MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF STANDARDS-BASED GRADING

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MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF STANDARDS-BASED GRADING

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Graduate Education Department
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By

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Abstract

A goal of education at all levels from early childhood efforts to post-secondary instruction is student learning. A key strategy to ensure learning is occurring is to report the learning at regular intervals to those involved and interested in the outcome. Therefore, grading and reporting student learning surface as integral parts of a learning institution's endeavors. Standards-based grading (SBG) is one way to report learning and was the focus of this quantitative study. Specifically, this study explored the perceptions of middle school teachers and principals regarding standards-based grading and effective practices to accompany SBG.

The need for a valid and reliable survey became clear; therefore, much time, effort and focus went into developing a survey instrument, testing the instrument in various pilot settings and then revising it to ensure the final study would garner results worthy of making predictions and descriptive statements regarding the sample population as well as the educational community at large.

The sample population consisted of teachers and principals in 217 middle and junior high schools within 36 counties in the western region of Missouri. Respondents were overall favorable to both scales on the survey—collaborative culture and perception of standards-based grading practices. There were a number of statistically significant differences; however the results would point to schools being ripe, or at least somewhat open, to SBG implementation. The first step, developing a collaborative culture, is in place in the sample population and presents a platform for SBG to take root.

Further study is recommended into how SBG affects student achievement and what long-term results may be regarding perceptions and the collaborative culture. In addition, the middle school focus of this study leaves open the elementary and secondary arenas for similar research.

Another avenue this study could spur is how students perceive standards-based grading and what effect the practices have on their learning and progress in the classroom.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Schools exist to provide learning opportunities for students and, subsequently, report on that learning to a variety of groups: the students themselves, parents, state agencies and administration. Grade reporting is crucial and, when done correctly, will present meaningful feedback to these groups. All 50 states have defined standards schools must teach and the goal is for every student to master these standards (O'Connor, 2011). Consequently, in this standards-based educational climate, grading and reporting should be standards-based as well. Standards-based grading (SBG) and reporting is not a new concept yet it is relatively scarce in implementation within schools across the United States. As the research body continues to grow and more schools experience success with standards-based grading, school leaders may adjust grading policies from traditional practices to standards-based principles.

One of the keys to implementing successful standards-based grading is to have an established grading policy along with universally accepted grading practices within a school. The body of research has not been conclusive or extensive in the area of recommended grading policies; few dissertations exist regarding grading policies and the books, articles and journals available thinly cover grading policies. Therefore, the intent of this study is to delve deeper into the literature, as well as into the schools selected to be participants in this study, to compose the framework for a usable grading policy along with grading practices to implement, in turn, setting the foundation for standards-based grading.

Problem Statement

Effective grading practices are the foundation to standards-based grading in schools. Therefore, the importance of investigating the perceptions and understandings held by teachers

and principals as to these grading practices within the standards-based grading philosophy cannot be overstated. A negative perception or lack of understanding of effective grading practices undermines the implementation itself. Ultimately, a disconnect between perception, practice and grading theory will result in failed standards-based grading implementation; or at a minimum a problematic, stilted standards-based grading journey for teachers and principals. School leaders and educators looking to implement standards-based grading will benefit from knowing the relationship between various effective grading practices, standards-based grading implementation levels and teacher and principal perceptions toward each. Furthermore, this study will look at what impact a standards-based grading model has on teacher and principal perceptions and practices to help educators predict what perceptions could be once the model is in place in a school for some time.

Research Questions

This study explores the perceptions of middle school teachers and principals regarding standards-based grading and effective practices to accompany SBG. The following three research questions guided the study:

1. What are the perceptions of principals and teachers in middle schools in the western region of Missouri of standards-based grading regarding the two scales on the attitudinal survey?
2. To what extent do principals and teachers in middle schools in the western region of Missouri implement effective grading practices to support SBG?
3. Do those teachers and principals implementing standards-based grading have a more favorable perception toward effective grading practices?

Theoretical Framework

Since the mid-1990's standards-based grading has increasingly become a prominent topic for educational researchers and practitioners. Leading figures in education such as Thomas Guskey, Robert Marzano, Susan Brookhart, Doug Reeves and Ken O'Connor conducted research on effective grading practices, formative assessment and standards-based grading. Specifically, Ken O'Connor addressed broken grading practices, defined as traditional practices, in his book, A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades (2011). O'Connor (2011) states, "grading still remains an aspect of school that is clothed in myth, mystery, and magic" (pg. xi). Robert Marzano, a respected school improvement expert, stated, "why [w]ould anyone want to change current grading practices? The answer is quite simple: grades are so imprecise that they are almost meaningless" (2000, pg. 1). The problems with traditional grades have resulted in the need for more research and closer scrutiny of the current grading practices in schools. Standards-based grading is certainly not a new idea. Over sixty years ago, historical and educational figure Ralph Tyler outlined the key concept schools should be tackling bringing forth the genesis of standards-based grading although it has not been realized until the last two decades:

> If an educational program is to be planned and if efforts for continued improvement are to be made, it is necessary to have some conception of the goals being sought. These educational objectives become the criteria by which materials are selected, content is outlined, instructional procedures are developed and tests and examinations are prepared. All aspects of the educational program are really means to accomplish these basic educational purposes (as quoted in Guskey and Bailey, 2010, pg. 15).

While a majority of schools still utilize a traditional grading approach, standards-based education and alternative grading practices are becoming more prevalent discussion topics within these schools. These discussions are evidenced by the current availability of books, articles, conferences and webinars on the subject of standards -based grading. Furthermore, according to Wilson (2004), "the issue of whether or not current grading practices result in an accurate reflection of student achievement continues to be of interest to education professionals. Specifically, inaccurate assessment and grading practices can undermine the ability of administrators to target the professional development needs of staff members" (as quoted in Dyb, 2012, pg. 1).

A driving impetus to this study is the need to glean insight into the perceptions of teachers and principals as to standards-based grading and effective grading practices. The current practices and perceptions in Western Missouri must be assessed to determine the readiness for implementation of SBG in schools. Teachers and principals are the gateways for new practices to enter into the classroom; therefore the weight their perception holds is paramount as they ultimately decide whether or not to implement these practices. The quantitative data this study produces may provide a starting point, even a catapult, for informed decision-making as well as further research to be done into this topic. Also schools in Western Missouri may be emboldened to employ standards-based grading practices.

Rationale/Purpose of Study

The premise behind standards-based grading is self-evident in the name itself; it is based upon standards. The grading practices utilized within the SBG method are based upon standardized, or universal, processes to maintain fidelity within a school, grade level or department. "In urging schools to develop course-alike grading policies, district leaders

presented a compelling case for supporting standards-based instruction with consistent grading practices" (Cox, 2011, pg. 78). Consequently, a need to have predetermined universal grading practices agreed upon by the faculty before implementing standards-based grading comes to the forefront. Therefore, to underscore the connection between SBG and effective grading practices, this study will look at schools, at various stages in regard to standards-based grading practices, and analyze their perceptions toward effective grading practices to find commonalities, differences and areas for potential improvement. These suggested improvements or additions will come from the review of literature and recommendations based on studies in the field of standards-based education. One of the aims of this study is to provide a description of the perceptions and practices as it pertains to readiness for standards-based grading implementation in the western region of Missouri. Furthermore, effective grading practices outlined by the literature review will be presented so a grading policy could be adopted in schools focused on standards-based grading.

A portion of this study will focus on grading practices, standards-based grading and perceptions therein aiming to describe the demographics in terms of those implementing SBG and those not implementing SBG in Western Missouri; however, a major goal will be to produce a quality survey tested to be valid and reliable. The time spent in developing the survey for this study as well as the process, piloting through final data analysis, will result in a final product ready to be used by administrators to ascertain whether the school in question is prepared to implement standards-based grading. In addition, the survey will have the capability to identify areas of need, knowledge levels and gaps in teacher and administrator thinking pertaining to grading practices and standards-based grading for professional development planning purposes. Principals, lead teachers, staff development specialists and other district personnel may be able

to use their school-specific data to design training modules within a larger professional development plan. A small number of surveys already developed surfaced—none solely focused on perceptions of teachers and administrators about standards-based grading and effective grading practices. These surveys had no indication any validity and reliability testing had been performed. Therefore, a tested survey ready to be implemented is needed.

Limitations/Delimitations

Limitations-

The data used in this study will be survey data procured through an attitudinal survey. Therefore, the researcher acknowledges the perceptual nature of the data and the presence of compromise to the authenticity of the information somewhat. The responses will offer a perception on the success of standards-based grading and student success at the school. Further research will also be necessary to determine the impact standards-based grading and the effective grading practices therein have on student achievement.

Delimitations-

1. This study will focus on building level principals and teachers in middle schools in the western region of Missouri.

Conclusion

Standards are a part of education and are inextricably tied to grading and reporting. Two primary ways of reporting learning to students, parents and educators themselves are traditional grading and standards-based grading (SBG). The newest system, standards-based grading, has been researched of late but little has been done in the ways of perceptions, particularly at the middle school level. This study will explore the tenets of SBG while gauging middle school teacher and principals' perceptions of this grading and reporting system in the western side of

Missouri. An important piece of this study is the survey itself. Out of an extensive validity and reliability pilot, extensive data analysis and numerous iterations will come a valid and highly reliable survey ready to be used by educators to measure the perceptions of schools, districts or at the state level in regards to standards-based grading to determine readiness for implementation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Within the following literature review, a framework will be provided for this study by delving into what research has been conducted within the standards-based grading realm. The review looks at the history behind standards and where education stands in regard to grading in the classroom. The chapter also takes a look at traditional grading, various SBG components, effective grading practices outlined by current researchers in the field, potential obstacles and challenges to SBG and the collaborative culture necessary for SBG to be successful. Lastly, rationale behind the focus on middle schools within this study is discussed along with the missing research, thus setting the stage for a quantitative study of standards-based grading, effective grading practices therein and the teacher and principal perceptions concerning these topics in middle schools in Western Missouri.

History and Definition of Standards

Studying standards-based grading is not only to examine grading and reporting practices but to also look at what standards are and how they support teaching and learning. Foundational to understanding standards-based grading is knowing what standards are, where standards came from and their current status in our nation and more specifically in Missouri where this particular study will take place. To provide a framework for understanding standards, standards will first be defined philosophically to present the backdrop for why educators are bound, pedagogically speaking, to standards. Educators committed to the best educational practices must embrace the importance of standards in developing successful schools and ultimately successful students.

Standards, as defined by Guskey and Bailey (2010), "…are the goals of teaching and learning. They describe precisely what we want students to know and be able to do as a result of their experiences in school" (pg. 13). Standards bring specificity to learning goals and objectives and provide a direction for instruction and learning as well as an anchor by which to measure student performance. According to Murphy (2006), standards are the "true north" for states and their educational systems (pg. 700). While standards are garnering widespread attention and fame in the education world, Guskey and Bailey (2010) draw a link to the definition above for standards to mid-20th century educator Ralph Tyler who stated "two fundamental questions must be addressed prior to teaching: 1) What do we want students to learn and be able to do? and 2) What evidence would we accept to verify that learning?" (pg. 15). Rick DuFour's (1998) Professional Learning Community (PLC) core questions have propagated this standards-based thinking. The first of DuFour's original PLC questions, "if we believe all kids can learn, exactly what is it that we will expect them to learn?", is a reframing of Tyler's questions and has become the foundation for countless school reformation efforts (DuFour, pg. 59). A number of schools in America currently subscribe to the PLC concepts as the way they do business.

A Nation at Risk, the 1983 report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, brought about the widespread notion American schools were involved in "a rising tide of mediocrity" and states responded by focusing on academic standards with standards-based reform efforts (http://datacenter.spps.org/uploads/SOTW_A_Nation_at_Risk_1983.pdf, pg. 9). Further cementing standards-based education in the United States education system, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 requires all states to establish standards for learning and subsequently utilize assessments that measure student progress on these established standards (Lauer et al., 2005). While there were many states, including Missouri, and schools

already operating with standards, this formalization of the standard and assessment process ushered in the era of standards-based education currently in place.

Prior to NCLB, in an effort to improve the public school system, Missouri passed the Outstanding Schools Act in 1993. This act is officially Senate Bill 380 and established a number of initiatives including; The Show-Me Standards, Curriculum Frameworks, a new statewide assessment, professional development for educators and professional standards for new educators. The Missouri State Board of Education approved The Show-Me Standards on January 18, 1996 under the authority of Section 160.514 in the Revised Statutes of Missouri and the Code of State Regulations, 5 CSR 50-375. 100 (http://dese.mo.gov/standards/documents/Show_Me_Standards_Placemat.pdf). In 2004, the K-12 Grade-Level Expectations were developed to further delineate what students should know and be able to do and ensure students across the state of Missouri are learning the same established set of standards. The Grade-Level Expectations have been revised periodically with input from educators across the state with schools currently using the version 2.0 established in 2008.

The next evolution in standards for the state of Missouri was initiated by a nationwide alliance of state chief school officers and governors. This group of leaders has led the effort to establish a new set of standards that are common among as many states as choose to accept them. The effort is called the Common Core State Standards Initiative and includes 45 states and 3 territories. While the initial effort was nationwide, it is state-led and voluntary for each state to be involved. Missouri opted to become a part of the initiative and adopt the Common Core Standards on June 15, 2010 (http://www.corestandards.org/in-the-states). Recently, Missouri renamed the standards Core Academic Standards. This set of standards will be fully implemented in all schools in the school year 2014-15 with a pilot state assessment administered

in the spring of 2014 and the assessment for accountability required by DESE for all school districts in the spring of 2015.

Impact of Traditional Grading

Traditional grading is not the opposite of the topic of this dissertation—standards-based grading. Simply put, the concepts inherent to traditional grading have been the extent of teacher's knowledge and are where grading has been since the inception of grading itself. More recently, teachers have learned new ways to grade. In the void of direction and instruction in the area of grading, teachers are left to create their own system. Consider the following quote as an illustration of this dilemma; "…this teacher did not have the opportunity to learn what are known as sound grading practices prior to beginning her career…she was left to develop her own system for arriving at report card grades" (Arter et al., 2012, pg. 335).

In order to draw a distinction between traditional grading and standards-based grading, it is crucial to first define traditional grading as it currently stands. The definition of traditional grading as defined by the researcher for the purpose of this study is to accumulate points and scores from a variety of assignments, assessments, projects, etc. along 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 reason behind traditional grading is, "that others want and need the information to make decisions about students. Parents consistently want to see the familiar, periodic report card grades they knew as students so they know how their children are doing" (Arter et al., 2012, pg. 332). Parents, employers, coaches, colleges and other entities may want to see traditional grades and report cards because these traditional reports are comfortable and familiar to them. "A traditional grading system spotlights the individual teacher's subjectivity in grading as well as comparison of students to one another" (Urich, 2012, pg. 11).

According to Haponstall's dissertation on standards-based grading and non-standards-based grading systems, a form of traditional grading in place since the mid-1800s is termed norm-referenced grading (2010, in Marzano, 2010). Norm-referenced grading compares one student to another and reports how one student performs in relation to another student. In addition, norm-referenced grading gave birth to class rankings and grading on the curve, both techniques of relationship affected by variables known and unknown. The comparison among students was the cornerstone to norm-referenced grading and was at one time used to group kids for instruction according to knowledge and skill (Marzano, 2010). Unfortunately, the lack of standardization in setting the criteria to norm-reference students eats at the very basis upon which these comparisons are set and allows for error and subjectivity. The problems inherent to norm-referenced grading lie in this lack of objectivity in setting the grading criteria. Furthermore, the history and background students have in the subject are not factored in, nor are other factors inhibiting learning. Essentially, norm-referenced grading compares the proverbial apple to the orange; indeed a teacher may or may not even know the fact different objects are being compared much less what types of apple or orange are being compared.

