TMS Grading Policy & Procedures for Tolland Middle School

(9-1-2014)

Overview

Tolland Middle School practices a Mastery Based Grading philosophy, also known as *Mastery Grading*. A committee was formed by the Principal in the 2012-2013 school year to review our grading practices. The committee reviewed research and the Principal discussed Mastery Grading with parent groups. Please see Appendix A of this document for some information on the background literature and rationale of Mastery Grading. The move to Mastery Based Grading at Tolland Middle School requires more of educators than traditional methods do. These practices will be most noticeable by parents and students in the 1) TMS Grading Scales, 2) Disaggregation of "averaged" grades into specific student skill categories (although an aggregate or "omnibus" grade will still be shown as well), 3) the separation of academic and behavioral performance reporting, 4) the re-assessment (retake) policy, and 5) the use of Standards Based Student Proficiency Reports.

TMS does not use traditional report cards. Instead, day to day academic performance can be tracked in Power School – and parents can sign up for regular progress updates. This electronic reporting of academic performance is more accurate, and more detailed than a paper report. For anyone who does not have access to the web, paper reports can be sent home quarterly. Parents will be reminded of the coming end of a Quarter through an on-line caller system, and will be encouraged to access Power School at that time if they are not regularly doing so otherwise. Teachers are required to update the data in the Power School Parent Portal within 10 school days of an assessment being taken, throughout the school year. Omnibus (or averaged) grades are available in Power School; clicking on a grade will result in a displayed break down of the aggregate grade into all of the assessments that comprise it in the current quarter, and the categories into which they fit.

The school will also provide a Student Proficiency Report at the end of Semester 1, and Semester 2. These reports are *Standards Based* reports meaning they will report a student's progress on specific learning standards, skills, and content. Instead of an "A" or "B" (referred to in some circles as an "averaged," "amalgamated," or "omnibus" grade) students will receive a rating (Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, Goal, Advanced) on a *series* of learning standards (or categories). So for instance, rather than indicating a "C" in Language Arts (an "omnibus" grade) these reports will indicate a series of ratings (i.e. *Determines and analyzes central ideas:* ***Proficient****, Uses relevant and sufficient evidence to support analysis of text:* ***Basic,*** etc. and the **number** of times a student was rated in that area (i.e. "3') to report a student's overall progress on grade level learning standards. This is important information for parents, and the school, in helping address students areas of weakness, as well as areas in which they excel.

Finally, the school will provide Quarterly "SOAR" reports – or behavior reports on each student's behavioral performance in each class relative to the school's core values of Safety, Ownership, Active Learning, and Respect. Students complete a "self" report that is then reviewed by the teacher (with teacher comments added if s/he feels their opinion diverges from that of the student's), and sent home for parent review, signature, and return. The purpose of the SOAR reports is to evolve beyond the

practice of simply reporting behaviors on a "progress" report in which the student is a passive recipient of a rating. The literature on behavior indicates that when students, and human beings in general, are encouraged to reflect on their *own* behaviors and review themselves it results in more accountability and a greater propensity for change and growth on the part of the person reflecting. The reports are designed to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion between students and teachers, and students and parents, that were not possible with sporadic comments on progress reports.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Principal if you have any questions or comments .

TMS Grading Scales

Grades for academic skills will be separated from any behavioral considerations. This is an important step in Mastery Based grading. The Academic Skills based grade a student receives has to reflect the student's learning and/or ability relative to a skill, competency, academic content, standard and/or indicator category. Doing so provides more detailed information about the student's learning and ability level, and provides a method of mitigating misrepresentation of the student's actual skill acquisition by excluding considerations that do not relate directly to a student's level of skill and knowledge in that area. The next section will define the categories of student performance. The grading scale will be as follows:

100 – 90	A – Advanced Understanding (level of Mastery)
89 – 80	B – Developed (level of Mastery)
79 – 70	C – Proficient (Level of Mastery)
69 or less	LES / LESA – Limited Evidence of Skill/Content Acquisition
0	NE – No evidence (of Skill/Content Acquisition)

