

## Grading Policy & Procedures for Tolland Middle School

### Overview

Tolland Middle School is working to incorporate Mastery Based Grading philosophy and practice into our evaluation structure. As a result of a review of the research, committee work, and discussions with parent groups, the following policies and procedures have been developed. Please see Appendix A of this document for some information on the background literature and rationale. The move to Mastery Based Grading at Tolland Middle School requires much of the educators in the building that they have not done before. These new practices will be most noticeable by parents and students in the 1) new TMS Grading Scales, 2) Disaggregation of “averaged” grades into specific student skill categories (although an aggregate or “omnibus” grade will still be shown as well), 3) the separation of academic and behavioral performance reporting, and 4) the new re-assessment (retake) policy including the TMS Afternoon Academy. While there will be paper reports sent home for academic and social *behavior* reporting, academic skills and an aggregate grade will be reported through the Power School Parent Portal, there are no paper report cards. There will be a call home from our phone calling system, however, to signify when the end of a quarter would fall, as a periodic reminder to check the Parent Portal regarding student progress. There is also a “progress reporting” option available on the Parent Portal that allows for daily and weekly updates to be emailed. Thus report cards in any paper form cost the district to send, and by the time they arrive at home contain outdated information. Teachers are required to update the data in Power School Parent Portal within 10 school days. If you do not have access to the Internet, or desire a paper copy of the Power School grade page, please notify the school at the end of the quarter.

### TMS Grading Scales

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

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

**TMS Grading Categories (only bold and underlined words are category headings)**

Subject	Indicator/Category
READING	<b><u>KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS</u></b> (The reader summarizes central ideas, including theme or main idea, key events, details, and relationships in literature and/or informational text.) <b>Pilot EOU Assessments</b>
READING	<b><u>SUPPORTING EVIDENCE &amp; CONCLUSIONS</u></b> (The reader cites specific, accurate, and sufficient textual evidence to support inferences and conclusions.) <b>Pilot EOU Assessments</b>
READING	<b><u>CRAFT AND STRUCTURE</u></b> (The reader determines the intended or precise meanings of words, analyzes figurative and/or connotative meanings and their impact on meaning and tone, and analyzes text structure, features or formats and their impact on meaning or how information is presented.) <b>Pilot EOU Assessments</b>
READING	<b><u>VOCABULARY</u></b> (Applies multiple strategies to determine or clarify the meaning of an unknown and multiple meaning words.) <b>Pilot EOU Assessments</b>
READING	<b><u>CRITICAL ANALYSIS</u></b> (The reader justifies an analysis of the author's information, and/or the interrelationships among literary elements within or across multiple texts.) <b>Pilot EOU Assessments</b>
READING	<b><u>READING LITERATURE</u></b> on all Assessments other than EOU Assessments
READING	<b><u>READING INFORMATIONAL TEXT</u></b> on all Assessments other than EOU Assessments
WRITING	<b><u>ELABORATION</u></b> (The response provides thorough and convincing events, details, dialogue, evidence, and support for the controlling idea or main idea). <b>Pilot EOU Assessments</b>
WRITING	<b><u>LANGUAGE COVENTIONS DURING WRITING</u></b> (The response demonstrates a strong command of the conventions of grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing). <b>Pilot EOU Assessments</b>
WRITING	<b><u>WRITING TEXT TYPES, PROCESS and RESEARCH LANGUAGE</u></b> on all Assessments other than EOU Assessments
SPEAKING-LISTENING	<b><u>SPEAKING AND LISTENING</u></b> all Assessments other than EOU Assessments
SOCIAL STUDIES	Category header
SOCIALSTUDIES	SOCIAL STUDIES CONTENT
SOCIALSTUDIES	SOCIAL STUDIES APPLICATION
MATH	Category header
MATH	RATIOS AND PROPORTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS
MATH	THE NUMBER SYSTEM
MATH	EXPRESSIONS AND EQUATIONS
MATH	GEOMETRY
MATH	STATISTICS AND PROBABILITY
MATH	FUNCTIONS
SCIENCE	Category header
SCIENCE	SCIENCE CONTENT
SCIENCE	SCIENCE PROCESS

## **Academic Practice**

Academic practice will replace the term “homework.” Anything that is designed to *reinforce, but will not be used to assess progress on academic content or skills, is Academic Practice*. In other words, if an assignment provides information or data about how a student is progressing on one of the learning indicators/categories it is considered an *assessment* and is part of the *Academic Grade*. If an assignment is designed to reinforce an understanding (drill and practice math problems, reading to prep for the next day’s class activity, etc.) and will **not** be used to assess progress on skills or content, that is considered *Academic Practice* and a student’s performance in this area would be evaluated through a behavioral report (see the SOAR Report Cards section below). Students who refuse to do their work (Assessment or Academic Practice) or perform poorly, will be assigned to the TMS After-School Academy Program to complete the work or assessments.

