Grading Exceptional Learners

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How should we grade?

Essential Questions
1. What are the major reasons we use report cards and assign grades to students’ work?
2. Ideally, what purposes should report cards or grades serve?
3. What elements should teachers use in determining students’ grades?
   (For example, major assessments, compositions, homework, attendance, class participation, etc.)

Purposes of Grading
1. Communicate the Achievement Status of Students to Their Parents and Others
2. Provide Information for Student Self-Evaluation
3. Select, Identify, or Group Students for Certain Educational Programs
4. Provide Incentives for Students to Learn
5. Document Students' Performance to Evaluate the Effectiveness of Instructional Programs
6. Provide Evidence of Students' Lack of Effort or Inappropriate Responsibility

Grading Elements
- Major Exams or Compositions
- Class Quizzes
- Reports or Projects
- Student Portfolios
- Exhibits of Students' Work
- Laboratory Projects
- Students' Notebooks or Journals
- Classroom Observations
- Oral Presentations

Homework Completion
- Homework Quality
- Class Participation
- Work Habits and Neatness
- Effort Put Forth
- Class Attendance
- Punctuality of Assignments
- Class Behavior or Attitude
- Progress Made

General Conclusions from the Research on Grading
#1 Grading and Reporting are **NOT** Essential to the Instructional Process

- Teachers can teach without grades.
- Students can and do learn without grades.

Checking *is* Essential!

- Checking is Diagnostic
  - Teacher is an **Advocate**
- Grading is Evaluative
  - Teacher is a **Judge**

#2 No One Method of Grading and Reporting Serves *All* Purposes Well!

**Purposes of Grading**
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**Architecture:**
- Form **Follows** Function.

**Education:**
- Method **Follows** Purpose!

**Solution:**
Multiple Purposes Require a *Multi-Faceted, Comprehensive Reporting System!*
**Letter Grades**

- **Advantages:**
  1. Brief Description of Adequacy
  2. Generally Understood

- **Disadvantages:**
  1. Require the Abstraction of Lots of Information
  2. Cut-offs are Arbitrary
  3. Easily Misinterpreted

**Percentage Grades**

- **Advantages:**
  1. Provide Finer Discriminations
  2. Increase Variation in Grades

- **Disadvantages:**
  1. Require the Abstraction of Lots of Information
  2. Increased Number of Arbitrary Cut-offs
  3. Greater Influence of Subjectivity

**Standards-Based (Checklist of Skills)**

- **Advantages:**
  1. Clear Description of Achievement
  2. Useful for Diagnosis and Prescription

- **Disadvantages:**
  1. Often Too Complicated for Parents to Understand
  2. Seldom Communicate the Appropriateness of Progress

**Steps in Developing Standards-Based Grading**

1. **Identify the major learning goals or standards** that students will be expected to achieve at each grade level or in each course of study.
2. **Establish performance indicators** for the learning goals or standards.
3. **Determine graduated levels of performance** (benchmarks) for assessing each goal or standard.
4. **Develop reporting forms** that communicate teachers’ judgments of students’ learning progress and culminating achievement in relation to the learning goals or standards.

**Crucial Development Questions**

1. What is the purpose of the report card?
2. How often will report cards be completed and sent home?
3. Will a specific report card be developed for each grade level, or will a more general report card be used across several grade levels?
4. How many standards will be included for each subject area or course?
5. What specific standards will be reported at each grade level or in each course?
6. Will standards be set for the grade level or each marking period?
7. What product, process, and progress standards should be reported?
8. How many levels of performance will be reported for each standard?
9. How will the levels be labeled?
10. Will teachers’ comments be included and encouraged?
11. How will information be arranged on the report?
12. What are parents expected to do with this information?
13. What are students expected to do with this information?
14. What policies need to accompany the new reporting procedures?
15. When should input of parents and/or students be sought?
Challenges in Determining Graduated Levels of Student Performance

1. Levels of Understanding / Quality
   - Modest
   - Proficient
   - Superior

2. Level of Mastery / Proficiency
   - Below Basic
   - Basic
   - Proficient
   - Advanced

3. Frequency of Display
   - Rarely
   - Occasionally
   - Frequently

4. Degree of Effectiveness
   - Ineffective
   - Moderately Effective
   - Highly Effective

5. Evidence of Accomplishment
   - Little or No Evidence
   - Partial Evidence
   - Extensive Evidence

Advantages:
1. Clear Description of Progress and Achievement
2. Useful for Diagnosis and Prescription

Disadvantages:
1. Extremely Time-Consuming for Teachers to Develop
2. May Not Communicate Appropriateness of Progress
3. Comments Often Become Standardized

Grades with Comments are Better than Grades Alone!