Supporting Research for Traditional Grading Practices

Proponents of traditional grading and the practices associated historically in the traditional classroom offer support for continuing with the time-honored system. For example, one of the effective grading practices evidenced in the literature review and delineated in this study is using an incomplete marking rather than using zeros for missing assignments. The 100-point system, one using the zero, presents a larger interval between a D and F when compared to the other letter grades, A, B and C. In his 2008 USA Today article, author Steve Friess points out how proponents of traditional grading justify this gap in the following way:

…the larger gap between D and F exists because passing requires a minimum competency of understanding at least 60% of the material. Handing out more credit than a student has earned is grade inflation, says Ed Fields, founder of HotChalk.com, a site for teachers and parents: "I certainly don't want to teach my children that no effort is going to get them half the way there" (2008, May 19).

Another debated component of traditional grading is entwined in standardized testing used by states across the Union. The controversial component up for discussion is norm-referenced testing-comparing students to one another based upon test performance. Supporters of norm-referenced practices argue the importance of understanding where one student is in relation to another. Universities, when comparing student grade point averages, utilize a form of norm-referencing as they select students for admittance. Underlying support for traditional grading, including comparing students to each other, is girded by teacher beliefs and values; "researchers examining the rationale behind teacher grading practices have found that individual teacher beliefs and values are significant influences" (Cox, 2011, pg. 68). Cox summarizes the impetus, internal principles, for support of traditional grading practices implying also there is history and experience at play. Classroom teachers and administrators have, for the majority, learned in a traditional grading environment. Therefore, the natural tendency is to produce and practice traditional grading practices, comfortable and understood, unless shown or compelled otherwise.

Problematic Tenets of Traditional Grading

As described in an earlier section, traditional grading as it has been used for decades is distinctly different than standards-based grading. Within traditional grading, a number of key components clearly show the limitations inherent to this approach. According to Cizek et al.,

"teachers generally claim to consider and incorporate a variety of objective and subjective factors when assigning grades…teachers seemed to have individual assessment policies that reflected their own individualistic values and beliefs about teaching." (1996, pgs. 159-160). Because the output grade is a mixture of items, factors, etc., in essence, traditional grading practices do not reflect student learning; rather, they show how well a student accumulates points or how responsible they are in their ability to keep track of assignments and turn them in to the teacher in a timely manner. A student may prosper, earning As and Bs, in a traditional grading environment by accumulating the necessary homework points to cover for low test scores.

A perennial piece of traditional grading, extra credit, is as detrimental to communicating learning as any other reporting or grading method used in the classroom. The addition of credit to a grade based upon something other than learning is diluting the grade. One use of extra credit is giving points to students for bringing in Kleenex boxes for the classroom. A particular student could have a 79.2 percent in the class and, with the addition of the Kleenex box points, be moved up to an 80 percent; thus going from a C to a B. Unfortunately, this rise in the student's grade exhibits not what they have learned or an improvement in learning, rather it shows that the student is responsible and remembered to bring in a Kleenex box. Responsibility is key in a student's academic world; however accurate grades should reflect learning and not be muddied by other factors. Supporting this notion, Ken O'Connor (2011) suggested teachers should offer opportunities for students to "provide "extra" evidence that demonstrates a higher level of achievement" as opposed to offering extra credit or bonus points having nothing to do with actual reflecting achievement of learning objectives (pg. 32).

An additional flaw in traditional grading is the comparison of one student to another. This norm-referenced grading, as mentioned above, was seen as problematic in the 1930s due to

the lack of fidelity in teacher grading practices; however this grading practice still exists in the modern classroom (Brookhart, 2009). Brookhart points out, "Crooks was able to cite scholarly arguments against using these norm-referenced methods for grading even then" (2009, pg. 20). In the 1930s, educators were discussing the problems with pitting students against one another and comparing scores across classrooms with different expectations and grading styles. Underscored by the propagation of bell-curve thinking, the main goal of norm-referenced grading, even informally in the classroom, is competition. Grading and reporting should be focused on learning based upon established and communicated criteria or standards (Urich, 2012). Brookhart (2009) has advocated for criterion-referenced grading in schools. Unfortunately, traditional grading systems do not allow for the use of criterion-referenced practices due to the presence of effort, behavior and other nonacademic behaviors in grades.

Hodgepodge grading, a faulty component of traditional grading, is defined as compiling a grade, whether it be a number or letter, from a multitude of pieces of student work (Guskey, 2009). These student work sources could be homework, assessments, projects, quizzes or numerous other pieces of student work. O'Connor posited most schools have inconsistent and broken grading systems, therefore he proposes grades should meet four overarching criteria: they must be accurate, meaningful, and consistent, and must support learning (2011). In order to meet O'Connor's first prong, accuracy, teachers should avoid a conglomeration grade where various types of effort and products are included in the same grade. Learning and effort can be two different things and it follows these two components must be reported in a grade differently. Also denoted as omnibus or conglomerate grading, this limitation to traditional grading muddies the purpose of assigning grades—to clearly communicate learning to students, teachers and parents. The recipient of the grade cannot be sure what the grade is aiming to convey when a

number of factors are included. Brookhart (2009) pointed out one of the many errors with hodgepodge grading, "if everything counts in a final grade, students will do relatively little risk-taking, preferring instead to stick to tried-and-true—and already successful—methods" (pg. 117). Furthermore, conglomerate grading glaringly portrays the limitation to traditional grading as it compiles multiple pieces of evidence into a single grade; therefore, attempting to convey everything yet ultimately conveying nothing. O'Connor stated, "grades are broken when evidence of learning from multiple sources is blended into a single grade and the communication fails to show how successful students have been in mastering individual standards/learning goals" (2011, pg. 58). O'Connor's statement points out another error in traditional grading while highlighting the need for a standards-based approach in order to communicate learning on distinct academic criteria.

Another limitation surfaces in a traditional classroom when a teacher averages grades over a period of time utilizing a number of sources to arrive at a final grade. This final averaged grade has a high level of volatility across teachers' classrooms and within a school because it depends on the weight or points assigned each task within the grading period. Cizek's study of teacher assessment and grading practices illustrates the variation of point weight and grade totals, "More than half of the respondents (52.7%) did not know how the total number of grades they used to calculate students' final grades compared with other teachers in their building" (1996, pg. 168). Furthermore, the very nature of averaging, adding factors and dividing by the number of occurrences, causes the averaged final grade to be an inaccurate reflection of a student's current level of performance or final learning level. Rather, the grade gives a level of performance over a period of time. This grading over time is, in essence, penalizing a student for where he or she started in their level of learning. Opposite to this, standards-based grading gives an accurate

reflection of a student's performance at a given time (Urich, 2012). O'Connor illustrates this error in traditional grading with a parachute analogy (as presented in Urich, 2012). The analogy presents three students' assessments scores after completing a skydiving course. Student A started out with high scores but then had a downward spiral. Student B was unpredictable and scored high and low at various times. Student C started out below the other two students yet she improved steadily until she earned the highest scores by the end of the course; her end-of-course score was the only of the three students that ended up with mastery on the necessary concepts. In a traditional classroom, the instructor would have assigned all three students the same grade based upon their average over the period of the course. But, if the instructor considered the final level of learning, demanding mastery upon the end of the course, Student C was the only student able to successfully pack a parachute. "With traditional grading practices, the skydiver would have selected any of the three students since they all earned the same final score, and yet Students A and B do not possess the skills to keep the skydiver safe" (Urich, 2012, pg. 19). O'Connor's analogy clearly shows why schools will want to veer away from traditional grading practices and step into standards-based grading systems in order to more accurately report a student's learning and progress.

The final limitation within traditional grading is a result of teachers' unfamiliarity with research relating to grading and assessment in the classroom and is more than likely unintended due to lack of knowledge and scrutiny about what a grade conveys. Cizek explains, "A lack of exposure to fundamentals of assessment also helps to explain the problem. Despite its seemingly obvious relevance to teachers' practice, it seems that teachers need help acquiring knowledge about sound assessment" (1996, pg. 162). Teachers come to the profession unaware and ill-prepared to handle the complexities involved in grading causing a limitation in using grades,

albeit unwittingly, as a form of punishment by lowering grades due to academic dishonesty or poor attendance. O'Connor called the practice of reducing grades "another example of broken grades because it uses the assessment/grading policy as a tool to discipline students for inappropriate behavior, thus distorting student achievement" (2011, pg. 38). Including academic dishonesty in a student's grade is incongruent with the purpose behind grades-to communicate learning. Another piece of traditional grading is allowing students' grades to reflect attendance. One of the reasons including attendance is a limitation is the fact students come from a variety of backgrounds and home situations. Getting to school may or may not be the student's responsibility and parents or other factors could get in the way of attending school. Therefore, a teacher intent on reflecting achievement in a grade should not allow attendance to factor in. One common example all schools deal with is the student with poor attendance, missing two or three days per week, who comes in after being gone numerous days and scores extremely high on an assessment. However, due to these absences this student may have a poor grade because he has not turned in assignments or is behind on a project. Yet, this same student was able to evidence mastery of standards on the assessment. This student example clearly underscores how a traditional grade is limited by the inclusion of attendance in the grade. As Brookhart (2009) relays, "one reason teachers may resist the "achievement" only rule for grading is that they are acutely aware of the importance of some of the nonachievement factors for developing the learning skills and dispositions that will serve students well" (pg. 116). While it is true students will need to learn nonacademic behaviors, such as attendance, in order to be successful in life, little evidence exists supporting the use of grades to this end. Brookhart also cites a number of court cases involving utilizing grades as a penalty for behavior and absenteeism (2009). The courts have historically upheld school districts and the policies therein, yet this legal context is

outside of the realm of research into how lowering grades actually affects learning and changing student behavior.

Standards-Based Grading Components

In a standards-based educational climate, schools are responsible for standards-based instruction, grading and reporting. Standards-based grading and reporting is not a new concept yet it is relatively scarce in actual implementation within schools across the United States. Extensive literature has been produced in the past decade concerning standards and grading and reporting based on standards. In the quintessential book, *Classroom Assessment and Grading That Work,* Marzano (2006) describes the flawed system currently used by the vast majority of schools, "obviously, from the perspective of standards-based education, isolated overall letter grades (or overall percentage scores or even average rubric scores) are extremely deficient because they cannot provide the level of detailed feedback necessary to enhance student learning" (pg. 125). Marzano's statement provides the launching pad for this dissertation. O'Connor (2009) adds to the argument for improving grading practices and the need for better communication provided by standards-based grading; "communication is most effective when it is clear and concise; grades are certainly concise, and they can be clear communication vehicles if there is a shared understanding of how they are determined and, thus, what they mean" (pg. 16). If the current traditional grading system is unclear and deficient, there has to be a better system available to better give feedback to teachers, students and parents. The evidence of the literature review points to benefits of standards-based grading as a better system for communicating student learning.

Feedback

Understanding quality feedback is key to truly having a grasp of standards-based grading, reporting, assessment and instruction. According to educational researcher Shute (2008), feedback is "information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behavior for the purpose of improving learning" (pg. 154). There are different types of feedback; formal, informal, formative and summative. The point of feedback is to give information to the learner and any other parties that might be interested such as parents, teachers, and administrators. Information pertaining to learning given to the various parties should have the purpose of enhancing student learning and can be given to a group of students or in one-on-one situations (Marzano, 2010). To illustrate how crucial feedback is to education and student learning, Hattie and Timperley's 2007 study outlined a meta-analysis of 12 previous meta-analyses, including 196 studies and 6,972 effect sizes. The average effect size found by Hattie and Timperley (2007) was .79 for feedback, .40 being a typical one-year of growth for a learner, with a 29 percentile point gain in achievement. Hattie and Timperley describe how feedback is vital to student learning as they conclude the following:

> Learning can be enhanced to the degree that students share the challenging goals of learning, adopt self-assessment and evaluation strategies, and develop error detection procedures and heightened self-efficacy to tackle more challenging tasks leading to mastery and understanding of lessons (2007, pg. 103).

For the purposes of this study, the center focus will be on grading and how to provide feedback to students on an assessment as well as to parents in an official form over a specific time period such as a quarter, semester or year. Teachers are required to provide some form of grade at the end of a grading period based upon the student work and their feedback. According

to Marzano (2010), "this overall evaluation is in the form of some type of overall grade commonly referred to as an 'omnibus grade'. Unfortunately, grades add a whole new layer of error to the assessment process" (pg. 15). This "layer of error" is germane to the thrust of this study as mentioned above. Teachers, undoubtedly, desire to give valuable feedback in the way of grades, however the knowledge and expertise is not evident in teacher practices in accurately compiling and computing these grades. Marzano's quote gives a compelling reason to move to a standards-based grading system. Learning is the reason schools exist and reporting the learning, grades, should be top priority. Inequities and inconsistencies in grading can be fixed by implementing standards-based grading and allowing the grade to truly report learning. According to Brookhart (2009), standards-based grading gives meaning to grades and indicates more specifically what is being learned.

Classroom Assessment

One other element of standards-based grading for review is classroom assessment; both formative and summative. Assessment, in general, is "anything a teacher does to gather information about a student's knowledge or skill regarding a specific topic" (Marzano, 2010, pg.22). The two different types of assessment, formative and summative, have very different purposes yet are important in their own right within the classroom. Formative assessment "is to be interpreted as all of those activities undertaken by teachers and/or by their students which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged" (as cited in Marzano, 2010, pg. 23). Summative assessment can be defined as an endpoint check to determine a student's final status, his or her learning level or ability to relate knowledge acquired. The difference between formative assessment and summative assessment can be illustrated by the following analogy:

As illustrated by Bob Stake's maxim: when the cook tastes the soup it is formative, when the guests taste the soup it is summative. Thus a key issue is timing, and it is possible that the same stimulus (e.g., tasting the soup) can be interpreted and used for both forms of assessment. Hence, it is NOT the instrument…that is formative and summative. It is the timing of the interpretation and the purpose to which the information is used (as cited in Marzano, 2010, pg. 27).

Therefore, a certain assessment is not inherently formative or summative, rather it depends on how and when the assessment is used. Formative assessment is essentially shaping and checking along the way with time for learning to change and improve. Summative assessment can be too late for learning to continue or grow unless teachers follow the myriad of effective grading practices outlined in this research.

Arter et al. (2012) outline classroom assessment as foundational in the learning focus accompanying standards-based grading; "teachers use assessment information during the learning to diagnose student needs, plan next steps in instruction, provide students with targeted practice, and offer effective feedback" (pg. 24). In Arter, Chappuis, Chappuis and Stiggins's work, the authors bring about the idea of "assessment *for* learning" and how classroom assessments can be used to inform students and teachers about the learning process and what potential areas of growth may exist (2012, pg. 25). The contrast to assessment for learning is "assessment *of* learning"; the difference being in the purpose of each type of assessment (Arter et al., 2012, pg. 25). Assessment for learning seeks to guide, shape and produce learning opportunities leaving the learning window open. On the other hand, assessment of learning is summative and closed in nature endeavoring to gauge whether or not learning happened and is used primarily for accountability purposes (Arter et al., 2012).

