



TEACHER PERCEPTION OF STANDARDS-BASED GRADING: IMPLICATION AND EFFECTIVENESS

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The purpose this study was to examine teacher's perceptions of standards-based grading (SBG) and the extent to which they properly implement standards-based grading in their classrooms. The study used a mixed-method design. Data was collected through the use of a five point Likert scale that contained open-ended questions. The results indicated that teachers felt neutral that standards based grading can a difference in both students ability to identify strengths and weaknesses to better master a particular subject and that SBG is a better reflection of a student's knowledge compared to traditional methods of grading. However, when looking at years of experience; usually teachers with 15-20 years had a more negative outlook about SBG than teachers with less teaching experience, under 10 years, who had a more positive outlook. When analyzing teachers understanding of SBG, the results indicated that teachers felt neutral about their personal understanding of the implementation of SBG.

Keywords: Assessment, Grading, Standards-based grading, Teacher perception, High school.

Introduction

Educational reform has been largely focused on creating clear, specific, and measurable standards since the 1980's. This stems from President Ronald Reagan's educational report titled, "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform" which sought to expose the failing American educational system. Throughout the years these reforms have transitioned from the Clinton (President William Clinton 1994) era of "outcome-based education" to the Bush (President George Bush 2001) administration which enacted the "No Child Left Behind". The reforms originally marketed as "outcomes" during the 1990's and largely rejected as unusable for education have been altered and adapted to an accountability system that allows for educators to ensure that their students are receiving and mastering specific standards-based content.

Standards based grading is outlined as; teachers providing specific academic goals or standards for a class, evaluating if students met those specific goals, and then communicating the results to students and parents (Spencer, 2012, p. 5). Standards are specific to the class and can be found in multiple forms. Dueck (2011) as reviewed by Shippy stated there are multiple aspects of standards, "different types of targets can be used by students and teachers to guide learning: Knowledge targets: what students need to know, reasoning targets: what students should be able to do with this information, skill targets: how can students demonstrate mastery, and product targets: what can I make to show my learning." (Shippy et. al. 2013, p. 15). To properly implement standards based grading several criteria must be met:

1. The purpose of grading is to report on student achievement; grades should reflect mastery of specific criterion referenced standards.
2. A grade should accurately represent student achievement, meaning the grade should not include non-achievement factors such as formative work, lateness, responsibility, and effort.
3. The grade should accurately summarize achievement, meaning standards should be weighted to reflect accurate reporting of expectations.
4. Standards should be clearly communicated to students, parents, and other teachers so they are aware of the expectations within the class. (Tierney et. al. 2011, p. 212)

If the criteria above is not met, then the purpose of standards based grading is lost, which is to clearly define goals for students, and accurately assess if students have met those goals.

The field of education is expanding in the 21st century, standards-based grading and skill accumulation are fast replacing the traditional grades of A,B,C,D, and F. The issue with standards-based grading is that there is little research to support the effectiveness of the outcome as well as the implementation of the actual practice.

One of the main components of standard-based grading is the student's ability to recognize areas of weakness within a specific academic subject. It is very important for students to fully understand these areas so that they can adequately adjust their own personal learning style to achieve the objectives within the standard. If students do not have this ability then students cannot make those adjustments, which could delay a student's progress. The traditional grade book provides very little information regarding student progress towards mastery of the subject, the standard-based grading system reveals much more information that a student can use to identify weakness within the subject. When students identify areas of weakness they can use alternate assessments, until they show proficiency of the subject. However, research indicates that students and parents do not understand why their child received a certain grade and could not identify strengths and weaknesses. A strategy that educators are using to relieve this confusion of what the grade actual means is sending home bi-weekly progress reports detailing student progress toward individual state learning standards. The component of identifying a weakness within the standard is a very complex problem that takes a lot of communication between teachers, students, and parents.

Another main component of standard-based grading is understanding how the grade reflects a student's overall knowledge and or skill set when specifically analyzing objectives within the standard. Educators would emphasizes that the students ability to learn or understand a new skill, standard-based grading has very little impact, the effect comes from the amount of work the student neglects to do towards mastering the objective. It is important that students understand the importance of doing the formative assessment assignments. Formative assessments will identify student's strengths and weaknesses which will untimely help them when completing summative assessments. When standard-based grading is used correctly it can provide the teacher with unlimited information about whether or not a student's knowledge and or skill set is being established within the objective of the standard.

Quakertown Community School District located in Bucks County, Pennsylvania adopted a school wide policy specifically informing teachers the purpose and correct implementation of standard-based grading. The policy reads, "The purpose of standards-based grading is to raise student achievement by clearly communicating students' progress toward learning targets. Standard-based grading aligns grading with the state academic standards as measured by consistent and accurate student achievement data and common criteria for grading. Standard-based grading also accurately communicates achievement of learning targets to students, parents and educators. The influence of positive and consistent work habits on student learning is reported separately from the academics." (<http://www.qcsd.org/site/Default.aspx?PageID=345#>) If educators do not fully understand the purpose of standard-based grading then how are they to implement it correctly into their curriculum. This one component of standard-based grading is the cornerstone that helps guide educators toward proper implementation of the objectives within the standards. Schools must have policies in place and teacher training to ensure that students are working towards mastery of the academic subject.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of standards-based grading based on teachers' perceptions within their own classroom. In addition the study looked at the implementation of standards-based grading, if it is being executed properly, and the teacher's satisfaction with the application process. It is important to note that this study focuses specifically on the view of teachers from one central Illinois High School. Therefore, this teacher sample may not relate to views of other school districts. Nevertheless, this study will further research about standards based grading and hopefully spark further discussion about the effectiveness of standards-based grading and how to properly implement new grading policies to transition from traditional grading policies to standards based grading.

Methodology

This was a mixed method study collecting both qualitative and quantitative data about teacher's perceptions of standards based grading. The survey included ten Likert scale questions ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with two open ended questions. This study measured teacher's attitudes towards standards based grading, focusing specifically on the following questions:

1. Based on teacher perception, does standards based grading allow students to identify areas of weakness and improves their mastery?
2. According to a teacher's perspective, is a standards based grade more reflective of student based knowledge and skill set?
3. Are teachers aware of proper standards based grading policies to ensure correct implementation?