TMS Grading Categories

Language Arts

READING

RGLT - Read and comprehend grade level literary and informational texts proficiently and independently. (Reading Anchor #10)

KIDS - Determines and analyzes central ideas. (Reading Anchor #2)

EVI - Uses relevant and sufficient evidence to support analysis of text. (Reading Anchor #1)

VOC- Uses multiple strategies to acquire and use vocabulary. (Language Anchor #4-6)

WRITING

WTT - Produces clear and coherent argument, informative, and narrative texts appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Writing Anchor #1-4)

GRAM - Demonstrates command of English grammar and mechanics when writing. (Language Anchors #1-2)

RES -Conducts research to build and present knowledge. (Writing Anchors #7-10)

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Prepare for and participate in range of conversations and collaborations (SL Anchor Standard #1)

CODES

RGLT = reads grade level text

KIDS = Key Ideas and DetailS

EVI= evidence

VOC= vocabulary

WTT= Writing Texts & Traits

GRAM = grammar

RES= Research

PREP= Prepares for group discussions

SOCIAL STUDIES	Category header
SOCIALSTUDIES	SOCIAL STUDIES CONTENT
SOCIALSTUDIES	SOCIAL STUDIES APPLICATION
MATH	Category header
MATH	RATIOS AND PROPORTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS
MATH	THE NUMBER SYSTEM
MATH	EXPRESSIONS AND EQUATIONS
MATH	GEOMETRY
MATH	STATISTICS AND PROBABILITY
MATH	FUNCTIONS
SCIENCE	Category header
SCIENCE	SCIENCE CONTENT
SCIENCE	SCIENCE PROCESS

Academic Practice

Academic practice replaces the term "homework." Anything that is designed to *reinforce, but will not be used to assess progress on academic content or skills, is Academic Practice.* In other words, if an assignment provides information or data about how a student is progressing on one of the learning indicators/categories it is considered an *assessment* and is part of the *Academic Grade.* If an assignment

is designed to reinforce an understanding (drill and practice math problems, task completion, preparation for class, reading to prep for the next day's class activity, etc.) and will **not** be used to assess progress on skills or content, that is considered *Academic Practice* and a student's performance in this area would be evaluated through a behavioral report (see the SOAR Report Cards section below). Students who refuse to do their work (Assessment or Academic Practice) perform poorly, or who complete work in a way that is not conducive to learning will be assigned to the TMS Academic Assistance Program.

Failure to complete Academic Practice work will result in the following actions (to be assessed *Quarterly and for each class separately*):

1st offense*- Teacher verbal warning, and at the teacher's discretion s/he may ask the student stay after school with the teacher to complete the assignment.*

2nd offense *- Teacher verbal warning, and at the teacher's discretion s/he may ask the student stay after school with the teacher to complete the assignment. The teacher may also complete a Lunch Detention for the student based on the circumstances.*

3rd Offense *- The teacher processes a mandatory Lunch Detention and makes contact with the parent through e-mail, phone call, or sign and return form.*

4th Offense *- The teacher writes a discipline referral for an Office Detention and makes contact with the parent through e-mail, phone call, or sign and return form.*

5th Offense *- The teacher writes a discipline referral and the student receives two Office Detentions, parent contact is made by the administration, and the teacher (or team) makes a referral to the TMS Academic Assistance Program using the on-line referral form.*

TMS Academic Assistance Program

This program is staffed by teachers, paraprofessionals, and volunteers. This program occurs after school and serves students who consistently fail to complete work, execute poorly done work, or who need help/reinforcement on skill or content acquisition. This program has a week-to-week enrollment cycle. Teachers will submit students for the program each week by Thursday for enrollment the following week. Students report Monday – Thursday to the TMS AAP program. A folder will be kept in the main office, and teachers will provide work to be put into that folder by 1:04 PM each day. Students in the TMS AAP will be called down at 2:25 PM each day and routed to the TMS AAP. Students will work on the material in that folder with the TMS AAP staff. Parents will be called each Friday a) for an update about their daughter or son's progress, or b) to request permission from the parent to enroll them in the program. Parents must agree to their child's enrollment in this program for the student to participate. This program occurs after-school from 2:30 PM to 4:10 PM and requires the student stay Monday through Thursday and either take the late bus home, or be picked up at 4:10 PM. Parents/guardians picking students up from this program must come to the main office. Akin to a class, and as an extension of the school day, students who do not show to a scheduled session will be given first a Lunch Detention, and then Office Detentions for not doing so. Students who demonstrated a continued need for these services will be considered for Tier II and III supports. Other students, for whom motivation is the primary challenge, may be motivated

