and when zeroes are ever appropriate, considering their mathematical repercussions on a 100-point scale*

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Where are we?

- *4 of our middle schools were already using a grading floor for individual assignments; two have used a floor since 2009*
- *11 of our middle schools implemented this initiative at the start of the fall semester (2015)*
- *3 middle schools implemented this initiative at the start of second semester (2016)*
- *1 middle school has targeted the start of the 2016-17 school year for its implementation date.*

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Recommended Resources

Marzano, R. (2000). Transforming Classroom Grading

Marzano, R. (2006). Classroom Assessment and Grading that Work

Reeves, D. (2004). 101 More Questions and Answers about Standards, Assessment and Accountability

Guskey, T. Developing Grading and Reporting Systems for Student Learning

Ainsworth, L. (2007). Ahead of the Curve: The Power of Assessment to Transform Teaching and Learning

Reeves, D. (2003). Making Standards Work

Reeves, D. (2002). The Leaders' Guide to Standards

Reeves, D. (2004). The Case Against the Zero.

Stiggins, R. (2001). Student-Involved Classroom Assessment

Brookhart, S. (2004). Grading

O'Connor, K. (2009). How to Grade for Learning, K-12

Wormeli, R. (2006). Fair Isn't Always Equal.