MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF OBSTACLES TO IMPLEMENTING STANDARDS-BASED GRADING

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MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF OBSTACLES TO IMPLEMENTING STANDARDS-BASED GRADING

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables

Abstract

Standards-based education has been cited for decades as a means to increasing student achievement. Standards-based grading (SBG) has been identified as a possible method to support learning of standards. While SBG has received much attention it is still a relatively uncommon practice in most schools. This quantitative study attempted to identify Missouri middle school principal perceptions of obstacles to implementing SBG.

A survey of obstacles to implementing SBG which supported the scales of the study, instructional foundation, culture and climate, and resources was not located. Therefore, the researcher developed a survey to support the study goals. One of the study outcomes was the development of a valid and reliable survey instrument. Factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha were utilized to establish the results were valid and reliable.

The population size was 379 Missouri middle school principals. The final study data reached a sample size of 175. Statistically significant differences were found in six areas. Most notably there was a difference in perceptions of obstacles on the instructional foundation scale and the culture and climate scale for schools implementing SBG for 1 – 3 years compared to those not implementing SBG.

The study did not examine the impact of SBG on achievement on high stakes testing, attendance, retention, and graduation rates. A study of achievement outcomes in schools currently implementing SBG is recommended. Studying student, parent, and teacher perception of culture and climate in SBG schools is also recommended.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Middle School Principal Perceptions of Obstacles to Implementing Standards-Based Grading

Introduction

Standards-based education has been a focus in educational improvement efforts since the Nation at Risk Report in 1983. As a result, a driving force in educational reform over the past few decades has been a focus on standards-based education. According to Guskey (2009), standards give direction to education reform initiatives by offering consensus about what students should know and be able to do (p.1). When standards are well defined, the specific knowledge, skills and abilities students should acquire through schooling are identified. To support the effective implementation of standards, an increasing number of school administrators are reviewing and revisiting grading and reporting practices. "It is believed that if teachers must assess student progress on precise goals or objectives, they will be more likely to focus their instruction on them as well" (Guskey, 2009, p.75). Utilizing standards-based progress reports then becomes a driving force in promoting standards-based reform. "Districts often implement standards-based progress reports to provide a measure of standards attainment that supplements state assessment scores in helping parents to understand student achievement" (Guskey, 2009, p. 75). This additional communication about student academic progress provides parents with increased information about mastery of standards.

Even though many researchers such as Guskey, Marzano, O'Connor, Reeves, Stiggins, Wormeli, and Brookhart have shown the effectiveness of standards-based grade

reporting, traditional grading practices remain the norm. Traditional grading is still, by far, the most prevalent approach to reporting student learning (Reeves, 2011). The widespread use of traditional grading raises the question of whether principals, as the instructional leaders, believe it is the most effective approach or if principals are facing significant obstacles in leading their staff to adopt standards-based grading (SBG) practices. One reason this study is important is that it will seek to identify issues keeping principals from leading their staff to improve grading practices.

The goal of grade reporting is communicating student achievement to parents and students. Communicating the level of student achievement may be done more effectively by reporting student progress toward mastering standards. Traditional grading systems may be limited in the feedback provided to students. The importance of feedback has been established by many researchers. For example, Hattie (2012) has found the effect size of feedback to be 0.75. Hattie identifies effective feedback as having a clear learning goal, determining where the student is in relation to the goal, and then providing the student with information on how to close the gap. The average effect size of all instructional practices used by teachers is 0.40. Therefore, the proper use of feedback can result in almost double the amount of gain in student achievement over the course of a school year when compared to the average strategy. According to Hattie, "about half of what we do to all students has an effect size of 0.40 or greater, while half are in classes that get less than the 0.4 effect" (2012, p. 3). An effect size of 0.75, such as the case with feedback, is well above the norm and is considered a high impact instructional practice. In recent years many educators have been examining grading practices to determine if they can improve on reporting the extent of learning to students and parents.

Guskey (2009) writes about how well established SBG practices support effective feedback. Guskey explains when teachers provide scores they have the opportunity to communicate to students how well and in what ways proficiency was demonstrated. SBG attempts to help students understand the target/standard, where the student is in relation to the target, and what further action is needed to achieve proficiency. By providing this type of feedback, standards-based progress reports may support student achievement.

Conducting this study may increase understanding of how to implement SBG by identifying principal perceptions of the obstacles to implementing SBG. The results may provide support for educators attempting to implement SBG practices. In addition, the results may provide insights to district level administration on how to support principals in leading grading reform. Having a clear understanding of perceived obstacles will allow for precious time and resources to be directed to the key issues most likely to result in successful change. Successful implementation is crucial because it may hold the potential to increase student learning.

Problem Statement

Educators are facing increased accountability to help students learn. Tracking student progress toward mastery of standards is a crucial component in helping students succeed. The effectiveness of SBG in supporting student learning is becoming increasingly apparent through the research of many prominent educational experts such as Reeves (2011, 2008, 2006, 2004), Marzano (2011, 2009, 2007, 2006, 1997), Wormeli (2011, 2006), Stiggins (2009, 2005), O'Connor (2011, 2009), and Guskey (2011, 2010, 2009). Therefore, it is important to investigate principal perceptions on the key

components of SBG and the perceived obstacles preventing instructional leaders from transitioning their schools to standards-based grading practices. School leaders will benefit from knowing the obstacles principals are facing in leading their staff to improve grading practices. Having an understanding of the perceived obstacles will allow strategies to be developed in overcoming these obstacles.

Educators utilizing traditional grading practices may inhibit student achievement compared to educators utilizing SBG practices. In an era of increased accountability, schools are focusing on the achievement of each sub-group of students. Schools not making progress toward improving achievement of all students may face sanctions, negative labels, and other consequences from state and federal education agencies. Educational leaders in each state have been allowed to submit plans to the Department of Education requesting exemptions, or a waiver, from sanctions listed under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). These sanctions are more commonly recognized as consequences for lack of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. For example, in Missouri's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Waiver it is noted, "Using three years of data to set targets, it recognizes movement of students throughout all Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) achievement levels, ensuring the focus remains on all students and not just those closest to being proficient" (2012, p.42). The focus on improvement for all students includes establishing improvement targets for school districts, individual schools, and subgroups. In addition, Missouri's waiver indicates, "performance targets are defined and used to determine whether the Local Educational Agency (LEA), school, or subgroup exceeds, is on target, is approaching or is substantially not meeting the expected status, progress, or

growth" (2012, p. 43). Tracking student progress toward mastery of standards supports this progress by tracking each student's learning with a focus on what the students knows and can do.

The waiver explains that in Missouri, "student performance on tests administered through the MAP is reported in terms of four achievement levels (below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced) that describe a pathway to proficiency" (2012, p. 49). Districts are held accountable for the number of students scoring at proficient and advanced and for the number of students who are not proficient demonstrating adequate growth toward proficiency. "Points are purposefully assigned to each level in a manner that prevents high performing students from masking or compensating for students still performing at the lowest levels" (ESEA Waiver, p. 50, 2012). This underscores the importance to school districts in focusing on students at all levels and subgroups and tracking each student's progress toward proficiency. Using a standards-based reporting system may help facilitate this process. In addition, Missouri uses a Map Performance Index (MPI) to hold district accountable for student performance. "The MPI is used to determine whether the LEA, school, or subgroup is exceeds, is on target, is approaching, or is substantially not meeting the performance targets for English language arts and mathematics MAP assessments" (Missouri ESEA, 2012, p. 52). In this manner, schools are held accountable for student performance in relation to statewide performance targets. The consequences for not meeting these targets can be significant.

Theoretical Framework

Over the past two decades, multiple books have been written on the effectiveness of SBG. Research by Reeves (2011, 2008, 2006, 2004), Marzano (2011, 2009, 2007,

2006, 1997), Wormeli (2011, 2006), Stiggins (2009, 2005), O'Connor (2011, 2009), and Guskey (2011, 2010, 2009) has demonstrated the connection between mastery of standards, formative assessment, feedback, and differentiated instruction in improving student learning. SBG provides a foundation for these key learning components and provides the tool to effectively communicate the extent of student learning to students and parents.

Guskey writes in Developing Standards Based Report Cards (2010) educators cannot wait any longer to put knowledge of effective grading and reporting practices into action. Guskey explains that current grading and reporting practices are shamefully inadequate, report cards are misaligned with current teaching and learning reforms, and standards-based report card development leads to a critical examination of standards, instructional goals, and assessments (p. 5). Guskey notes the dominant theme of the past two decades has been for schools to get serious about standards.

O'Connor describes the importance of grades supporting learning. "We want students to understand that school is about learning. Grades are artifacts of learning; as such, they should reflect student achievement only" (2011, pg. 5). O'Connor further explains that when teachers put an emphasis on assigning point values the message sent to students is success lies in accumulating points. Instead, the goal should be that the quality of learning is what is important and that grades reflect student achievement. As educators continue to strive for high levels of learning for all students SBG can be a tool to support effective feedback in order for students to increase their understanding of standards. Reeves underscores the importance of grading as feedback, noting that

feedback is a very powerful instructional tool when it comes to influencing student achievement (2011).

Wormeli describes current grading practices as the "elephant in the room" that educators often do not want to talk about or acknowledge. However, Wormeli, writes it is time to discuss grades and grading practices openly. The author explains how we implement grading practices has a dramatic impact on how we differentiate instruction and differentiated instruction should in turn impact our grading policies (Wormeli, 2006). Departing from summative grades as an accumulation of points is uncomfortable for many stakeholders. However, it is necessary to go further in providing students and parents with information about student mastery of standards. Marzano (2006) supports providing more feedback on mastery of standards by writing from the perspective of standards-based education isolated letter grades are extremely deficient. Isolated letter grades cannot provide the level of detailed feedback needed to enhance student learning because letter grades by themselves do not communicate specific learning goals and where the student is in relation to the goal.

With evidence suggesting the effectiveness of SBG and the importance of grading in providing feedback, the question remains as to why it may be an uncommon practice in our schools. This study will seek to identify the perceptions of principals about the obstacles to leading change in standards-based education and implementing SBG practices. The quantitative data generated from this study may inform district-level leaders about the obstacles faced by principals. As a result the data may help leaders develop strategies to overcome the obstacles to standards-based grading and may

ultimately improve student learning. In addition, this study may inform further research to be conducted on this topic.

Rationale/Purpose for Study

Many researchers have written about the benefits of SBG. "A vehicle must be in place that institutionalizes tracking student progress, identifying students in need of help, and then providing that help." (Marzano, 2009, p. 48). However, even with mounting evidence about the need to depart from traditional grading practices these traditional grading practices remain the norm in the majority of schools. This study will seek to identify principal perceptions of the obstacles preventing them from implementing SBG practices.

Obstacles can range from stakeholder attitudes and beliefs about grading, to lack of the necessary fundamental components in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, to a lack of time and resources to make a change. Many of these obstacles have been engrained through decades of the educational system as a whole utilizing traditional grading practices. As principals run into these obstacles it makes the move toward implementing SBG a sometimes daunting task and may underscore why SBG remains an uncommon practice in the majority of schools.

This study sought to identify the obstacles principals perceive in implementing SBG. This information is essential in determining how to successfully implement SBG practices and provides insight on how to support these key instructional leaders as they endeavor to improve teaching and learning through effective grading practices.

One outcome of this study is a survey educational leaders can use to determine perceived obstacles instructional leaders are facing in implementing SBG. As perceived

obstacles are identified, school leaders can develop goals and strategies to overcome these obstacles on the path to successful implementation. Knowing what obstacles exist allows educators to plan for what needs to be addressed during the implementation process. Educators cannot afford to waste valuable time and resources on initiatives that have a low probability of succeeding. Knowing obstacles prior to implementation increases the chances of success. As the data are collected schools can also begin to identify professional development needs, policy needs, and communication needs principals may have in order to successfully lead this change.

Research Questions

This study examined the perceptions of middle school principals regarding SBG and perceptions about obstacles to implementing SBG in their schools. The overarching research focus is, "To what extent do middle school principals in Missouri perceive the existence of obstacles to implementing SBG?" The following research questions will guide this study.

1. What are Missouri middle school principal perceptions of obstacles to implementing SBG related to instructional issues?
2. What are Missouri middle school principal perceptions of obstacles to implementing SBG related to culture and climate?
3. What are Missouri middle school principal perceptions of obstacles to implementing SBG related to resource limitations?

Limitations

1. The data generated for this study were obtained through a survey focusing on principal perceptions.

2. The focus was on schools primarily serving grades 5 – 8, but participating schools varied in the grade levels they serve.
3. Schools in the study have varying demographics.
4. Principals in the study have varying levels of understanding and experiences with SBG.
5. Some of the schools in the study have implemented SBG while most have not implemented SBG.

Delimitations

1. The study focused on public middle school principals in Missouri.
2. The schools primarily serve grades 5 – 8.
3. Kindergarten – 6th grade, Kindergarten – 8th grade, and Kindergarten – 12th grade schools were excluded from the study. This resulted in the smallest school districts in Missouri being excluded from the study.
4. The study focused on Missouri schools exclusively.

Conclusion

With traditional grading systems, parents and students may be misled by letter grades into believing the student has mastered or has not mastered essential standards. This deception may occur when the grade includes a reflection of strong or weak work habits, positive or negative attitude and behavior, responsibility or lack of responsibility, and extra-credit. Consequently, parents and students in Missouri schools frequently receive results on Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) or End of Course (EOC) testing which do not correlate with the grades the student received throughout the year.

Standards have been an important part of education for decades. Mastery of standards is increasingly important as students compete globally and educators are held accountable to meet higher standards. SBG has been shown as a possible method to support mastery of standards and provide feedback to students and their parents. As a result student learning is supported and has an opportunity to increase. However, traditional grading remains the norm. Little research has been conducted on principal perception of obstacles preventing implementation of SBG. This study identified perceptions of these obstacles. A survey for school districts to use to identify obstacles to changing grading practices was developed through this study. As a result schools have access to a valid and reliable instrument to help identify goals and action steps for implementing SBG.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

The following literature review provides a structure for the study by analyzing current research on standards-based grading (SBG). The review begins with an analysis of the history of the standards movement in education. The prevalence of standards has elevated awareness of grading practices which communicate level of mastery of standards. The review of literature will address three overarching areas commonly cited as obstacles to implementing SBG. The three areas are establishing the proper instructional foundation to implement SBG effectively, culture and climate obstacles, and resource obstacles. Establishing the instructional foundation through standards encompasses all aspects related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment needed to successfully report the level of student mastery on essential learning standards. Culture and climate connects to the attitudes and beliefs of stakeholders when it comes to grading practices. Resources are the time, training, budget, and support needed for teachers to transition to SBG effectively. Through the analysis of obstacles to implementing SBG a focus for the survey emerged. This established a framework for the importance of studying perceived obstacles to implementing SBG on the part of building principals who are key instructional leaders. The review of literature concludes with the important role of school leaders and the absence of research on SBG as it relates to school leaders. The review of literature supports why a quantitative study on obstacles to implementing SBG is a worthy endeavor.

History of the Standards Movement

Educational standards drive current educational practice. With increased focus on school accountability and the widespread adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) educators will be focusing on standards for many years to come. Marzano (1997) states former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch is commonly recognized as one of the chief architects of the standards movement. Ravitch emphasized the importance of standards to clearly define what is being taught and the level of performance expected. According to Marzano (1997), many educators view the A Nation At-Risk Report as the beginning of the modern standards movement. The report motivated state and local leaders to improve the educational system. The improvement efforts often included increasing the rigor of graduation requirements, but when these efforts failed to increase student learning, as measured by standardized testing, leaders turned to national goals and standards.

