GRADES -
Undermining Our Work and our Culture
Thurgood Marshall Middle School
Michelle Irwin
Kate Moffatt
Stephen Olds
September 2016
“And it is you, the young and fearless at heart, the most diverse and educated generation in our history, who the nation is waiting to follow.”

President Obama
Selma, Alabama
March 2015
Creating Thoughtful Productive Citizens for our Global Society

RIGOR
- Engaging in collaborative conversations
- Improving listening skills
- Forming questions
- Using reasoning skills

RELEVANCE

RELATIONSHIPS
ARAV:

“If someone cannot solve a particular problem, I will try to look at it differently or from another angle. Usually, it works and I manage to solve it.”

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CAROLINE:

“I am a leader when I try to be the best person I can be every day and treat others with the respect they deserve.”
CLARISSA:

“I try to think outside the box.”

Mohammad:

“I am a team player...I always work well with people and it makes me happy that I’ve made a change.”
MAVERICK:
“I try to find shortcuts to get my work done fast and once I find that I tell people all/some of the shortcuts. Then once I find the shortcuts I question why the teacher didn’t teach us or tell us about it.”

ASHVEEN:
“I always have this need for things to be in “order,” for things to be perfect--I guess that also makes me a perfectionist.”
ASHLEY:

“I have questions in my mind, but never ask them.”

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JOSEPH:

“I am a dim-witted person because I act beneath my intelligence to appear and act more down to earth and approachable.”
THE CONFLICT

Will this be graded?

Is this going to be on the test?

How much do I have to write to get an "A"?

How many problems can I miss and still get a good grade?

How do I get an "A" on this?

How many points will be taken off if this project is late?

Can I do any extra credit?

Why did you give my child a G (good) in citizenship?

Grades are undermining our work and our culture!
The Conflict....
Our School Goals vs Our Grading Practices

**Learners who:**

- Learned how to ‘play’ school;
- Are motivated for all “A’s / E’s” or ‘good’ grades;
- Are focused on the product not the process;
- Fear failure.

**Learners who:**

- Didn’t learn how to ‘play’ school;
- Are unmotivated due to unsatisfactory test scores and/or grades with no chance to improve;
- Believe they are failures.

*Created students (and parents) who have “fixed” mindsets!*
**Our Data...**

Percent of Population Not Exceeding a 2.0 or Higher in GPA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Asian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sem 1: Male/Female</td>
<td>Sem 1: Male/Female</td>
<td>Sem 1: Male/Female</td>
<td>Sem 1: Male/Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>25/20</td>
<td>20.5/15</td>
<td>5/1.7</td>
<td>2.4/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21/17.5</td>
<td>22.1/16.7</td>
<td>6/1.9</td>
<td>2.9/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>31.3/25</td>
<td>17.6/11.4</td>
<td>2.7/1</td>
<td>0.5/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.8/25</td>
<td>19.8/11.4</td>
<td>4.3/1</td>
<td>2.2/0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>33.3/12.5</td>
<td>15.5/9.8</td>
<td>4.2/2.9</td>
<td>2.3/1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.3/25</td>
<td>14.4/2.2</td>
<td>4.0/2.2</td>
<td>2.3/0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average All Three Years</td>
<td>27% / 20.8%</td>
<td><strong>18.3% / 11.2%</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.4% / 1.8%</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.1% / 3.5%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GRADES

- Does our grading system support our goals?

- Do grades truly reflect our students’ mastery of the content and true character?

- How do grading practices impact how our students view grades, school and who they are as learners?

- Do grading practices kill the joy of learning?
Motivation

**Autonomy:**
Autonomous motivation involves sense of choice. Control leads to compliance - Autonomy leads to engagement.

**Mastery:**
Engagement produces mastery. Mastery is the desire to get better at something that matters. It leads to the growth mindset.

**Purpose:**
So what? How is this relevant? How am I contributing to a larger cause?
Listening Closely to Our Students......

- Ask students for their opinions on type of assignments given;
- Be more flexible with students;
- Give more examples of expectations;
- More opportunities for students to develop and voice their own opinions by completing more open-ended projects;
- More feedback from teachers;
- More trust in kids: less restrictions;
- No busy-work;
- Greater teacher/student communication;
- Be open to more questions/thorough explanations;
Paradigm Shift in Citizenship Grading

**MMS CITIZENSHIP:**

- **Satisfactory**
  - A student who earns an “S”, as a whole, neither helps nor hinders themselves or others.

- **Needs to Improve –** A student who earns an “N”, as a whole, hinders his or her own efforts.

- **Good –** A student who earns a “G”, as a whole, helps only himself or herself.

- **Excellent –** A student who earns an “E” helps others.

- **Unacceptable –** A student who earns a “U” hinders the efforts of others.
Beginning the Paradigm Shift in Academic Grading
Where are we now?

Our 8th grade team challenged traditional academic grading practices during 2015-16 school year by:

- Eliminating the homework grade component;
- Limiting the homework grade component;
- Creating “Flipped for Mastery” lessons requiring a minimum standard to move forward;
- Grading on a 3 point scale;
- Beginning to evaluate summative work at “C” level;
- Grouping students heterogeneously;
- Focusing on meaningful assessments;
- Providing meaningful feedback;
- Providing students opportunities to self-reflect and give feedback.
Outcomes....

Preliminary Results:

- More 8\textsuperscript{th} grade students were eligible for our promotion ceremony than in past years;

- Grades that students have earned are beginning to reflect their true character and their mastery of content;

- SBAC scores have improved;

- Student attitudes towards grading are changing.
## Closing the Equity and Opportunity Gap
Percent of Population Not Exceeding a 2.0 or Higher in GPA – 2015-16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>African American Male/Female</th>
<th>Latino Male/Female</th>
<th>White Male/Female</th>
<th>Asian Male/Female</th>
<th>TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS BELOW 2.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>30/28</td>
<td>15/2.6</td>
<td>1.7/0.98</td>
<td>1.5/0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>20/0</td>
<td>20.9/13.5</td>
<td>2.3/2.9</td>
<td>2.4/1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0/20</td>
<td>4/9.1</td>
<td>0.8/0.9</td>
<td>1.6/0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>15.8% / 15.8%</td>
<td>14.8% / 8.2%</td>
<td>1.6% / 1.7%</td>
<td>1.9% / 0.4%</td>
<td>49</td>
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</tbody>
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Our Reflections
“If people waited for others to make a goal possible instead of taking risks for themselves, no one would succeed.”

Ruby Melchior
MMS 2016 Alumna
Acknowledgements

Dr. Doug Fisher, Dr. Nancy Frey and Dr. Ian Pumpian -

- “No Penalties for Practice”
- How to Create a Culture of Achievement in Your School and Classroom

Daniel Pink - Drive

Rick Wormeli - Fair Isn’t Always Equal