Included as subsets of classroom assessment are three types of assessments; obtrusive, unobtrusive and student-generated as pointed out by Marzano (2010). These types of assessments can be used either in a formative or summative manner by teachers and students. Obtrusive assessments are those that stop the normal progress of classroom instruction; in fact, no instruction occurs during an obtrusive assessment. The most ubiquitous form of obtrusive assessment is the traditional paper/pencil test. The paper/pencil test is typically scheduled and notice is given to students ahead of time. On the other hand, the second type of classroom assessment, unobtrusive assessment, does not interrupt classroom instruction and "students might not even be aware that they are being assessed" during this type of assessment (Marzano, 2010, pg. 24). Unobtrusive assessment is primarily accomplished through observation, during a performance, in a lab setting or other student-centered activities. Essentially, the teacher is observing and assessing student progress and learning while the student performs a certain task. Lastly, student-generated assessments are simple to understand and utilize yet this type of assessment is relatively scarce in the typical classroom. Student-generated assessments are ideas or ways in which a student decides he/she will show knowledge on a particular topic. The manner in which the student shows knowledge could be an obtrusive assessment; but, the key to student-generated assessments is the idea comes from the student and the student chooses how to show learning (Marzano, 2010). Important to remember here are these three types of assessments are simply types of classroom assessments suggested by Marzano. Furthermore, each of these assessments can be used in a formative or summative manner depending on the ultimate purpose the teacher wishes to fulfill.

Definition of Standards-Based Grading

Standards-based grading is defined as grading that references student achievement to specific topics within each subject area (Marzano, 2010). The word "grading" is interchangeable with "reporting" in this study. In order to accurately implement standards-based grading, performance standards, also called reporting or measurement topics, must first be identified. Once identified, the teacher can grade a student's performance on each standard and, subsequently, report that performance on a grade card. Researchers such as Marzano, Guskey and Stiggins are in agreement in the literature that performance categories are key to standards-based grading and a rubric or scale most accurately measures a student's performance. Four performance categories have become the most popular and ubiquitous in school districts as well as state departments of education for assessment purposes-advanced, proficient, basic and below basic.

The distinction needs to be made between standards-based systems and standards-referenced systems. For the purposes of this dissertation, standards-based grading and standards-referenced reporting are used synonymously; however the standards-based system is certainly different when the grading piece is absent. The absence of the word "grading" in the standards-based system is noteworthy. This absence is crucial because of the following definitions. Standards-based systems do not allow students to move to the next level, learning objective or grade identifier, until the student has demonstrated competency or mastery at the current level (Marzano, 2010). In a standards-referenced system, students' level of mastery is reported based on or referenced to learning objectives. Students may or may not master each subject or content area's list of skills, yet they still move on to the next level unless serious grade issues are evident in which retention may be a strategy. "…the vast majority of schools and districts that claim to

have standards-based systems in fact have standards-referenced systems" (Marzano, 2010, pg. 18-19).

Scriffiny (2008), a Colorado math teacher, cites one of the reasons for standards-based grading as the need to challenge the status quo of traditional grading. The status quo has been to assign grades for everything from homework to assessments. However, students of all types can earn poor grades even if they are learning because they may not be proficient at completing homework. Moreover, this same student could pass an assessment, exhibiting learning, but fail the class due to poor homework scores. These inequities and inconsistencies can be fixed by implementing standards-based grading and allowing the grade to truly report learning. Guskey and Bailey (2010) present clear reasoning behind standards-based grading and the need to analyze our current grading and report card system as to whether or not it is communicating effectively:

> As part of their professional responsibilities, these educators must collect evidence on student achievement and performance, evaluate that evidence, and then communicate the results of their evaluations to others through a variety of means, report cards being the most obvious (pg. 10).

Standards-based grading gives meaning to grades and indicates more specifically what is being learned. This approach to reporting learning will ultimately promote improved scoring practices, assessment quality and scrutiny of teachers' overall approach to instruction; thus improving the quality of the school as a whole.

According to O'Connor (2011), "the "fix" needed for grades to be meaningful is that they must directly reflect specified learning goals" (pg. 4). O'Connor's statement summarizes the premise for this dissertation topic—meaningful grades tied to learning goals or standards.

O'Connor's (2011) suggestions for fixing broken grades provide a framework for effective grading practices to be employed by schools and are explained as follows; include only academic achievement in grades by avoiding the use of student behaviors in grade calculations, provide support for the learner while avoiding the use of reductions on student work submitted late, allow multiple opportunities for assessment (retakes); grades indicate student growth and understanding vs. giving points for extra credit work, apply other consequences and reassess to determine actual level of achievement for incidents of academic dishonesty, report student attendance concerns separately of academic achievement in grade determination, use only individual achievement as summative evidence of learning; provide formative feedback on group work, organize and report evidence by standards or learning goals, utilize clear performance standards in assigning grades, assign grades based on each student's performance compared to preset standards, use evidence gathered from assessments that meet standards of quality – purpose, clear targets, method of design and communication, consider multiple measures of central tendency and growth while using professional judgment, use reassessment and other evidence that is not counterproductive (i.e. avoid use of zeros or grade reductions for punishment) in determining achievement, use only summative evidence to determine grades by using information from formative assessments and practice to provide feedback for improvement, emphasize more recent achievement and developmental growth through repeated opportunities over summarizing evidence accumulated over time and include students throughout the grading process.

Effective Grading Practices

To effectively implement standards-based grading, certain grading practices must be in place to undergird the concept of providing effective and meaningful feedback to students,

parents and teachers. While teachers have the best of intentions in grading, or scoring, student work, they may not understand the flaws and errors inherent to practices that have been in place in schools since the inception of schools themselves. Brookhart (2011) sums up conventional grading as, "…one grade sums up achievement in a subject, and that one grade often includes effort and behavior" (pg. 10). Mathematical and theoretical flaws are inherent to conventional grading practices. Below is a comparison of effective grading practices with traditional grading practices to be discussed in detail in this section. The following represents key elements within the two primary grading practices in this study and is not all-inclusive:
Traditional grading components; assignments and assessments are final, focus is on accountability, missing work is assigned a zero, averages and all work included in grade, and practice is scored and included in grade. Effective grading components; redos and retakes are given, focus is on learning, missing work is assigned an incomplete, uses most recent learning and replaces grades, and practice is utilized in a risk-free environment.

The first effective grading practice to explore is redos and retakes. Students do not learn at the same rate nor do they all learn at the same level of mastery. Teachers are encouraged to have a curriculum map in order to plan instruction and ensure standards are taught within the scheduled time period such as the quarter or school year. However, arbitrary decisions about when a unit will be completed or the assessment given do not take into account student learning differences. The concept of redos and retakes takes these differences into account. However, some teachers simply do not allow retakes and redos in their classroom. The reasoning may be to build responsibility or provide real-world experience. Wormeli (2011) debunks this way of thinking, "in reality, these practices have the opposite effect: They retard student achievement and maturation….students disengage from the school's mission and the adults who care for

them" (pg. 22). While there may be a greater number of teachers allowing redos or retakes on assignments and assessments, there is still much disparity in what to give as a grade or score on the work. According to Wormeli, best practice is to, "replace the previous grade or mark with the most recent one; don't average the two attempts together" (2011, pg. 25).

Wormeli (2006) terms the type of teaching where redos and retakes are not allowed as "conveyor-belt learning" (pg. 24). If a student does not understand or master the material the first time around, it is too late because the conveyor belt continues and there is no stop button to reteach and, subsequently, give redos and retakes. This way of instructing is unfortunate for students and unrealistic in preparing them for the real world. A lawyer can attempt the bar exam multiple times like the prospective certified public accountant can take sections of the Uniform CPA examination again if he or she fails. These examinees are allowed to take one section at a time and then may retake any failed portions of the exam. Clearly, real life allows for redos and retakes as this real-life example helps discredit the philosophy that we must prepare students for real life by not allowing redos or retakes. The overall goal of allowing students to deepen their learning by offering multiple and varied opportunities is to ensure students accomplish the reason why they are called a student: learn. Learning is the main reason schools exist; therefore, it should be the goal guiding our practices as opposed to simply indiscriminately closing the window on an assessment.

The next grading practice to examine is avoiding assigning a zero for missing or unfinished work. Giving a zero skews a grade tremendously because it is an extreme score and weighs heavily in the final grade if using an average (Guskey, 2009). Students realize that a zero will hurt their final grade and experience hopelessness when assigned a zero, much less two or

more. Reeves (2004) makes a case for the mathematical incorrectness when a teacher gives a zero on a 100-point scale:

> This (assigning a zero using a 100-point scale) defies logic and mathematical accuracy. On a 100-point scale, the interval between numerical and letter grades is typically 10 points, with the break points at 90, 80, 70, and so on. But when the grade of zero is applied to a 100-point scale, the interval between the D and F is not 10 points but 60 points…To insist on the use of a zero on a 100-point scale is to assert that work that is not turned in deserves a penalty that is many times more severe than that assessed for work that is done wretchedly and is worth a D. Readers were asked earlier how many points would be awarded to a student who failed to turn in work on a grading scale of 4, 3, 2, 1, 0, but I'll bet not a single person arrived at the answer "minus 6." Yet that is precisely the logic that is employed when the zero is awarded on a 100-point scale (pgs. 324-25).

Not only does giving a zero defy mathematical thinking, it also avoids what should be the true goal of giving an assignment and then a grade. The classroom learning goal should be for students to complete the assignment and attain a grade that shows mastery of the content. The logical consequence for not turning in an assignment or turning incomplete in to the teacher must be for the student to do the assignment. Giving a zero allows the student to move on without doing the assignment and does not ensure the student masters the content. Conventional thinking has been to punish the student or make a point by assigning a zero (Reeves, 2004). Yet, if learning is our ultimate goal in education we must adhere to effective practices unmasked by research and logical reasoning such as making students do an assignment, thus teaching them a lesson, in life and in content, as opposed to simply punishing them.

Another effective grading practice to employ is to provide a risk-free environment for practice in the classroom. The typical grade in a conventional grading system is compiled from an amalgam of classwork, homework, quizzes, tests, projects, and classroom behavior (Fisher et al., 2011). Classwork, homework and other assignments leading up to an assessment should not be included in a student's grade because these activities are for practice and should be set up as learning opportunities without risk. O'Connor states, "Many teachers inappropriately include homework as a specific part of grades. Most of the time, homework is formative and, therefore, should not be a part of a grade" (2009, pg. 127). If the purpose of grades is to reflect learning, than other behaviors such as effort and attitude as well as practice work leading up to the final learning goal should not be included in a grade. Students should have the opportunity to practice without penalty much like they do in sports. Coaches do not grade practices in order to give a final/summative grade. The goal of practicing in sports is to improve, learn new skills, make errors, perfect specific skills and receive feedback and improve in order to excel in the assessment: the game (Deddeh et al., 2010). Educators can learn from the world of sports, but tend to do the opposite. When classwork or homework is graded, introducing risk to the equation, students may only do what is necessary to get the grade on the work. There may even be a temptation to cheat on the assignment if the student does not have it complete or does not understand the material. Educators tend to act as if students are always in the "proficient-runner stage" as opposed to the "learning-to-run" stage of development (Reeves, 2011, pg. 23). The student cannot be expected to perform in practice as if it were in a game when new skills are being honed. Similar to the grading with zeroes concept, the motivation for assignments should be to see students learn and giving zeroes or requiring students to practice in a risky situation will undermine the ultimate goal of student learning. Rather than students deciding not to do

homework when it is not graded, students realize the connection between practice and performing well on the assessment, "they (students) begin to understand that their effort determines outcomes, which is a valuable lesson for us all" (Fisher et al., 2011, pg. 51).

Obstacles and Challenges to Standards-Based Grading

There are many challenges associated with grading as Brookhart (2009) points out, "grades have been used to serve three general purposes simultaneously: ranking…; reporting results…; and contributing to learning" (pg. 24). Traditionally, these three purposes have been considered valid yet they have different perspectives (Marzano, 2010). Grading is different between individual classrooms, schools, districts and states. According to Guskey (2009) there is typically a commonality among teachers in what they include in a grade; tests, assignments, projects, portfolios, classwork, homework, effort, growth, participation, reports, quizzes, unit tests and other assessments. However, this sort of hodgepodge grading results in grades being calculated according to each teacher's different perspective and philosophy on what percentage or value should be applied to each student learning product. Therefore, grades across teacher classrooms and certainly schools retain very little reliability and can only be interpreted within the context of each teacher's grading practices, albeit they may be vague and unknown to the interpreter (Marzano, 2010). This difference in practices is another reason to focus on effective grading practices and how student learning should be tied to standards.

Marzano (2010) has found standards-based grading to be extremely inaccurate if teachers are not given the proper professional development and support. Teachers must be specifically trained in how to utilize proficiency scales and how to apply the terms below basic, basic, proficient and advanced to formative assessments. Grading rubrics or scales must be in place for the consistency necessary to successful standards-based

grading to be present. There is the potential for a standards-based grading system to be as ineffective and inconsistent as traditional grading if teachers remain fragmented and grading practices in disarray.

Another challenge with standards-based grading is dealing with grade distribution and perception of grade inflation. First, there has been a pervasive view in education in regard to distribution of grades. In undergraduate education, teachers are taught the grade distribution in a particular class or group of students should reflect the bell curve. This misinterpretation is an egregious error when making decisions about student learning. The key point lost on teachers is the bell curve is distribution before interventions are applied. An example given by Guskey (2011) illustrates this point well:

> If we conducted an experiment on crop yield in agriculture, for example, we would expect the results to resemble a normal curve. A few fertile fields would produce a high yield; a few infertile fields would produce a low yield…clustering around the center of the distribution. But if we intervene in that process--say we add a fertilizer--we would hope to attain a very different distribution of results. Specifically, we would hope to have all fields, or nearly all, produce a high yield (pg. 18).

The prevalent misperception of the bell curve leads to an unrealistic expectation that student grades will be distributed evenly across the range—A, B, C, D and F. In reality, when schools provide interventions, quality instruction and high standards for student learning the majority of student will be in the A to B range. Concern over inflation and what to do with burgeoning honor rolls can exist. However, when schools communicate the new approach to grading and reporting learning, students and parents will understand why more students are earning As and Bs. If grades are truly reflecting learning, it follows that higher grades or larger

numbers of students earning such grades will reflect higher levels of learning. Summing this concept up, Goodwin stated, "tougher grades don't necessarily translate into better learning" (2011, pg. 81). The opposite holds true as well—more students earning As and Bs, what could be seen as weak or loose grading, does not necessarily translate into less learning. In fact, the tenets of standards-based grading support the idea more learning is occurring as grades go up when teachers utilize the supporting effective grading practices.