Growing concerns about educational effectiveness prompted President George H.W. Bush to call an Educational Summit in September, 1989 (Marzano, 1997). The summit resulted in six goals to be reached by the year 2000. Bush's national education goals were called America 2000 and resulted in the federal government offering grants to educational organizations that would develop standards in various fields (Relic, 2011).

> Soon after the summit two groups were established to implement the new educational goals: the National Educational Goals Panel and the National Council on Education Standards and Testing. Together, these two groups were charged with addressing unprecedented questions regarding American education such as: What is the subject matter to be addressed? What types of assessments

should be used? What standards or performance should be set? (Marzano, 1997, p. 3).

This work led to many subject area organizations developing standards for subject matter. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the National Science Teachers Association were two of the first (Marzano, 1997). The increased use of standards in education led to the emergence of critics who found fault with standards-based education. The main criticism was the overwhelming number of standards and lack of time to teach them all. Due to the large number of standards the initiative lost momentum. The standards movement was eventually bogged down under its own weight (Marzano, 1997).

The Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association spearheaded the CCSS movement. The work began in July, 2009 and by June 2, 2010 the final version of the CCSS was made public. At this time, the Validation Committee published its final report stating, "Unlike past standards setting efforts, the CCSS are based on best practices in national and international education, as well as research and input from numerous sources" (National Governors Association, 2010, p. 5). Standards continue to be an important part of educational reform now and in the foreseeable future. By the fall of 2011 40 states had legislation regarding standards and 33 of them also included high stakes testing with twelfth grade exit exams (Relic, 2011). With the advancement of CCSS and the advent of multi-state assessment consortiums this movement continues to grow.

The issue of standards has been a focus in education for many years. "In education, 'standards' represent the goals of teaching and learning. They describe what we want students to know and be able to do as a result of their experiences in school" (Guskey, 2009, p. 1). Identifying standards informs educators about specific content and skills students must know and be able to perform. Standards provide the foundation for educators to establish learning goals. Learning goals enable teachers to track student progress toward mastery of the goal and provides the impetus for standards-based grade reporting. Moving toward SBG remains a difficult process met with much reluctance from various stakeholders. According to Guskey, we persist in using antiquated practices not because they have proven effective but because they are steeped in tradition (2009). However, Guskey explains in recent years new perspectives have begun to emerge. Increasingly, educators at all levels are taking a serious look at grading and reporting. The benefits of basing reform on standards are numerous. "By providing consensus about what is important for students to learn and what skills they should acquire, standards give direction to educational improvement efforts" (Guskey. 2009, p. 9).

To successfully implement standards-based education educators must focus on the classroom level. "Improvement in education means one simple thing: more students learning better. And the only level at which student learning generally takes place is the classroom level" (Guskey, 2010, p. 20). Chappuis, Commodore, and Stiggins (2010) write about the importance of focusing on the classroom level by emphasizing classroom level assessment of standards has almost been completely ignored as a school improvement tool. Furthermore, the authors state no assessment system can be in balance unless the classroom level assessment of standards is supporting and verifying

learning. "Achievement standards must be spelled out from the beginning of instruction in the form of deconstructed, clear, and appropriate learning targets. Further, these learning targets must be turned into quality assessments that yield dependable information with sufficient precision to reflect how well each student mastered each of the standards" (Chappuis, Commodore, and Stiggins, 2010, p. 16).

O'Connor (2011) reinforces how prevalent standards are in education by explaining that every state in the United States, every province in Canada, and most other countries have identified content standards. O'Connor defines content standards as published statements of the expected outcomes of learning. O'Connor underscores learning standards are what students are expected to know, understand, and do. "The primary goal of a standards-based system is for all students to 'meet standards'; that is, to be competent or proficient in every aspect of the curriculum" (O'Connor, 2011, p. 2). When determining if all students are meeting standards it is necessary to evaluate each student's achievement using similar criteria. SBG helps support evaluation and communication of level of mastery on essential standards.

Traditional Grading

While researching SBG it is important to have an understanding of traditional grading. While traditional grading practices have been a long established practice it is difficult to find research on traditional grading. The common use and longevity of traditional grading practices demonstrate the acceptance of traditional grading practices in education. In addition, traditional grading methods are widely understood by society as a whole. According to Reeves (2011) the standard 100 point scale with 10 point intervals dates back to the 1960's. Based on a survey conducted by one school system in

Fairfax County, Virginia the 100-point scale is now the most widely used system in the United States. Educators in the Littleton, Colorado Public School District (2010) identified characteristics of traditional grading as they developed a parent resource for report card grading. According to the authors, with traditional grading almost everything each student does is given a score and every scores is averaged into the final grade. All assessment data are cumulative. This cumulative approach is used to determine a summative grade for the report card. Final grades are norm-referenced and are often based on preset standards (Littleton Public School District, 2010).

Dublin (2014) defined traditional grading in his study on middle school teacher and principal perceptions of SBG. Dublin's definition of traditional grading is the accumulation of points and scores from a variety of assignments, assessments and projects over a period of time with the end goal of averaging these scores for one final grade at the end of said period of time. The result with traditional grading is a large amount of evidence regarding student achievement is combined into a single grade or symbol. Guskey (1996) states traditionally grades have served several purposes including communication, fostering student self-assessment, sorting and selecting, motivation, punishment, and teaching/program evaluation. Reeves (2011b) notes, there is nothing inherently wrong with letter grades. However, the present grading system has become toxic because letter grades in the absence of additional information are inaccurate and misleading.

One compelling reason frequently cited for continuing with traditional grading practices is the approach is useful in ranking or sorting students for recognition, awards, scholarships, college admissions, etc. "With most conventional grading practices, one

grade sums up achievement in a subject, and that one grade often includes effort and behavior" (Brookhart, 2011). Guskey (2011) explains one of the oldest traditions in grading is the differentiating of students. This practice stems from the belief grades should differentiate students on the basis of demonstrated talent. "Students who show superior talent receive high grades, whereas those who display lesser talent receive lower grades" (Guskey, 2011, p. 17). Guskey explains the implications of this practice are significant because it promotes the idea educators are there to select talent rather than develop it.

Wormeli (2006, p. 102) has identified six reasons educators have traditionally cited for grading. The six reasons are documenting student and teacher progress, providing feedback to the student, family, and teacher, informing instructional decisions, motivating students, punishing students, and sorting students. Wormeli further explains the first three reasons work to support student achievement and can be part of a traditional grading system. However, in any type of grading system the last three reasons result in distorting grades. "When we use grades to motivate, punish, or sort students, we do three things: we dilute the grade's accuracy; we dilute its usefulness; and we use grading to manipulate students, which may or may not be healthy" (Wormeli, 2006, p. 103).

Research on Possible Issues with Traditional Grading

In many traditional grading systems a large amount of evidence is combined into a single grade or symbol. Guskey (2011) compares this approach to combining measures of a person's height, weight, diet and exercise into a single number in order to represent a person's physical condition. "How could the combination of such diverse measures yield

anything meaningful? Yet every day, teachers combine aspects of students' achievement, attitude, responsibility, effort, and behavior into a single grade that's recorded on a report card—and no one questions it" (Guskey, 2011, p. 19).

Reeves (2006) supports Guskey when he writes, "Simply put, letter grades do not reflect student achievement in an astonishing number of cases. This situation has long been tolerated because of the pervasive belief that teaching is a private endeavor and grading policies are the exclusive domain of those private practitioners" (p. 113). Reeves has identified thousands of cases where students have received grades of A, B, or C but are failing state graduation exams. Reeves's conclusion is the grades received by students reflect many factors attributed to work habits, attitude, and behavior instead of reporting whether or not students are proficient. "While there are doubtless virtues in completing homework and behaving in class, we err gravely when we call compliance and politeness 'algebra' or 'English' or any other label that conflates proficiency with behavior" (Reeves, 2006, p. 118).

Tomlison (2011) writes traditional grading is a small part of a more important cycle of instruction, assessment, and adjustment which leads to deeper learning. Therefore, traditional grading by itself does little to contribute to learning. Tomlison explains students often make very high grades with no struggle or need for support. Tomlison describes this as a waste of time for students and deems an A without personal struggle or growth a lie. Tomlison (2011) emphasizes consistent, specific feedback on a student's competency is a more potent teaching tool than a number or letter grade. Guskey (2011) concurs by stating traditional grading practices place the focus in the wrong area which is identifying or selecting students versus developing student talent.

When educators focus on developing talent they will clarify what students need to learn and be able to do and then do everything possible to help all students learn. "If educators succeed there should be little or no variation in measures of student learning. All students are likely to attain high scores on measures of achievement, and all might receive high grades" (Guskey, 2011, p. 17).

Society is increasingly aware simply ranking students is not adequate. Stiggins (2005b) notes society is now asking schools to raise the bar by moving beyond simply rank ordering students to achieving a certain level of minimum competence. The change Stiggins describes has important implications for assessment and grading practices. For example, now assessment and grading procedures designed to permit only a few students to succeed must be revised to allow all students to succeed at some minimum level of proficiency (according to Stiggins). The implications of this shift mean policies and procedures which once permitted or encouraged students to give up must be replaced with those which promote continuous effort toward proficiency. The goal has shifted from merely beating others to instead becoming competent. Traditional grading systems utilizing norm-based grading procedures aim to judge each student's performance against the performance of their classmates. The result of this method is turning the learning environment into one that is highly competitive. Guskey describes this environment as one where students compete for a few scarce rewards (high grades). The problem with this approach is it shifts the focus from learning excellently to a focus on performing better than your classmate according to Guskcy.

Kohn (2011) makes a statement against the value of letter grades by stating when schools choose to cling to letter grades students end up stuck in a system that undermines

learning. Kohn indicates that grades are not a necessary part of school and that grades do not prepare students for the real world. Kohn (2011) summarizes his research on grading by identifying three main findings. First, grades tend to diminish students' interest in whatever they are learning. Second, grades create a preference for the easiest possible task. Third, grades tend to reduce the quality of students' thinking. Kohn concludes research on the effects of grading has slowed in the last couple of decades, but the studies still being done reinforce the earlier findings (Kohn, 2011).

Instructional Foundation for Implementing Standards-Based Grading

Essential Components

SBG is a way of reporting what students know and can do on a defined set of standards, and SBG focuses on student proficiency. Schools using SBG communicate mastery by standard or by categories derived from standards (O'Connor, 2011). To effectively implement SBG schools must organize curriculum, instruction, and grading around standards. Standards-based schools plan assessments to provide direct evidence of proficiency on specific learning outcomes. This evidence is then recorded by goal and reported to parents and students (O'Connor, 2011).

According to Brookhart (2011), "the purpose of traditional grades in the beginning was to sort students into learners and non-learners, not to support learning for all" (p. 10). The focus on standards and accountability has made traditional grading less relevant. Today schools are accountable for the learning of all students. SBG may be a good fit with these new expectations. According to Brookhart (2011), SBG could just as easily be called learning-focused grading. SBG differs from traditional grading in at least two significant ways. First, traditional grading sums up achievement with one grade

while SBG sums up achievement on several standards with multiple reporting or grades per subject. Second, traditional grading often includes effort and responsibility while SBG separates reporting on effort and responsibility from the grade itself. The constant focus with SBG is on what students have learned.

An important consideration in defining SBG is establishing the purpose. Having a common understanding of a well-defined purpose is essential to success. Guskey (2010) has defined six major purposes of report cards. The author explains that each of the purposes may be considered legitimate but educators rarely agree on the most important purpose (2010). Having a thorough discussion and arriving at consensus about the report card purpose is essential for success. In addition, Guskey emphasizes there are three key types of information which must be incorporated in standards-based reporting. First, educators must list explicit standards or learning goals students are expected to meet. Second, each student's level of progress or proficiency in meeting those standards must be noted. Third, information must be included on the adequacy level of progress or proficiency at the time of reporting. Just as standards identify what we want students to know and do the report is aligned to clearly communicate what we want students to know and do. In this way, an important purpose of report cards is communicating achievement to students and parents.

Guskey (2009), writes effective grading should reflect how well students have achieved the learning criteria for a course. This requires describing the students' performance based on specific learning criteria. Guskey explains grading usually involves three broad categories: product, process, and progress criteria. Product criteria based grades typically focus on final exam scores, final products/projects, and other

culminating measures of learning. Process criteria grades focus on the final product but also focus on how students got there which involves including effort and work habits in the grade. Process criteria also includes quizzes, homework, timeliness, class participation, and attendance. Progress criteria are used when teachers assign grades based on how much improvement students have made over a particular period of time. All three criteria are often used when assigning grades. Mixing the three criteria often leads to inconsistency and subjectivity from teacher to teacher in a given school. According to Guskey (2009), most researchers and measurement specialists recognize these interpretation problems and recommend educators use product criteria to determine grades. When focusing on product criteria it removes the guess work about how difficult a task was for students. Schools implementing SBG will often separate the three types of criteria and report a separate grade for each. Guskey emphasizes the intent is to provide a more accurate and more comprehensive picture of what students accomplish in school.

One goal of SBG is to accurately communicate student achievement to students and parents. In many schools grading is inconsistent and inaccurate when it comes to communicating what students know and can do. "Effective grades need to meet four overarching criteria for, or keys to, success: they must be accurate, meaningful, and consistent, and they must support learning" (O'Connor, 2011, p. 3).

Characteristics

A key characteristic for educators implementing SBG is placing a focus on student proficiency. When proficiency is the focus, factors which distort grades, such as effort and behavior, may be reduced or eliminated. Guskey explains SBG is designed to compare student performance to established levels of proficiency. The areas of

proficiency include knowledge, understanding, and skills (2009). The goal for utilizing SBG practices is for educators to place more focus on how students perform on mastering the established standards and less focus on how students compare to one another.

Since there is a focus on proficiency, students in a standards-based grading system are allowed to redo assignments or retake assessments. While allowing redos and retakes is possible in a traditional grading system it is a necessity in a SBG system. Rick Wormeli has written extensively about the value in allowing redos and retakes. Wormeli (2011) writes when we do not allow for redos and retakes we are retarding student achievement and maturation. When re-teaching and redoing do not occur Wormeli (2011) describes the result as a system of "conveyor-belt" learning. The message to the students becomes one of we do not have time to help you learn the material. Keep traveling on the conveyor-belt through our system. Wormeli emphasizes this is not the correct approach when considering the impact on a child's future. Wormeli further writes, "When it comes to deciding whether to allow a student to redo an assignment or assessment, consider the alternative—to let the student settle for work done poorly, ensuring that he or she doesn't learn the content" (2011, p. 26). Redos and retakes are more likely to lead to student proficiency than a system not allowing redos or retakes.

With a standards-based system the perception of homework is different. Traditionally, students and teachers have viewed homework grades as a reward or payment for doing the work. Homework is a much better support to student learning when it is viewed as an opportunity for feedback about learning. "Behaviorist solutions such as grades fail to validate the most important purpose of homework—to help students reach their learning goals" (Vatterott, 2011, p. 62). According to Vatterott, the value of

comes not from the grade but from the value for learning. The author suggests making sure homework is tied to assessments. This can be accomplished by allowing students to use assignments and notes when taking a test. Another method Vatterott (2011) recommends is correlating the amount of homework completed with test scores. She explains when there is a focus on demonstration of learning instead of task completion students are much more motivated to do their best on assignments as it taps into their innate drive for mastery, autonomy, and purpose.

