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STANDARDS-BASED GRADING AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF DISTRICT LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF TRANSITIONING FROM A TRADITIONAL GRADING SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

STANDARDS-BASED GRADING AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL:
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Traditional grading practices have been in place for well over a hundred years and grades received served to identify in which subjects a student is "smart" or in which ones they are not (Dewitt, 2017). Standards-based grading (SBG) allows the communication of where a student is in relation to well-defined standards. The problem is that many schools do not implement a SBG and reporting system at the secondary level. This is in light of our nation and New York State having made considerable efforts and changes to establish well-defined standards.

As movement to a standards-based model has been noted at the primary grades, the purpose of this study is to identify the extent to which district level administrators are willing to change from a traditional grading system to a SBG and reporting method at the secondary level. More specifically, this research attempted to discover the views of superintendents and assistant superintendents in changing from a traditional grading and reporting system to a SBG model at the secondary level.

To conduct this study, the researcher used a qualitative approach by conducting semi-structured exploratory interviews. Participants in the study were certified public school superintendents and assistant superintendents currently employed in a New York public high school (non-charter) in two suburban New York State counties. The selected

population was presented with interview questions aimed at determining general background information as it relates to grading, if it is believed that SBG is important at the secondary level, how district level administrators would make a change from a traditional model to a standards-based model, and what, if any, barriers and challenges exist in making such a change.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my wife, Stephanie, my two daughters, Morgan and Charlotte, my mother Sue, my sister Becky, my mother-in-law Lorraine, my father-in-law Nick, and my sister-in-law Cheryl. Without your support and understanding of my prolonged absences from family interactions, this long journey would never have come to fruition. I love you with all my heart.

Mom- Thank you for making me the man that I am today and thank you for modeling the skills that I will carry forever: work ethic, grit, and perseverance.

Steph- You are my rock and I could not have done this without you. You have singlehandedly carried the weight of our family on your shoulders throughout this entire journey. Thank you for your help in providing the time necessary for this project to come to life.

Morgan and Charley- Always be sure to put your best foot forward and do not let any barriers get in your way of your goals and aspirations; see them through. I thank you for providing me with the fuel that I needed to cross the finish line.

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I acknowledge my friends and colleagues who provided the gentle nudges that I needed along the way. I thank you for reminding me to keep the eye on the prize. You were always willing to lend an ear, give a new perspective, and help sharpen my vision as I progressed. Thank you.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my mentor, Dr. Anthony Annunziato, for his support, guidance, and patience throughout this study.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

Traditional grading practices have been in place for well over a hundred years and grades received only served to identify in which subjects a student is “smart” or in which ones they are not (Dewitt, 2017). The problem with traditional grading is that it does not provide qualitative information on the difference between an A, B, C, D, or F (Scriffiny, 2008). Traditional grading practices often include areas of student performance such as attendance, behavior, and participation which do not reflect student achievement. Although this information is important and should be reported, it should be done separately from academic achievement (O’Connor, 2011; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006).

Heflebower et al. (2014) state that "standard-based grading (SBG) is a method of assigning grades that ties student achievement to specific topics within each subject area" (p. xvii). SBG involves measuring students’ proficiency on well-defined course objectives (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Scriffiny (2008) stated, “Although many districts adopt SBG in addition to traditional grades, SBG can and should replace traditional point-based grades” (p. 70).

One of the many advantages to SBG is that it provides the teacher with clear and specific information to help inform his or her instruction (Scriffiny, 2008). Furthermore, SBG also provides students with a clear direction as to what he or she needs to do to improve (Marzano, forward in Heflebower, 2014). Marzano (forward in Heflebower, 2014) stated, "A grading system that allows school leaders, teachers, students, and parents to improve student achievement over time, rather than simply reporting it at

predetermined interval, is an overdue change in many schools" (p. xviii). Dewitt (2017) added, “The concept of standards-based grading is not easily enacted by teachers, nor is it easily understood by parents. Rather, this change is a work in progress which requires both educators and parents to work together to relearn what we have been taught in the past about grades” (p. 1).