to regain their own personal time after-school and change their habits as a result. This approach is based in the literature on habit formation (i.e. *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business by Charles Duhigg),* Behavior Supports (influenced by the work of Dr. George Sugai) and literature on Mastery Grading (found in the References of this document).

TMS Re-assessment (re-take) Policy

Re-assessments are mandatory on all *formative* assessments at Tolland Middle School. Please see the *Evaluation Example Matrix* in the Appendix of this document for examples of which assessments are, and are not, subject to re-assessment. If the majority of the class performed poorly on a formative assessment (more than 50%) the assessment is ***not*** *to* be considered in any student's grade. Instead, re-teaching and re-assessment should occur.

Students who score 69 or below on any formative assessment will be required to study, and be re-assessed. Teachers will fill out the referral paperwork for the TMS Re-assessment Program (which is held after school, Monday through Thursday) and students will be assigned a study session and/or date to take the re-assessment. Teachers may offer re-assessments to the students themselves, but these re-assessments *must be afterschool* and the paperwork (on-line form) must still be completed to track the re-assessment. Students who score 69 or below will be required to take the re-assessment. The maximum score recorded for a student on a re-assessment is a 70 (although a student's actual retake score can be noted in the comments). If a student refuses to take the assessment an NE or "No Evidence" designation should be entered into Power Teacher / Power School for the assessment. If a student performs below a 70 on the re-assessment, that student will have the highest grade earned entered into Power Teacher / Power School for that assessment. Students *must* complete a remediation activity *before* re-assessing (this can be a packet, activity, or assignment provided by the teacher). If a student is being re-assessed frequently the team teachers will discuss the student's performance and formulate a plan, EIP, or referral to Tier II or III services as appropriate. Re-assessments are allowed *up until the last week before grades close for a quarter.*

Assessing Students' Behavior (Academic Behaviors / Social Behaviors)

Productive academic and social behaviors lend themselves to successful academic achievement. Given this, Tolland Middle School will also assess and report how students perform behaviorally. The student behavioral assessment / report is called the "SOAR Report" and reports the student's progress on and adherence to the core values of the school, Safety, Ownership, Active Learning, and Respect. These will be sent home four times a year. Students will be asked to complete this report card with each teacher and class they have; the teacher will then review the reports for accuracy checking off and making comments *only when they disagree, want to provide information from their data, or need to clarify something the student has reported.* These reports will be sent home for parents to sign and return. These reports go beyond the typical "comments" on a progress report because they require students to reflect on their own behaviors, and progress or lack thereof in that area. Literature on behavior and

habit formation suggestions that this reflection process is integral to changing behavior. In addition, the reports are reviewed by the teachers, and sent home to the parents for review, signatures, and return giving each stakeholder an opportunity to weight in, and help guide the student. This process has significant behavioral advantages over a comment on a progress report or report card - and provides many opportunities for cognitive reflection and improvement.

Student Proficiency Reports

The school will provide a Student Proficiency Report at the end of Semester 1, and Semester 2. These reports are *Standards Based* reports meaning they will report a student's progress on specific learning standards, skills, and content. Instead of an "A" or "B" (referred to in some circles as an "averaged," "amalgamated," or "omnibus" grade) students will receive a rating (Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, Goal, Advanced) on a *series* of learning standards (or categories). So for instance, rather than indicating a "C" in Language Arts (an "omnibus" grade) these reports will indicate a series of ratings (i.e. *Determines and analyzes central ideas:* ***Proficient****, Uses relevant and sufficient evidence to support analysis of text:* ***Basic****,* etc. and the **number** of times a student was rated in that area (i.e. "3') to report a student's overall progress on grade level learning standards. This is important information for parents, and the school, in helping address students areas of weakness, as well as areas in which they excel.