Formative and Summative Assessments

A key characteristic in a SBG system is to support student learning and success by focusing on summative evidence. As this occurs there is an understanding formative assessments and practice are to be used for the learning process while summative assessments are used to measure the learning, often called assessment of learning. "Standards-based teachers distinguish clearly between teaching activities (which include diagnostic and formative assessment) through which students learn and practice, and summative assessments, when students 'perform' and show what they know, understand, and can do" (O'Connor, 2011, p. 107). O'Connor (2011) recommends fixing grading practices by only using evidence from summative assessments intended to document learning in report card grades. Wormeli (2011) supports this line of thinking when he writes that it makes sense to grade students according to their performance on standards, not the routes they take to achieve those standards. Some students need more time building background knowledge before they learn new material, and others need help making sense of text.

Educators may implement an approach called "no penalties for practice" in order to avoid penalizing a student for practicing and learning new material. Under this approach educators can create a system where it is safe for students to practice as they learn new material and then allow students an opportunity to demonstrate their learning on a summative assessment. When grades are administered they should reflect students' understanding of the content (Fisher, Fry, & Pumpian, 2011). An example of using formative and summative assessment effectively can be found at Health Sciences High and Middle College (HSHMC) in San Diego, California. HSHMC implemented a policy where grades would be determined entirely on students' demonstration of understanding on performance assessments. Students must pass all competencies with a score of 70 or higher in order to pass a class. Students not passing a competency receive an incomplete until they master that competency. "The decision to assign incompletes instead of failing grades marked a significant milestone. Instead of assigning failure, we told students their learning and performance on the competency was simply not complete. It reminded us different students would require different amounts of time and differentiated instruction to achieve a competency" (Fisher, Fry, & Pumpian, 2011, p. 48 - 49). Through this approach to grading HSHMC has seen learning data improve in many areas including homework completion, increased grade point averages, and higher state test scores.

Another key characteristic of SBG is increased consistency among teachers. Standards-based education results in greater curriculum alignment. SBG increases consistency of communication about student achievement. Guskey (2009) explains SBG can result in more consistency about what grades mean, how they are determined, and how they are integrated with instruction. The goal is to get teachers together to develop

and implement consistent grading practices based primarily on student achievement. When SBG is implemented effectively there is increased clarity for teachers and students. "The promise of SBG is both teachers and students will have a clearer conception of what needs to be learned and of what constitutes successful performance. This results in greater specification of what student-generated evidence is needed for evaluating the standard, how grades should be aligned to the evidence, and how effort and other 'nonacademic' factors are reported" (Guskey, 2009, pg. 107). When this is in place it reduces the need for teacher judgment in determining grades. In this manner grades may become more valid and meaningful in communicating the level of student learning as less subjectivity is involved in the process of assigning grades.

Another important component of effective grading practices, including SBG, is validity. Guskey (2009) states validity is a basic requirement of good grading practices. The author emphasizes validity refers to the extent to which inferences, interpretations, and uses of grades are reasonable and appropriate. When grades only refer to achievement or mastery of standards they are more valid. According to Guskey, SBG will result in more accurate inferences about student performance by focusing solely on achievement versus learning skills such as improvement, work ethic, responsibility, etc. SBG may result in more accurate communication about what students know and can do.

Feedback

Reeves (2011) identifies four characteristics of effective grading: accuracy, fairness, specificity, and timeliness. SBG facilitates meeting all four characteristics. When accuracy, fairness, specificity and timeliness are present in a grading system then feedback that actually benefits student achievement is achieved. Reeves notes feedback

may be the most powerful instructional technique when it comes to influencing student achievement. Grades can be the most important form of feedback students receive. This places even greater importance on providing feedback on the level of mastery of essential learning standards. Reeves emphasizes another important component of effective grading is whether or not students are using the feedback from grading to improve their performance. Reeves (2011) states the acid test for any grading system is whether students, teachers, and parents can use feedback from the system to increase performance. Standards-based grading helps communicate to students what they are currently doing well and what the next steps are to improve. In this manner students are able to articulate why they received the score they did and what steps are necessary to move to the next level.

Identifying reporting standards requires educators to develop learning targets. This is important in supporting student learning because it helps students answer the question, "Where am I going?" Chappuis (2012) states students must know the ultimate destination or goal in order for feedback to allow meaningful growth. By having a clear learning target students and teachers can identify strengths in their work and next steps on the learning progression. Standards-based report cards can help support this role. According to Chappuis, there are conditions that must be in place for feedback to be successful. "Three conditions related to the learning need to be in place before we offer feedback. First students need a clear vision of the intended learning. Second, our instructional activities need to align directly with the intended learning, and third, students need to see the connection between the learning and what they are doing" (Chappuis, 2012, p. 36). Standards-based reporting supports all three conditions by

requiring educators to define mastery/proficiency, develop activities that measure the learning, and demonstrate to students how the activities are providing evidence of what the student knows and can do.

Identifying essential standards and determining what is required for mastery of these standards enables educators to move forward with standards-based grading. By clarifying learning intentions progress toward mastery can be identified and communicated. To achieve progressive development a teacher must know a range of learning strategies when the student seems not to understand and must provide direction and redirection in terms of content being understood and thus maximize the power of feedback according to Reeves (2012). Being clear about the standard and where the student is in regard to meeting the standard is a key to providing students with the needed instruction to take the next step in their learning. Reeves notes the importance of the teacher providing direction and redirection for the content to be understood, and the greater the challenge the higher the probability one seeks and needs feedback. SBG provides a tool for the teacher to communicate this feedback to the learner.

Importance of Establishing Essential Standards/Learning Targets

Moss and Brookhart (2012) make the connection between learning targets, instruction, assignments, assessments, and grading. Moss and Brookhart list several big ideas to make this connection. These big ideas include providing feedback directly reflecting expectations for learning and instructional activities, developing effective formative and summative assessments, and communicating through grades reflecting performances of understanding. The authors further explain graded performances should be a match with learning expectations. Grading can show students and others the current

standing regarding essential knowledge and skills the students were intended to learn. This type of clarity should lead to increased student achievement.

Although the importance of learning targets is essential to implementing SBG and supporting feedback this can also be a roadblock to implementation. "While educators embrace the importance of prioritizing standards, some are still concerned that if certain standards and indicators are singled out as Power Standards, what will happen to the 'nice to know' standards and indicators?" (Ainsworth, 2003, p. 11). This can become an implementation roadblock because educators believe focusing on Power Standards can result in gaps in student learning as teachers gravitate away from teaching 'nice to know' standards. Resisters may be hesitant to adapt standards-based instruction and grading because they believe the omission of other standards will result in lower state test scores.

Ainsworth (2003) counters this by emphasizing identifying Power Standards does not relieve teachers of the responsibility of teaching all standards and indicators in the grade level or curricular area. Rather the focus is on which standards are essential for student success versus which standards can receive less emphasis. Developing a standards-based reporting system can help support the process of identifying the essential standards. Ainsworth (2003) maintains if we focus on what is enduring in ensuring student success then it will also result in the necessary learning for students to be successful on the state test. Engaging educators in the systemic identification of essential standards is a crucial step in eventually implementing a standards-based reporting system. The goal is for teachers to see their annual test as a culmination of the learning which has taken place for a student up through their grade level. Once this understanding is

established then each teacher can begin to see the role they play in teaching essential content needed for learning which will take place beyond their class.

Guskey (2010) has identified six levels in standards-based report card development. First, educators must define the purpose for grading. Second, reporting standards must be developed. Third, essential steps in achieving proficiency of standards must be identified. Fourth, performance indicators must be developed. Fifth, the reporting form must be produced. Finally, the report card must be piloted and revised. Guskey explains each level is important and each subsequent level depends on completion of the prior level. If the process breaks down or a step is skipped then no more success can be expected at the next level. Following these steps provides schools with a framework for development of a standards-based report card.

After clarifying what is meant by standards, educators can turn their attention to developing reporting standards. When reporting standards are clearly defined school leaders have a means to communicate student achievement. "Standards identify the specific knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions that we hope students will gain through interactions with teachers and fellow students in school learning environments" (Guskey, 2010, p. 41). An important part of this process is to describe levels of performance which depict particular student behaviors. When educators know the expected level of performance required for proficiency they can provide feedback to students on their progress toward mastery of the standard. Guskey (2010) concluded reporting standards to be best when the standards are precise enough to communicate the knowledge and skills students are expected to acquire but not so detailed they lose their

significance when shared with parents and students. This underscores the importance of writing learning targets, based on standards, in student friendly language.

Guskey (2010) recommends four to six reporting standards. By limiting the number of reporting standards it eases the work load for teachers. This also fits with many researchers who recommend identifying priority standards. For example, Ainsworth (2003) writes about the importance of differentiating between standards that are essential versus those that are just nice to know. According to Ainsworth (2003), educators nationwide have formed consensus that in-depth instruction of essential concepts and skills is more effective than trying to cover every concept in the textbook. Limitations on time and the varying learning needs of students make it imperative to prioritize standards students must master in a given course. Ainsworth (2003) states racing students through a thin coverage to all standards results in students who do not remember what they learned the previous year. This resulting lack of readiness requires time-consuming review and re-teaching of what students should have already learned in prior grades. Ainsworth states the effect of this cycle being repeated over several years begs the question of how can we expect different results unless we change how we teach the standards. Prioritizing standards and subsequently reporting on these standards will encourage depth over breadth. When educators achieve this depth students will be much more likely to remember what was taught. "The challenge in designing a good standards-based report card is in moving from the curriculum standards teachers are using on a daily basis to the reporting standards that will most help parents or others make sense of students' performance…" (Guskey, 2010, p. 46). Standards-based education results in greater alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Culture and Climate for Implementing Standards-Based Grading

O'Connor (2011) summarizes the challenges of implementing SBG when he states most parents and educators agree about the necessity of grades being accurate, consistent, and supporting learning; however, there are many disagreements over how to achieve these goals. These disagreements form the basis of the debate about how to grade. One of the issues with traditional grading is that accuracy may be compromised by combining many factors into a symbol. "When determining grades, many teachers continue the traditional practice of combining a large amount of evidence/data into a single summary symbol. This may involve literally hundreds of decisions; if even one is wrong the grade inaccurately reflects student learning" (O'Connor, 2011, p. 4). According to O'Connor inaccurate grades are commonly caused by teachers blending achievement and behavior. Therefore, one way to increase grading accuracy is to clarify behaviors (participation, effort, following rules, etc.) should be reported separately from achievement.

O'Connor (2011) emphasizes grades must communicate useful information to students and other stakeholders about their learning. The author states the fix required for grades to be meaningful is to make sure grades reflect specified learning goals. Therefore, prior to implementing a standards-based grading system educators must identify learning targets. By identifying learning targets, educators can also improve consistency among teachers by defining proficiency for identified learning targets. O'Connor (2011) emphasizes performance standards and what constitute proficiency need to be the same from teacher to teacher. When teachers are clear on the performance standards then students achieving at the same level should get the same grade regardless

of the classroom setting where the learning is taking place. When this consistency is in place student learning should be enhanced.

O'Connor's other key factor in grading is developing a system which supports learning. Grades supporting learning shift the focus from earning points to the actual learning as it relates to student achievement. The purpose of each type of assessment both summative and formative should be clear. Only evidence from summative assessments, with a few limited exceptions, should be used when determining grades according to O'Connor (2011). The author takes this a step further by emphasizing we must allow new evidence to replace old evidence when new learning occurs and by involving students in the grading process.

SBG may support student learning in a variety of ways. One way is by weighting work and assessments more heavily at the end of a learning period than at the beginning. Fisher, Frey, and Pumpian (2011) cite practice as an important part of learning. When students make mistakes teachers know to teach them again. However, when practice work is part of a grade students may not take risks and teachers may not gain information about student understanding.

One method to encourage practice is to only record grades on summative assessments. O'Connor (2011) explains standards-based teachers differentiate between practice including diagnostic and formative assessments and summative assessments. The purpose of summative assessments is for students to demonstrate what they know and can do. Standards-based teachers know the purpose of their assessments and distinguish between assessments for learning versus assessments of learning. Students of standards-based teachers also know the difference.

To overcome obstacles to implementing SBG it is necessary to develop an understanding and consensus around the purpose of grading. The perspectives on grading are wide and varied. According to Reeves (2011, p. 104) perceptions about the fundamental purposes of grading generally fall into six categories. First, providing feedback to students in order to improve their performance. Second, reporting student progress toward specific objectives to parents. Third, communicating to teachers at the next level of instruction to facilitate meeting diverse student needs. Fourth, giving rewards to students for good behavior and attitudes. Fifth, administering punishment to students for poor behavior and attitudes. Sixth, making public distinctions between good and bad students. Leaders who identify these various perspectives and begin to delve deeper into the last three –rewards, punishment, and distinction- stand a better chance of overcoming some key obstacles to implementation. Reeves (2011) explains the last three items are at the heart of most grading policies.

Delving deeper into the beliefs about rewards, punishment, and distinction provides a great opportunity to bring forward research on what does and does not work when it comes to grading as a way to improve student performance. For example, Reeves (2011) explains there is substantial evidence other variables, including respect, mastery, autonomy, and pursuit of worthy goals, are far more motivating than rewards and punishments.

> In fact, when students are rewarded only with feedback on their performance and are not subjected to a grade, their performance is better than when they are graded. Similarly, when teachers think they are building work ethic and respect by the use of zeroes for missing work, strict policies against acceptance of

> resubmission of work, and the use of the average to determine final grades, rather than encouraging work ethic and personal responsibility, they send the following clear message: your semester is over after a few missing assignments so you might as well give up (Reeves, 2011, p. 105).

Reeves goes on to state we can counteract this obstacle by focusing the discussion on developing a policy that has as its first principle the primary purpose of our grading is to improve student performance through feedback.

Waiting for buy-in prior to implementing a major change such as SBG is often cited as a reason to postpone a change. Frequently, this delay in making a change results in the change not occurring at all. Reeves (2011) writes buy-in is an illusion and rather than trying to achieve buy-in effective leaders place their focus elsewhere. Reeves suggests the focus should be on specificity of behavioral change at the individual level. To accomplish this, Reeves (2011) has outlined a four pronged approach to effectively implementing change with the elements being explicit vision, specification of behavior, assessment and feedback, and continuous refinement. According to Reeves (2011) the leader creates a vivid vision, defines explicit behavioral expectations for implementing the change, assesses the impact on improved student results, and refines the changes on a continuous basis.

Resources to Successfully Implement Standards-Based Grading

There are many resource obstacles and challenges tied to grading. Many educators believe traditional grading is an efficient use of time. This is an example of how many of our grading practices have been in place for so long they are rarely questioned. Even when practices are inefficient, ineffective or possibly even harmful to

students these practices often continue because we have always done it the same way. According to Guskey (2011) educational leaders who challenge grading traditions must be prepared with research-based alternatives not just passionately argued opinions. The author explains to succeed in tearing down old traditions leaders must create new traditions to take their place. Guskey (2011) explains overcoming obstacles to grading reform requires educational leaders to be knowledgeable regarding the research on grading and what works best for students. When leaders are prepared they can propose more meaningful policies and practices to support learning.

One of the resource obstacles to SBG is many educators cling tightly to the belief schools need to efficiently rank students because colleges or employers find it useful. With SBG ranking is minimized because all students can master the standards or all students can fail. This is the nature of criterion or standards referenced grading. Guskey (2009) has found one problem with standards-referenced grading is that it is inconsistent with one of the enduring characteristics of schooling—ranking and selection of students. When students are ranked it is possible to identify the best and worst students. To overcome this obstacle Guskey suggests educators may establish grading scales to allow for ranking. For example, 'proficient' may be considered an average ranking, with advanced used to indicate performance that is better than average. SBG can facilitate this by establishing several levels of performance on a standard.