Grade  Standard Comment
A  Excellent ! Keep it up.
B  Good work. Keep at it.
C  Perhaps try to do still better?
D  Let's bring this up.
F  Let's raise this grade!


Solution:

- Determine the Primary Purpose of each Grading and Reporting Tool.
- Select or Develop the Most Appropriate Method for Each Tool.
- Develop a Multi-Faceted, Comprehensive Reporting System!

#3 Grading and Reporting should Always be done in reference to Learning Criteria, Never “On The Curve”
Grading Criteria

1. **Product** Criteria
2. **Process** Criteria
3. **Progress** Criteria

Summary of Grading Guidelines

1. **Determine the Purpose**
   - Why Grading and Reporting Are Done?
   - For Whom is the Information Intended?
   - What will be the Frequency of Reports?
   - What are the Desired Results?

2. **Distinguish the Three Types of Learning Criteria**
   - **Product:** Achievement of the standards
   - **Process:** Effort, behavior, timeliness, attendance, etc.
   - **Progress:** Improvement from the last performance

What about Exceptional Learners?

20% of students are exceptional learners.
100% of teachers face the issue.

Current Practice

- School policies?
- Unwritten “rules?”
- Common solutions?
- Who decides the grade?
- Who else reports progress?

A Common Solution

1. Reports of progress on individual goals are separate from the traditional report card.
2. Specialists provide progress reports.
3. General education teacher provides report card grades
4. 90% of general education teachers informally adapt the grade. *(Silva, Munk, & Bursuck, 2005)*

Typical Grading Adaptations:

- Add points for behavior.
- Adjust the scale.
- Weight assignments differently.
- Grade based on progress. *(Silva, Munk, & Bursuck, 2005)*

Grading adaptations *Don’t Work* in standards-based reporting.

In early grades...

Exceptional learners earn grades similar to other students. *(Donahue and Zigmond, 1990; Ring & Reetz, 2000)*
Exceptional learners receive “modified grades” that inflate the grade and lower their motivation. (Donahue and Zigmond, 1990; Ring & Reetz, 2000)

Exceptional learners earn low passing grades, placing them at **greatest risk** for dropout. (Donahue and Zigmond, 1990; Ring & Reetz, 2000)

Exceptional learners do not receive adequate information about achievement on the level of work they are able to complete. (Donahue and Zigmond, 1990; Ring & Reetz, 2000)

The IDEA requirement with which states struggle most to comply is **progress monitoring and reporting**. (Etscheidt, 2006)

- Decide **WHAT to measure** in the beginning, instead of **HOW to measure** in the end.

**Instrument Driven Goals…**

- Traditional Instrument
- Special Service
- Lowest Items Missed
- Goals
Traditional Instruments
Measure…

“…the strange behavior of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible period of time”

Bronfenbrenner, 1979

Standards-Based Goals…

Functional Assessment Information

Goals

What's needed for the student to participate in, and learn from the general curriculum?

Appropriateness of Grade-level Standards

Common Adaptations

✓ Taking an exam orally
✓ Having fewer questions
✓ Extending time on exams
✓ Providing a note-taker
✓ Providing assistive technology
✓ Other examples?

Accommodation or Modification?

Accommodations - do not fundamentally alter the grade-level standard

It depends on what you are measuring.

(Freedman, 2009)
Inclusive Grading Model

1. Is this an appropriate standard without adaptation?
   - Yes
   - No change in grading needed
   - No
2. What type of adaptation is needed?
   - Accommodation
3. Determine Modified Standard
4. Grade on Modified Standards
5. Communicate Grades' Meaning

Modifications - fundamentally alter the standard
(Freedman, 2009)

Setting the Foundation
Before implementing a model for exceptional learners, we must distinguish learning criteria in the grading system.

Product
Process
Progress

Step 1
For each grade level standard, ask:

✓ Is this an appropriate expectation without adaptation?
  ✓ If yes, apply equal grading practices on the grade-level standard.
  ➤ If no, move to Step 2.

Step 2
For each adaptation needed, ask:

✓ Is an accommodation needed?
✓ Is a modification needed?
Accommodations

✓ Level the playing field.
✓ Do not change the standard.
⇒ Apply equal grading practices on the grade-level standard

Modifications

✓ Change the game.
✓ Fundamentally alter the standard.
⇒ Move to step 3.