## **TMS After School Academy**

This is an afterschool program staffed each day by a teacher, and at least one paraprofessional. Students assigned to the TMS ASA will be there to a) retake tests or quizzes, b) complete unfinished or poorly done work, or c) to get learning help or reinforcement on skill or content acquisition. This will sometimes be used as an “academic detention” of sorts if a child is not completing work, is completing it poorly, and/or is not living up to their potential. It is *after* school, and therefore students who are to be re-assessed (in other words “retake” assessments) will generally not see this as a positive (though it isn’t specifically a punishment) and will generally want to go home at their regular time as opposed to having to stay after to do the re-assessments. The re-assessments, or make up work, are very important in assuring their skill acquisition, however, and therefore students who skip these sessions will ultimately receive discipline for doing so (lunch detentions, office detentions). This may motivate them to complete it correctly, and to the best of their ability, the first time. For students refusing to do work, or not completing work that has been assigned, the recommended process is 1) Teacher warning with parent contact, 2) a lunch detention in which they do the work (must be assigned as soon after the transgression as possible), and then on the 3<sup>rd</sup> time, 3) referral for a work session in the TMS ASA. Missing a session in the TMS ASA will result in an office detention for students or other in-school work sessions out of non-academic classes.

## **TMS Re-assessment (re-take) Policy**

Re-assessments (Retakes) are allowed on all assessments with the **exception** of the following:

- Math – End of Unit Assessments
  - Grade 6 Math = 7 End of Unit Assessments
  - Math 7 = 7 End of Unit Assessments
  - Accelerated Math 7 = 9 End of Unit Assessments
  - Grade 8 Pre-Algebra = 7 End of Unit Assessments
  - Grade 8 Algebra 1a = 8 End of Unit Assessments
  - Grade 8 Honors Algebra = 12 End of Unit Assessments
- Language Arts – End of Unit Assessments (6)

- Science – Benchmarks/End of Unit Assessments (4)
  - Grade 6:
    - Ecology, Roots of Life, Being a Meteorologist
  - Grade 7:
    - Astronomy, Earth Matters, Cells and Heredity
  - Grade 8:
    - Energy, Force and Motion, Matter, Human Body
  
- Social Studies – End of Unit Assessments (4 in 6<sup>th</sup>, 4 in 7<sup>th</sup>, 6 in 8<sup>th</sup>)

All other assessments are considered formative in that they are designed to gauge a student's progress toward understanding and skill acquisition, and readiness for the End of Unit/Benchmark assessments. If the great majority of the class performed poorly on a formative assessment it is recommended that the assessment *not* be considered in any student's grade. Instead, re-teaching and re-assessment should occur.

Students who score 69 or below on all assessments other than those listed above will be required to study, and be re-assessed. Teachers will fill out the referral paperwork for the TMS After School Academy and students will be assigned a study session and/or date to take the re-assessment. Students who score 69 or below will be required to take the re-assessment up to 2 times or until the student achieves a grade of 70 or above. The maximum score recorded for a student on a re-assessment is a 70 (although a student's actual retake score can be noted in the comments). If a student refuses to take the assessment an NE or "No Evidence" designation should be entered into Power Teacher / Power School for the assessment. If a student performs below a 70 regardless of the number of times an assessment is taken, that student will have the highest grade earned entered into Power Teacher / Power School for that assessment. If this is happening on a regular basis the team teachers will discuss the student's performance and formulate a plan, EIP, or referral to Tier II or III services as appropriate. Retakes are allowed up until the last week before grades close for a quarter.

### **Assessing Students' Behavior (Academic Behaviors / Social Behaviors)**

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

## Appendix A

### Background Literature and Rationale

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

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

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

### Some Big Questions

Among the big questions when thinking about Mastery grading are:

- 1) Are grades supposed to act as *incentives (to perform)*, *Feedback (to use for improving performance)*, or *evaluation (to assess mastery)*?
- 2) Should we have separate marks for *Progress (improvement from the last performance)*, *Process (effort and timeliness)*, and/or *Product (achievement of standards)*?

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

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

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

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

### Re-assessments (Redos and Retakes)

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

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

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

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

### The Omnibus Grade

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

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

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

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

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

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

### The Problem with Zeros

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

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

### Group Work

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

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



## TMS SOAR REPORT for Quarter \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**C – Consistently      D – Inconsistently      N – Needs Improvement**

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

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

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

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

Please return by the next school day

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