Reeves (2011) has identified one potential obstacle to implementing SBG as teachers having the mindset they do not have time to implement SBG. To counter this belief, Reeves challenges the idea traditional grading and ranking practices are as efficient as they appear. Reeves notes grading systems that lead to higher levels of

student failure have enormous costs for the student in terms of frustration and failure while also costing teachers and schools excessive time and energy. Reeves explains effective grading systems will actually save time and be in the best interest of students and teachers. The author has found many grading reforms are unsuccessful, because teachers assume any policy promoting students to do more and better work will, as a consequence, require more time and work from the teacher. To counter this obstacle, each instructional initiative, such as transitioning to SBG, should begin with a discussion on how time and space can be created for the idea to grow. According to Reeves (2011), this approach creates an environment of credibility, authenticity, and optimism. These are essential nutrients for any instructional initiative or for effective leadership.

Schools are being compelled to change from a variety of angles. Implementing standards, differentiating instruction, and striving to meet expectations on high stakes testing are all consuming the attention of educators. Adding the additional burden of changing grade reporting systems can often seem like too much to try and accomplish, especially when traditional grading is so deeply entrenched in our system. Guskey and Bailey (2010) have compiled a list of four items which hinder report card change. First, different groups have different goals for the report card. Second, report cards are based on traditions. Third, educators have a lack of training in grading and reporting. Fourth, demands for change in curriculum, instruction, assessments seem to be more of a priority than report card change.

To counter these obstacles Guskey and Bailey (2010) point out initiatives to develop new reporting systems frequently prompt discussions about other aspects of schooling that can be crucial to student success. As educators revise grade reporting they

engage in discussions about standards, instructional strategies, and assessments. "In addition, educators often become more conscientious about helping students learn well, earn high grades or marks, and gain confidence in learning situation" (Guskey and Bailey, 2010, p. 5).

Reeves (2011) lists four ways schools and their leaders have leveraged time in order to successfully implement SBG. First schools engage the community in dialogue about grading instead of merely announcing a change in grading policy. Second, leaders have a clear sense of the purpose of grading as a tool to improve student learning. Their purpose is not to rank or judge students but to increase student success. Third, leaders are tolerant of dissent but resilient in moving forward with improving grading practices. Effective leaders focus on both sides of the issue agreeing on their commitment to children while debating the benefits of changing grading practices. Fourth, successful leaders are demonstrating the effectiveness of their changes. This is accomplished by demonstrating the impact of improved student success.

Role of Leadership in Implementing Standards-Based Grading

A key to overcoming obstacles to implementing SBG may be effective leadership. Without effective leadership policy does not move to implementation. This study focused on building principals and the obstacles they perceive in implementing SBG. Building leaders play a crucial role in the success or failure of any initiative including leading stakeholders to adopt SBG practices. One of the obstacles noted by Reeves (2006) is the belief by many educators teaching and grading is a private endeavor carried out by private practitioners. Reeves (2006) emphasizes leaders cannot do it alone. Reeves (2006) explains leaders are faced with expectations that are out of line with

reality. In order to be effective in leadership roles, Reeves (2006) writes of the importance of leaders not trying to be all things to all people but rather to focus on tasks that maximize their energy. In order to effectively implement change, Reeves believes leaders need to identify and partner with informal leaders who have profound system-wide impact. Focusing on these leaders and the influence they possess allows the leader to leverage influence within the organization.

DuFour and Marzano (2011) write about the importance of leaders implementing powerful concepts and processes to improve student learning. At the same time they speak of the importance of appealing to people's passion, calling, or emotions as they relate to the work. The authors note effective leaders hold themselves and others accountable for providing tangible evidence of improved student learning while also appealing directly to the emotions of those they lead. The best leaders link the vision of their district, school, or classroom to the hopes and dreams of those they serve. Leaders must work with a guiding coalition to develop the specific actionable steps to move toward the vision according to DuFour and Marzano (2011). Effective leaders continually remind stakeholders of the importance of the work and the connection of the efforts to a higher purpose. The goal is to help everyone involved recognize the importance and significance of their work. Dublin (2014) supports the further study of this area when he recommends additional research on parent and community member roles in the successful implementation of SBG. "Along with the actual results and knowing the perceptions from a parent and community study, the conversations ignited can help in frontloading education efforts and proactively moving SBG initiatives toward success" (Dublin, 2014, p. 76).

Much has been written about the need to focus on what we already know in order to successfully implement change. In this regard, the need for simplicity often emerges as a key along with the leaders creating the will and persistence to effectively implement change. Schmoker (2011) points out the educational system routinely fails to simplify its work and focus on what is known to make a difference. The lack of implementing what is known to work is attributed to why we have not made big strides in providing better schooling for students. "Our failure to be clear and focused prevails even as we continue, year after year, to attend conferences, workshops, and book studies; adopt complex programs and initiatives; divide students into groups based on their respective 'learning styles'; and 'integrate technology' into our instruction—all while denying students a coherent curriculum, sound lessons, and meaningful opportunities to read and write" (Schmoker, 2011, p. 13). Schmoker argues educators need to focus on a simple, emphatic insistence on common curriculum, sound lessons and authentic literacy year after year until every student can be assured of reasonably good curriculum and instruction in every course. The author emphasizes leaders need to be sure what they want to see in their school is precisely what is communicated—simply, clearly, and persistently. Collaboratively developing SBG practices may help support this communication and common learning experiences for students no matter which teacher the student is assigned.

Reeves (2011) encourages educational leaders to begin the conversation on grading reform in a public format. Reeves states the grading conversation can effectively begin by focusing on principles in which all stakeholders can agree. For example, most people agree grading should be fair, accurate, specific, timely, and provide students with

feedback. Parents, teachers, administrators, students, and policymakers can be united by using the principles of accuracy, fairness, specificity, and timeliness according to Reeves (2011). By bringing stakeholders together around a set of principles educational leaders can facilitate the development of a set of boundaries which improve grading practices while allowing abundant freedom for teachers to stay in place. Leaders who assume the good will of all stakeholders in supporting student learning will approach the impending change with a spirit of collaboration. Reeves notes the first presumption should be that everyone involved in the discussion loves kids and cares about their futures, and suggestions of reform are not a criticism of the past but a hope for the future.

Brookhart (2011) writes about the importance of leadership in reforming grading practices. The author describes the first crucial task in successful grading reform as leading stakeholders in reaching consensus on the purpose of grades. Leaders play a key role in creating a safe climate for skeptics and supporters to discuss their beliefs about grading. Brookhart (2011) says leaders implementing change usually start with an agenda and the agenda should be no secret. However, the author notes this does not mean the conversation should be about how to make people agree with the agenda. After creating a safe environment and having meaningful conversations about the purpose of grading, Brookhart (2011) explains successful districts will often engage in professional development about learning. This occurs because grappling with grading leads to questions about learning. Leaders will find to succeed with implementing SBG a host of learning topics need to be addressed. According to Brookhart, developing teaching and learning strategies, formative assessment strategies, and coaching strategies is equally important as developing grading plans in order to succeed with SBG. In addition, how to

differentiate instruction is an important consideration. Brookhart (2011) concludes by emphasizing to truly succeed in reforming grading requires conversations about what grades should mean and who the audience for grading should include. When leaders focus on foundational issues instead of details productive conversations about long held beliefs and entrenched practices can be addressed and effective grading practices can take root.

Craig (2011) identified four best practices defined in her literature review as essential in implementing SBG with fidelity; use of performance levels to identify progress and achievement; removal of failing grades; separation of achievement from grades for learner and social behaviors; and the use of power standards (p. 115). Determining principal understanding and knowledge about these components is an essential step in make sure SBG practices are developed and implemented effectively. It would serve districts and leaders well to make sure key stakeholders have an understanding and have reached consensus about these components prior to embarking on utilizing SBG.

Absence of Research on Standards-Based Grading

According to Dublin (2014) there have been several dissertations related to perceptions associated with SBG and its effectiveness. However, Dublin (2014) concluded perceptions of teachers and principals regarding the practices embedded within SBG have been researched minimally. The important role of the principal as an instructional leader and the perception of obstacles faced by the principal in implementing SBG have been researched minimally. With the principal serving as a key catalyst to driving change it is important to study the perceived obstacles faced by these

leaders. Dublin (2014) states, "Limited research into the actual implementation process and a small number of qualitative studies have been administered documenting small groups of educators and their insights into this process" (p. 39).

Souter (2009) completed case study research into feedback in a standards-based system. However, this study was limited to a single school system at the elementary level. The prevalence of case study research corresponds to Dublin's (2014) research findings when he explains, "There is a void in respect to quantitative studies relating to perceptions and effective grading practices" (p. 39). The same can be said for an absence of quantitative research regarding obstacles faced by principals in implementing SBG. Souter (2009) recommends more study on the context of SBG by using quantitative approaches. For example, Souter (2009) mentions rubrics used in implementing SBG may have had a positive impact in increasing the quality of feedback provided to students. Lack of rubrics or other contextual factors may be a possible obstacle to implementation.

Dublin (2014) reports there is a scarcity of research into principal perceptions as they relate to grading practices. This study, therefore, adds to the knowledge base on SBG and the principal's role. Dyb's (2012) research demonstrated principal support of teachers as they implement SBG and grading practices is a key to implementation success. Identifying obstacles faced by principals will help inform ways the principal can support teachers. Dyb (2012) determined principals need to provide professional development on effective grading, time to implement changes, and continuous support. When these items are in place grading reform stands a better chance of being implemented with fidelity.

Research Standards-Based Grading did not Increase Test Scores

During the review of literature one dissertation was found on the effects of standards-based report cards on student learning. Craig researched fourth grade schools using standards-based report cards and then analyzed their state test results in fourth grade math. The study was conducted in Massachusetts. Craig noted there was not a significant difference in test scores when comparing schools using traditional letter grades versus standards-based report cards. Craig (2011) attributed this to several factors which underscore the importance of identifying obstacles principals are facing as they endeavor to improve grading practices. Craig reported her findings about the effect of SBG on student test scores were ultimately not conclusive. Craig's research emphasizes educators not taking the time to research obstacles and areas in need of additional support run the risk of investing considerable time, effort, and resources into an initiative which may ultimately result in discontented stakeholders and no measurable change in student learning.

Conclusion

Educators are increasingly being held accountable for high levels of learning for every student. Standards are used across the United States to identify what students should know and be able to do. With such a huge focus on standards, SBG may be an effective way to track student progress toward mastery of essential learning standards. Communication about learning, feedback, and clarity may be increased when SBG is in place and implemented with fidelity. In addition, differentiation based on each student's performance may be greatly improved when teachers are reporting on mastery of

standards versus using traditional letter grades. The principal plays a vital role in the implementation of SBG practices.

This literature review summarizes research on SBG. At the same time, the literature review demonstrates a lack of research on the effectiveness of traditional grading practices. In addition, the review shows there is little in the way of research on the key role principals play in implementation of SBG. With the limited amount of research on principal perceptions of obstacles to implementing SBG this study identified information to help support leaders in making the difficult transition from traditional grading practices to a system of SBG. The review of literature has identified three key areas to successfully implementing SBG. The three areas are creating the proper instructional foundation, establishing the proper culture and climate for SBG, and identifying and providing the necessary resources for the initiative to be successful. Leaders in a variety of educational settings will be interested in knowing the perceived obstacles in these three areas as they are identified from the building principal's perspective. Knowing the issues allow plans to be developed to address obstacles as different grading practices are being implemented.

Chapter three describes the methods used to determine principal perceptions about obstacles to implementing SBG. The literature review pointed to three broad categories used to develop survey items to determine perceived obstacles. This first category of obstacles is culture and climate including beliefs and attitudes of teachers, parents, the community, district level administrators, and the building principal. The second category of obstacles is instructional issues. This includes identifying reporting standards, using effective instructional techniques, use of assessments, and feedback. The third category

of obstacles is those related to time and resources. This includes time to make the change, professional development to ensure the necessary knowledge and skills to make the change, and time to collaborate.

Chapter III Methodology

Introduction

This study was a descriptive, non-experimental, quantitative dissertation on perceived obstacles by principals to implementing standards-based grading (SBG) in middle schools. The study focused on middle school principals in Missouri. This study focuses solely on middle school principals and the perceived obstacles to implementing SBG. Listed in the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Public School Directory, there are 379 middle schools or junior highs in Missouri. These schools primarily serve students in grades 5 – 8. This study focuses on the key role leaders play in SBG implementation and helps foster an understanding of obstacles educators need to prepare to overcome as they endeavor to implement SBG.

Participants

An attitudinal survey was administered to principals in public middle schools of various sizes in Missouri. The survey was provided to building level principals to determine their perceptions of obstacles to implementing SBG in middle schools. Participants were asked to respond to statements related to the overarching research focus which is "To what extent do middle school principals in Missouri perceive the existence of obstacles to implementing SBG? Three research questions were used in the study:

1. What are principal perceptions of obstacles to SBG related to instructional issues?
2. What are principal perceptions of obstacles to SBG related to culture and climate?
3. What are principal perceptions of obstacles to SBG related to resource limitations?

A survey instrument assessed the perceptions of principals concerning obstacles to implementing SBG. The survey was sent to middle school principals in all Missouri school districts with at least one middle or junior high school, schools primarily serving grades 5 – 8, as listed in the Missouri Public School Directory. This included 379 principals. For this study the definition of SBG is based on O'Connor's (2011) definition which he identifies as a way of reporting what students know and can do on a defined set of standards. Furthermore, O'Connor (2011) explains SBG is a system focusing on student proficiency and communicating mastery by standard or by categories derived from standards. The survey determined principal perceptions of obstacles to implementing SBG. Demographic information was collected to allow analysis and comparisons of various groups using the data.

The Research Review Board (RRB) application, survey, informed consent letter, and ethics training certificate were submitted and approved in May of 2015. Participants indicated their consent to be involved in the study by completing the electronic survey via QuestionPro. The documents submitted to the RRB described the process for maintaining confidentiality of participants, the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and the lack of foreseen harm from participating in the study. In addition, the application described the study's goal of identifying perceived obstacles to implementing SBG by middle school principals in Missouri.

Selection/Sampling

The Missouri Public School Directory was obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The directory was utilized to identify all Missouri schools primarily serving grades 5 – 8 and listed as having a middle

or junior high in the directory. While schools in the study primarily serve grades 5 – 8 some schools also serve students in grades besides 5 – 8 (i.e., 4^{th} – 8^{th}, 4^{th} – 6^{th}, 5^{th} – 7^{th}, 5^{th} – 8^{th}, etc). However, schools serving students from grades K – 6, K – 8, 7 – 12, or grades K – 12 were excluded from this study. This eliminated several districts in Missouri from being included in the study. The number of principals was 379. All building level principals were asked to complete a survey.

Participation in the survey was voluntary. No coercion was used to try and persuade people to participate. Only middle school or junior high principals listed in the Missouri Public School Directory and meeting selection criteria were asked to participate. The selection of middle school/junior high principals was relevant to the research because the study is seeking to determine the perceived obstacles these principals are facing when it comes to implementing SBG practices. The researcher protected the participant's right to privacy, health, safety, and overall well-being. Participants could opt out of taking the survey from prior to beginning to any time during the survey. Names of participants and identification numbers of participants were kept separate to insure confidentiality of participants. Data were not shared in any manner identifying individual responses. At the conclusion of the study all electronic data identifying individual participants were deleted. All paper copies of data identifying individual participants were shredded.