The research was collected from 31 teachers who have been in the field of education from 1 to 20 years. Of the participant group nine teachers had an undergraduate degree, twenty had a Master's degree and two had a Doctoral degree. All adults are currently working at the same central Illinois high school. According to the high's school's annual report where the study was conducted it has a student population of approximately 600 students, of those 600 students 78.5% are Caucasian, 12.5% are African-American, and the final 9% is divided between Hispanic, Asian, and multiracial students (Annual Report, 2012). All teachers who responded to the survey have been using standards-based grading practices as outlined by the district for 1 to 4 years.

The primary means of data collection was a survey of consenting adults who are teachers within the same building of a central Illinois high school. The survey consisted of ten Likert scale questions as well as two open ended questions (mixed method). The survey (see full survey in the appendix) covered a variety of concepts related to teachers' perceptions of standard based grading, including proper implementation, effectiveness, and students ability to identify areas of weakness. Teachers were asked to voluntarily respond to the given survey and explain their participation in the current district policy of standards-based grading. All identifying information was removed prior to reporting out findings. The construct validity of the survey was checked by a peer review of other educational professionals twice. In addition, the average variance will be checked and used to measure the instrument's internal consistency or reliability.

Literature Review

Longstanding in education has been the desire for all students to be able to achieve a meaningful degree that allows them to evolve into participatory citizens. This aspiration is being ushered into the 21st century through the vessel of standards-based grading. The standards-based movement has been long associated with President Ronald Regan's education reform report titled, "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform" which exposed the failing educational system. While outcome based educational reform has been recirculated in the past 40 years it has not been until recent years that an urgency to have all educators conform to a common system, "There was a feeling of urgency that the

educational system needed to be stronger, and that in addition to what states and districts and individual schools were doing we needed a stronger presence at the national level... We recognized that we didn't need a national curriculum, so national goals and voluntary national standards came to be seen as a good mechanism for providing a focus" (O'Neil, 1995, p.12). This is a pedagogical shift from norm-referenced grading where students are ranked and put in a position of direct opposition to criterion based grades where students can identify individual areas of strength and weakness.

This pedagogical shift is echoed by McMillan in Brookhart's article, "The purpose of grading in standards-based systems is to compare student performance and to establish levels of proficiency in knowledge, understanding, and skills" (McMillan 2009, p. 108, in Brookhart, 2004). As professional educators we should be able to differentiate between ranking our students versus providing them with self-reference grading that allows for individual learning support.

Standards Based Grading (SBG)

Today, teachers' grade many different aspects of a student's performance, including elements of knowledge, skill sets, effort, responsibility, etc. Due to the fact that many factors are included in the grade, the grade becomes ambiguous or unclear. Both students and parents are unsure what the grade actually means or indicates about the student's ability in a specific class. Standards Based Grading or SBG is a method to more clearly map the expectations within the class and clearly indicate what the student knows or what skill set the student can apply. In other words the grade used in SBG indicates the ability for a student to master a standard; only achievement factors are included in the final grade. Standards based grading is outlined as; teachers providing specific academic goals or standards for a class, evaluating if students met those specific goals, and then communicating the results to students and parents (Spencer, 2012).

To properly apply standards based grading with the classroom several criteria must be met:

1. The purpose of grading is to report on student achievement; grades should reflect mastery of specific criterion referenced standards.
2. A grade should accurately represent student achievement, meaning the grade should not include non-achievement factors such as formative work, lateness, responsibility, and effort.
3. The grade should accurately summarize achievement, meaning standards should be weighted to reflect accurate reporting of expectations.
4. Standards should be clearly communicated to students, parents, and other teachers so they are aware of the expectations within the class. (Tierney et. al. 2011, p. 212)

One specific goal of SBG is to only include the student's mastery of specific content with the grade. However, standards can still be found in multiple forms. Dueck (2011) as reviewed by Shippy state there are multiple aspects of standards, "different types of targets can be used by students and teachers to guide learning: Knowledge targets: what students need to know, reasoning targets: what students should be able to do with this information, skill targets: how can students demonstrate mastery, and product targets: what can I make to show my learning." (Shippy et. al. 2013, p. 15). It is important to note that these four factors all measure the student's ability to comprehend and utilize knowledge learned in class. Secondly, the grade should not reflect components of effort such formative work, responsibility, timeliness of an assignment. (Tierney et. al. 2011) Basically, non-achievement factors are eliminated from the grade. These non-achievement factors should still be reported but separately from the grade in the class. Instead, the grade should be specific to the learning goals of the class or be criterion referenced. One controversial piece is formative work or homework should not be included in the grade. The rationale behind this is formative work is done during the learning process and therefore cannot be used as a method to measure a student's ability to master a concept or skill. (Wormeli, 2006)

When implementing SBG it is necessary to weight the grades to more accurately reflect what the student has mastered. Meaning, that depending on the class or subject area, some standards may be

covered multiple times while others may be used less frequently or only once during the year. It is necessary to weight the standard grade, to create a more precise report about what the student is mastering in the class. Lastly, for SBG to be successful, the standards and the mastery level must be communicated to both students and parents. This will help students and parents understand what a student is capable of doing in the class and where the student struggles. Thus, helping the student identify where he or she needs improvement and what he or she should focus on to better themselves in the class. When implementing SBG it is of utmost importance to follow the criteria above, if the criteria above is not followed then the purpose of SBG is lost, which is making the components of the grade clearer, the grade again becomes ambiguous.

Implementation

Nathan Schleicher, educator at South High School, North Dakota, author of the article titled, *The Fab Formatives: A Checklist for Implementing Standards-based Grading*, states that, “There is little argument that grades vary dramatically from classroom to classroom; dozens of different factors go into determining the millions of grades assigned each year by millions of different teachers using thousands of different scales.” Understanding standard-based grading and how it is to be implemented into the classroom is not an easy task, for teachers or administrators. One of problems according to the American Federation of Teachers (ATF), “Only 13 of 49 state documents are specific enough to be used effectively by teachers as a guide for classroom instruction or as a measure of instructor accountability.” (2) If educators do not understand how standard-based grading is to be used then it creates confusion amongst co-workers, students, and parents. Before standard-based grading can be implemented everyone from teachers, students, and parents must all value its importance and understand how the process works.