Finally, a major challenge to standards-based grading is garnering buy in and support from the stakeholders in the community at large; parents, board members, interested community members and legislators. According to Reeves (2011), "knowing these things is not enough. Unless education leaders can engage…in a rational discussion about grading, progress will be as elusive now as it was a century ago" (pg. 76). Reeves (2011) suggests beginning the conversation with controversial topics such as eliminating the use of zero and using homework as practice without grades assigned can "undermine" the standards-based grading implementation process (pg. 76). The suggested alternative is to start discussing things educators and those involved stakeholders can agree on such as the need for grading to reflect learning, be timely and accurate in their reflection of student progress. Furthermore, making clear what will not change can promote trust in the school system as various guidelines and procedures do begin to change. Reeves notes schools should reassure parents that letter grades will still exist, the change is additional information will be provided regarding student learning. In addition, learning progress will be separate from behaviors for the purpose of demystifying what the letter grade actually means. Parents will not only accept the notion of more information concerning their child's learning, they will come to support and request this type of information. Ultimately, as Reeves points out, an approach to this conversation should spring from a mutual

love for students and what is best for their learning needs. Those individuals, whether in education or outside, in disagreement with the change and new approach to grading should not be viewed as naysayers or negative. Rather, those involved in the discussion are encouraged to value each other's opinions and assume a professional and inclusive attitude with one another.

Teacher and Principal Perceptions

The main thrust of this study was to look at the perceptions, or attitudes, held toward standards-based grading and the grading practices therein by teachers and principals. The existing literature has little research regarding principal perception but a number of studies have covered teacher perception of grading practices as well as administrative leadership during transition into standards-based grading. Tatum (2010) studied teacher perceptions during the state of Georgia's 2004 transition to standards-based curriculum. Tatum's summary posed the idea teachers have marked perceptions as to administrators and the support during a transition; "as the faculty embarked…leadership became an important mark of stability…educators needed to have reassurance that their acting principal would recognize, support, and reaffirm…through supportive measures, educational leaders could assist faculty members during transitions" (2010, pg. 4). Dyb (2012) studied teacher perception of middle level grading practices along with the factors influencing their own classroom grading practices. Dyb found, "the most important perceived influences (on grading practices) were on-going professional development and time for collaboration" (2012, pg., 48). Within Dyb's study, the author summarized his findings regarding teacher's perceptions of their grading practices; "first, teachers reportedly perceived that their grading practices do more than measure academic achievement. Second, teachers reportedly gave varying importance to differing assessments. Third, teachers gave varying reasons for scores and grades" (2012, pg. 49). Dyb also found "implementation of effective

grading practices was reportedly perceived to require on-going support of administrative leaders" (2012, pg. 50). The following summary of influences of school leadership on grading practices is from Dyb's dissertation which showed participant responses evidencing the perception of administration and school leadership as exhibiting strong support of the teachers' grading practices (adapted from Dyb, 2012, pgs. 44-45). The teachers' responses indicated administrative support caused reflection, discussion, evolution of grading practices and an overall open door attitude bringing about research-based practices in the classroom (Dyb, 2012).

The scarcity of research into principal perceptions as they relate to grading practices presents an opportunity for this study to be on the leading edge of standards-based grading and effective grading practices. Underscored by Dyb's (2012) research, principal support of teachers as they implement standards-based reform and research-based grading practices is paramount. Teachers need professional development to learn the precepts of effective grading practices, time to implement and continuous support from administrators and leadership for these reforms to be implemented with fidelity and for teachers to remain positive in their perception of said reforms.

Collaborative Culture for Standards-Based Grading

Traditional grading, at its very core, is performed in an isolated manner and teachers can be independent of one another in their approach to assigning grades; albeit arbitrarily and with major error. On the contrary, integral to the approach to standards-based grading is the collaborative nature in which teachers and principals must operate for this system to function well. Urich sets the stage stating standards-based grading practices, "open the door to shared, collaborative practice among educators" (2012, pg. 41). Furthermore, schools are called to be learning organizations engaged in "learningful" conversations; a term coined by Peter Senge (1990, pg. 4). Being a learning organization entails working together in a meaningful way to

examine the school's vision, ascertain where the school is in respect to that vision and then make decisions as a team to move forward in attaining the vision. In order to effectively move to the goal of reporting grades based upon standards, or criteria, teachers must work together to adopt the standards for their classroom and agree upon effective assessments. Also, principals should work alongside teachers to transition from traditional grading to the effective grading practices mandated by research. In 1998, DuFour and Eaker penned the watershed book, Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement, and consequently became the fathers of collaborative cultures in modern American schools. "DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2006) presented how a cultural shift takes place when teachers are working collaboratively and engaged in conversations grounded in results and learning" (Urich, 2012, pg. 41). No longer can schools have classrooms isolated in thinking resulting in a disconnect between standards, grading, reporting and instructional decisions.

As outlined in this study, effective grading practices call for the use of formative assessment grounded in standards. The final grade, representative of current learning levels, for a student is calculated using multiple methods after a large number of opportunities for redos and retakes. The purpose behind standards-based grading is to communicate learning to students, parents and teachers. "Effective communication is impossible, however, if the people involved do not know or agree on what the relationship is between performance and the numeric or letter symbols that appear in grades" (Reeves, 2011, pg. 63). For the ultimate purpose to be realized the teachers involved must collaborate around what the grade will entail and how the student's learning will be reported, thus reducing error and faulty thinking in grading practices.

Middle School Focus

This dissertation focused on middle schools prompted by the dearth of quantitative research into attitudes and perceptions concerning standards-based grading and the effective grading practices therein at the middle level. Perceptions drive actions and actions directly affect student learning, thus the need to determine what perceptions concerning standards-based grading are in order for actions to potentially change. Furthermore, the researcher desired to bring the middle school dimension into the body of standards-based grading at large. The one quantitative dissertation in the standards-based grading realm found was conducted in a middle school in one large suburban school district in Virginia by Grimes (2010). While a similar study in nature, descriptive quantitative, the thrust was entirely different as it sought to determine what grades mean according to the teachers involved in the study. Perceptions and attitudes of teachers and principals towards standards-based grading itself will be the primary concentration of this study. The focus on middle school, in particular, in this dissertation is also based upon the researcher's experience as a teacher and administrator at the middle school level. Fourteen years as a teacher and principal give considerable depth to this study's middle school perspective. With little known about perception regarding standards-based grading and effective supporting grading practices, the need to strive to fill the void becomes patent.

Elementary schools have historically been inclined to operate within a standards-based grading archetype. The natural elementary bent and grading system is based upon specific skills and standards reported to parents separately. In fact, most elementary schools do not utilize letter grades at all. These schools implement a variation of the following example:

Student Name: A. Student

Counts to 100: 4	Reporting Key:
Writes first and last name: 3	4= Exceptional
Kind to others: 4	3= Proficient
Reads fluently: 3	2= Progressing
Adds to 10: 1	1= Beginning

The above sample report card, adapted from Guskey and Bailey is typical of elementary schools beginning in preschool and carrying on through fifth or sixth grade in some cases (2010, pg. 64). However, "most middle school and high school reporting forms allow only a single grade to be assigned to students for each course or subject area" (Guskey and Bailey, 2010, pg. 149). Anywhere from the third grade to the sixth grade, schools begin reporting student progress using letter grades. These letter grades begin the problematic grading practices as described above in this dissertation. The hodgepodge, conglomerate and omnibus approaches to letter grades pose a need for something different and better. No clear reason has been unearthed as to why middle schools should not and could not continue the previously established elementary approach to grading. Middle schools do not deal with the controversial and problematic components of grading high schools deal with such as grade point averages, ranking, competitive college scholarships and other constricting factors. The high school factors do not preclude the ninth through twelfth grades from joining the standards-based grading revolution; however these factors do bring considerable confusion and will take careful deliberation and coordination to make the high school-college transition seamless. On the contrary, because middle schools do not deal with these convoluting factors, the landscape may be open for standards-based grading to be continued from the elementary level. Guskey and Bailey acknowledge the need "to make

middle school and high school grades more meaningful" (2010, pg. 149). Consequently, focus on the middle school is paramount to the growth of standards-based grading, a focus on learning and proliferation of the effective grading practices therein. This study will provide a springboard for the already established elementary grading process to proliferate up into the middle school level. Furthermore, the importance of knowing the landscape for standards-based grading in Western Missouri through this descriptive study cannot be understated for those leaders delving into this grading arena.

Absence of Research

Research related to multiple aspects of standards-based grading is limited at best. First, various dissertations related to perceptions associated with standards-based grading itself and the effectiveness therein have been completed. However, teacher and principal perceptions as to the grading practices within standards-based grading has been researched or recorded minimally. Limited research into the actual implementation process and a small number of qualitative studies has been administered documenting small groups of educators and their insights into this process. This particular research focused on implementation has been largely focused on the elementary and middle level. The middle level research, specifically Tracy in 2005 and Urich in 2012, is overwhelmingly comprised of case studies and, therefore, qualitative in nature. There is a void in respect to quantitative studies relating to perception and effective grading practices. One case study was found focusing on high schools and traditional grading versus non-traditional grading practices (Cox, 2011). There is one dissertation focused on perceptions pertaining to rural high schools in Nebraska and standards-based grading itself (Stephens, 2010). Souter analyzed aspects of standards-based grading at the elementary level in 2009. Haponstall

focused on standards-based grading and the correlation between the grades a student earns and achievement on Colorado's state assessment (2009).

Conclusion

Schools are in the business of student learning and preparing students to wield the skills necessary to be productive members of society. Throughout the 1990s, and with Iowa's adoption is 2008, all 50 states have mandated standards in effect in the public schools within their jurisdiction (O'Connor, 2009). These standards bring specificity and heightened accountability to schools' business of learning. Effective grading practices bring consistency to teacher implementation of standards-based grading and are paramount to schools moving forward successfully in this standards-based atmosphere and realizing high levels of student learning. Students, parents, teachers and other stakeholders have an interest in the outcomes of learning whether in the form of grades, marks, rankings, etc. Standards-based grading, when used along with effective grading practices, clearly communicates student learning to the interested parties by breaking apart the traditional letter grade, separating academic learning from responsibility and effort as well as listing learning levels by each specific standard.

The preceding literature review showcases the large amount of research within the SBG and effective grading practice realm. However, the review also exposes the lack of research into teacher and principal perceptions at the middle school level bringing forth the need for this study. The results of this study will provide a clear picture of the landscape in middle schools in Western Missouri pertaining to standards-based grading and the coinciding effective grading practices. School leaders, principals, teachers and those desiring continuous school improvement will have an interest in knowing the perceptions regarding SBG and will be able to utilize the survey tool designed for this study to gauge building and district level perceptions. The data

from the survey tool can be invaluable in setting the stage for school change as well as proactively highlighting areas needing professional development to better prepare teachers for SBG practices.

Chapter Three presents the methodology, participants, survey instrument, pilot process and guidelines involved in this quantitative study. Chapter Four will provide the findings of the study with an analysis of the results and possibilities for future research to follow in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This descriptive, non-experimental, quantitative dissertation studied standards-based grading (SBG) as an effective method of grading and reporting student learning. The survey instrument focused on teacher and principal attitudes toward SBG in middle schools in Western Missouri. Two hundred seventeen middle schools and junior highs in 36 counties within this Western Missouri region were included. Each of these schools includes at least one of the grades 5^{th}-8^{th}, deemed the middle school range for this study, but has grades configured in a variety of ways (i.e., 4th-8^{th}, 4^{th}-12^{th}, 5^{th}-7^{th}). The study results were disaggregated by the five different demographic questions: 1) How many years have you been in education?, 2) Is your school a-Middle School or Junior High?, 3) How many students are in your school?, 4) If your school is currently implementing standards-based grading, how long? and 5) My current role is?. The main goal is to determine the landscape of middle schools in the region as to their readiness and/or openness to SBG implementation and the practices therein based upon the reported perceptions of principals and teachers.

Participants

The attitudinal survey was given to teachers and principals in middle schools of all sizes in Western Missouri. Western Missouri has been determined to range north to include Kansas City, east to Lebanon, south to the Arkansas border and west to the Kansas border—a total of thirty-six counties. The Western Missouri population of schools represents 217 principals, 7,901 teachers and 87,139 students. Some of the schools are currently implementing SBG and others are not involved in SBG. All middle schools, regardless of size, type, grade arrangement or configuration were contacted to be involved in this study. The survey was given to principals

and teachers in each school to determine their perception and attitudes regarding SBG and grading practices therein. Demographic information was collected to assist in separating various groups for analyzing and comparing various sets of data.

The survey, informed email consent, ethics certificate and Research Review Board (RRB) application were sent to the RRB electronically and as a paper copy with the appropriate signatures in August 2013 for approval. Participants give consent to be involved in the study by completing the online survey. The submitted forms outlined participant confidentiality, the ability to withdraw at any time without penalty, lack of any foreseen harm to respondents and a brief overview of the study's aim to provide a synopsis of the teacher and principal perception regarding standards-based grading and grading practices in the Western Missouri region.

Survey Rationale and Construction

The survey used in this study is composed of two scales: 1. Collaborative School Culture and 2. Perception of Standards-Based Grading Practices. The first scale, collaborative school culture, comes from the research pointing at the need for collaboration, fidelity, and an alignment to the professional learning community tenets. In order for a school to be poised to be successful at standards-based grading, the adults within the school walls must be focused on learning, willing to take risks and work together to pursue researched-based classroom grading and reporting practices, part of the second scale on the survey, perception of standards-based grading practices. The classroom grading and reporting practices within this second scale tie directly to the research and support successful standards-based grading. Determining the existence, or absence, of these practices will shed light on schools individually and Western Missouri as to the level of implementation of these practices.

The second scale is also integral to the purpose behind this study; assessing the landscape in middle schools in Western Missouri as to readiness for standards-based grading. Teachers and principals will have varied views and perspectives based upon experiences, or lack thereof, with standards-based grading. The data from this scale painted a picture for educators wanting to move forward with standards-based grading as well as give a starting point for further research to be assayed. Lastly, the demographic data allowed segmentation of the various populations and comparison of homogeneous groups; for example early-career teachers and seasoned veterans. Knowing the various shades within the population providing the survey data added depth and breadth to the data when it was analyzed.

Final Survey Instrument Iteration

The survey uses a likert-type scale:

(1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Disagree or (4) Strongly Disagree:

<u>Collaborative School Culture:</u>

1. My school has a collaborative culture.
2. My school supports risk-taking by teachers in the classroom.
3. My school is open to changes in instructional practice each year.
4. My school has reached consensus on clear and consistent standards all students need to know and be able to do.
5. My school has had conversations centering on grading practices.
6. My school has had conversations centering on grade reporting practices.

<u>Perception of Standards-Based Grading Practices:</u>

7. Parents and community members support change in grading and reporting practices.
8. Penalizing late work should be part of the grading process.

9. My school knows what it looks like when students master the agreed upon standards.
10. A student's grade should not be lowered for academic dishonesty.
11. A student's attendance should not be reflected in his/her grade.
12. I give incompletes rather than zeros for missing assignments.
13. I believe student effort should be reported separately from academic learning.
14. A student's overall grade should be comprised of a number of formative and summative components (projects, quizzes, tests, etc.).
15. When calculating a student's end-of-term (quarter, semester, etc.) grade, I average assessments to arrive at one final grade.
16. A report card should report student progress toward learning goals.
17. I believe homework should not be included in the overall grade.
18. Class grades should be distributed according to a bell curve.
19. I would prefer to have a report card showing grades tied to specific standards within a subject.
20. A standards-based report card communicates specifically what students know and can do.
21. I believe moving toward a standards-based approach to grading student learning is key to improving student achievement.
22. Standards-based grading practices are an improvement upon traditional grading practices.
23. Standards-based grades communicate learning effectively to students and parents.
24. I would like additional training to assist me in the use of standards-based report cards.