The researcher monitored data collection through QuestionPro to make sure data were being kept confidential. Electronic data was kept secure via the use of passwords. Any printed data were locked securely in a file cabinet to protect confidentiality. Names and identification numbers were kept separate in order to protect the identity of participants.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument was researcher developed because no existing survey addressed the elements of the study. The survey was sent to principals in all 379 middle school principals in Missouri. The survey was delivered in an electronic format. An email was sent to each middle school principal which included an introductory letter including informed consent information and the attached survey. The survey sought to identify perceived obstacles faced by principals when attempting to implement SBG. If perceived obstacles are identified prior to attempting to implement SBG the likelihood of successful implementation may be increased. The survey collected quantitative data using a Likert scale where respondents answered if they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement. Items were placed randomly to lessen the possibility of survey error and to ensure internal consistency. Additionally, some items were reverse coded. The survey items were written to be similar in nature in order to confirm internal consistency. The results of each question were analyzed and the mean, median, mode, standard deviation and confidence interval were calculated for the three scales.

The survey focused on three areas commonly cited in the review of literature as obstacles to implementing SBG. The three categories or scales of obstacles are instructional issues, culture and climate, and resource limitations. Identifying obstacles related to standards development and setting an instructional foundation helps facilitate the development of goals and plans to strengthen the instructional program in a manner consistent with focusing on standards and standards-based reporting. Identifying stakeholder attitudes and beliefs helps foster an understanding of the school's culture and

climate which provides a starting point in engaging both external and internal stakeholders in a dialogue about changing grading practices. Identifying obstacles related to time and resources assists in the planning of budgets and calendars in a manner supporting the transition to a new way of grading. The final survey is included in Appendix C.

Survey Scales

The survey supported the research by providing data on the three research questions. Principals were asked to respond to 10 – 12 statements in each of the three areas identified through the literature as being aligned to the three scales of significant obstacles. The three scales are instructional issues surrounding standards-based education, school culture and climate as it relates to grading, and resource obstacles.

The instructional foundation scale was developed to determine the extent obstacles related to creating a strong instructional foundation may interfere with implementation of SBG. Questions 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, 27, 30, 33, and 35, as listed in Table 1, provided data on instructional issues related to SBG. Instructional issues are obstacles when educators have not identified a few essential standards per course and reached consensus on what constitutes proficiency for these standards. Additional instructional obstacles may arise when educators do not understand instructional building blocks with a high effect size such as feedback, formative versus summative assessments, and differentiation of instruction based on level of student mastery on standards.

The culture and climate scale was developed to identify the degree to which the school and community stakeholders are supportive of transitioning to SBG. Survey items 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, and 36, as listed in Table 1, provided data on the

culture and climate of the school as it relates to grading practices. These items identified all key stakeholders when it comes to making a significant change such as transitioning to SBG. The stakeholders included central office administration, faculty, parents, community, and the principal as instructional leader.

The resource obstacle scale was developed to identify the degree to which obstacles related to having adequate resources impede SBG implementation. Survey items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, and 32, as listed in Table 1, provide data on resource obstacles. These questions focused on obstacles primarily related to time, budget, and professional development when it comes to transitioning to SBG.

The survey instrument collected demographic information. The demographic information focused on five areas. The first area was the participant's years of experience in education. This helped determine if there are differences in perceived obstacles based on how long the person has been an educator. The second area was the participant's years of experience in their current position. This helped determine if perceived obstacles differ based on how many years a person has served in their current position as principal. The third area was the number of students in the school. This helped identify if perceived obstacles change based on the size of the school. The fourth area was how many students are in the school district. This helped identify if obstacles are different in districts of various sizes. The fifth area asked if educators at the school were currently implementing SBG practices. This helped determine how many middle schools/junior highs in Missouri currently use SBG and also provided information on whether there is a difference in perceived obstacles when comparing schools actually using SBG versus those that do not. The demographic survey items allowed

differentiation of various populations and comparison of various groups. For example, comparing varying lengths of time in the participant's current position, or comparing those who have few years of experience versus those who have many years of experience. Knowing variations among the population allowed for deeper analysis of the data. This analysis is presented in Chapter 4.

Survey Development

Since no existing survey supported the goals of the study a survey was created using a variety of resources. Information obtained through the literature review was used to develop questions pinpointing perceived obstacles and the important role of leadership in implementing SBG practices. The literature review suggested three overarching categories of obstacles may exist. These categories included instructional foundation issues (lack of power standards, lack of understanding of student motivation and feedback), culture and climate (attitudes/beliefs of stakeholders), and resource limitations. In addition, Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications was used as a resource in developing survey questions and pilot procedures (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2009).

Initially, drafts of the survey were submitted to the researcher's advisor. The advisor has a deep understanding and expertise of statistical processes. Each draft was revised based on feedback from the advisor. Pilot surveys were utilized to improve the survey instrument. Three steps were completed during the pilot process to address face, content, and construct validity in order to increase the overall validity. These three steps are described in the following paragraphs.

The pilot participants consisted of experts in the field of education and were primarily public school administrators. The first review involved doctoral cohort colleagues. The second review group included two current building level administrators, two central office administrators, and one university educator. The pilot group consisted of building level principals in Missouri. The principals in the pilot group were identified using the Missouri Public School Directory, but were selected in a manner that preserved all middle school/junior high principals to participate in the final study instead of the pilot survey.

Face Validity

The first step of the pilot process was an informal review utilizing input from colleagues from the Southwest Baptist University doctoral program. This feedback was based on learning received through doctoral coursework. Resources were shared with colleagues.

The table of specifications, Table 1, was developed to identify alignment of the survey items with the three scales (instructional foundation, culture and climate, and resources). By utilizing the table of specifications the researcher helped establish face validity by identifying which survey items theoretically aligned with the three scales. This theorized alignment was then checked through factor analysis in both the pilot survey and final survey. The table of specifications was also used to determine if each of three scales had an adequate number of survey items in order to draw some conclusions about the scales.

Table 1: Specifications of Theorized Scale

#	Survey Item	Culture	Resources	Instruction
1.	I believe central office administration supports standards-based grading practices.	X		
2.	I believe a lack of resources would prevent us from being successful in implementing SBG.		X	
3.	I believe our school faculty is unable to agree on standards to assess and report on the level of student learning.			X
4.	I believe parents and the community are receptive to SBG.	X		
5.	I believe reporting on 4 to 6 learning standards per subject is an unrealistic burden on teachers.		X	
6.	I believe teachers are unable to reach consensus on standards.			X
7	I believe teachers are willing to change grading practices to a SBG system.	X		
8	I believe reporting on 4 to 6 learning standards per subject places an unrealistic commitment of time and effort on teachers.		X	
9	Our school has invested enough time on standards, instructional strategies, assessments to be prepared for implementing SBG.			X
10	I believe standards based grading would increase student success.	X		
11	I believe our school has the resources to implement standards-based grading.		X	
12	Our school has not invested enough time on standards, instructional strategies, and assessments in order to be successful with SBG.			X
13	I believe parents and the community would oppose moving from traditional grading to SBG.	X		
14	I believe our school has had the training to implement SBG.		X	
15	Our school has not established a clear purpose that grading exists to support student learning.			X
16	I believe central office administration would not fully support moving to SBG practices.	X		
17	I believe our school has resources to transition to SBG.		X	
18	Our school believes the main purpose of grading is to rank, reward, judge, or punish students.	X		
19	I believe traditional grading practices are preferable to SBG.	X		
20	I believe SBG requires too much time for grading.		X	
21	I have a clear understanding of how reporting the level of student mastery on standards makes a difference in student learning.			X
22	I believe traditional grading at our school accurately reports the level of student learning.	X		
23	I believe traditional grading is a more efficient method of grading compared to SBG.		X	
24	I do not have an understanding of how reporting the level of student mastery on standards makes a difference in student learning.			X
25	I believe our teachers would be unwilling to consistently assess and grade students.	X		
26.	I believe our school has the capacity to develop the necessary policies for SBG.		X	
27	Our school has defined what is required for student proficiency on standards for each course.			X
28	I believe there is no need to switch from traditional to SBG because we currently do an adequate job supporting learning.	X		
29	I believe our current policies would allow us to implement SBG.		X	
30	Our school has not identified requirements for proficiency on essential standards in each course.			X
31	Our school cannot be successful with implementing SBG because we lack widespread buy-in from faculty and staff.	X		
32	Based on the number of changes currently being implemented I believe asking teachers to change grading practices is unrealistic.		X	
33	Our teachers understand how SBG provides student feedback.			X
34	I have the support of informal leaders among the faculty in order to drive changes such as effective grading practices.	X		
35	Our teachers don't understand how SBG support student feedback.			X
36	I do not have the support of informal leaders among the faculty in order to implement change such as SBG grading.	X		

Content Validity

The second step in the review process was an expert validity pilot. The first version of the survey which is included in Appendix A was emailed to five experts in the area of SBG and survey instrumentation. These experts included two middle school principals, two central office administrators, and one staff member from the University of Missouri Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC). Participants were asked to take the survey and provide comments on the survey's quality, clarity, and alignment with the three identified scales for obstacles to implementing SBG (resource limitations, instructional issues, and culture and climate). Suggestions for additions to the survey were also provided. Experts used the index of item-objective congruency developed by Rovinelli and Hambleton (1977). This process uses content experts to rate items on the degree to which they measure or do not measure specific objectives identified by the item developer. The scale was -1, 0, and 1. -1 indicates the question does not ask what is intended, 0 is neutral, and 1 signifies the question asks what was intended.

Based on feedback from the expert validity pilot the survey was revised to increase content validity. All survey items scored above the 0.67 threshold required by the index of item congruency. However, two survey items were deleted resulting in a survey with 34 items instead of 36. Statement 16, "I believe reporting on 4 to 6 learning standards per subject requires an unreasonable burden on teachers" was deleted because it was determined to be redundant with another item. Statement 24, "I believe our current school policies allow us to implement standards-based grading" was deleted because it was not clear policies linked to the resource scale as intended. In addition, some minor

wording and grammatical changes were made based on input from the experts. Table 2 lists the index of item congruency score for each item.

Table 2: Index of Item-Objective Congruency

Survey Statements	Index
1. I believe central office administration supports standards-based grading practices.	1.00
2. I believe parents and the community are receptive to standards-based grading.	1.00
3. I believe teachers are willing to change grading practices to a standards-based system.	1.00
4. I believe standards-based grading increases student success.	1.00
5. I believe parents and the community oppose moving from traditional grading to standards-based grading.	0.80
6. I believe central office administration does not support transitioning to standards-based grading.	1.00
7. Educators at our school believe the main purpose of grading is to rank, reward, judge, or punish students.	1.00
8. I believe traditional grading practices are preferable to standards-based grading practices.	1.00
9. I believe traditional grading accurately reports the level of student learning.	1.00
10. I believe our teachers who are teaching the same grade level and subject area are willing to consistently assess and grade students from classroom to classroom.	1.00
11. I believe there is no need to switch from traditional grading to standards-based grading because traditional grading does an adequate job supporting student learning.	1.00
12. Our school cannot be successful with SBG because we lack widespread buy-in from faculty and staff.	1.00
13. I have the support of informal leaders among the faculty in order to drive changes such as SBG.	1.00
14. I do not have the support of informal leaders among the faculty in order to implement change such as SBG.	1.00
15. I believe a lack of resources would/does prevent us from being successful in implementing SBG.	1.00
16. I believe reporting on 4 to 6 learning standards per subject places an unreasonable burden on teachers.	1.00
17. I believe reporting on 4 to 6 learning standards per subject requires an unrealistic commitment of time and effort on the part of teachers.	1.00
18. I believe our school has the time and resources to effectively implement standards-based grading.	1.00
19. I believe our educators have had the training to successfully implement standards-based grading.	1.00
20. I believe our school has the resources to transition to SBG.	1.00
21. I believe standards-based grading requires teachers to spend too much time on grading.	1.00
22. I believe traditional grading is a more efficient method of grading when compared to SBG.	1.00
23. I believe our educators have the capacity to develop the necessary policies for standards-based grading.	1.00
24. I believe our current school policies allow us to implement standards-based grading.	1.00
25. Based on the number of changes currently being implemented I believe asking teachers to change grading practices places an unnecessary burden on teachers.	1.00
26. I believe our school faculty is unable to agree on standards to assess and report about the level of learning.	1.00

27.	I believe teachers at our school are unable to reach consensus on proficiency for learning standards.	1.00
28.	Our educators have invested enough time on identifying standards and assessment development to be prepared for implementing standards-based grading.	1.00
29.	Our educators have not invested enough time on identifying standards and developing assessments to be successful with standards-based grading.	0.80
30.	Our faculty has not established a clear purpose that grading exists to support student learning.	1.00
31.	I have a clear understanding of how reporting the level of student mastery on standards makes a difference in student learning.	1.00
32.	I do not have a clear understanding of how reporting the level of student mastery on standards makes a difference in student learning.	0.80
33.	Our educators have defined what is required for students to be proficient on essential standards for each course.	1.00
34.	Our educators have not identified what is required for proficiency on essential standards for each course.	1.00
35.	Our teachers understand how standards-based grading provides feedback to students.	0.80
36.	Our teachers do not understand how standards-based grading supports feedback to students.	0.80

Construct Validity

The revised pilot survey, included in Appendix B, was sent to 336 Missouri building level principals. Sixty-seven principals responded to the pilot survey. Sending a large number of surveys to principals throughout Missouri provided insight from a diverse range of perspectives representative of the target population for the study. The pilot survey was open from May 29, 2015 through June 5, 2015. The validity pilot survey provided open comment fields for respondents to provide feedback on recommended changes to the survey instrument. The validity pilot survey results were uploaded to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program in order to complete a factor analysis regarding validity. The results of the factor analysis are listed in Table 3. The factor analysis indicated enough survey items adequately aligned with the three scales intended during the survey development to allow for the survey to be used in the final study. The decision was made to use 30 survey items in the final study.