Robert Marzano from the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning in an article titled, *Eight Questions about Implementing Standards-Based Education*, discusses that one of the first steps in implementing standard-based grading is asking the question, “Who will set the standards?” Marzano says the process begins with, “assigning subject area teachers to identify the standards in their areas of expertise.” This will allow teachers to create standards that vary in format and levels of specificity. The next step, according to Marzano, is to, “ask committees of teachers and community members to set standards in various content areas.” Marzano stresses that, “community input is valuable; community members frequently do not have enough proficiency in technical subject areas to formulate appropriate standards.” Schools must identify the “players” involved before implementing something as important as a standard-based grading system.

Before implementation can take place teachers must ask themselves some very important questions. These questions come directly from the article, *The Fab Formatives: A Checklist for Implementing Standards-based Grading*.

- Are behavior and attendance issues separate from student grades in my class?
- Do I regularly post and communicate learning targets for students?
- Do I avoid grading student work on which students can copy or cheat?
- Do I avoid grading practice worksheets, quizzes, and other formative assessments?
- Can I assign grades reflective of learning rather than completion?
- Can students improve their grades in my classes by revising their work or retaking a test?
- Will other teachers and administrators support my efforts to adapt grading practices and still maintain school grading policies?

Deciding to switch from traditional grading to standard-based grading is not an event, it is a process that takes time and lots of energy from everyone involved. Questioning your own grading procedure, especially for veteran teachers, is not an easy task. The questions above are of extreme importance before implementation takes place.

According to Mazano, one of the last steps of implementation is addressing the issue of, “How will student progress be reported?” Mazano says that educators should, “continue to give traditional grades in

all courses but include a student progress report using the standards that describe levels of performance for that course.” This approach allows parents to better understand the meaning of the grade that is given. The use of progress reports provides students and parents with specific and useful information about performance on standards in each academic subject.

In summary implementing standard-based grading is a long process that takes lots of cooperation from teachers, administrators, and parents. Schools must carefully evaluate the need to adopt the standard-based grading system. Schools also must understand why this particular type of grading gives students and parents a better way to evaluate progress within academic subjects.

Problems and Obstacles

Standards Based Grading has been around since the 1980’s, it has recirculated several times in the past 4 decades, but due to various obstacles it has not gained longevity in the educational world. This is due to five long-held traditions:

1. Grades should provide the basis for differentiating students, meaning students with the best talent receives the highest grade; however, as educators it is not our job to select talent but to develop it.
2. Grade distributions should resemble a normal bell-shaped curve; conversely this concept fails to include intervention. It is possible with teaching or intervention to have all students or nearly all students learn what is taught, thus disrupting the normal curve distribution (bell shaped).
3. Grades should be based on students’ standing among classmates, where students are graded based on their standing amongst peers. However, this tells us nothing about what a student has learned.
4. Poor grades prompt students to try harder, as understood by Selby & Murphy in Guskey’s article there is no evidence in research to support that low grades cause students to be motivated to try harder.
5. Students should receive one grade for each subject or course. Everyday teacher’s use one grade to signify a student’s achievement, attitude, responsibility, effort and behavior create an ambiguous interpretation about the students standing within that specific class. (Guskey, 2011).

Besides these five traditions that have been difficult to break, standards based grading also faces the issue of having an appropriate reporting tool. For example what information needs to be communicated, who is the primary audience for this information, and how would educators like the information to be used. Many educators choose a grading tool first, before carefully deciding the purpose of that tool. (Guskey & Bailey, 2001, p. 22) Guskey and Bailey suggest to determine the appropriate grading tools; educators must first identify the major standards students are expected to meet, educators must determine how they plan on indicating or measuring achievement, and finally, how will the educator determine the quality of work based on student performance.(2001, p. 23)

Benefits

Standards-Based grading is an outcome based means of assessment that allows for educators to ensure that grades given to students are not ambiguous. This process requires paradoxical shift in thinking as well as teacher training to ensure proper implementation. The survey will allow the school district to understand the professional perception of the effectiveness of standards-based grading.

Results

This study used a mixed method design collecting both qualitative and quantitative data from a survey. The survey contained ten Likert scale questions with two open ended questions all hoping to obtain some insight to teacher’s perceptions of Standards Based Grading. The Likert scale questions ranged from

strongly agree to strongly disagree (5-1) and the open ended questions were added for teachers to provide specific examples and to give details about their experience with SBG. The Likert scale questions were analyzed by finding means and the standard deviations. Of the 40 teachers who were given the survey, 31 participated. The participation rate was 77.5%. The participants' demographic data is displayed in table 1.

Table 1. Participants' Demographics in a Central Illinois High School

Category	Number
Years of Experience	
0-5	7
6-10	6
11-15	6
16-20	11
Level of Education	
Bachelor's degree	9
Master's degree	19
Doctorate degree	2

The data shows that the majority of participants have at least 10 years of teaching experience and at least a Master's or a doctoral degree.

The first question for this study was; based on teacher perception, does standards based grading allow students to identify areas of weakness and improve their mastery? This question was answered by using a Likert scale question ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). The results are presented in tables 2, 3 and in figure 1.

Table 2. Does SBG Allow Students to Identify Areas of Strength and Weakness

Identification of Strength and Weakness	
N	30
Mean	3.6
Standard Deviation	1.25

The participants mean response for questions one "Does SBG Allow Students to Identify Areas of Strength and Weakness" was 3.6 with a standard deviation of 1.25.