Appendix

Background Literature and Rationale

One of the challenges of our educational time is grade inflation. A recent report from the College Board investigated grade inflation, the process in which higher grades are assigned (over time) for the same level of achievement. The study in the report compared SAT scores and cumulative grade point averages (GPAs) over 11 years of diploma receiving cohorts. The study involved 1.2 million students. The findings were that the average GPA for the class of 1996 was 2.64; in 2006 the average GPA was 2.90. However, during that period, standardized scores on the SAT remained relatively unchanged. (Godfred, Kelly, *Investigating Grade Inflation and Grade Non-Equivalence – available at http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/cb/gradeinflation_nonequivalence.)*

A similar report by the makers of the ACT indicated that between 1991 and 2003, the mathematics grades of students taking the ACT exam rose from a grade point average of 2.80 to 3.04, whereas their average scores on the math portion of the ACT rose only slightly, from 20.04 to 20.55 on a 36 point scale. Similarly, average English grades rose from a grade point average of 3.04 to 3.29, whereas ACT English scores nudged up from 20.22 to 20.46 (Woodruff & Ziomek, 2004).

In another report nearly twice as many students reported earning an A or A- average in 2006, than in 1992 (32.8 percent versus 18.3 percent) (Twenge & Campell, 2013). In yet further research two federal reports found that the performance of U.S. school students on the reading portion of the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Process) had declined between 1992 and 2005, even though students reported getting higher grades (GPAs rose from 2.68 in 1990, to 2.98 in 2005).

Some Big Questions

Among the big questions when thinking about Mastery grading are:

1) Are grades supposed to act as *incentives (to perform), Feedback (to use for improving performance), or evaluation (to assess mastery)?*

2) Should we have separate marks for *Progress (improvement from the last performance)*, *Process (effort and timeliness,* and/or *Product* (achievement of standards)?

Product criteria are favored by educators who believe that the primary purpose of grading is to communicate summative evaluations of students' achievement and performance (O'Connor, 2002) focusing on what students know and are able to do at a point in time. Product criteria are usually final examination scores, final reports, projects, or exhibits, etc.

Process criteria are emphasized by educators who believe that product criteria do not provide a complete picture of student learning. In this perspective, grades reflect not only the final results, but also how the students got there. Process criteria are responsibility, effort, work habits, etc.

Progress Criteria are used by educators who believe that the most important aspect of grading is how much students gain from their learning experiences. Progress criteria are learning gains, improvements in scores on a standard or concept, educational growth evaluations, and value-added evaluations. The educators using this approach look at how much improvement students have made over a particular period of time, rather than where they are at a given moment (Educational Leadership, *Effective Grading Practices*, November 2011, Vol.69 No.3).

Although there is research that suggests grades and other reporting methods affect student motivation and the effort they put forth (Cameron & Pierce, 1996), and studies show that most students view ***high grades*** as positive recognition of their success (Haladyna, 1999) there is no research that supports the idea that low grades prompt students to try harder. More often, low grades prompt students to withdraw from learning (Selby & Murphy, 1992).

Re-assessments (Redos and Retakes)

As Rick Wormelli points out in *Redos and Retakes Done Right* (2011):

> "Many teachers reason that they are building moral fiber and preparing students for the working world by denying them the opportunity to redo assignments and assessments…These are the same teachers who set a deadline for submitting work and then give students who do not meet the deadline a zero, thinking that the devastating score will teach them responsibility. In reality, these practices have the opposite effect: They retard student achievement and maturation. As hope wanes, resentment builds…students disengage from the school's mission and the adults who care for them."