<u>Demographics:</u>

25. How many years have you been in education?

a. 1-5

b. 6-10

c. 11 +

26. Is your school a?

a. Middle School

b. Junior High

27. How many students are in your school?

a. Less than 500 (small to medium)

b. 500 or More (large)

28. If your school is currently implementing standards based-grading, how long?

a. Not currently implementing

b. 1-3

c. 4 +

29. My current role is:

a. Principal

b. Teacher

c. Other

30. Please provide any further information or comments regarding standards-based grading:

Survey Development

Survey questions were created utilizing a number of resources. First, the researcher perused a number of surveys schools had administered. In particular, the Ft. Osage and Liberty school districts near Kansas City, Mo. had online surveys useful for prompting brainstorming ideas for questions. A number of questions on the survey were created after looking at these two districts' samples. In addition, knowledge and items gained from the continued literature review

about effective grading practices were utilized when crafting the survey. The survey instrument was entered into the Question Pro system available through Southwest Baptist University at no cost.

Pilot Process

To increase reliability, the survey consisted of questions stated in the positive as well as reversed questions to ensure respondents are giving consistent responses as opposed to marking responses automatically without scrutiny. Drafts of the survey were submitted numerous times to the researcher's advisor, an expert in statistics, and, consequently, the survey was revised after each discussion. In addition, a number of pilot surveys were administered to experts in the education field. The results of these pilot surveys were utilized to revise and improve the survey tool. The pilot process consisted of the following five steps:

1. Informal pilot—Doctoral cohort colleagues provided feedback in summer 2012 during the Advanced Statistics course. The survey underwent considerable changes and additions were made to the survey based upon the colleagues' feedback.
2. Expert validity pilot #1—The first version of the survey instrument as presented in Appendix A was used to garner feedback from experts in the fields of SBG and survey instruments—two elementary principals, two middle school assistant principals and a university professor. Two questions on the survey instrument were reversed to prevent respondents from falling into "fatigue" and automatic response mode. The survey was sent to each of these experts and they were asked to take the survey as well as make comments on the survey's nature, clarity and effectiveness. Specifically, the researcher sent out Rovinelli and Hambleton's index of item-objective congruency (1977) to these "experts"- a scale of -1, 0 and 1. -1 indicates the question does not ask what is intended, 0 is neutral, and 1 signifies the question

does ask what is intended. Feedback from the experts was used to further revise and improve the survey instrument. The survey was sent to these five expert administrators on Wednesday, August 28, 2013 and all five had completed as of Monday September 2, 2013. Researcher had conversations by phone and in person with 4 of the 5 post-survey to further analyze responses and refine intended responses on the item-objective congruency survey. A number of grammar and wording mistakes were highlighted and subsequently revised in the survey before moving to the next step in the pilot process.

3. Validity Pilot—The next iteration of the survey was sent as a pilot to 46 colleagues and teachers. For this particular pilot, participants are principals and teachers in four schools in Southwest Missouri. To present a cross-section of the study's potential population, four schools were chosen with a variety of characteristics. Two of the four schools are considered small to medium with 350 +/- students. The other two schools are considered large with 600 students +/-. Two of the four schools were chosen because they are currently implementing standards-based grading. The other two schools were chosen because they have little to no involvement in standards-based grading. The range of SBG and non-SBG respondents provides a wide array of opinions and perceptions as to SBG grading and reporting practices. The four schools have the following makeup—5^{th}-8^{th} configuration, 6^{th}-8^{th} configuration and two with a 7^{th}-8^{th} configuration. Three schools call themselves a middle school and one a junior high. Each of the four schools would be labeled rural with the following free and reduced lunch percentages, a 23 percent range, as of the 2012 count; 56 percent, 62 percent, 50 percent and 39 percent. On the survey pilot, there were two open comment fields for respondents to provide feedback as to any recommended revisions and/or additions to the instrument. Lastly, the pilot survey results were uploaded to the Statistical Package for the

Social Sciences (SPSS) software to perform a factor analysis to determine validity. Using load values of < -.300 or > .300 as a baseline, considered by researchers to be a rigorous level, those questions between the -.300 and .300 marks on each scale were taken out of the survey. Questions loading, those with values less than -.300 or greater than .300, on a particular scale were retained and indicated the item is influenced by the underlying construct or scale. In addition, the survey was streamlined from three scales to two scales based upon the SPSS data from this validity pilot. The original scale, "Classroom Grading Practices", was dropped. The two scales were merged and named 'Collaborative School Culture' and 'Perception of Standards-Based Grading Practices'. When this pilot's data was run through the SPSS system, the validity pilot data returned much more favorably, the questions loaded more clearly on the two scales, as a two-scale survey. Four questions were deleted for the next step based upon respondent feedback and the factor analysis leaving 24 total questions for the final survey. These four questions were below the .300 threshold, thus they were deemed as unusable for the final survey.

Along with this step, the researcher observed three colleagues taking the reliability pilot and had conversations regarding the ease of taking the survey, problematic questions, suggested revisions and other questions aimed at improving the survey itself. These colleagues' input was taken into account and used to revise the survey for the next step. Table 1 below represents the factor analysis performed to determine statement loading per scale. Some statements did not load as theorized; therefore questions were put into the appropriate scale according to the factor analysis.

Table 1: Validity Pilot Factor Analysis

Statements	Scale	
	Practice	Culture
A standards-based report card communicates specifically what students know and can do.	**.790**	.061
Parents and community members support change in grading and reporting practices.	**.457**	.280
A student's grade should not be lowered for academic dishonesty.	**.723**	.106
My school has outlined clear and consistent standards that all students need to know and be able to do.	-.099	**.853**
My school has had conversations centering on grading practices.	.039	**.657**
I believe student effort should be reported separately from academic learning.	**.643**	.225
I believe moving toward a standards-based approach to grading student learning is key to improving student achievement.	**.890**	.096
A student's overall grade should be comprised of a number of different components (projects, quizzes, tests, etc.).	**.418**	-.056
I believe homework scores should not be included in the overall grade.	**.729**	-.096
My school has had conversations centering on grade reporting practices.	.278	**.711**
Penalizing late work should be part of the grading process.	**.787**	.144
I would prefer to have a report card showing grades tied to specific standards within a subject.	**.841**	.217
My school knows what it looks like when students master the agreed upon standards.	-.279	**.774**
My school is open to changes in instructional practice each year.	-.135	**.495**
Standards-based grades communicate learning effectively to students and parents.	**.873**	-.029
I would like additional training to assist me in the use of standards-based report cards.	**.544**	-.141
A student's attendance should not be reflected in his/her grade.	**.663**	.091
My school supports risk-taking by teachers in the classroom.	**.315**	**.370**
I give incompletes rather than zeros for missing assignments.	**.707**	.129
When calculating a student's end-of-term (quarter, semester, etc.) grade I average assessments to arrive at one final grade.	**.443**	-.179
A report card should report student progress toward learning goals.	**.781**	.113
My school has a collaborative culture.	.245	**.486**
Class grades should be distributed according to a bell curve.	**.467**	-.075
Standards-based grading practices are an improvement upon traditional grading practices.	**.879**	.032

Note. Bolded values represent those with a value of .300 or higher indicating they load on that particular scale. The decision was made to place the one item (risk-taking) loading on both scales at relatively the same value on the culture scale for the final survey.

4. 2- Scale Expert Validity Pilot #2—The next step of the pilot process was to utilize the Rovinelli and Hambleton's index of item-objective congruency (1977) a second time to perform a second expert pilot for the 2-scale revised survey. A university professor, two school administrators and a former teacher were used for this second pilot to garner feedback as to how each question matched the two scales. One question was revised as a result, but there were no major revisions or changes made as the experts remarked the survey matched considerably well. Table 2 below represents the Rovinelli and Hambleton's index aggregate results for each question on the survey. A value of 1.00 is the highest possible value with each of the four respondents indicating 1- highly matches scale denoting the statement matches one and only one scale. Ideally, values should be .75 or higher. Statements #5 and #24 had values below .75. As a result, the wording for #5 was modified at one of the respondent's suggestions to say "My school has reached consensus on clear and consistent standards all students need to know and be able to do." #24 was close enough to the .75 value, so it was kept in the original form.

Table 2: Index of Item-Objective Congruency

Survey Statements	Index
1. My school has a collaborative culture.	1.00
2. My school supports risk-taking by teachers in the classroom.	1.00
3. My school has had conversations centering on grading practices.	1.00
4. My school is open to changes in instructional practice each year.	.75
5. My school has reached consensus on clear and consistent standards all students need to know and be able to do.	.25
6. My school has had conversations centering on grade reporting practices.	1.00
7. Penalizing late work should be part of the grading process.	.75
8. A student's grade should not be lowered for academic dishonesty.	.75
9. A student's attendance should not be reflected in his/her grade.	1.00
10. Parents and community members support change in grading and reporting practices.	1.00
11. I give incompletes rather than zeros for missing assignments.	1.00
12. My school knows what it looks like when students master the agreed upon standards.	1.00
13. I believe student effort should be reported separately from academic learning.	1.00
14. A student's overall grade should be comprised of a number of formative and summative components (projects, quizzes, tests, etc.).	1.00
15. When calculating a student's end-of-term (quarter, semester, etc.) grade, I average assessments to arrive at one final grade.	1.00
16. A report card should report student progress toward learning goals.	1.00
17. I believe homework should not be included in the overall grade.	1.00
18. Class grades should be distributed according to a bell curve.	1.00

19. I would prefer to have a report card showing grades tied to specific standards within a subject.	1.00
20. A standards-based report card communicates specifically what students know and can do.	1.00
21. I believe moving toward a standards-based approach to grading student learning is key to improving student achievement.	1.00
22. Standards-based grades communicate learning effectively to students and parents.	1.00
23. Standards-based grading practices are an improvement upon traditional grading practices.	1.00
24. I would like additional training to assist me in the use of standards-based report cards.	.67

5. Cronbach's Alpha for Internal Consistency/Reliability—The final step of the pilot process was to run the Cronbach's Alpha through SPSS using the final 46-person pilot and the two final scales. Cronbach's alphas for the six culture and 18 practice items on the final survey were .60 and .91, respectively.

With a goal of a Cronbach's Alpha figure of .70 or higher, the second scale at .91, perceptions of standards-based grading practices, clearly met the criteria for being reliable enough to use in the final instrument. The first scale at .60, collaborative culture, did not return as favorably but is still usable for the purposes of this study and showed promise to hold for the duration of the survey process.

Procedure

Once the pilot surveys were complete and necessary revisions made, the final version of the survey instrument was emailed to principals and teachers, by way of their administrators, in the participant schools within the Western Missouri region as outlined above in fall 2013. Principals were petitioned to forward the link to their respective teachers. Email addresses of

middle school principals in Western Missouri region were obtained through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) information system. The survey was left open for approximately three weeks. The RRB approved informed consent and explanation information presented in Appendix C were included in the original email as well as the opening page of the online survey. Each potential participant had the option to recuse him/herself from taking the survey by declining to take the survey. In order to obtain a higher return rate, principals were reminded two times via email to take the survey as well as send it to their staff.

A factor analysis was performed on the final results from the 24-question survey to determine validity and item load on the theorized scales. Table 3 shows the factor analysis values for the final survey results.

Table 3: Final Survey Factor Analysis

Statements	Scale	
	Practice	Culture
A standards-based report card communicates specifically what students know and can do.	**.732**	.098
Parents and community members support change in grading and reporting practices.	.259	.493
A student's grade should not be lowered for academic dishonesty.	**.576**	.151
My school has reached consensus on clear and consistent standards all students need to know and be able to do.	-.027	**.605**
My school has had conversations centering on grading practices.	.274	**.643**
I believe student effort should be reported separately from academic learning.	**.696**	.150
I believe moving toward a standards-based approach to grading student learning is key to improving student achievement.	**.807**	.149
A student's overall grade should be comprised of a number of different components (projects, quizzes, tests, etc.).	.011	-.009
I believe homework scores should not be included in the overall grade.	**.673**	.104
My school has had conversations centering on grade reporting practices.	.242	**.641**
Penalizing late work should be part of the grading process.	**.638**	.155
I would prefer to have a report card showing grades tied to specific standards within a subject.	**.791**	.104
My school knows what it looks like when students master the agreed upon standards.	-.024	**.706**
My school is open to changes in instructional practice each year.	.122	**.690**
Standards-based grades communicate learning effectively to students and parents.	**.764**	.118
I would like additional training to assist me in the use of standards-based report cards.	.412	-.277
A student's attendance should not be reflected in his/her grade.	**.553**	.071
My school supports risk-taking by teachers in the classroom.	.350	.355
I give incompletes rather than zeros for missing assignments.	.427	.415
When calculating a student's end-of-term (quarter, semester, etc.) grade I average assessments to arrive at one final grade.	.267	.155
A report card should report student progress toward learning goals.	**.625**	.248
My school has a collaborative culture.	.033	**.678**
Class grades should be distributed according to a bell curve.	.405	.034
Standards-based grading practices are an improvement upon traditional grading practices.	**.841**	.125

Note. Bolded values represent those with a value of .300 or higher indicating they load on that particular scale. Items with similar load values or insignificant differences were not bolded.

Conclusion

A large element of this study was the development of the survey instrument to gauge teacher and principal perceptions of standards-based grading and the effective grading practices therein. With the in-depth pilot process, the resulting survey instrument constructed is a reliable, valid and thorough tool ready to be used by school leaders in their endeavors to pursue SBG. The tool is useable, universal and able to provide valuable feedback including areas of need for professional development. The data to support use of the tool in other settings is presented in chapter four.

Along with the development of a quality survey instrument, the results of this study will provide data for school and state leaders to discuss the landscape within the western region of Missouri. Standards-based grading is a relevant topic and sparks many conversations; the data from this study will add detail and specificity to these conversations. An analysis of the open-ended question responses was performed to determine if there was information worth sharing in the study. Themes and ideas that consistently surfaced are addressed in chapter four. The quantitative nature of this study was held except for quality substantial information from the comments in the survey.

Chapter Four: Analysis

The final survey results consisting of 247 total respondents (72 principals, 155 teachers and 17 in other roles—3 respondents skipped the 'role' question), were uploaded to the SPSS software system. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized to analyze the data and will be presented in this chapter to give insight into answers to the research questions in this study. First, the overall statistics are reported in Table 4, Culture Scale, and Table 5, Perception of SBG Practices, below for each question representing the teacher and principal responses regarding attitude and perception toward standards-based grading, focusing on the following research question—What are the perceptions of principals and teachers in middle schools in the western region of Missouri of standards-based grading (SBG) regarding the scales on the attitudinal survey? (2 Scales= 1. Collaborative School Culture and 2. Perception of Standards-Based Grading Practices). The means for the responses to all questions reported below illustrate the overall perceptions of the respondents. Range for means is 1.00-4.00 where 1.00= Strongly agree and 4.00= Strongly disagree.

Table 4: Survey Overall Results for Culture Scale- Respondent Means

Survey Question	Mean
My school has had conversations centering on grade reporting practices.	1.70
My school supports risk-taking by teachers in the classroom.	1.94
My school has a collaborative culture.	1.74
My school has had conversations centering on grading practices.	1.77
My school has reached consensus on clear and consistent standards all students need to know and be able to do.	2.39
My school is open to changes in instructional practice each year.	1.88

Note. *n* = 247.