Table 3. Teacher Agreement on the Ability of SBG to Allow Students to Identify Areas of Strength and Weakness Based on Teacher's Years of Experience and Degree Level

Category	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Years of Experience			
0-5	7	4.43	0.79
6-10	6	4.33	0.82
11-15	6	3.67	3.67
16-20	11	2.64	1.12
Degree Level			
Bachelor's Degree	9	3.56	1.42
Master's Degree	19	3.68	1.25
Doctorate	2	3.00	1.41

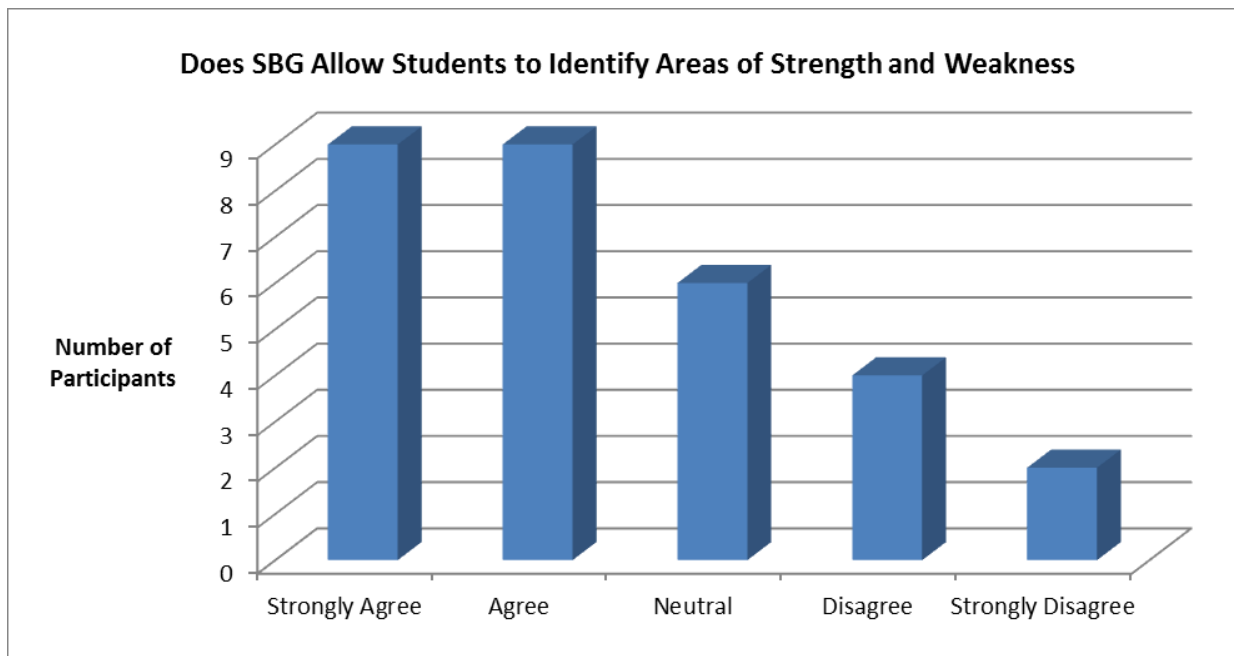


Figure 1. Does standards based-grading allow students to identify areas of weakness and improve their subject mastery?

As shown in table 3, teachers lean more towards agreeing that SBG allows for students to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses. However, as age increases and degree level increases the data shows there is slightly less agreement. The mean for the 0-5 experience category was 4.43 while the 16-20 year experience category was 2.64. In addition, a teacher with a bachelor's degree had a slightly higher mean than a teacher with a Doctorate degree. Those means were 3.56 and 3.00 respectively.

The second question in this study was; according to a teacher's perspective, is a standards based grade more reflective of student based knowledge and skill set? Again this was answered by a Likert scale questions ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Table 4 and 5 highlight teachers' perspectives regarding the relationship between standards based grades and students' knowledge and skill set. Table 4 demonstrates that most teachers were neutral about the extent to which SBG is a more accurate reflection of students' knowledge compared to traditional grading the mean score of agreement was 3.23 and standard deviation of 1.38.

Table 4. Is SBG a more Accurate reflection of students' knowledge compared to traditional grading

More Accurate Reflection	
N	30
Mean	3.23
Standard Deviation	1.38

Table 5 indicates the teachers with the least amount of years of experience (0-5 years) were more likely to agree with the question having a mean of 3.57, and the teachers with more years of experience (16-20 years) were more likely to disagree with the question having a mean of 2.92. However based on degree level, there seemed to be a fairly even consensus as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5. Teacher Agreement on SBG Being a More Accurate Reflection of Students’ Knowledge Compared to Traditional Grading based on Year of Experience and Degree Level

Category	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Years of Experience			
0-5	7	3.57	0.98
6-10	6	3.83	1.17
11-15	5	2.80	1.79
16-20	12	2.92	1.50
Degree Level			
Bachelor’s Degree	9	3.44	1.13
Master’s Degree	19	3.11	1.56
Doctorate	2	3.50	0.71