Table 3: Validity Pilot Factor Analysis

Statements	Scale		
	Resources	**Instruction**	**Culture**
1. I believe central office administration supports SBG.	.105	.013	**.711**
2. I believe our school faculty is unable to agree on standards to assess and report on the level of learning.	**.380**	.360	.333
3. I believe parents and the community are receptive to SBG.	.056	.129	**.705**
4. I believe teachers are willing to change grading practices to a SBG system.	.346	.163	**.666**
5. I believe reporting on 4 to 6 learning standards per subject requires an unrealistic commitment of time and effort on the part of teachers.	**.483**	.423	.057
6. I believe SBG increases student success.	.803	.047	**.130**
7. I believe our school has the time and resources to effectively implement SBG.	.254	**.689**	.067
8. Our educators have not had the opportunity to invest enough time on identifying standards and developing assessments to be successful with SBG.	.026	.655	**.196**
9. I believe parents and the community oppose moving from traditional grading to SBG.	.022	.048	**.813**
10. I believe our educators have had the training to successfully implement SBG.	**.204**	.652	.177
11. Our faculty has not established a clear purpose grading exists to support student learning.	.124	**.607**	.203
12. I believe central office administration does not support transitioning to SBG.	.088	.036	**.624**
13. I believe our school has the resources to provide enough time and professional development to successfully transition to SBG.	**.232**	.544	.135
14. Educators at our school believe the main purpose of grading is to rank, reward, judge, or punish students.	.281	.289	**.643**
15. I believe traditional grading practices are preferable to SBG practices.	.637	.176	**.421**
16. I believe SBG requires teachers to spend too much time on grading.	**.670**	.273	.234
17. I have a clear understanding of how reporting the level of student mastery on standards makes a difference in student learning.	.748	**.084**	.028
18. I believe traditional grading accurately reports the level of student learning.	.671	.001	**.065**
19. I believe traditional grading is a more efficient method of grading when compared to SBG.	**.674**	-.077	-.065
20. I do not have a clear understanding of how reporting the level of student mastery on standards makes a difference in student learning.	.798	**.112**	.041
21. I believe our teachers who are teaching the same grade level and subject area are willing to consistently assess and grade students from classroom to classroom.	.130	.188	**.401**
22. I believe our educators have the capacity to develop the necessary policies for SBG.	**.348**	.361	.086
23. Our educators have defined what is required for students to be proficient on essential standards for each course.	.108	**.852**	.124
24. I believe there is no need to switch from traditional grading to SBG because traditional grading does an adequate job supporting student learning.	.857	.101	**.100**
25. Our educators have not identified what is required for proficiency on essential standards for each course.	.103	**.791**	.035
26. Based on the number of changes currently being implemented I believe asking teachers to change grading practices places an unnecessary burden on teachers.	**.602**	.116	.138
27. Our teachers understand how SBG provides feedback.	.263	**.501**	.396
28. I have the support of informal leaders among the faculty in order to drive changes such as SBG practices.	.323	.323	**.482**
29. Our teachers don't understand how SBG supports feedback..	.110	**.467**	.527
30. I do not have the support of informal leaders among the faculty in order to implement change such as transitioning to SBG.	.409	.332	**.485**

Reliability

The final step of the pilot process was to perform Cronbach's alpha to determine internal consistency/reliability on the pilot data. This step of the pilot process was utilized to determine the reliability of the three scales identified in the survey. Data obtained from the larger pilot process used in the Validity Pilot were used for this analysis. According to Gay, et. al. (2009) Cronbach's alpha provides information on the extent to which items in a single test are consistent among themselves and with the test as a whole. Internal consistency results when all the items on a test are related. Cronbach's alpha for the instructional foundation scale was determined to be .360. Cronbach's alpha for the culture scale was determined to be .341. Cronbach's alpha for the resource scale was determined to be .074.

Procedure

After the pilot process was completed the final survey, included in Appendix D, was emailed to 379 middle schools principals throughout Missouri. One hundred eight principals completed the survey. Email addresses of middle school principals were secured from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The initial survey email and reminder emails were sent from June 10, 2015 through June 25, 2015. The survey was left open for approximately three weeks. Principals received two email reminders to take the survey. Principals could decline to take the survey in order to not participate in the study. The informed consent approved by the RRB included in Appendix C was included in the email sent to principals.

The QuestionPro electronic survey tool was used to administer the survey. QuestionPro allows for the creation of the survey, collection of data, and analysis of

results. QuestionPro provided samples of effective survey items, allowed for the monitoring of survey responses, and provided real time reports. QuestionPro provided an extra level of security and confidentiality to the research process. The researcher had the ability to enable and disable the survey, prevent multiple submissions from the same user, and provide respondent anonymity assurance. Using QuestionPro helped ensure participants had a well-organized survey which flowed smoothly and made the best use of the time the principals invested in the research.

Data Analysis

This quantitative study was conducted to determine, "To what extent do middle school principals in Missouri perceive the existence of obstacles to implementing SBG?" The research identifies to what extent middle school principals in Missouri perceive the existence of obstacles to SBG from instructional issues, stakeholder beliefs about grading, and limitations of time and resources. The three research questions were.

1. What are principal perceptions of obstacles to SBG related to instructional issues?
2. What are principal perceptions of obstacles to SBG related to culture and climate?
3. What are principal perceptions of obstacles to SBG related to resource limitations?

Data were analyzed to support the descriptive nature of this research. According to Gay, et al. (2009) descriptive research describes the way things are, test hypothesis, and answers questions about the current subject of study. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data and describe the data with numerical indices. This allowed the researcher to compile data to help identify the perceptions of building principals regarding obstacles to implementing SBG. Gay, et al. (2009) explains descriptive

statistics will define frequency, central tendency, and differentiate among mean, median, and mode. In addition, it will define variability and differentiate among the range, variance, and deviation.

Validity of Final Study

To determine construct validity, factor analysis was used in the pilot study and repeated with the full survey administration. Gay, et al. (2009) explains factor analysis is a way to take a large number of variables and group them in to clusters called factors. Factor analysis computes the correlations among variables and derives factors by finding groups of variables correlated highly among each other but have weak correlations with other variables. Factors identified are then used as variables instead of many individual items (206).

Data were loaded into SPSS and factor analysis was conducted on the three scales identified during the pilot study. The three scales are instructional foundation, culture and climate, and resources. To increase construct validity the data from the pilot study and final study were combined for the final factor analysis. Based on the factor analysis 20 survey items were identified for the study. The instructional foundation scale utilized six items. The culture and climate scale utilized eight items. The resource scale utilized six items. Items not used in the final study failed to show a strong alignment to their theorized scale once factor analysis was completed. This may be attributed to the study's small sample size. The results from the final study factor analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Final Study Factor Analysis

Statements	Scale		
	Resources	**Instruction**	**Culture**
1. I believe central office administration supports SBG.	.158	.211	**.635**
2. I believe a lack of resources would/does prevent us from being successful in implementing SBG.	**.608**	.207	.029
3. I believe parents and the community are receptive to SBG.	.001	.032	**.764**
4. I believe teachers are willing to change grading practices to a SBG system.	.253	.454	**.342**
5. I believe reporting on 4 to 6 learning standards per subject requires an unrealistic commitment of time and effort on the part of teachers.	**.302**	.470	.047
6. I believe SBG increases student success.	.046	**.769**	.258
7. I believe parents and the community oppose moving from traditional grading to SBG.	.058	.068	**.710**
8. I believe central office administration does not support transitioning to SBG.	.119	.169	**.691**
9. Educators at our school believe the main purpose of grading is to rank, reward, judge, or punish students.	.448	.059	**.264**
10. I believe SBG requires teachers to spend too much time on grading.	**.346**	.605	.227
11. I have a clear understanding of how reporting the level of student mastery on standards makes a difference in student learning.	.251	**.623**	.136
12. I believe traditional grading accurately reports the level of student learning.	.078	**.751**	.007
13. I believe traditional grading is a more efficient method of grading when compared to SBG.	**.203**	.309	.037
14. I do not have a clear understanding of how reporting the level of student mastery on standards makes a difference in student learning.	.236	**.670**	.147
15. I believe our educators have the capacity to develop the necessary policies for SBG.	**.479**	.377	.062
16. I believe there is no need to switch from traditional grading to SBG because traditional grading does an adequate job supporting student learning.	.004	**.862**	.102
17. Based on the number of changes currently being implemented I believe asking teachers to change grading practices places an unnecessary burden on teachers.	**.155**	.623	.393
18. Our teachers understand how SBG provides feedback to students.	.516	**.257**	.434
19. I have the support of informal leaders among the faculty in order to drive changes such as SBG practices.	.362	.414	**.559**
20. I do not have the support of informal leaders among the faculty in order to implement change such as transitioning to SBG.	.407	.466	**.498**

Bold indicates theorized scale for each item.

The instruction scale had several strong relationships between the survey items and the theorized scale. Five of the six survey items loaded at .623 or higher. Item number 18, "Our teachers understand how SBG provides feedback to students." had the lowest value at -.257 while loading at .516 on the resource scale. Further testing is recommended to determine the validity of item 18. The factor analysis may suggest principals view feedback as a resource instead of connected to establishing an instructional foundation.

The factor analysis on the culture and climate scale showed strong relationships between the survey items and the scale. Five of the eight items identified for the culture and climate scale loaded at .498 or higher. Two items on the culture scale did not show a strong relationship to the scale. Item number 4 in Table 3, "I believe teachers are willing to change grading practices to a standards-based system" loaded at -.454 on the resource scale while loading at .342 on the culture scale. Item nine in Table 3, "Educators at our school believe the main purpose of grading is to rank, reward, judge or punish students" loaded at -.448 on the instruction scale while only loading at -.264 on the culture scale. The lack of a strong relationship to the theorized scale indicates more testing needs to be done for these two items.

Four of the six items identified for the resource scale loaded at .302 or higher. Item number 13 on Table 3, "I believe traditional grading is a more efficient method of grading when compared to SBG." loaded at -.309 for the instruction scale while loading at .203 for the resource scale. Further testing on item 13 is recommended. Item 16 on Table 3, "Based on the number of changes currently being implemented I believe asking teachers to change grading practices places an unnecessary burden on teachers." loaded

strongly on the instruction scale at .623 while loading at .155 on the resource scale. Further testing is recommended to determine if this question may be better suited for determining perceptions on the instruction scale instead of the resource scale.

Reliability of the Final Study

Reliability was established by using Cronbach's alpha. "Cronbach's alpha estimates internal consistency reliability by determining how all items on a test relate to all other test items and to the total test (Gay, et al., 2009, p. 161). To achieve internal consistency all the items on a test are measuring similar things. The survey for this study uses a Likert scale which results in more than two scores possible. By using numbers for each choice internal consistency was established through Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha for the instructional foundation scale was determined to be .542. Cronbach's alpha for the culture and climate scale was determined to be .688. Cronbach's alpha for the resources scale was determined to be .524.

Conclusion

Developing a reliable and valid survey instrument was a priority of the study. This was accomplished through an extensive pilot process. The outcome was a survey instrument for others to utilize in the future. Data to support use of the survey by educational leaders seeking to implement SBG are included in Chapter 4. In addition, information was obtained to inform educational leaders about potential obstacles to implementing SBG. By having an understanding of principal perceptions of the obstacles to implementing SBG district leaders can support building level leaders when SBG initiatives are implemented in school districts.

Improving grading practices is an area of interest for many educators. The data

generated through this study will provide educators with research-based data to support the implementation of research-based grading practices. Study participants also had the opportunity to provide comments on their experiences with obstacles to implementing SBG. An analysis of these comments was performed to determine if relevant information was provided. Prevalent themes in the comments are included in chapter four. With the exception of the qualitative comments the study is quantitative.

Chapter Four

Analysis

Introduction

This study identified some of the perceived obstacles of middle school principals in implementing standards-based grading (SBG). Three scales were identified as categories of potential obstacles. The three scales are instructional foundation issues, culture and climate obstacles, and resource limitations. The final survey results consisted of 175 responses. All respondents were Missouri public school principals. The responses were exported to SPSS for analysis. The results will be presented in this chapter.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 5 lists the mean, range, and standard deviation for the three scales identified on the survey instrument. By identifying items for each scale through a factor analysis the descriptive statistics are based on twenty survey items. This consists of six items for the instructional foundation scale, eight items for the culture and climate scale, and six items on the resource scale. Table 4 presented load values for each scale based on factor analysis load values at the conclusion of the survey.

Table 5: Means, Variance, and Standard Deviations for Scales

Scale	Mean	Range	S.D
Instruction	14.05	6 to 24	1.654
Culture and Climate	18.47	8 to 32	3.049
Resources	16.12	6 to 24	2.154

Instructional Foundation Scale

The instructional foundation scale was developed to gather data for research question 1, "What are principal perceptions of obstacles to SBG related to instructional issues?" This scale emerged based on the review of literature which indicated there are important foundational pieces which need to be in place for SBG to be effective. For example, educators need to identify essential standards, agree on what is required for proficiency on these standards, and develop formative and summative assessments to determine the extent of student proficiency. In addition, principals need to have an understanding of standards and SBG as it impacts student learning. After completing the factor analysis it was determined 6 survey items were valid in supporting instructional foundation scale.

Possible scores on the instruction scale could range from six to twenty-four. With a mean score of 14.05 and standard deviation of 1.654 data indicates principals are slightly more favorable about the role the instructional foundation plays in implementing SBG at their school. This may suggest as a whole, principals believe the educators at their school have identified essential standards, determined what constitutes proficiency on these standards, and have developed an understanding of how SBG supports student learning. Therefore, creating the instructional foundation necessary for SBG implementation may not represent a significant obstacle based on the six statements linked to the instructional foundation scale.

Culture and Climate Scale

The culture and climate scale was developed to support research question 2, "What are principal perceptions of obstacles to SBG related to culture and climate?"

This scale emerged from the review of literature as the importance of having the proper culture and climate was identified as a key to implementing SBG. For example, having the proper culture and climate depends on stakeholder support from teachers, parents, the community, and central office administration. In addition, educators must have a common vision of grading as a means to support student learning. Schools who are successful with SBG view the role of grading as one where grading exists to communicate the extent of student learning to parents and students.

Possible scores on the culture and climate scale could range from eight to thirty-two. With a mean score of 18.47 and a standard deviation of 3.049 participants indicated they are less favorable about their culture and climate supporting SBG. This indicates principals attempting to implement SBG may face more significant obstacles in the area of culture and climate when compared to establishing the proper instructional foundation or identifying the necessary resources for implementing SBG.

Resource Scale

The resource scale was developed to support research question 3, "What are principal perceptions of obstacles to SBG related to resource limitations?" The importance of resources to implementing SBG was identified through the review of literature. As educators endeavor to implement SBG they must plan to provide adequate resources for the time and training required to support teachers in making the transition to a different method of grading.

Possible scores on the resource scale could range from six to twenty-four. With a median score of 16.12 and a standard deviation of 2.154 participant responses indicate a lack of resource does not represent a significant burden to implementing SBG. This may

indicate principals tend to feel positive about the resources, such as time and training, available to implement SBG.

Inferential Statistics

Thirty-four survey items were originally thought to be valid in supporting the three scales of the study. After the final survey data were compiled 20 items were identified as valid through factor analysis. These 20 items were calculated as having high enough values to be included in the analysis of inferential statistics. In regard to reliability, Cronbach's alpha for the instructional foundation scale was .542, for the culture and climate scale it was .688, and for the resource scale it was .524.

The inferential statistics presented in this chapter were computed using the 20 questions identified as loading to a specific scale. Data generated from the demographic items and the 20 valid survey items were analyzed to determine differences and relationships in varying demographics based on responses from the participants. The study utilized five demographic survey items. The five demographic questions were, How many years have you been an educator?, How many years have you been in your current position?, How many students are in your school?, How many students are in your school district?, Which statement best describes your school's length of time implementing SBG?

Resource Scale and Years as an Educator

When analyzing data for years of experience as an educator a significant difference was identified on the resource scale. Participants indicated their years of experience as an educator as either being 6 – 10 years of experience or 11+ years of experience.

Table 6: ANOVA for Resource Scale and Years as an Educator

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	40.195	1	40.195	9.298
Within Groups	664.471	151	4.400	
Total	705.386	152		

Note: p<.01

The significant difference for years of experience as an educator and the resource scale was $F(1,151) = 9.298$, $p < .01$. Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) post-hoc test was performed to determine respondents with more years of experience as an educator were more favorable toward resources. The data suggests principals with fewer years of experience as an educator perceive a lack of resources as being a larger obstacle to implementing SBG. This may indicate principals with more years of experience as an educator are more adept at identifying the necessary resources to implement a change such as SBG.

Culture Scale and Size of School District

There was a significant difference on the culture scale when comparing smaller school districts to larger school districts. School district size was identified as less than 2,000 students, 2001 – 4,000 students, 4,001 – 6,000 students, and more than 6,000 students.