Table 5: Survey Overall Results for Perceptions of SBG Practices Scale- Respondent Means

Survey Question	Mean
I give incompletes rather than zeros for missing assignments.	2.28
Penalizing late work should be part of the grading process.	2.54
A student's attendance should not be reflected in his/her grade.	2.13
I believe student effort should be reported separately from academic learning.	1.95
Parents and community members support change in grading and reporting practices.	2.75
A student's grade should not be lowered for academic dishonesty.	2.92
A student's overall grade should be comprised of a number of formative and summative components (projects, quizzes, tests, etc.).	1.57
When calculating a student's end-of-term (quarter, semester, etc.) grade, I average assessments to arrive at one final grade.	2.22
A report card should report student progress toward learning goals.	1.63
I believe homework should not be included in the overall grade.	2.57
My school knows what it looks like when students master the agreed upon standards.	2.22
Class grades should be distributed according to a bell curve.	3.30
I would prefer to have a report card showing grades tied to specific standards within a	1.93
A standards-based report card communicates specifically what students know and can do.	1.87
I believe moving toward a standards-based approach to grading student learning is key to improving student achievement.	2.10
Standards-based grading practices are an improvement upon traditional grading	2.01
Standards-based grades communicate learning effectively to students and parents.	2.04
I would like additional training to assist me in the use of standards-based report cards.	1.88

Note. *n* = 247.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 6 below shows the means, ranges, and standard deviations for the two scales on this survey instrument. The figures for descriptive statistics are based upon six questions in the culture scale and 11 questions in the practice scale as determined by the factor analysis. Load values and explanations were presented in Table 3 as to how each scale was determined post survey closing based upon each load value.

Table 6: Means, Ranges and Standard Deviations for Scales

Scale	Mean	S.D.	Range
Collaborative Culture	11.80	2.82	6 to 20
Practice	23.39	6.15	11 to 44

The mean of the collaborative culture scale would indicate that principals and teachers in the western region of Missouri are favorable to and operating in a culture of collaboration. The 11.80 mean translates to an overall 'agree' on the likert-type scale. According to the mean on the practice scale as well, it appears principals and teachers are favorable to the SBG practices presented in the survey instrument and would be fairly ready to implement if not already doing so. The standard deviation on the practice scale is more widely distributed—evidence indicating more varied responses and stronger perceptions either way on the subject.

Collaborative Culture Scale

The collaborative culture scale was designed as a result of literature review findings regarding professional learning communities and the need for schools to have a culture fostering collaboration in order to provide an environment conducive to standards-based grading. Research question one of this study is directly supported by the culture scale. This scale aims to provide insight into schools in the western region of Missouri and to what extent these schools

have a collaborative culture indicating the region may be ready to implement standards-based grading. The mean for this scale was 11.80, the range of possible values 6 to 24 and the standard deviation 2.82. A lower value represents a more favorable perception toward the statement. With a mean of 11.80, teachers and principals are favorable or in agreement with the statements under the collaborative culture scale. The values for this sample population points to schools in the western region of Missouri in large part having a collaborative culture.

The standard deviation of 2.82 indicates the responses given were not widely distributed giving the impression teachers and principals in the sample population are in relative agreement regarding the statements under the collaborative culture scale. It appears there is a general consensus that schools in the western region of Missouri have a collaborative culture according to the responses to the six statements asked in this scale.

Practice Scale

The practice scale was designed to inform research question two: To what extent do principals and teachers in middle schools in the western region of Missouri implement effective grading practices to support SBG? The practice scale consists of 11 items centering on effective grading practices as outlined in the literature review. For the practice scale, the mean was 23.39, range of possible values 11 to 44 and the standard deviation 6.15. A lower value indicates agreement with or use of the effective grading practice. With a mean of 23.39, teachers and principals are in agreement generally with the statements in this scale. There appears to be support for and actual implementation of the effective grading practices which, in turn, indicates standards-based grading could be successful if implemented. The standard deviation shows responses are given are widely distributed.

Inferential Statistics

Out of the 24 original questions theorized to be in the two scales, 17 total questions held as valid through the actual survey process and loaded at high enough values to proceed with the inferential statistical analysis. These questions loaded at a value high enough to warrant their use as valid survey items. To illustrate reliability, Cronbach's alpha for the six culture and 11 practice items were .78 and .90, respectively. These values indicate a high reliability and give confidence to persons wanting to utilize these items as a survey instrument.

The inferential statistics to follow were computed using the 17 total questions loading clearly to a respective scale. Data from these questions were analyzed to ascertain any differences and relationships in each demographic between responses by the survey participants. Each of the five demographic questions was analyzed including the following: 1) How many years have you been in education?, 2) Is your school a- Middle School or Junior High?, 3) How many students are in your school?, 4) If your school is currently implementing standards-based grading, how long? And 5) My current role is?.

Table 7: ANOVA for Culture Scale and Years in Education

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p value
Between Groups	12.06	2	6.03	.76	.47
Within Groups	1834.64	230	7.98		
Total	1846.70	232			

p = n.s.

Table 8: ANOVA for Practice Scale and Years in Education

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p value
Between Groups	165.23	2	82.612	2.20	.11
Within Groups	8028.03	214	37.514		
Total	8193.25	216			

p = n.s.

For both the culture and practice scale, there was no significant differences found between the three options—1-5 years, 6-10 and 11 + years in education, $F(2, 214) = 2.20$, p = n.s. This lack of significant difference suggests educators are favorable toward the collaborative culture and standards-based grading practice regardless of their station in their career. An interesting note is nearly two-thirds of the respondents have been in education for 11+ years indicating teacher and principal veterans remain open to collaborative culture ideas and the SBG practices as they mature in their career.

Table 9: *t*-test results—Is your school a: Middle School or Junior High?

Scale	Middle School	Junior High	*t*	*df*
Culture	11.44 (2.92)	12.39 (2.55)	-2.45*	227
Practice	22.32	25.58	-3.65**	211

Note. *= $p < .05$, **= $p < .001$. Standard Deviations appear in parentheses under the means.

Middle school personnel ($M = 11.44$, $SD = 2.92$) are more favorable to having a collaborative culture than junior high personnel ($M = 12.39$, $SD = 2.55$), $t(1) = -2.45$, $p < .05$. In addition, middle school personnel ($M = 22.32$, $SD = 6.14$) are more favorable toward standards-

based grading practices than junior high personnel (M = 25.58, SD = 5.77), $t(1) = -3.65$, $p < .001$, at a highly significant level. These results indicate personnel in a school labeling itself as a middle school are more favorable or in agreement with the collaborative culture ideas. Also, personnel in a middle school setting agree at a highly significant level with the standards-based grading practices as opposed to junior high personnel. One could postulate personnel in the middle school setting are more progressive minded or open to current ideas.

Table 10: *t*-test results—School Size

Scale	Small to Medium	Large	*t*	*df*
Culture	12.22 (2.93)	11.36 (2.63)	2.35*	227
Practice	23.59	23.23	.42	211

Note. *= $p < .05$. Standard Deviations appear in parentheses under the means.

Small to medium schools (M = 12.22, SD = 2.93) are less favorable to having a collaborative culture than large schools (M = 11.36, SD = 2.63), $t(1) = 2.35$, $p < .05$. Whereas, small to medium schools (M = 23.59, SD = 6.25) and large schools (M = 23.23, SD = 6.12) did not differ significantly on being favorable toward standards-based grading practices, $t(1) = .42$, p = n.s. A potential reason for small to medium schools being less favorable to the collaborative culture scale statements is these schools have fewer teachers per grade level, content or department, thus the opportunity for collaboration reduces as the school gets smaller. Adversely, a larger school will have large departments and grade levels, and personnel in this large setting spend more time collaborating due to the nature and size of their school.

Table 11: ANOVA for Culture Scale and SBG Implementation Years

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p value
Between Groups	305.42	2	152.71	22.65	.000*
Within Groups	1537.42	228	6.74		
Total	1842.84	230			

Note. *= $p < .001$.

For the culture scale, statistically significant differences were found between the various SBG implementation years groups—not currently implementing, 1-3 and 4+, $F(2, 228) = 22.65$, $p < .001$. When Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) test was performed, schools not currently implementing SBG were found to be significantly less favorable to the collaborative culture scale than both other types—1-3 year SBG schools and 4+ year SBG schools. There was no significant difference found between the 1-3 year SBG schools and 4+ year SBG schools groups.

Table 12: ANOVA for Practice Scale and SBG Implementation Years

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p value
Between Groups	606.03	2	303.02	8.51	.000*
Within Groups	7584.59	213	35.61		
Total	8190.63	215			

Note. *= $p < .001$.

For the practice scale, significant differences were found between the various SBG implementation years groups—not currently implementing, 1-3 and 4+, $F(2, 213) = 8.51$, $p < .001$. When Tukey's HSD test was performed, schools not currently implementing were found

to be significantly less favorable to the SBG practices than 1-3 year SBG schools. There was no other significant difference found between the other groups according to Tukey's HSD test. Research question three seeks to answer the following: Do those teachers and principals implementing standards-based grading have a more favorable perception toward effective grading practices? The ANOVA results in Table 11 directly answer this question. Those teachers and principals in SBG schools (1-3 years) are significantly more favorable to SBG practices compared to non-SBG schools. The data did not point to a significant difference in 4+ years of SBG implementation. A reason may be schools that have been implementing SBG for some period of time are either dissatisfied with the SBG practices or possibly unconvinced as to the effectiveness of SBG practices and their impact on student achievement results. This piece of data opens up a wide area of potential research into SBG perceptions among schools implementing the SBG practices and what occurs as the implementation runs into four years and beyond.

Table 13: ANOVA for Culture Scale and Role

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p value
Between Groups	39.10	2	20.00	2.54	.081*
Within Groups	1801.83	229	7.87		
Total	1841.79	231			

Note. *= $p < .1$.

For the culture scale, significant differences were found among the three different roles involved in the survey—principal, teacher and other, $F(2, 229) = 2.54$, $p < .1$. While not highly significant since it is accepted at the 10 percent level, this is an acceptable significant level for

the purposes of this study since .1 is widely known to be acceptable within the educational arena. When Tukey's HSD test was performed, those respondents in the 'other' role were found to be significantly more favorable to the collaborative culture scale than both principals and teachers. The researcher noted there were only 14 respondents in the 'other' category, therefore this result may change if given again and a higher population of the 'other' role responded. There was no significant difference found between the principals and teachers according to Tukey's HSD test.

Table 14: ANOVA for Practice Scale and Role

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p value
Between Groups	968.00	2	484.00	14.38	.000*
Within Groups	7167.00	213	33.65		
Total	8134.96	215			

Note. *= $p < .001$.

For the practice scale, significant differences were found between the three different roles involved— principal, teacher and other, $F(2, 213) = 14.38$, $p < .001$. When Tukey's HSD test was performed, principals were found to be significantly more favorable to the SBG practices than teachers. Also, those in the 'other' role were found to be significantly more favorable to the SBG practices than teachers. There was no significant difference found between the principals and 'others' according to Tukey's HSD test.

As a quick reference tool, Table 15 summarizes the significant differences found as a result of the final survey data analysis.

Table 15: Significant Differences Summary

Demographic Statement	Culture Scale	Practice Scale
Years in Education	No sig. diff.	No sig. diff.
Type School	MS | JH	MS | JH
# of Students of School	Large | Small/Medium	No sig. diff.
SBG Implementation	1-3 years | No SBG	1-3 years | No SBG
	4+ years | No SBG	
Role	Other | Teacher	Principal | Teacher
	Other | Principal	Other | Teacher

Note. First demographic in each box represents the more favorable demographic to that particular scale. For example, MS is more favorable to the Culture Scale than JH. No sig. diff. = No significant difference.

Respondents' Comments

The final question of the survey provided a place for respondent comments or other information pertaining to standards-based grading. There were 64 total written responses in the final results. The comments were related to the teachers and principals' sense of agreement, or disagreement, with standards-based grading. One of the themes, indicated by five open-ended comments, was how quality implementation must be preceded by teacher, parent and student education because SBG is a major mind shift for those involved. The respondents mentioned eight times specifically that SBG can be good for schools, but can also be very confusing and overwhelming if information is not presented clearly and proactively or the process is done incorrectly or too quickly. Along this same line of thinking, the concern that standards-based grading can be perceived as more work emerged in the comments. Another subtheme, shown by three responses, was there is little research into the effects standards-based grading has on student achievement, if any. Before some of the respondents would be favorable toward SBG

practices, they indicated research would need to indicate these practices increase student achievement. The comments are presented in the Appendix D.

Summary

The survey results were first displayed holistically to define the western region of Missouri as it pertains to middle school teachers and principals' general perceptions of standards-based grading practices. The survey results were entered into the SPSS data software to run factor analyses to analyze data with the intention of answering the three research questions in this study. To this end, descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to give insight into the survey results data. In analyzing and presenting the data, the overall picture of principal and teacher perceptions of standards-based grading practices was portrayed. In addition, the five demographic questions were compared to ascertain where significant differences may occur, also pointing to the answers to the three research questions. The *t*-tests and ANOVA values, and the ensuing Tukey's HSD test results, for the demographic comparisons were displayed in tables to illustrate the significant differences. The results are clear there are statistically significant differences between a number of the different demographic factors while other factors do not differ whatsoever.

Finally, recognition was given to the respondents' comments on the open-ended question—the final question of the survey. A total of 64 responses were recorded and inspected to bring to light themes and important topics to consider for this study's purpose. The respondents gave valuable and numerous insights into standards-based grading and the practices therein.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The main goal of this dissertation is to gauge the landscape of Western Missouri in regards to teacher and principal attitude toward standards-based grading and the grading practices therein. The results and findings from this study are valuable on a number of levels. In the sample population itself, the survey sparked conversation and added to discussions in place as to potential implementation of standards-based grading at various schools evidenced by response emails and comments in the study. Guiding the overall aim, were the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of principals and teachers in middle schools in the western region of Missouri of standards-based grading (SBG) regarding the two scales on the attitudinal survey? (2 Scales= 1. Collaborative School Culture and 2. Perception of Standards-Based Grading Practices)
2. To what extent do principals and teachers in middle schools in the western region of Missouri implement effective grading practices to support SBG?
3. Do those teachers and principals implementing standards-based grading have a more favorable perception toward effective grading practices?

An overall view of the survey results leads to a description of the sample population's perceptions of SBG in light of the scales in the survey. The first scale, collaborative culture, focused solely on research question one and contained six questions exploring respondents' perceptions of collaborative cultures within the schools in the western region of Missouri. Four of the six questions pointed to collaboration, conversations about grading and schools' openness

to risk-taking by teachers. Nearly 90 percent of teachers and principals responded in the agree or strongly agree categories showing the region has collaborative cultures for the most part and respondents are involved in collegial conversations about grading and reporting practices. The results from these four questions do not necessarily point to agreement regarding SBG practices themselves, but the results do clearly indicate schools are thinking about and discussing grading. The other two questions within this scale focus on consensus about learning standards and what it looks like when students master those standards. The results indicate schools are not overly aligned to each other in respect to developing agreed upon standards for students. Respondents were split with approximately 85 percent of the responses falling in the two categories, agree and disagree. While schools are, in large part, collaborative in nature within the sample region there seems to be a disconnect between that collaboration and arriving at consensus on what standards students should learn and what it looks like when they have learned the agreed upon standards. One reason for this disconnect could be the recent change to the Common Core Standards or Missouri Learning Standards. Principals and teachers may be uncertain as to what exactly students are supposed to know with all of the changes. Furthermore, with unclear standards, knowing what it looks like when students master them would be difficult as well. Another factor in these two questions' results is the data was not disaggregated between principal and teacher response for each question, rather data was disaggregated between teacher and principal responses on the entire scale. Teachers and principals may have differing perceptions as to the level of collaboration around standards.