Wormelli uses the Olympic runner as an example, stating "does he get a do-over of the race? No, and that's proper at this level of competition. Remember, he's not in the *learning-to-run* stage of development, he's in the *proficient-runner* stage." Wormelli points out that the runner became competent at racing because he has run a dozen times, or even hundreds of times prior to the race, and that each time he ran his time was not aggregated into a compilation of all his digressions (bad times) woven together with his successful ones, instead, often his best time is reported. For example, if his early time was 68.74 two years ago, and his best new time is 51.03, averaging the two numbers would not give an accurate indication of the level that the runner is performing.

To Wormelli, and other researchers, practice, retakes, and redos are how humans learn. They do not learn from, for instance, receiving a 55 on an assessment, and then never revisiting or reinforcing the content. Humans learn best when we can review our failures, and try again, until we obtain some level of mastery of the competency, content, and/or idea.

The Omnibus Grade

For years, averages or means have been used to report grades. This has also been referred to as an "Omnibus" grade (Marazano, 2011, Heflebower, 2011). And there has been a lot of research criticizing

the current way we do grading, which has its origins at Harvard University in 1880 (Crooks, 1933, DeZouche, 1945, Kirschenbaum, Simon, & Napier, 1971; Marshall, 1968). This is true of final grades, and individual assessments. Consider this quote from Marazano:

> "Two students, both of whom have attained a score of 70. The first student might have acquired all 35 of the 35 points on patterns but only 35 of 65 points on data analysis. The student has demonstrated a robust understanding of patterns but only a partial understanding of data analysis. The second student might have received only 5 of the 35 points on patterns, but all 65 points on data analysis. This student has demonstrated the opposite pattern. The convention of designing tests that involve more than one topic and then scoring these tests…makes it impossible to gauge individual students' knowledge."

Averaging grades falsifies grade reports (Marazano, 2000; O'Conner, 2009, 2010; Reeves, 2010; Wormelli, 2006). A student who receives an F on the first test but then learns the material and receives and A on a new assessment would, if averaged, get an average of the two (say a C). This does not represent an accurate report of the student's proficiency.

Marazano (2011) gives an example of the limitations of "omnibus" grading by using three students. Student 1 receives a "B" on his report card for math (a traditional omnibus grade). Student 2 receives a report card that indicates he received a "B" in number sense, a "C" in calculation, and an "A" in measurement (a hybrid). Student 3 received different grades for Number Sense variables of *Identifies place value to 1000s, Readings and writes common fractions, Reading whole numbers through four digits, Writes whole numbers through four digits, and Orders and compares whole numbers through four digits*. In the last two examples, more meaningful information is provided.

Similarly, mixing in academic behaviors (receiving zeros for tardiness on assignments or for non-compliance behaviors not related to content mastery) can result in a lower "omnibus" average than the student's actual skills would indicate. Another example of this would be that an "organized notebook" is not, say, a geometry standard. It is a helpful learning tool, but is not an indicator of what a student has learned (O'Conner, Ken. & Wormelli, Rick., 2011).

<u>The Problem with Zeros</u>

Zeros provide a mathematical inaccuracy when used in grading practices. This is true because it does not represent equal skewing. "Recording a zero on a 100-point scale for a student's lack of work on an assessment not only falsifies the report of what he or she knows, but also immediately generates despair. Only a mammoth pile of perfect 100s can overcome the deficit and result in a passing D grade. So why bother? (O'Connor & Wormelli, 2011)." When averaging grades a single assignment that is a zero can disproportionately skew the data: 100+100+100+0 equals a 75, whereas if the lowest possible grade of an F followed a "fair" and mathematically even scale (say of 50) the average yields an 87.5, or closer to the truth of overall competency, especially if these assessments are all reporting on a specific skill set or indicator. At TMS students who do not complete work will receive an "NE" to indicate that we

have no evidence of whether they have attained that skill or not. The re-assessment policy is meant to try to help avoid this situation.