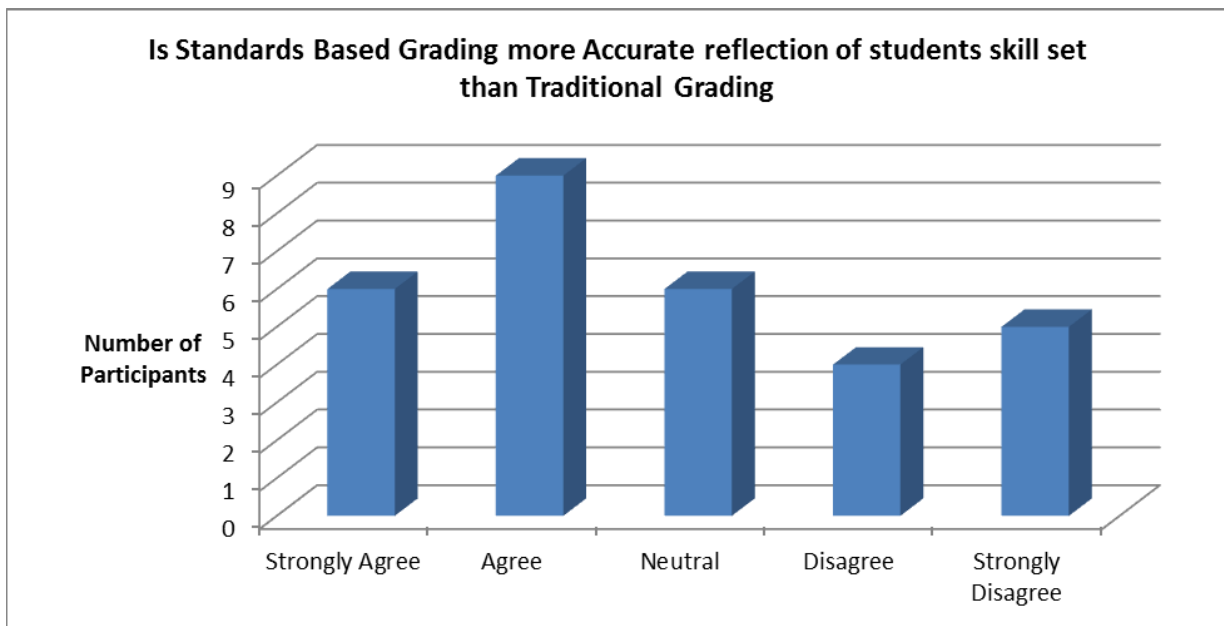


Figure 2. When comparing standards-based grading to traditional grading, do you feel that standards-based grading is a more accurate reflection of students’ knowledge?

The third and final question investigated in this study was; are teachers aware of proper standards based grading policies to ensure correct implementation? This question was answered with a series of Likert scale questions asking teachers about the implementation of Standards based Grading in their classroom. Questions focused the following areas: if teachers felt aware of proper SBG grading policies, indicating if the understood proper implementation, used or created criterion referenced standards for their class, weighted standards based on the frequency each standard was assessed in their class, communicated standards in the grade book, and if the teacher clearly defined standards in their class so students were aware of what they are being assessed on.

The data demonstrates that teachers felt neutral about the proper implementation of SBG in their classroom with a mean score of 3.35 as indicated in table 6. The data also indicates that teachers with years of experience ranging from 16-20 years had the lowest mean score in all categories as indicated in table 7. Also as shown in table 7, teachers with 6-10 years of teaching experience had the best

understanding of proper implementation of SBG having high mean scores in the categories understanding implementation (4.17), creation of criterion reference standards (4.60), and standards clearly defined in the grade book (4.17).

Table 6. Teacher Awareness about Proper SBG Grading Policies and Correct Implementation

Factors included in Proper Understanding and Implementation	N.	Mean	SD
Do Teachers Understand Implementation?	31	3.35	0.95
Have Teachers Created Criterion Referenced Standards?	30	3.70	1.49
Are Standards Weighted based on Frequency?	29	1.31	0.47
Are Standards Communicated in Grade Book?	30	1.70	0.47
Are Standards Clearly Defined?	30	3.60	1.13

Table 7. Teacher Awareness about Proper SBG Grading Policies and Correct Implementation

Category		Understanding Implementation	Created Criterion Reference Standards	Standards Weighted Based on Frequency	Standards Communicated in Grade Book	Standards Clearly Defined
Years of Experience						
0-5	N	7	7	7	7	7
	Mean	2.86	4.00	1.42	2.00	4.14
	St. Dev.	0.69	0.82	0.53	0	1.069
6-10	N	6	5	5	6	6
	Mean	4.17	4.60	1.60	1.67	4.17
	St. Dev.	0.41	0.55	0.55	0.52	0.98
11-15	N	6	6	6	6	6
	Mean	3.83	4.17	1.17	1.67	4.00
	St. Dev.	0.75	0.75	0.41	0.52	1.09
16-20	N	12	12	11	11	11
	Mean	3.00	2.92	1.18	1.55	2.73
	St. Dev.	1.04	1.24	0.40	0.52	0.79
Degree Level						
Bachelors	N	9	8	8	9	8
	Mean	3.00	3.50	1.50	1.78	3.56
	St. Dev	0.87	1.31	0.53	0.44	1.33
Masters	N	20	20	19	19	19
	Mean	3.40	3.75	1.21	1.63	3.63
	St. Dev	0.94	1.12	0.42	0.50	1.12
Doctorate	N	2	2	2	2	2
	Mean	4.50	4.00	1.50	2.0	3.50
	St. Dev	0.71	1.41	0.71	0	0.71

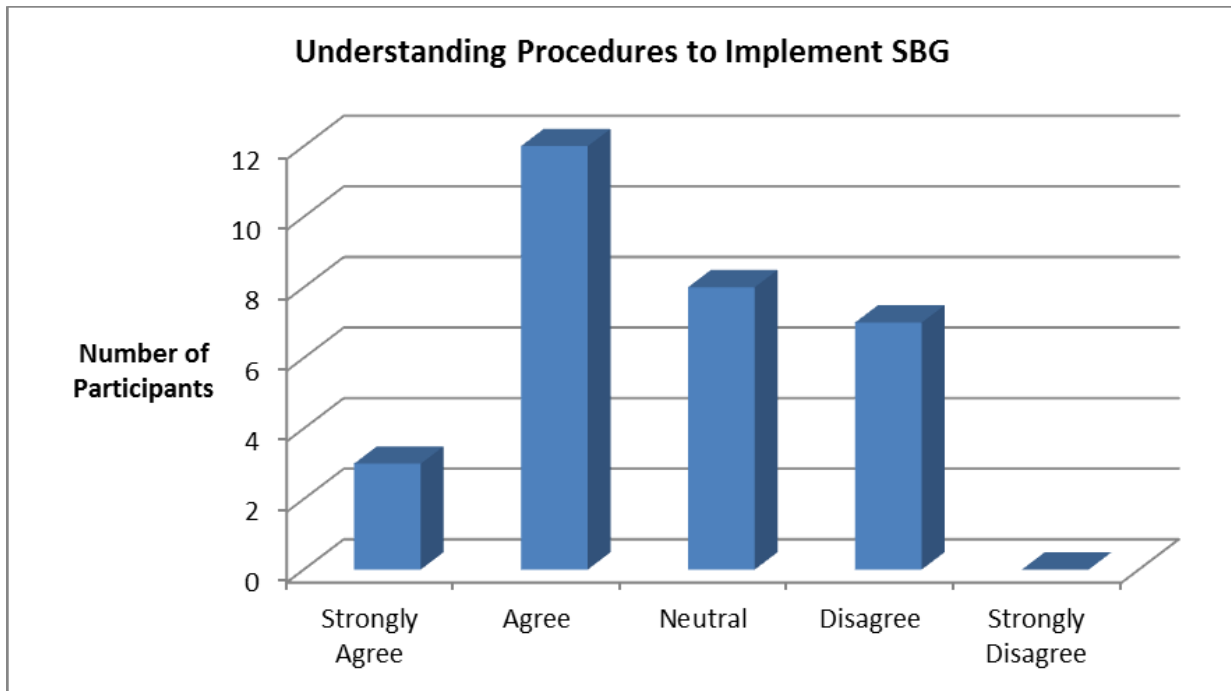


Figure 3. Question 3 Do Teachers Understand Procedures Necessary to Implement SBG in their Discipline