Results from the second scale, perceptions of standards-based grading practices, give answers to each of the three research questions. First, the results show the overall perception of standards-based grading practices, question one, as being generally favorable. The range for the

SBG practices scale was 11.00 to 38.00. The mean for the practices scale was 23.39 indicating the respondents overall agree with SBG practices. However, the standard deviation of 6.15 shows a wide spread between the respondents' views pointing to more varied views as opposed to clearly aligned perceptions. The study found a statistically significant difference between principals and teachers' perceptions regarding SBG practices. One could posit a number of contributing factors to this difference. For one, principals may be more exposed than teachers to research and discussion centering around grading and reporting practices, SBG in particular. Also, teachers are in the classroom grading and reporting scores and would have to receive training to change their practices, consequently this need for training and lack of knowledge or awareness of what practices may be out there could drive teachers to be more uncertain and less favorable than principals toward the practices presented in the survey. 85 percent of the respondents were favorable to needing more training in the area of standards-based grading. The openness to professional development indicates an interest in learning more about SBG and, if training were provided, could increase respondents' level of agreement to SBG practices. Secondly, the SBG practices scale can paint a picture of the implementation of SBG practices within the region of Western Missouri. This research question is closely linked to the preceding question and both questions could be merged. The survey questions were geared more toward perceptions rather than actual implementation. Although, one could make the leap to generalize teachers in agreement with, or with a favorable perception toward, standards-based grading practices are utilizing these practices in the classroom.

The last research question regarding a difference between schools implementing standards-based grading and those schools not implementing is clearly answered by the results from this second scale. The data analysis showed schools that have been implementing SBG for

one to three years were significantly more favorable toward the grading practices presented in the survey when compared to non-SBG schools. There was not a significant difference between schools implementing SBG for four or more years and non-SBG schools, nor was there a significant difference found between schools implementing for four or more years and schools implementing SBG for one to three years. The difference between SBG schools and non-SBG schools comes as no surprise since it would take a measure of agreement with the SBG philosophy and the practices therein for them to be implemented at a building level. On the other hand, the research was postulating schools involved in SBG implementation could potentially have a less favorable perception toward SBG practices because of a lack of training or simply burnout from maintaining a universal approach to grading and reporting practices. The survey results support this hypothesis to a degree since there was no significant difference between schools implementing for four or more years and the non-SBG schools. Further analysis and research would need to be done to get at the reason behind this finding.

The third section, demographics, helped in disaggregating the data to answer the research questions. Knowing what type and size of school, respondent role, years in education and longevity of SBG implementation gave clear boundaries to run the *t*-tests and ANOVAs to answer the research questions. The final question in the demographic scale asked for comments or further information regarding standards-based grading. The goal of this question was to gather any ideas, thoughts, perceptions and pontifications respondents may have not had the opportunity to give otherwise since the questions were focused on limited grading practices and the collaborative culture theme. Approximately 25% of the respondents took the time to answer this open-ended question giving the impression there was energy and motivation behind this study's topic.

As important to this study, even more so than the actual perception results from the survey instrument, was the development of an attitudinal survey tested to be valid and reliable with the purpose of being made available to future researchers. A number of informal surveys developed by districts surfaced to ascertain perceptions regarding various grading practices and implementation within classrooms. Also, there were a number of surveys directed at parents and students. However, a survey instrument tailored to the needs and purpose of this study was not available. No survey unearthed from the review of literature included a scale with collaborative culture questions. Nor was there a survey with a demographic scale inquiring as to type of school (middle school or junior high), years of SBG implementation or respondent role. This lack drove the researcher to develop a survey instrument geared to produce results able to answer the research questions in this study. The extensive pilot process started in summer of 2012 and included an informal colleague pilot, two separate expert pilots utilizing Rovinelli and Hambleton's index of item-objective congruency (1977), a 46-person pilot and a researcher-observed pilot. At each pilot step, factor analyses were conducted resulting in multiple revisions to the survey instrument and the original three-scale survey changing to a two-scale instrument. Lastly, the Cronbach's alpha figures for each of the two content scales, collaborative culture and SBG practices, were .60 and .91, respectively. These results were reliable enough to proceed with the full study. Once the study was complete, Cronbach's alpha was figured again based upon the factor analysis and the 17 questions loading clearly on one scale or another. The collaborative culture scale consisted of 6 items ($\alpha = .78$) and the SBG practices scale consisted of 11 items ($\alpha = .90$). These alpha results show the survey instrument to be highly reliable, therefore further research could utilize this instrument and be confident the results would hold.

The implications this study has on future research as well as the field of education in general are numerous. Most importantly, the survey instrument from this study is tested to be valid and reliable making it ready to be utilized at a building, district or state level to determine whether or not a collaborative culture is present to support the exploration of standards-based grading implementation. The survey can also be used at various levels to ascertain the existing perceptions regarding SBG practices showing whether principals and teachers are already favorable or not. A school, district or state could make an implementation plan based on the results of their own internal study. Furthermore, professional development plans, budgets and courses can be based upon the results of the survey instrument. By analyzing the results of each question, a school district may decide to spend financial resources on professional development targeting the areas showing lack of knowledge or weaknesses. States may utilize the survey to determine the level of readiness for a statewide SBG pilot such as Kentucky administered. The survey could spark valuable conversations about grading and reporting practices at all levels from teachers in the classroom to state officials making decisions regarding future educational initiatives. The results of this study can be viewed as reflective of a larger population because there was a stratified demographic represented. Large, small, rural and suburban schools were a part of the study.

The review of literature guided the construction of the survey and the decision to add or delete certain questions. Consequently, the literature review brought to light the importance of a school's collaborative culture and its connectedness to standards-based grading implementation. This piece of knowledge and the presence of the collaborative culture scale on the survey instrument may prove to be useful to educators at large as discussions ensue regarding SBG, grading and reporting practices and what is necessary for successful SBG implementation.

Gauging the presence, or lack thereof, of a collaborative culture will aid in avoiding future stall out of SBG implementation.

Limitations

With 217 principals, 7,901 teachers and 87,139 students represented, the size of the sample (n = 247) was not as large as anticipated. Nonetheless, the data analysis and resulting figures were convincing enough to make conclusions and recommendations. The Cronbach's alphas produced were encouraging and provided a launching pad for a great deal of implications and recommendations. Only a small number of comparisons between factors were considered to keep the scope of this study within the boundaries dictated by the research questions. Exploration of other factors such as rural versus suburban schools or an analysis of each question and statistically significant differences could be done.

Recommendations

Building on this study, the next phase of research could look at student achievement and whether or not there is a statistically significant difference between SBG and non-SBG traditional schools. The review of literature in this study highlighted a number of effective grading practices advocated by educational researchers and practitioners. However, very limited research is available to determine if these effective grading practices affect student achievement positively or negatively. Moreover, it could be beneficial to study whether or not students of teachers employing the following practices have statistically significant different achievement than those not utilizing these practices: reteaching, scoring assessments alone in the final grade, marking the latest learning grade, providing a risk-free environment for practice and using incompletes rather than zeros. A foray into student perceptions would shed light on how standards-based grading practices affect students and their motivation for learning.

Based on the results of this study, adding the parent and community component to the attitudinal survey would be advantageous to schools considering standards-based grading. According to the open-ended responses, parents and community members are key to the success of standards-based grading process since it can be somewhat confusing and complex. 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. Also, a future study may look at the difference in attitude/perception between elementary, middle and secondary schools. Research questions could include: Are lower grade teachers and principals more favorable to SBG practices than those at the higher level? Are more middle schools implementing SBG than high schools? Any of these questions could be spurs to take from and add to this original dissertation.

Summary

Educators look for best practices to employ with the goal of high levels of student learning. Studying standards-based grading and the effective grading practices to support SBG adds to what educators know about good teaching and learning. As SBG practices become more accepted and increase in frequency of use, studying the necessary components needed for successful implementation and the conditions necessary as well as preexisting in certain regions are of value. The survey tool created in this study will prove to be useful in future research to gauge where principals and teachers are in their thinking related to SBG. Furthermore, schools, districts and states can structure professional development and make plans according to the data procured from the valid and highly reliable instrument.

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Appendix A: Expert Pilot #1 (first version) Survey Instrument

The survey will use a likert-type scale:

(1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Disagree or (4) Strongly Disagree

Collaborative Culture:

1. My school is a collaborative culture.
2. My school supports risk-taking in the classroom.
3. My school is open to changes in instructional practice each year.
4. Parents and community members support/would support change in grading and reporting practices.
5. My school has outlined clear and consistent about our standards; teachers agree about what all students need to know and be able to do.
6. My school knows what it looks like when students master the agreed upon standards.
7. My school has had conversations centering on grading practices.
8. My school has had conversations centering on reporting (grades/scores) practices.

Classroom Grading and Reporting Practices:

9. When I give scores in my classroom/school I separate achievement from behavior.
10. Penalizing late work should be part of the grading process.
11. I allow redos and retakes in my classroom.
12. Extra credit is offered in my classroom.
13. A student's grade should be lowered for academic dishonesty.
14. A student's attendance should be reflected in his/her grade.
15. I give zeros for missing assignments.
16. I believe student participation and effort should be included in the overall grade.

17. A student's overall grade is comprised of a number of different components (projects, quizzes, tests, etc.).

18. When calculating a student's end-of-term (quarter, semester, etc.) grade, I average assessments to arrive at one final grade.

19. A report card should report student progress/growth toward learning goals.

20. I believe homework should be included in the overall grade.

21. Class grades should be distributed according to a bell curve.

22. I would prefer to have a report card showing grades tied to specific standards within a subject.

Readiness to Implement Standards-Based Grading:

23. I understand standards-based grading (SBG) and the tenets involved.

24. A standards-based report card would (does) help me communicate more specifically what students know and can do.

25. I believe moving toward a standards-based approach to grading and reporting student learning is key to improving student achievement.

26. Standards-based grading practices are an improvement upon traditional grading practices.

27. Standards-based grades are better for students and parents.

28. I would like additional training to assist me in the use of standards-based report cards.

Demographics:

29. How many years have you been in education?

a. 1-5

b. 6-10

c. 11 +

30. Is your school a?

a. Middle School

b. Junior High

31. How many students are in your school?

a. Less than 500 (small to medium)

b. 500 or More (large)

32. If your school is currently implementing standards based-grading, how long?

a. Not currently implementing

b. 1-3

c. 4 +

33. My current role is:

a. Principal

b. Teacher

c. Other

Please provide any further information or comments regarding standards-based grading:

Appendix B: Final Survey Instrument Administered to Sample Population

The survey uses a likert-type scale:

(1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Disagree or (4) Strongly Disagree:

Collaborative School Culture:

1. My school has a collaborative culture.
2. My school supports risk-taking by teachers in the classroom.
3. My school is open to changes in instructional practice each year.
4. My school has reached consensus on clear and consistent standards all students need to know and be able to do.
5. My school has had conversations centering on grading practices.
6. My school has had conversations centering on grade reporting practices.

Perception of Standards-Based Grading Practices:

7. Parents and community members support change in grading and reporting practices.
8. Penalizing late work should be part of the grading process.
9. My school knows what it looks like when students master the agreed upon standards.
10. A student's grade should not be lowered for academic dishonesty.
11. A student's attendance should not be reflected in his/her grade.
12. I give incompletes rather than zeros for missing assignments.
13. I believe student effort should be reported separately from academic learning.
14. A student's overall grade should be comprised of a number of formative and summative components (projects, quizzes, tests, etc.).
15. When calculating a student's end-of-term (quarter, semester, etc.) grade, I average assessments to arrive at one final grade.

16. A report card should report student progress toward learning goals.

17. I believe homework should not be included in the overall grade.

18. Class grades should be distributed according to a bell curve.

19. I would prefer to have a report card showing grades tied to specific standards within a subject.

20. A standards-based report card communicates specifically what students know and can do.

21. I believe moving toward a standards-based approach to grading student learning is key to improving student achievement.

22. Standards-based grading practices are an improvement upon traditional grading practices.

23. Standards-based grades communicate learning effectively to students and parents.

24. I would like additional training to assist me in the use of standards-based report cards.

Demographics:

25. How many years have you been in education?

a. 1-5

b. 6-10

c. 11 +

26. Is your school a?

a. Middle School

b. Junior High

27. How many students are in your school?

a. Less than 500 (small to medium)

b. 500 or More (large)

28. If your school is currently implementing standards based-grading, how long?

a. Not currently implementing

b. 1-3

c. 4 +

29. My current role is:

a. Principal

b. Teacher

c. Other

Please provide any further information or comments regarding standards-based grading:

Appendix C: Consent Email

Dear Colleague,

My name is Shane Dublin and I am the Principal at Bolivar Middle School in Bolivar, MO. I am a doctoral student at Southwest Baptist University and I am conducting a research study to gather information about teacher and principal perceptions regarding standards-based grading and effective grading practices. I am surveying all middle/junior high school building principals and teachers in the western region of Missouri. Since you are the principal at your current middle/junior high school, I would like to ask for your participation. I realize that you are very busy; the survey should take no more than 15 minutes of your time to complete. The survey is completely anonymous. It will ask you for demographic information and your experience with, perceptions regarding and knowledge levels of standards-based grading and effective grading practices associated therein.

Your privacy is important; your answers will be combined with other participants and reported in aggregate form. Information reported will not indicate individual participants or school districts. There is no penalty should you choose not to participate or answer all of the questions. Your completion and submission of the survey will indicate your consent to participate and permission to use the information that 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 point without penalty.
- You need not answer all of 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 standards-based grading and the effective grading practices therein.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the RRB Committee at Southwest Baptist University (326-1659). The committee believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties and rights.

You may contact me at 417-326-3811 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 sdublin@bolivarschools.org. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Shane Dublin
Bolivar Middle School

Appendix D: Principal and Teacher Open-Ended Comments

1. Educating the parents is one of our main focuses prior to implementing standards based grading. Getting past traditional grading is difficult to overcome fort some teachers.

2. Come see us.

3. I would love more information about this. I have a tenured group of teachers who fight this approach to teaching.

4. There is no empirical evidence that standards-based grading improves student learning. Though I agree with many of the tenets of s-b grading, I don't agree that it is something to jump into. I believe it will fundamentally change how people view grades and their motivation to do well in school. With the push for more and more technology and personal devices being used in the classroom distractions are taking away from a focus on fundamentals. Colleges and universities are not going to do s-b grading so figuring out GPA and college entrance will be difficult. Changing to a grading system that uses "progressing" and "proficient" to report progress is a change in the mindset for earning grades. Mathematics is the only pure science known to man, anything that cannot be proven mathematically is theory. Standards-Based grading is fodder for divisive behavior among teachers. Spend your time agreeing on what a grade means, not a new way to divide teachers in an already fractured system that has become education.