Table 7: ANOVA for Culture Scale and Size of School District

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	94.989	3	31.663	3.585
Within Groups	1271.842	144	8.832	
Total	1366.831	147		

Note: p<.05

The significant difference on the culture scale as it relates to the number of students in the school district was $F(3, 144) = 3.585$, $p < .05$. After performing Tukey's HSD post-hoc test school districts with less than 2,000 students scored higher on culture than those with 4,000 – 6,000 students. This suggests smaller school districts have a more positive climate when it comes to implementing SBG practices, or culture is a more significant obstacle in larger school districts. Larger schools may experience more challenges in creating the proper culture and climate because they are faced with the challenge of communicating with more stakeholders.

Resource Scale and Size of School District

There was a significant difference on the resource scale as it relates to the size of school district. The size of school districts identified was explained above.

Table 8: ANOVA for Resource Scale and Size of School District

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	52.899	3	17.633	4.026
Within Groups	656.997	150	4.380	
Total	709.896	153		

Note. p<.01

The significant difference on the resource scale as it relates to the size of the school district was $F(3,150) = 4.026$, $p < .01$. Tukey's HSD post-hoc test determined the difference exists between districts with less than 2,000 students compared to districts with 4,000 – 6,000 students. The districts with 4,000 – 6,000 students scored higher on the resource scale. This suggests larger districts have more resources available for implementing SBG, or resources are a bigger obstacle to implementing SBG in smaller districts.

Culture Scale and Time Implementing SBG

There was a significant difference on the culture scale as it relates to time implementing SBG. Data were divided into three groups, not currently implementing SBG, 1 – 3 years, and 4+ years.

Table 9: ANOVA for Culture Scale and Time Implementing SBG

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	218.033	2	109.016	13.760
Within Groups	1148.798	145	7.923	
Total	1366.831	147		

Note. p<.001

The significant difference on the culture scale as it relates to time implementing SBG was $F(2,145) = 13.76$, $p < .001$. Tukey's HSD post-hoc test indicated schools not currently implementing SBG had a more positive culture than schools implementing SBG for 1 – 3 years. This suggests schools within the first three years of implementing SBG may experience a negative impact to their culture. This could possibly prevent the transition to SBG from being successful. Schools not implementing SBG perceive the culture to be more positive as it relates to SBG. These schools may not have an awareness or may not have experienced some of the obstacles to implementing SBG compared to schools actually implementing. Perhaps schools within their first three years of implementation would benefit from placing more focus on improving their culture and climate or establishing the proper culture and climate prior to implementation.

Instructional Foundation and Time Implementing SBG

There was a significant difference on the instructional foundation scale between schools not currently implementing SBG and those implementing SBG for 1 – 3 years.

Table 10: ANOVA Instructional Foundation Scale Time Implementing SBG

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	70.843	2	35.422	15.463
Within Groups	336.730	147	2.291	
Total	407.573	149		

Note. p<.001

The significant difference was $F(2,147) = 15.643$, $p < .001$. When Tukey's HSD post-hoc test was performed schools not implementing SBG scored higher than schools implementing SBG for 1 – 3 years, as was the case on the culture scale. This may suggest schools implementing SBG for 1 – 3 years realize there are obstacles in the area of creating an instructional foundation which schools not implementing SBG have not experienced. Implementing SBG may help expose some areas in the instructional foundation in need of further development.

Resource Scale and Time Implementing SBG

There was a significant difference on the resource scale as it relates to time implementing SBG in two areas. First, there was a difference between schools not implementing SBG and those implementing SBG for 1 – 3 years. Next, there was a significant difference between schools not currently implementing SBG and those implementing SBG four or more years.

Table 11: ANOVA for Resource Scale and Time Implementing SBG

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	88.716	2	44.358	10.783
Within Groups	621.180	151	4.114	
Total	709.896	153		

Note. p<.001

The significant difference was $F(2,151) = 10.783$, $p < .001$. Tukey's HSD post-hoc test indicated schools implementing SBG for any length of time are more favorable regarding resources and may have more resources available. Districts not implementing SBG are less favorable toward resources and may not be implementing due to obstacles related to resources such as time and professional development opportunities.

Significant Differences Summary

Table 12 summarizes the statistical differences for the various demographic groups on each of the three scales.

Table 12: Significant Differences Summary

Demographic Statement	Instruction	Resources	Culture
Years as Educator	No Sig. Difference	+ for more yrs. exp.	No Sig. Difference
Years in current position	No Sig. Difference	No Sig. Difference	No Sig. Difference
# Students in School	No Sig. Difference	No Sig. Difference	No Sig. Difference
# Students in District	No Sig. Difference	+ for larger districts	+ for smaller districts
Time Implement SBG	- for 1 – 3 years	+ for 1 – 3 yrs. & longer	- for 1 – 3 years

Participant Comments

Participants were asked to share open ended comments on their experiences with obstacles to implementing SBG. Twenty-one participants provided comments. These comments are listed in Appendix E. Nineteen of the comments connected with one of the three scales identified for the study. This provides support for the three scales as being representative of potential obstacles to implementing SBG. Eleven of the comments were related to the culture and climate scale. These comments spoke to the importance of ongoing dialogue with stakeholders. Parents were most frequently mentioned as an area of focus in building understanding and support of SBG. Respondents commented on how communicating with teachers, students, and parents is a key to success. Comments also mentioned the importance of early communication with parents in order to avoid "push back" to SBG. In one case, the principal commented they did not believe the method of grade reporting has been proven to have an impact on student learning. Four comments were related to establishing the proper instructional foundation as a potential obstacle. These comments spoke to the importance of consistency among teachers and having a clear understanding of what constitutes proficiency on the essential standards. One respondent mentioned uncertainty about standards and assessments at the state level as an obstacle to SBG. Four comments were connected to the resource scale as obstacles to implementing SBG. These comments primarily focused on training and the report card/grading software required for SBG. In the area of training, respondents commented on the professional development plan and the ongoing need to train new staff each year on SBG. With regard to grading software and report card development respondents commented their current system or report card was not set up for SBG and represented an

obstacle to SBG reporting. Two comments were unrelated to the three scales. These comments stated the educators were either not currently implementing SBG or were in their first year of implementation.

Summary

Data were analyzed to determine middle school principal perceptions of obstacles to implementing SBG. Descriptive statistics were presented to illustrate principal perceptions on three scales related to obstacles for implementing SBG. Through analysis it was determined principals perceive culture and climate obstacles to pose the most significant challenge to implementing SBG. Inferential data were presented in tables to show ANOVA results for the five areas of the demographic data as it related to the three scales for the study. There were significant differences in perceptions in six areas. There was no significant difference in nine areas. This information was summarized in Table 12.

Participant comments were analyzed to determine any trends in the open-ended responses. Twenty-one comments were submitted to the question, "Do you have any comments to share about your experience with obstacles related to implementing standards-based grading?" The comments closely aligned with the three areas of obstacles identified as scales for the study. Ten of the twenty-one comments spoke to the importance of establishing the proper culture and climate for effective grading practices prior to attempting to implement SBG. Parents were frequently mentioned as the most important group of stakeholders to communicate with while establishing the proper culture for SBG.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

This study sought to identify Missouri public middle school principal perceptions of potential obstacles to implementing standards-based grading (SBG). This was accomplished by surveying all Missouri middle school principals. By including all Missouri middle school principals a statewide comprehensive view of potential obstacles to SBG was accomplished.

The overall research focus was, "To what extent do middle school principals in Missouri perceive the existence of obstacles to implementing SBG?" Three research questions provided direction for the study.

1. What are Missouri middle school principal perceptions of obstacles to implementing SBG related to instructional issues?
2. What are Missouri middle school principal perceptions of obstacles to implementing SBG related to culture and climate?
3. What are Missouri middle school principal perceptions of obstacles to implementing SBG related to resource limitations?

The survey instrument identified valid and reliable items measuring principal perceptions of obstacles to implementing SBG across three scales. Items not used in the final study failed to show a strong alignment to its theorized scale once factor analysis was completed. This may be attributed to the study's small sample size. Further testing of the items not used in the final study may help determine if the items are valid when used with a larger sample size.

The first scale, instructional foundation obstacles to implementing SBG, supports research question one. Items identified for scale one included principal beliefs and depth of knowledge about SBG, understanding of standards, belief in the accuracy and effectiveness of traditional grading, and teacher understanding of SBG and feedback. Six items were identified for the instructional foundation scale. Five of the six items collected data on the principal's understanding and beliefs about standards and SBG. Eighty-eight percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they have a clear understanding of how standards impact instruction. Eighty-six percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they believe SBG increases student success. Eighty-eight percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed traditional grading accurately reports the level of student learning. Sixty-nine percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed teachers understand how SBG provides feedback to students. The responses are favorable regarding the principal's belief about the effectiveness of SBG and their understanding of the role of standards in impacting learning. In addition, there is the perception by principals that teachers understand the connection between SBG and feedback. These results point to the principal's role in the instructional foundation for SBG as not being a significant obstacle to implementing SBG. It was hoped other survey items would provide information on standards development, consensus on what constitutes proficiency on standards, consistency of standards implementation, and information regarding assessment practices. However, these items were not shown to be valid and reliable and were therefore not included in the data analysis.

The second scale, culture and climate for implementing SBG supported research question two. This scale consisted of eight items identifying possible culture and climate

obstacles to implementing SBG. The items determined culture and climate as it relates to support from central office administration, parents and the community, and teachers. Two of the eight items identified level of SBG support by central office administration. Eighty-four percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed central office administration is supportive of SBG practices. Four of the items addressed support of SBG by teachers and staff. Sixty-nine percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed teachers are willing to move to a SBG system. Two of the items identified perceptions of support from parents and the community regarding SBG. Forty-four percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed parents are receptive to SBG. The results indicate principals perceive central office administration, and teachers as favorable to transitioning to SBG. However, principals perceive parents and the community as less favorable to SBG. Comments from respondents also indicate parents and the community represent a challenge to implementing SBG. Therefore, when planning for SBG implementation time should be invested in educating the parents and community about SBG and attempting to garner their support for the initiative. Since the overall data indicated culture is perceived as an obstacle to SBG implementation it appears the biggest area of concern is with parents and the community.

The third scale, resources for implementing SBG, supports research question three. Resource items include time required to implement SBG, policies to support SBG, and the capacity of educators to implement SBG in light of other initiatives being implemented. Six items supported the resource scale. Four of the statements related to the resource of time. Seventy-two percent of respondents indicated they did not believe SBG required teachers to spend too much time on grading. Ninety percent of

respondents disagreed that reporting on four to six learning standards per subject requires an unrealistic commitment of time and effort on the part of teachers. One question addressed resources for implementing SBG in general. Thirty-nine percent of respondents indicated they strongly agreed or agreed a lack of resources would prevent success in implementing SBG. One item addressed policies to support SBG. Ninety-six percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed their school has the capacity to develop the necessary policies for SBG. With a positive perception of time available and resources in general, principals did not indicate resources was a substantial obstacle to implementing SBG. It was hoped some of the survey items would provide insight to training as a potential resource obstacle. However, the survey items regarding training did not prove to be valid and reliable and were not included in the data analysis.

Collecting demographic data helped analyze the results by disaggregating data based on various characteristics. This proved helpful by providing evidence of significant differences among groups in the areas of years as an educator, size of school district, and length of time implementing SBG. No significant differences were found in the number of years respondents had served in their current position, and the size of the school. The differences in all three scales regarding time implementing SBG perhaps provides the most insight. Schools actually implementing SBG for 1 – 3 years scored lower on the instruction scale and the culture scale when compared to schools not implementing SBG. While the same schools scored higher on the resource scale. This may be because schools actually implementing SBG for 1 – 3 years have firsthand experience with the role of instruction in supporting SBG and the impact on culture caused by SBG implementation which schools not implementing SBG have not

experienced. In addition, schools implementing SBG for 1 – 3 years scored higher on the resource scale indicating they may have found ways to identify the necessary resources for SBG. Since 108 of the 175 respondents have not implemented SBG this could have a large impact on the data. If only schools implementing SBG would have been studied the resulting data on perceived obstacles may have been much different.

The demographic data were analyzed by calculating ANOVAs with the exception of size of school which was calculated by using a *t-test*. The demographic section also provided participants the opportunity to provide open ended comments about any obstacles they have experienced with implementing SBG. This allowed for obstacles not identified in the survey items to be identified and also provided information on possible areas for further research. Twenty-one out of one hundred eight respondents took the time to comment. The comments seemed to support the broad areas of obstacles to implementing SBG are resources, instructional foundation issues, and culture and climate.

An important outcome of this study was the development of a valid and reliable survey instrument educators may use to identify obstacles to implementing SBG in their own settings. The researcher found many surveys about SBG focused around attitudes regarding SBG or effective grading practices. However, no surveys were found that specifically attempted to identify obstacles to implementing SBG. In addition, the survey placed a focus on identifying obstacles perceived by principals. These leaders play a key role in the success of implementing SBG. Having reliable and valid data about principal perceptions will allow educational leaders to develop a plan for implementing SBG based on overcoming obstacles. The survey instrument allows the plan to be organized around

three important areas critical to the success of SBG. First, establishing the proper instructional foundation for SBG. The proper instructional foundation includes educators identifying essential standards, agreeing on what is required for proficiency on these standards, and developing formative and summative assessments to determine the extent of student proficiency. Second, establishing the proper culture and climate to support SBG practices. The proper culture and climate requires developing a common vision of grading to support student learning and gaining support from stakeholders. Third, identifying the necessary resources to enable educators to transition to SBG practices. The necessary resources include providing adequate time and training for teachers to transition to SBG.

Due to the lack of a survey to support the goals of this study, the researcher developed a survey targeted at answering the study's research questions. The pilot process began in the spring of 2015. The pilot began with an informal pilot to establish face validity, then moved to an expert validity pilot to establish content validity. The expert validity pilot utilized Rovinelli and Hambleton's index of item congruency (1977) all items scored at .80 or higher on the expert validity pilot. The next phase of the pilot process was utilized to establish construct validity. The survey was sent to 336 Missouri principals with 67 principals responding. Factor analysis was conducted on the pilot survey results. Cronbach's alpha was also calculated on this data. Cronbach's alpha on the pilot data was .360 for the instruction scale, .341 for the culture and climate scale, and .074 for the resource scale. The results were determined to be reliable enough to proceed with the final study. Analyzing the data for the final study was completed by determining a factor analysis on the 20 survey items determined to clearly load to one of the three

scales. The instruction scale consisted of 6 items (a = .542). The culture and climate scale consisted of 8 items (a = .688). The resource scale consisted of 6 items (a = .524). The reliability results indicate the survey could be used in future research. However, the sample size was small. Therefore, further testing of the survey and individual items is recommended.

One benefit of the survey instrument is it provides a simple structure for educators to identify and address obstacles to SBG in three broad categories. This was accomplished by carefully analyzing the review of literature to determine overarching themes related to challenges with implementing SBG. Developing an implementation plan targeted at addressing obstacles in these three categories may prove beneficial to educators by possibly saving time, effort, and increasing the chances of success.

Limitations

The study had a population size of 379 which represents the number of middle school/junior high principals in Missouri. The resulting sample (n = 108) resulted in a response rate of 28 percent. This small sample size was a concern and therefore results from the pilot survey sample (n = 67) were added to the data. This provided an overall sample of (n = 175). While a larger sample size would have been more robust the data analysis results were adequate for making conclusions and recommendations. The resulting ANOVAs, factor analysis, and Cronbach's alphas supported the conclusions drawn from the data.