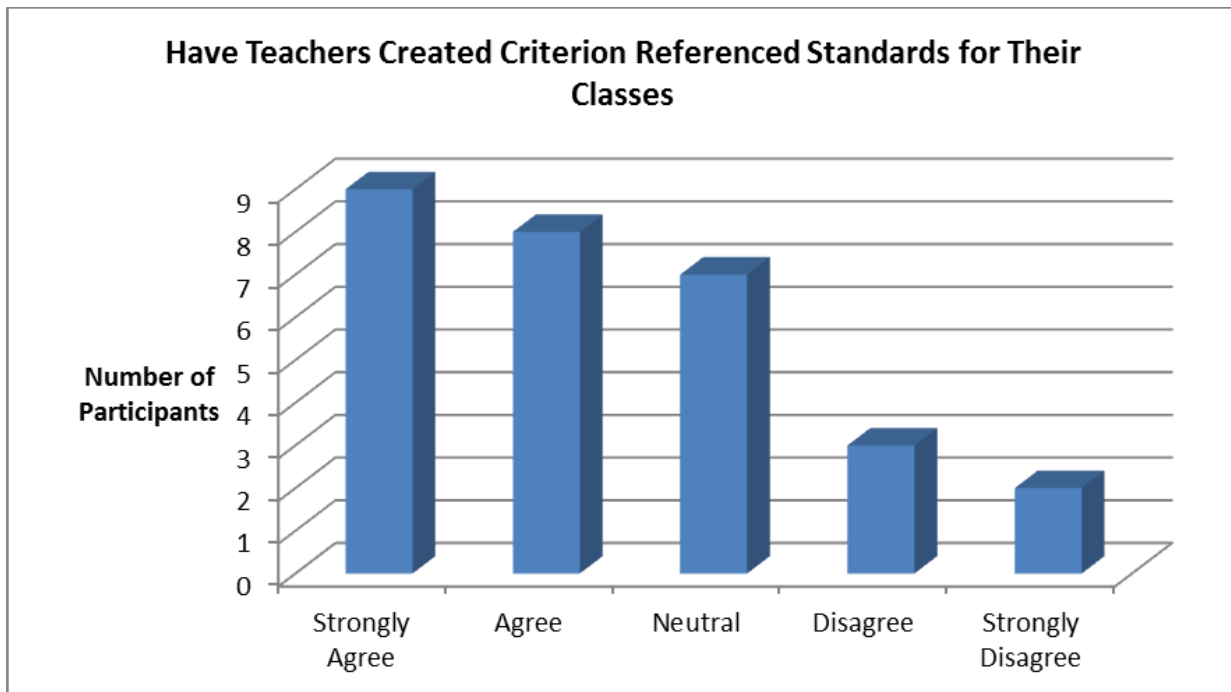


Figure 4. Have Teachers Created Standards for the Units of Classes They have Implemented SBG

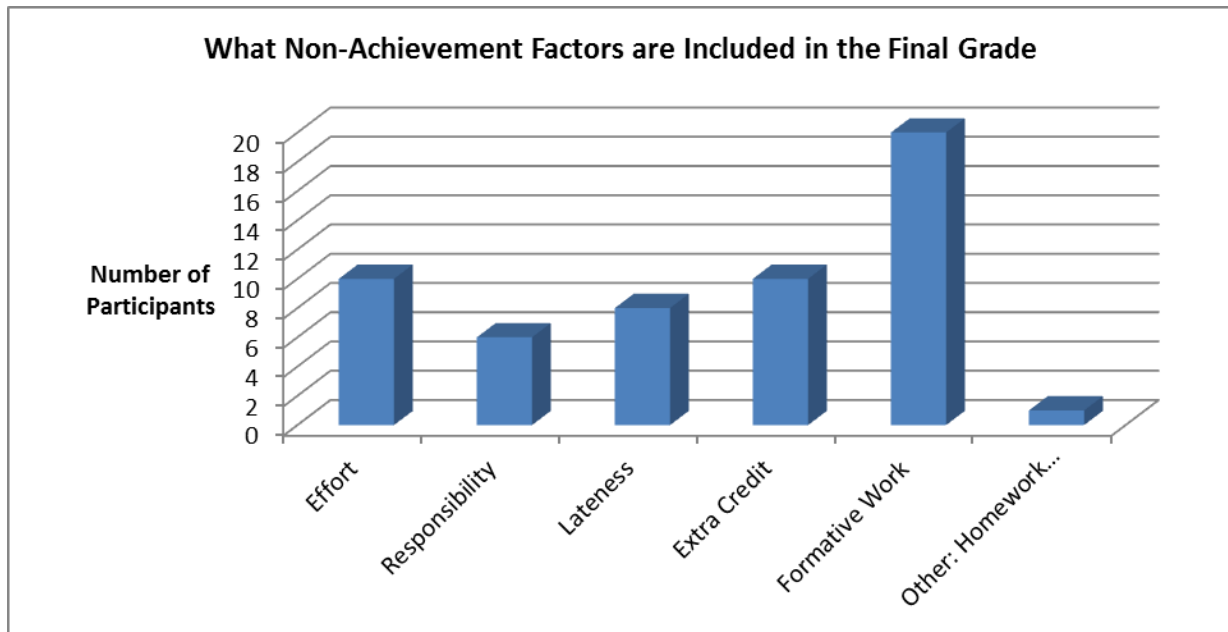


Figure 5. When calculating the overall grade for a class, what are the factors reported within the final grade