5. I believe in theory it sounds good but schools already see a lack in motivation by students in doing daily assignments and or homework which I see as important for skill practice. If I told my students that none of the practice work or classroom work was figured into their grades most would see it as an opportunity to not have to work. Most are not responsible or mature enough to understand the importance of practice unless they feel they are earning something for it. I do agree though that as a parent I would want to see specific standards and performance levels but I fear many parents would not.

6. I think SBG is good in theory, but from my limited knowledge of it, it seems to be extraordinarily subjective.

7. You can't argue with the tenets of standards based grading. In my opinion this is a big shift and demands large time investment from teachers, administrators, parents, and community. Grading practices need to be analyzed, consistent, and reflective of mastery. In order to implement STBG with fidelity it will take a minimum of a two year FOCUS for all members of the school community. The question that remains is whether or not STBG significantly increases student achievement to warrant the investment.

8. I would like to know more about standards base report cards.

9. I haven't heard enough information, or seen enough research, to have much of an opinion on this topic. In theory, it seems it would be a good idea, but implementation is usually messy with

new trends, and we have so many new trends to wade through in education, I'm not sure we always know what we are trying to accomplish, other than reinventing the wheel.

10. We are rushing towards the goal of standards based grading. The teachers feel very unprepared and the system that we are using (Mastery Connect) is not user friendly and is causing a great deal of stress. While I do believe that standards based grading can improve instruction, I don't think it is the only way to do so, and I believe that the transition needs to be taken slowly so that parents, teachers and students are able to understand the system.

11. I believe standards-based grading is a better measurement of actual learning than a traditional grading system. Other factors, such as tardies, late work, etc. should be a separate grade and not tied to learning standards.

12. I believe the shift towards standards based grading can be positive if done correctly. I think it is more valuable for students and parents to know which standards/skills they have or have not mastered so that they can specifically target their practice. However, I think there is more to being a successful member of society than mastering skills and so there has to be a way to report effort, responsibility, organization, attitude, etc. in combination with standards based grading. I also think there has to be a way to hold students accountable for their work when it comes to incomplete/missing work or academic dishonesty. The biggest complaint I hear from teachers right now is "How do I hold students accountable who choose not to do their work but get infinite chances to make it up with no consequences academically or otherwise?" and "I am working harder for students to "earn" their grade than they are." We have to find a way to report an accurate picture of students' learning and instill a strong work ethic and an internal drive to be successful.

13. We are implementing components of standard-based grading but are not doing everything.

14. This is a concept that we are considering. Possibly we will use this in some classes but not all.

15. I think standards-based grading helps parents and teachers know what specifically students need to work on, as well as what they are successful with. Standards-based grading also aids in teaching with differentiation and other teaching strategies which promote a higher degree of student learning and retention of information.

16. Your question regarding "Grade lowered for academic dishonesty" is misleading. It's not that the grade should be lowered, it is that the student must do the assignment on their own to show they have mastered or understand the concept. Grade doesn't come into account in academic dishonesty; it just causes the student to do more work to show mastery or understanding. It is the only question I had trouble answering as I see it differently.

17. The concept of Standard-Based grading is a very good idea. Some schools in our district are already implementing this grading practice but my school does not. We are moving to that in the

next few years so conversations are already beginning. I have heard from other teachers that the programs being used to show grades and keep track of mastery is hard to use and only adding stress to teachers. I have also spoken with parents that are very confused by the process and struggled to read grade cards at the end of 1st Quarter. If the kinks can get worked out it will be a great concept, but right now it is not working so well.

18. The parent piece is really lacking in Standards based grading. The student can track where they are but the parents cannot see it. We are still trying to find an online grading system that works with it. I like the idea of trying over and over until you get a concept from a parent and teacher point of view but I worry about the student memorizing or looking off other work and then retesting versus really knowing the information. I also don't like the idea of getting to turn things in late. I think that is not helping our students to be responsible. You are only going to be late so many times in real life before you get fired or pay a penalty and we are teaching it is ok. Those boundaries need to be set better.

19. We are currently moving toward standards based grading. It will be implemented within 1-2 years at the Middle School.

20. We have a system of common formative and summative assessments for science, math, ELA, and SS. Currently, we are in the process of transitioning to standards-based grading. Our elementary schools are using standards-based reporting this year; the intermediate school will follow in 2014-15; middle school will follow in 2015-16. Our curriculum work and the creation of common assessments has been the cornerstone for moving forward to standards-based reporting.

21. Making the transition from traditional to standards-based grading has been a challenging process, but worth it!! Teachers need to know and understand it is a process, will take time, and it is OK to make mistakes. Parents must be kept informed about the transition and process.

22. Administrators don't want to deal with structural changes that are necessary for reteaching without holding up others

23. We need to reeducate students about what their grades mean, according to the standards. We also need to educate the parents and the community not only how to interpret Standard Based Grading, but on how this style of grading impacts a student toward their goals.

24. It is important to find a way to implement standards based report cards without overwhelming the teachers. Currently it requires each teacher to select hundreds of levels per student per report card.

25. There are positive and negative sides to standards-based grading in my opinion. I feel it does a great job of showing exactly where a student is based on a goal. It can show growth and progress toward goals. However, if not done correctly, it can show a student has not mastered a concept, when in fact they have mastered. The criteria for mastery needs to be consistent among

all, not only in a school, but the nation. Also, by going to Standards-Based grading we eliminate the 4.0 scale which is important in high school especially due to college applications, scholarships, valedictorian status, etc. I don't think taking away the opportunities to show student achievement is the best thing to do. I personally feel like we should continue the grading system currently in place, and add a standards-based grading system that only reflects student progress towards goals and concepts. By having both grading systems in place, it will be evident the progression the students have based on the grade-level concepts expected, but the grading scale will reflect the GPA for scholarship, college, and class rank, but also may reflect performance of student's willingness to work, which is important to employers and colleges alike. We tend to be a society where we try to make things equal and fair, but truly like isn't. Would you rather have a worker that has all concepts mastered but refuses to do the work, or an employee that has mastered most areas and shows a willingness to continue learning and a drive to achieve the top with hard work? I know my answer. On a side note, I appreciate your look into this important subject. I took this survey as a teacher because that is where I have spent a majority of my education career, however now I fulfill the role of a process coordinator. I see many sides to education in general from this perspective and I appreciate you looking at all areas to see how it will affect the different groups of students. Good luck in your studies. I hope you are able to gain perspective of all areas you wish to determine what is best for the students.

26. My son attends JTSD, the magnet school in Nixa, MO. Teachers began implementing standards based grading this school year. As a parent, I'm encouraged to see that my son is succeeding in achieving goals set for him by himself, his teacher, the district and the state. I can see what is expected and how he's really doing.

27. Our CURRICULUM is standards based, so it is assumed that all grades derived from the curriculum are standards based; however, we do not code it or mark it that way on report cards.

28. I think most teachers would open to standards-based grading, if it could be completed in a manner that does not create more work, in a situation where teachers feel they are already over worked and underpaid. I feel most parents, simply want a quick reference to know how their child is doing and not multiple pages which might be confusing to parents that are not in education, even though it would paint a much better assessment of students over all ability.

29. Standards are too vague. School has to decide what standards mean. Then, there are not enough resources to teach the standards. Students miss practicing fundamental skills. 1, 2, 3, 4 ..... how is it different from A, B,.....? It is time consuming. How do you have time to complete rubrics for the standards-based projects? Students progress at different paces, so it is difficult to create an environment conducive to that with only one teacher. Also, a lot of times students work in pairs or groups which end up with students goofing off while others do the work. It is difficult to assess performance based tasks. It might take a whole period to observe one or more groups. It is just too generalized and a lot of gaps are created in a student's education without adequate practice. A lot of times I just see projects which are way over students' heads

because someone's got to prove that they're making the kids smarter by giving them something too advanced. Then, the teacher has to walk them through every step. I think students should be able to work cooperatively from time to time on projects, but not all of the time. I think that when we show the standards to parents, they don't know what they mean. We also are not clear on their meaning or the specificity of the underlying skills involved.

30. Standards-based grading is crucial in helping teachers understand how to teach and assess students more accurately.

31. The transition for parents is a difficult one if their child's grade has been inflated in the past based on student effort rather than skill. Your attendance question was difficult to answer. Attendance can impact grades when formatives and summatives are failed and/or not retaken due to absences.

32. We are working toward standards based grading but not there yet. While good in theory I still don't think this is the answer to today's educational issues.

33. My child's school grade cards are standards-based.

34. This is a focus in our PLC work.

35. We are in our 3rd year of changing how we arrive at grades. We are currently still reporting grades in a traditional format and plan to begin dual reporting in the 2014-15 school year. The change in how we arrive at grades (eliminating HW, behaviors, extra credit, etc.) has narrowed our focus and conversation with parents to more specifically, what can or can't the student do in relation to the course standards.

36. Our school is moving towards standards-referenced instead of standards-based due to the fact that we have to dual report starting 2014-15 school year. This made answering some of your questions difficult as it seems you are coming from a more standards-based grading angle. Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback in your doctoral program! Good luck!

37. I think standards-based grading is a great theory but no one has been able to help me implement it effectively. I also think that without having some kind of consequence for late work, it allows students to develop bad habits. There is no urgency to accomplish the task at hand when there is nothing motivating students to accomplish the work. This then leads to students falling behind and not understanding the learning targets that allow them to be successful during the school year making it more difficult for them to be successful in higher grades as well.

38. I believe standards-based grades would more accurately reflect student achievement. However, this would mean more differentiation in the classroom and some teachers would view this as more work. I teach special education and I think that a standards-based grading system would work more with IEP goals. Also for standards-based grading to be effective, we may have to move away from the traditional state-assessment at the end of the year. We need to start

meeting students where they are at academically.

39. I could not answer all of the questions. I do not submit grades nor implement standards-based grading in my duties.

40. I know that the younger grades use it. I like having it in the young grades but I am not sure how it can be used in Junior High setting.

41. I am not sure how this will work and be able to meet all of the standards that are required of me if I have to reteach until mastery is met.

42. Our school is still working on establishing all learning targets and scales. We are collaborating in our departments as well.

43. Standards based grading is a tool that promotes kids towards laziness. It also has created a culture of confusions and misunderstanding of what is expected from the students. The grading of it is too subjective. I have not seen it help students want to learn more or increase in motivation to do better in class.

44. I am a high school science teacher. In our school district, the only other teacher (besides me) of 6-12th grades who is using standards based grading is one high school math teacher. The two of us have met resistance from some parents, students, and other teachers. However, the advantages of using SBG were immediately noticeable in class room instruction. I won't be going back to traditional grading practices, and would attempt to find employment elsewhere if forced to do so. I am slowly trying to convince my administration to implement SBG district wide, but it is a tough sell. Fortunately they permit me to use SBG in my class room, and my Biology EOC scores going up steadily each year has given me support. There is a lot of misinformation about SBG out there, and I would really like to see a strong push to educate people about its advantages. Thanks!

45. I don't have enough exposure to standards-based grading practices to have a strong opinion, but I am looking forward to discussing it.

46. I have experienced standards based grading for the past 7 years as a parent. It is not particularly insightful for high achieving students who are already at proficiency when they arrive at school. Getting a "report card" of 3's is not as useful as a "report card" that indicates 90% versus 98% versus 87%. All of these are theoretically "proficient/3" grades, so the parent only sees a "3" for any of the above percentages. I think it is helpful for the bottom, but not for the top.

47. I agree with many of the principles of standards based grading. I struggle with having to dual report. As a middle school teacher who see 120 students daily the thought of trying to determine 4 grades per student per report card seems very overwhelming and time consuming.

48. The cost of moving towards standard based grading is significant (morale, time, new

learning, change, etc.). If it is a top down approach, it will fail. I have seen this occur. When it fails it caused the district to take a major step back. I believe if it comes from teachers, it could be very effective. I believe what is more important than grades, is student engagement and critical thinking. Many of jumped into standard based grading too quickly without the necessary support and proper structure.

49. I haven't studied it enough to determine whether or not I think it's beneficial. Based on what I've read so far, I'm skeptical.

50. Standards based grading will improve most mass public school education. For the large varied populace of students from modern homes it will be an improvement because it levels expectations. But the standards will never cover the special students at either extremes of our society, how can it? I worry about these students and our future without their freedom to be the best they can be.

51. I love the concept; my elementary has embraced and will likely make the change. Secondary and JH aren't so confident--really view effort and work completed as the grade. May have to create a compromise in the short run to push for implementation.

52. I've noticed students doing less and less "daily/homework" because they believe it's not graded. They aren't capable of relating that helps with the assessment. I have more Failing grades than ever.

53. The district has started the move toward standards-based grading starting with K-2 students. Conversations are happening at the middle and high school levels.

54. We have been utilizing standards-based grading for years. It hasn't seemed to make a difference in student achievement. However, I feel very strongly about this being the most accurate way to report student learning. I have to constantly revisit several standards-based practices with staff in order to maintain the fidelity of it.

55. I believe that standard based grading is a very good thing at the K-6 levels. But it is not necessarily as vital in the grades following. If students would progress through the grades based on how well they know and have mastered the skills for the standards, then perhaps we need to move to non-graded schools--at least K-8.

56. As a teacher as well as a parent, I feel better informed of student progress with SBG. I am concerned about how this will work at the high school level and how it will eventually translate to colleges. Will two grading systems be what is necessary and if so, will that be doable for teachers? Will parents understand the difference between the two? Will both give an accurate picture of student achievement or will they end up being vastly different?

57. I feel that teachers in our building need training in standards based grading to provide some consistency from teacher to teacher.

58. The theory sounds wonderful and has promise, but the logistics of identifying each standard per child per reporting period is daunting. This is especially true when standards are not taught in isolation but are spiraled together in units without definition. Add the number of duties and course curriculum changes in our building, and teachers are "maxed out" before we begin what otherwise might be awesome given proper gradual implementation.

59. I've graded, in two districts, using both grading systems. Standards-based grading is confusing for both students and parents.

60. Standards-based is very new to me and, at times, seems unhelpful, but I see the potential it holds if used effectively and accurately. Right now it just seems like it leaves a lot of room for holes in the grading of student work since there can be more than one assignment over each standard. It makes it very hard to give just one grade a quarter for those standards.

61. Parents are confused with the understanding mastery... If 85% is mastery, then is my child only working at that level (an 85%?) how do we recognize and encourage our students to work at a higher level?

62. While I believe whole-heartedly in mastery grading, I disagree with a rubric that does not have percentages. It is much more effective to provide percentages for individual standards mastery, which would allow for a much closer assessment of where students are at rather than a 1-4 rubric, which allows for vague assessment of where students are. For instance, a student with a 4 could be anywhere between 80% and 100% mastery levels, which in my mind are very different levels. Percentages allow for a more discrete evaluation of a student's level of understanding. As long as a percentage grade were given for individual standards and not as an average score of all standards, it is the best measure of student achievement, and it is a shame it is being tossed aside in favor of a very vague rubric system.

63. Until we begin focusing on specific areas of mastery for students we will not be providing parents with a true reflection of their child's learning. Standards-based grading will allow us to focus on specific strengths and areas in need of improvement for true individualization of students learning!!!!!!

64. Standards based grading requires teachers to be specific about what they want their students to accomplish. Teachers and principals and parents need to have a clear line of communication to effectively implement standards based grading.