Recommendations

An important question which remains to be answered through further research is whether or not SBG improves outcomes for student achievement as measured by

standardized tests such as the MAP test, improved student retention rates, graduation rates, and attendance. Currently, there is a lack of research on the impact SBG has on student achievement. This study identified some Missouri middle schools who are currently implementing SBG. Sixty-seven of the 148 respondents indicated their school currently utilizes SBG practices. A follow up study could focus on the schools currently implementing SBG as a case study regarding student achievement in these schools. In addition, students in schools currently implementing SBG could be surveyed to see if there is any difference in their perception of school climate, learning, and motivation as a result of standards-based grading practices.

An interesting difference in perception of obstacles to implementing SBG emerged between educators not implementing SBG and those implementing SBG for 1 to 3 years. Specifically, those implementing for 1 – 3 years perceived more obstacles with culture and climate and the instructional foundation for SBG. A possible future study could examine these differences or provide a more in-depth analysis of obstacles faced by educators implementing SBG for 1 – 3 years. A deeper look at obstacles faced by those implementing SBG may provide beneficial information to educators who are just beginning to implement SBG or those still in the planning phase. In addition, educators implementing SBG for 1 – 3 years had a more favorable impression of resources to support SBG compared to those not implementing. Studying this aspect may help provide information to educators not yet implementing SBG to assist with planning for adequate resources to support implementation.

This study focused on principal perceptions of obstacles to implementing SBG at the middle school/junior high level in Missouri. The study could be expanded by

studying the perceived obstacles for implementing SBG in Missouri elementary and/or high schools. Perhaps the culture and climate, instructional, and resource obstacles differ based on the age level of the students served.

Survey participants who provided comments on their experiences with obstacles to implementing SBG frequently mentioned the importance of developing understanding about and support for SBG among stakeholders and especially among parents. A future study could seek to determine the perceptions of parents, students, and teachers regarding how the quality of communication about student learning in schools using SBG differs from schools using traditional grading.

Another obstacle cited by principals who provided comments for the survey was the grading program or the report card itself. A future study could examine effective grading software programs and report card templates used in Missouri schools. Related to this topic a study could be conducted on the report cards from schools where the principal reported SBG is being utilized. The study could examine if the report cards reflect the characteristics identified as research based SBG practices. There may be a perception by some educators they are using SBG when actually many of the components of SBG are not in place. A study of report cards would help determine the extent of SBG components actually being applied.

Finally, respondents mentioned professional development for SBG grading as an obstacle to implementation. Specifically, the systemic training of new staff each year is an obstacle. A study devoted to effective professional development for implementing SBG would help educational leaders plan to meet the needs of educators.

Summary

Educators are increasingly being held accountable for high levels of learning for all students. Mastery of standards is one key to student success. SBG may support higher levels of mastery on standards. As educators consider transitioning to SBG they may benefit from closely examining potential obstacles prior to making changes. Identifying potential obstacles will assist in setting goals and developing action steps for successful implementation. This study identified three broad categories of potential obstacles to SBG implementation. Educators may use the results and the survey instrument to identify potential obstacles in their own schools. This may facilitate developing the proper instructional foundation for SBG, addressing culture and climate obstacles, and identifying necessary resources to increase the likelihood of success with SBG.

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APPENDIX A

Pilot Survey of Missouri Principals

Thank you for helping pilot this survey on principal perceptions of obstacles to implementing standards-based grading. Your participation will help determine if the questions are reliable in measuring potential obstacles to standards-based grading with regard to culture and climate, resources (time and training), and instructional issues. For the purposes of this research, standards-based grading is defined as grade reporting with the goal of communicating the level of student achievement on identified essential standards. Standards-based grading provides a measure of standards attainment. You will be asked to respond to each statement by using a Likert scale (1 Strongly Agree, 2 Agree, 3 Disagree, 4 Strongly Disagree). Please respond based on your perception of current reality at your school. All responses are confidential. There will also be an opportunity to provide feedback on how to improve the survey. Any suggestions you may have will be greatly appreciated. The survey should take 15 minutes or less. Thanks again for providing your expertise in helping develop a reliable survey.

I believe central office administration supports standards-based grading practices.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe a lack of resources would/does prevent us from being successful in implementing standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe our school faculty is unable to agree on standards to assess and report about the level of student learning.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe parents and the community are receptive to standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe teachers at our school are unable to reach consensus on what constitutes proficiency for essential learning standards.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe teachers are willing to change grading practices to a standards-based system.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe reporting on 4 to 6 learning standards per subject requires an unrealistic commitment of time and effort on the part of teachers.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our educators have invested enough time on identifying standards and developing assessments in order to be prepared for implementing standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe standards-based grading increases student success.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe our school has the time and resources to effectively implement SBG.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our educators have not had the opportunity to invest enough time on identifying standards and developing assessments to be successful with standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe parents and the community oppose moving from traditional grading to standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe our educators have had the training to successfully implement standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our faculty has not established a clear purpose that grading exists to support student learning.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe central office administration does not support transitioning to SBG.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe our school has the resources to provide enough time and professional development to successfully transition to standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Educators at our school believe the main purpose of grading is to rank, reward, judge, or punish students.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe traditional grading practices are preferable to standards-based grading practices.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe standards-based grading requires teachers to spend too much time on grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I have a clear understanding of how reporting the level of student mastery on standards makes a difference in student learning.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe traditional grading accurately reports the level of student learning.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe traditional grading is a more efficient method of grading when compared to standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I do not have a clear understanding of how reporting the level of student mastery on standards makes a difference in student learning.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe our teachers who are teaching the same grade level and subject area are willing to consistently assess and grade students from classroom to classroom.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe our educators have the capacity to develop the necessary policies for standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our educators have defined what is required for students to be proficient on essential standards for each course.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe there is no need to switch from traditional grading to standards-based grading because traditional grading does an adequate job supporting student learning.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our educators have not identified what is required for proficiency on standards.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our school cannot be successful with implementing standards-based grading because we lack widespread buy-in from faculty and staff.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Based on the number of changes currently being implemented I believe asking teachers to change grading practices places an unnecessary burden on teachers.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our teachers understand how standards-based grading provides feedback to students.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I have the support of informal faculty leaders in order to drive changes such as SBG practices.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our teachers do not understand how standards-based grading supports feedback to students.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I do not have the support of informal leaders among the faculty in order to implement change such as transitioning to standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Do you have any suggestions on how to improve this survey on potential obstacles to implementing standards-based grading?

1. Yes
2. No

How many years have you been an educator?

1. 1 - 5 years
2. 6 - 10 years
3. 11+ years

How many years have you been in your current position?

1. 1 - 5 years
2. 6 - 10 years
3. 11+ years

How many students are in your school?

1. Less than 500 students
2. 500 or more students

How many students are in your school district?

1. Less than 2,000 students
2. 2001 - 4,000 students
3. 4,001 - 6,000 students
4. More than 6,000 students

Which statement best describes your schools length of time utilizing standards-based grade reporting.

1. Not currently implementing standards-based grading
2. 1 - 3 years
3. 4+ years

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Dear Colleague,

I am a doctoral student at Southwest Baptist University, and I am conducting a research study to gather principal perceptions of obstacles to implementing standards-based grading. I am surveying all middle school/junior high principals in Missouri. Since you are the principal at your middle/junior high school, I am asking for your participation. I understand you have many demands on your time. The survey is designed to take no more than 10 minutes. The survey is completely anonymous. It will ask you for demographic information and your experience with standards-based grading and obstacles you perceive in implementing standards-based grading.

Your privacy is important. Therefore, your answers will be combined with all other participants and reported in aggregate form. There is no penalty if you choose not to participate or to not answer all the questions. Your completion and submission of the survey will indicate your consent to participate and permission to use the information you have provided in my study.

Before you make a final decision about participation please read the following statements about how your responses will be used and how your rights as a participant will be protected.

- Participation in the study is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time without penalty. You need not answer all the questions.
- Your answers will be kept confidential. Results will be presented to others in summary form only, without names or other identifying information.
- Your participation will take approximately 15 minutes. During this time you will answer questions about how you perceive obstacles to implementing standards-based grading.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the RRB Committee at Southwest Baptist University. The committee believes the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. Contact Information:

Dr. Tim Wood, Chair Research Review Board

Southwest Baptist University, 1600 University Ave, Bolivar, MO 65613

Phone: 417-328-2067 Email: RRB@sbuniv.edu

You may contact me at 573-355-3733 if you have questions or concerns about your participation. If you would like a copy of the results of this study you may contact me via email at patbauer94@gmail.com. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Pat Bauer

Appendix C

Final Survey

Thank you for taking this survey, Principal Perceptions of Obstacles to Implementing Standards-Based Grading. For the purposes of this research, standards-based grading is defined as grade reporting with the goal of communicating the level of student achievement on identified essential standards. Standards-based grading provides a measure of standards attainment. You will be asked to respond to each statement by using a Likert scale (1 Strongly Agree, 2 Agree, 3 Disagree, 4 Strongly Disagree). Please respond based on your perception of current reality at your school. All responses are confidential. There will also be an opportunity to comment on your experiences with obstacles to implementing standards-based grading. The survey should take 10 minutes or less. Thanks again.

I believe central office administration supports standards-based grading practices.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe a lack of resources would/does prevent us from being successful in implementing standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe our school faculty is unable to agree on standards to assess and report about the level of student learning.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe parents and the community are receptive to standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe teachers at our school are unable to reach consensus on what constitutes proficiency for essential learning standards.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe teachers are willing to change grading practices to a standards-based system.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe reporting on 4 to 6 learning standards per subject requires an unrealistic commitment of time and effort on the part of teachers.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our educators have developed standards, instructional strategies, and assessments to implement standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe standards-based grading increases student success.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe our school has the time and resources to effectively implement standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our educators have not had the opportunity to invest enough time on identifying standards and developing assessments to be successful with standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe parents and the community oppose moving from traditional grading to standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe our educators have had the training to successfully implement standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our faculty has not established a clear purpose that grading exists to support student learning.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe central office administration does not support transitioning to standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe our school has the resources to provide enough time and professional development to successfully transition to standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Educators at our school believe the main purpose of grading is to rank, reward, judge, or punish students.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe traditional grading practices are preferable to standards-based grading practices.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe standards-based grading requires teachers to spend too much time on grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I have a clear understanding of how standards impact learning.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe traditional grading accurately reports the level of student learning.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe traditional grading is a more efficient method of grading when compared to standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I do not have a clear understanding of how standards-based grading impacts learning of standards.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe our teachers who are teaching the same grade level and subject area are willing to consistently assess and grade students from classroom to classroom.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe our educators have the capacity to develop the necessary policies for standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our educators have defined what is required for students to be proficient on essential standards for each course.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I believe there is no need to switch from traditional grading to standards-based grading because traditional grading does an adequate job supporting student learning.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our educators have not identified what is required for proficiency on essential standards for each course.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our school cannot be successful with implementing standards-based grading because we lack widespread buy-in from faculty and staff.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Based on the number of changes currently being implemented I believe asking teachers to change grading practices places an unnecessary burden on teachers.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our teachers understand how standards-based grading provides feedback to students.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I have the support of informal leaders among the faculty in order to drive changes such as standards-based grading practices.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Our teachers do not understand how standards-based grading impacts learning standards.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

I do not have the support of informal leaders among the faculty in order to implement change such as transitioning to standards-based grading.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

Do you any comments to share about your experience with obstacles related to implementing standards-based grading?

1. Yes
2. No

How many years have you been an educator?

1. 1 - 5 years
2. 6 - 10 years
3. 11+ years

How many years have you been in your current position?

1. 1 - 5 years
2. 6 - 10 years
3. 11+ years

How many students are in your school?

1. Less than 500 students
2. 500 or more students

How many students are in your school district?

1. Less than 2,000 students
2. 2001 - 4,000 students
3. 4,001 - 6,000 students
4. More than 6,000 students

Which statement best describes your schools length of time utilizing standards-based grade reporting.

1. Not currently implementing standards-based grading
2. 1 - 3 years
3. 4+ years

Appendix D: Principal Comments on Obstacles to Standards-Based Grading

1. Initial training of teachers is not as big an obstacle as retraining every new teacher and then revising what we are all about as a new group. New principals struggle with understanding SBG as well.
2. Staff training related to current and alternative grading practices is an essential component of the transition to standards-based or standards-referenced reporting. Training should include information to deepen the conceptual understanding along with logistical how to. Training is key. Open and transparent dialogue with parents and community is important as well.
3. We have had to work with students who are not motivated to complete practice or formative assessments because they "do not count". Lots of ongoing parent and teacher education is essential.
4. Get all stakeholder feedback before implementing. Community has a hard time understanding the concept and want to constantly attack SBG when scores drop, etc.
5. The greatest obstacle is a clear vision and plan to implement SBG. The majority of staff are in favor of it but need direction, timelines, and a plan for informing the community.
6. Our district has a board member who ran on the platform of removing SBG from our district. Our faculty has been adamant about keeping it, but we may not have the option. This is a result of how we implemented SBG. We went K – 12 implementation and all of our hang ups have been a result of the secondary level, primarily, the high school implementation. We had some teachers who were not consistently implementing SBG in the classroom/department and some teachers who continued to try to be punitive in grading which hindered our progress into SBG. I would tell any district to implement at the lower levels and move it up with the student body. In addition, teachers need at least two years of dedicated training with a strong focus on rubric development before implementing SBG.
7. Communicating with students and parents is the biggest piece of this once the staff has wrapped their mind around the SBG transition. I do believe that if we did not reach out to parents early on there would have been push back.
8. We currently use both SBG and traditional grading. Our grade cards have both the levels of proficiency and letter grades. We are working towards aligning our grading system with the grade levels lower than us so it is the same from building to building.
9. Our work with SBG is unable to gain traction based on the limitations of our current student information system gradebook options.
10. I have never seen any data as to the effect size of SBG. Standards-based learning and teaching create improvement. The manner in which we report grades has not been proven to increase learning.

11. Our parents have the most difficult time. Many of the parents of students who are academically high like being able to rank their students. Despite efforts to educate parents, they still seem to love the traditional grading scale because it is what they used, and they understand it.
12. My building and all district middle schools will be implementing SBG this upcoming school year.
13. This needs to be a systematic approach district-wide while being transparent with all stakeholders. Frequent and accurate feedback to students and parents is a big key.
14. Currently, we are not discussing the implementation of SBG.
15. It appears in our community parents are not ready for SBG. We have one teacher who has fully implemented SBG and being on an island he has been the victim of a great deal of scrutiny by parents. I believe he was placed in a bad situation as our grade cards do not support a system of mastery versus non-mastery. Therefore, rather than parents seeing a not there yet on the grade they see C, D, or F. So, from my experience SBG at a minimum will need to be implemented at a grade level, if not building or district level.
16. One of the critical elements in implementing SBG is informing and educating all the stakeholders. If you do not, it will be a rough transition.
17. Helping parents make the shift to SBG is our biggest challenge.
18. At this time, there is no good reason to begin SBG because the state has no clue as to what they want. Once they get their act together, then maybe we could consider it.
19. The biggest obstacle is consistency in implementation by staff. There must be consistent procedures and a vision for what proficiency and progression is for each standard.
20. We have not implemented SBG in our district. We are on the ground floor of just researching the practice.
21. We established a good PD model prior to phasing in SBG. Our biggest challenges were getting the progress reports and mid-terms printed and the electronic grade books set up to reflect what we were collecting in terms of evidence. That has been our biggest learning curve, but one year into full implementation we are in much better shape for year two!