Step 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Period</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LANGUAGE ARTS</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategies to read new words *</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocabulary skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehension of material across the curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Fluency*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Handwriting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spelling*</td>
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Step 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Period</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALGEBRA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations with real numbers*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Linear equations and inequalities</td>
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<td>Relations and functions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Polynomials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quadratic, cubic, and radical equations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mathematical reasoning and problem solving</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

About Adaptations...

✓ Accommodations and modifications are not about student or even subject.

✓ They are about skill.
  - The student doesn’t require adaptation.
  - The standard/skill requires adaptation.

✓ It is a team decision.

About Modifications...

✓ Very few students require modifications in all areas.

✓ The need for modification is driven by data.

✓ Modification is not permanent—may change at any point.
Step 3

For each standard/skill requiring modification,

- Determine the modified expectation.

These become IEP, ELL, and 504 plan goals.

Being SMART in Modifying

- Specific skills or behaviors
- Measurable
- Attainable this academic year
- Relevant to the general classroom curriculum and routine
- Transdisciplinary

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**Step 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Fluency</th>
<th>Modification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will read passages containing grade-level words fluently.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Step 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Algebra</th>
<th>Modification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will represent numbers in multiple ways.</td>
<td>When given a reference of basic math facts, Spencer will identify at least 4 ways to represent 2-digit numbers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Step 4**

- Apply standard grading practices to **Modified Expectations**

When **modification** is needed, there is no need to measure on the grade level expectation!
Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Below Basic</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Below Basic</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Step 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Strategies to read new words</th>
<th>Vocabulary skills</th>
<th>Comprehension of material across the curriculum</th>
<th>Reading Fluency</th>
<th>Handwriting</th>
<th>Spelling</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Step 5**

- Note the grades that are based on a modified expectation.
- Carry notation over to transcript.
**Step 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LANGUAGE ARTS</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>B*</td>
<td>A*</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCIENCE</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL STUDIES</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALGEBRA</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B*</td>
<td>B*</td>
<td>B*</td>
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<td>PHYSICAL EDUCATION</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAREER SKILLS</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>ART</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* = based on a modified standard. For standards that are modified, please see the attached page for a description of the standard used to determine the grade.

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**Common Myths**

1. Exceptional Learners cannot receive failing grades.
2. Report cards cannot identify a student as exceptional.
3. Transcripts cannot show that modifications were given.

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## INTERVENTION PLAN

**Student:** Norah Jones  
**Start Date:** 3/10/2010  
**Team Members:**

### BACKGROUND

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IEP Goal</th>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
<th>PROGRESS RECORD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norah will consistently read second-grade level reading passages at 80 words per minute with no more than 1 uncorrected error per minute.</td>
<td>Provide Norah reading passages that are high interest (animals, funny stories) at the 2nd grade reading level.</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give Norah chances to read aloud at the 2nd grade level individually and in small groups.</td>
<td>3/15</td>
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<td></td>
<td>When in large groups, give Norah opportunities to read passages that she has mastered.</td>
<td>3/16</td>
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<td></td>
<td>In resource, provide Norah with practice in reading passages she will read aloud in the large group as well as passages from Reading Mastery II.</td>
<td>3/17</td>
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<td>5/3</td>
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<td>5/5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Short-Term Objective

Norah will read second-grade level reading passages at 60 words per minute with no more than 2 uncorrected errors per minute, eight times within two weeks.

### Data Collection Times

| 1 = | In Class Reading Group |
| 2 = | Resource Room |
| 3 = | |
| 4 = | |
| 5 = | |

### Scale

| 4 = | 60 or more words per minute |
| 3 = | 55 words per minute |
| 2 = | 50 words per minute |
| 1 = | 45 or fewer words per minute |

### Baseline Assessment

| Did do: Read 2nd grade level reading passages with many errors at 45 words per minute |
| Did not do: Read more than 45 words per minute without significant corrections. |

### During Group Reading:

If Norah makes an error in reading, correct the error and allow her to move on.

### During Individual Reading:

When Norah reads the passage without errors and at least 60 words per minute, give her praise and move on to another passage.

If Norah reads a passage with no errors but less than 60 words per minute, give her praise and repeat the passage.

If Norah makes an error that she does not correct while reading, stop her, point to the word and offer the correction. Then have her sound out the word and repeat the pronunciation of the word. Then have her begin again at the start of the sentence containing the error. (See this video for the error correction procedure demonstrated.)