Group Work

"Suppose students work collaboratively in a history class to analyze rhetoric, prepare for debates, or prepare a multi-media presentation that analyzes economic models. These are all methods for teaching students the history curriculum, but they are not the history curriculum itself. In addition, when students present their final report with everyone's names displayed on the opening slide, we're not sure where one student's influence ends and another's begins (O'Connor & Marazano, 2011)."

To be true to Mastery grading, and knowing a student's actual level of skill acquisition, students must be assessed outside the group work to understand what each student is learning from the experience. Group work/projects are really only a means to an end, they are not the actual curriculum.

TMS SOAR REPORT for Quarter ____

Class: _____ Teacher: _____Date:_____

C – Consistently I – Inconsistently N – Needs Improvement

Please note – the teacher will provide a rating *only* when it differs from how the student evaluated her or himself.

Student Name:	Student Reports	Teacher Reports		Student Reports	Teacher Reports
SAFETY			**ACTIVE LEARNING**		
Follows all TMS/Class rules, procedures, and safety expectations			Is alert and engaged during class (making eye contact and paying attention to the speaker, materials are out and ready, following directions)		
OWNERSHIP			Asks and responds to questions; participates in class discussions		
Shows self-control in class; focus is on academic conversations			Works well with others		
Comes to class prepared with assigned work and all materials needed for class			Actively participates when working in groups		
Materials/ binders/ notebooks appropriately organized			Stays focused on tasks		
Comes to class on time			**RESPECT**		
Turns in work on time			Shows self- respect and takes pride in doing work completely and neatly		
Completes missed/make-up work			Uses appropriate non- verbal communication/body language towards others		
			Uses appropriate verbal communication/words toward others		
			Comes to class on-time		
STUDENT COMMENTS:			TEACHER COMMENTS:		

Please note – the teacher will provide a rating *only* when it differs from how the student evaluated her or himself.

Parent/Guardian signature:_____ [I have seen the report] Date: _____

Please return by the next school day

Evaluation Example Matrix

Assessment Category	Assessment Type	Main Record location	Description	Examples	Subject to Re-assessment
Academic Practice	Drill and Practice, work completion	Power School (as non-graded), teacher notebooks	Assignments designed to reinforce classroom learning. Assignments checked for completion but not necessarily for skill acquisition.	Reading and answering general questions (questions designed mainly to ascertain if the student *completed* the task, not for any academic skill), math drill and practice, pre-reading for upcoming content or lesson. Journal writing (unless *assessed* for specific skills), task completion, preparation for class.	No
Class Assessments	Quasi-Formative*	Power School (counts towards omnibus grade),	*Classroom* assessments. Assessments that can be different for each class and suited/adjusted to the instructional needs of individual students or *class* populations. These are implemented to generate information about student skill acquisition during the process of learning material and should be utilized for the purpose of providing feedback/data for both student and teacher to modify teaching and learning activities.	Quiz, Test, short writing activity, daily or weekly project, check-for-understanding, assignments (take home or otherwise) that will be reviewed by the teacher for skill/content acquisition and for which ***feedback is provided*** to help students better understand content, and better apply skills, and **individual student progress** is reviewed for the purpose of assessing and adjusting instruction and/or learning strategies.	Yes
Common / Unit / Final Assessments	Summative	Power School (omnibus grade), Mastery Manager, NWEA	*Common Summative Assessments*. Assessments that are designed to determine an individual student and student group's acquisition of skills and content knowledge. It is used primarily to see whether instruction, strategies, and formative assessments were accurate and successful in measuring and facilitating student acquisition of skills and knowledge. These are uniform assessments given to multiple classrooms, and/or an entire grade or school population of learners.	SBAC, NWEA, Unit Assessments, Benchmark Tests, Common Assessments	No

- Formatives as defined above are more *obtrusive* assessments (Marazano, Formative Assessments and Standards based Grading, 2010). They could be considered summative as formatives typically happen *during* instruction and while used to assess, are not cumulative. The use of the term formative is in the context of assessing and adjusting for our Unit/Benchmark/NWEA/Common assessments. Our re-assessment policy as well as our use of classroom assessments makes our *class assessments* more formative in nature. Thus the Quasi-Formative rating.

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