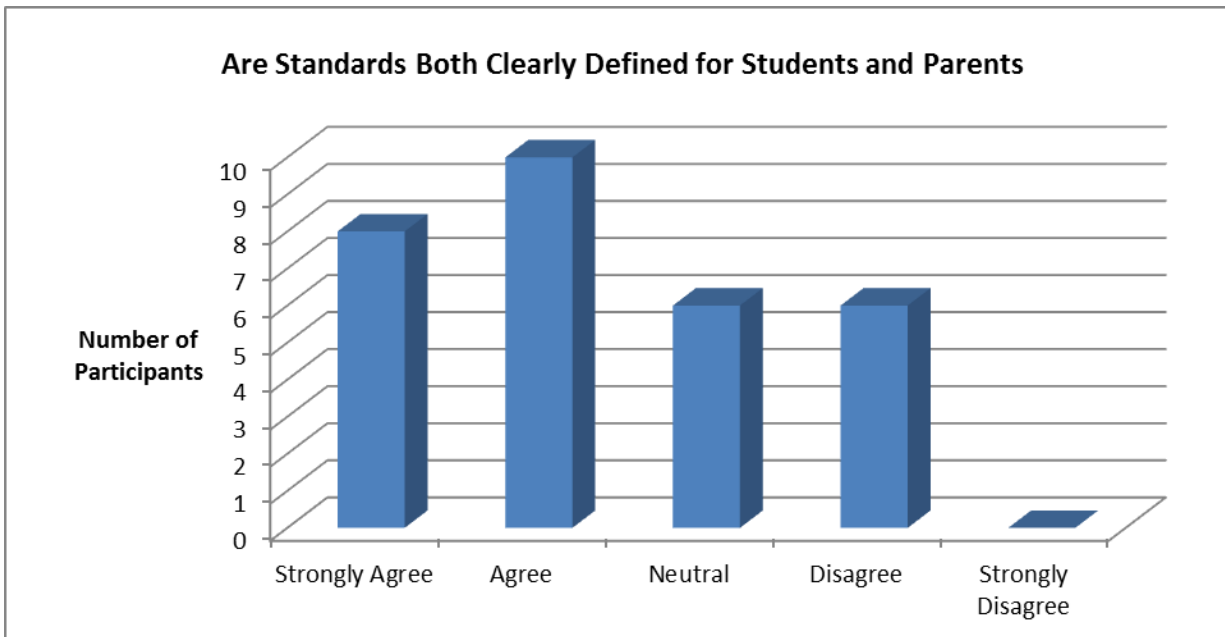


Figure 6. Are Standards Clearly Defined to Ensure Awareness for Expectations within Your Class

Discussion

Question 1: Does standards based grading allow students to identify areas of weakness and improve mastery?

The results indicated that teachers on average were in the neutral to agreement range. Teachers with less experience, under ten years, were more likely to agree that SBG does in fact help students to identify strengths and weaknesses, while teachers with the most experience (16+) were more likely to disagree.

On the other hand, when looking at degree level those with doctorate degrees were neutral; those with masters and bachelor's degrees were in the neutral to agree range. Thus, suggesting that teachers felt overall no real conviction in the difference between SBG and traditional grading or had conflicting views as indicated with the open ended question responses; one teacher stated, "Does it allow students to identify areas of weakness? Yes. Do students actually use them in this regard? No." Another said, "Students with below average grades used to ask for extra credit. Now, they often approach me and reference a particular standard with which they struggle. For example, one student asked for help on his writing skills (not on a particular assignment, but on the whole) because that standard reflected his lowest grade. Now he regularly visits me before he submits writing assignments to ensure he has met the requirements of the standard." An additional teacher also wrote, "Able to pinpoint skills and sub skills that are weak (e.g. Synthetic division) and can use that info to study and ask questions, or get further instruction and improve mastery." While another stated; "No better than before use of standard-based grading." This reveals that some teachers have experienced success while others have not. The overall goal of standards based grading is to make the grade less ambiguous, assigning multiple grades, usually distinguishing between product, process, and progress learning criteria, so students can easily identify areas of strength and weakness to make improvements. (Guskey, Five, 2011). The underlying cause of these trends may be due to older teachers being more skeptical about new grading practices and unwilling to change their methodology. Younger teachers are more apt to try new procedures in their classroom, looking for evidence to justify the changes. As stated by Guskey in his article titled *Five Obstacles to Grading Reform*, SBG challenges the statement "We've always done it that way", showing teachers may form habits in their classroom that go unquestioned because it is the traditional method. It should also be noted, the teachers in the particular school being surveyed are in the beginning stages of implementing SBG, therefore teachers are still attending professional development sessions and working out how SBG will fit into their curriculum.

Question 2: According to a teacher's perspective, is a standards-based grade more reflective of student based knowledge and skill set?

The results of this section indicated that most teachers were neutral when asked if standards-based grading was a more effective strategy for student reflection. The study also revealed that younger teachers (0-5 years of experience) were more likely to agree with the question and those with more years of experience (16-20) were less likely to agree with the question. It is interesting to note that the level of degree held (bachelors, masters, and doctorate) had an even consensus. While it is challenging to discern exactly through data why this trend is evident Guskey explains in his article, "Five Obstacles to Grading Reform" that contesting traditional grading practices will not be easy given the fact that they have simply always been a part of our education system (Gusky, 2011). The underlying cause to this data trend could be due to the fact that individuals who have been teaching for longer periods of time (16-20 years) are less likely to change their methodology whereas younger teachers seem more likely to try new approaches (Tyre, 2010). We are currently at a new place in the educational system where more than 50 percent of the nation's teaching staff consists of teachers who have 10 years or less of classroom experience (Mader, 2012). It is safe to infer that most individuals in this demographic received their undergraduate degree during or after the 2002 implementation of No Child Left Behind therefore are accustomed to testing and accountability more so than their more experienced colleagues (Mader 2012).

Question 3: Are teachers aware of proper standards based grading policies to ensure correct implementation?

Results for question three, "Do Teachers Understand Procedures Necessary to Implement SBG?" show that educators with less years of teaching experience (6-10 years) understand implementation of SBG more when compared to educators with more years of teaching experience (16-20 years). In addition to the years of experience, when analyzing the degree level, the data was inconsistent regarding the implementation of SBG. Finally, when analyzing the non-achievement factors related to SBG, data shows

that educators at all levels are using non-SBG procedures in determining final grades for students. Such factors include; effort, extra credit, formative work, and overall effort that the student is putting forth.

Jackie Mader of Tech Plus in an article titled, "*Great Expectations: Teachers' Views on Elevating the Teaching Profession*," which looks at the changing demographics of U.S. teachers, says that, "For the first time in decades, more than 50 percent of the nation's teaching force is comprised of teachers who have been in the classroom under 10 years." This finding may explain why less experienced educators understand SBG compared to educators with more experience; this current research examined the efforts that schools are taking to implement SBG. According to Huff Post Education, "Efforts to implement Standard-based report cards in high school has been slow to take effect." According to Huff Post Education, the slow efforts in implementing SBG can be attributed to the fact that, "Grades in high school, however, count toward graduation and college admissions, which is why some institutions are hesitant to move towards SBG." It would be difficult to change grade reporting in K-12 institutions to SBG without making the change in higher education admissions practices. Also, this slow start to implement SBG may be due to the fact that schools are facing stiff challenges from parents, unions and more experienced teachers. These factors are evident at the site location where the current study took place. A teacher's attitude toward educational change is a valuable step towards SBG. Celine Coggins, founder and CEO of Tech Plus says, "A new generation of teachers has been exposed to the magnitude of the achievement gap, which may influence their attitudes and their belief in the importance of data. (2012)" Gathering information "data" can help with the attitude towards SBG, not only for inexperienced teachers but for experienced teachers as well.

With regards to why educators are using non-achievement factors to determine overall grade, the New York Times reported that "many teachers had been grading kids for compliance not for mastering the course material." Additionally the paper reported that "A portion of our A and B students were not the ones who were gaining the most knowledge but the ones who had learned to do school the best" (Berglund, 2010). Potential factors related to using non-achievement factors to determine overall grade are the fact that educators are not being taught the proper procedures of SBG. In service programs could eliminate confusion and a better understanding of how to grade students using SBG. Also, the implementation of more SBG pilot programs that include a wide range of teachers who are experienced and inexperienced and the continued evaluation of their success would give schools a better understanding of SBG progress.

The study sample used for the current study consisted of a small group of educators who fairly understand the proper procedure of implementation SBG, the majority of them have (1 to 10) years of teaching experience. In comparison to the larger school population where this research took place, there is still a large group of teachers who are either not using SBG or they are using it incorrectly. According to O'Connor (2010) "Schools are finally realizing if you don't have standards-based grading you really do not have a standards-based education" (p.2) consequently, schools need to start implementing strategies to help all teachers understand the importance of SBG and how to implement it towards student achievement.

Conclusion

The research about teacher's perceptions of Standards Based Grading indicates that less experienced teachers are more likely to subscribe to the Standards Based Grading approach, while teachers with more experience are more likely to be skeptical of SBG and prefer a traditional grading method. The purpose of the research was to discover how teachers perceived Standards Based Grading based and its implementations. Trends indicated that years of experience and degree level had a high impact on how SBG was perceived. To close the gap of discrepancy between more experienced and less experienced teachers, professional development sessions should be offered, including outside observations of other schools using SBG, professional speakers on the topic of SBG, and facilitated discussion amongst faculty and staff to enhance grading practices. As mentioned before, this particular school is in the middle of

transition to SBG, therefore as faculty there is no uniform implementation at this time. To further this study, it would be helpful to survey the teachers again in a year to see if perceptions have changed. It would also be useful to start a study comparing grades between students in traditional grading classrooms vs standards based grading classrooms to identify any differences in the student's ability to identify weaknesses and better be able to master skills.

Recommendations

In order for standards-based grading to be a successful practice in this particular school it is suggested that more professional development be offered to the staff. This will allow for administration to clearly define the parameters of standards-based grading as well as develop teacher "buy-in" to the practice. If the staff is willing to "buy-in" to the practice they will be more invested in the outcome. The administration could potentially offer financial compensation for professional hours spent incorporated standards-based grading into their classroom. Future researchers could possibly explore a comparison of classrooms where traditional grading is taking place as well as classrooms where standards-based grading is common practice.

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Appendix

Standards-Based Grading Survey

1. How many years have you been involved in the educational field? (pick one):

- a. 0-5
- b. 6-10
- c. 11-15
- d. 16+

2. What is the highest level of education that you have received? (pick one):

- a. Undergraduate degree
- b. Graduate degree (Masters)
- c. Graduate degree (Doctorate)

3. Do you understand the procedures necessary to implement standards-based grading in your academic discipline? (please mark an "X" in the appropriate box):

Strongly Agree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Disagree

4. Have you created specific criteria referenced standards for your units of study within the class/classes where you have implemented standards-based grading? (please mark an "X" in the appropriate box):

Strongly Agree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Disagree

5. When calculating the overall grade for each student are any of the following reported in the final grade? (pick all that apply):

- a. Effort
- b. Responsibility
- c. Lateness
- d. Extra Credit
- e. Formative Work

6. Do you weigh your standards based on the frequency of occurrence (pick one)?

- a. Yes
- b. No

7. Are your standards communicated in your grade book for both students and parents/guardians to view (pick one)?

- a. Yes
- b. No

8. Are the standards clearly defined for both students and parents to ensure awareness of expectations within your class (please mark an “X” in the appropriate box)?

Strongly Agree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Disagree

9. Does standards-based grading allow students to identify areas of weakness and improve their subject mastery (please mark an “X” in the appropriate box)?

Strongly Agree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Disagree

In reference to the above question please use this space to provide a written example of how students have identified their weaknesses and improve their subject mastery (optional):

10. When comparing standards-based grading to traditional grading, do you feel that standards-based grading is a more accurate reflection of student’s knowledge? (please mark an “X” in the appropriate box)

Strongly Agree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Disagree

In reference to the above question please use this space to provide a written example of how either standards-based grading or traditional grading more accurately reflects student’s knowledge (optional):