As deep research suggests that schools should move from traditional grading practices to SBG, an overwhelming number of schools continue to use a traditional grading model at the secondary level. Therefore, the focus of this study is to examine administrators’ perspectives as to if superintendents and assistant superintendents are willing to move from a traditional grading and reporting system to a SBG and reporting system.

Statement of the Problem

In the time of high stakes accountability and the emphasis on student achievement, current grading and reporting practices are misaligned with learning standards for curriculum and instruction. The problem with our traditional grading practices is that these grades do not reflect what students have learned or what they know and are able to do. The way in which grades are reported “have been a part of our education system since the time our great-grandparents were in school” (Guskey, 2015, p. 1). Guskey continued:

> The problems associated with the way we grade and report student learning are certainly not new. Education scholars have recognized these problems and noted their seriousness for well over a century. So then why, if we’ve known about these problems for so long,

> have we not found a solution? With all that we have learned about education over the past hundred years, why have grading and reporting continued essentially unchanged? (p. 2)

The United States has witnessed a great deal of educational reforms in the past 100 years which reflects our need and desire to better our educational system. These reforms have resulted in giving state and federal officials a greater stake in education which has led to increased funding, a better focus on teacher preparation, standards, and accountability (Guskey, 2015). Although times have changed, and research suggests that grading systems ought to move from traditional grading practices to SBG, the problem remains that very few schools in New York State have made the shift to SBG. Guskey (2015) noted, "Even school leaders who have some knowledge of effective grading policies and practices typically find it difficult to challenge these long-held and deeply entrenched grading traditions" (p. 10). Furthermore, Westerberg (2016) stated:

> Classroom assessment and grading should be ground in practices and beliefs that are transparent, shared, and supported by research. And therein lies the problem- in too many U.S. classrooms, grades are determined by practices that are ill-defined, unique to individual teachers, and counterproductive. In too many U.S. schools, it can be said that a student's grade depends, to a significant degree, upon which teacher the computer assigns that student to. (p. 8)

Stiggins (1993) added that although grading is challenging and important to the profession of teaching, very few of them have been trained on effective grading practices.

Guskey (2015) explained the common practice when schools attempt to challenge and reform current grading systems. Most often educators start by revising the report card and do so by assembling a report card committee of various stakeholders which is typically charged with the mission to begin research of implementations in other schools. The committee then creates a hybrid report card which is then communicated out to all stakeholders. The problem is that few, if any, of these grading and reporting systems are deeply rooted in research. Guskey (2015) commented on the predictability of this common process:

> When Report Card Committee members present their work to other staff members and parents, they encounter a multitude of unexpected questions, unanticipated controversy, and sometimes stern opposition. Compromises that dilute the committee's intent are made to appease critics. So in the end, what they have is a report cared that no one really likes but few staunchly oppose. In the worst cases, the opposition is so great that reform efforts are abandoned entirely, and the school or school district returns to the traditional reporting forms and polices that have been in place for years. (p. 11)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the extent to which district level administrators are willing to change from a traditional grading system to a SBG and reporting method at the secondary level. Rosales (2013) noted that the transition to SBG is well underway at the elementary level. However, the majority of U.S. secondary

schools continue to use traditional grading practices (O'Connor, 2011). More specifically, this research attempted to discover the views of superintendents and assistant superintendents in changing from a traditional grading and reporting system to a SBG model at the secondary level. Unveiling the perceived impediments to implementing a SBG system at the secondary level was done by focusing on districts that have not implemented SBG at the secondary level and currently have a traditional grading model.

Research Questions

The following research questions will help guide the study and are directly tied to the purpose of the research. These questions also are aimed to guide the study throughout the multiple phases and help to delineate the scope of the project.

1) To what extent do superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban setting believe in the importance of SBG at the secondary level?
2) How would superintendents and assistant superintendents describe the change process with regard to moving from a traditional grading model to SBG at the secondary level?
3) What are the perceived barriers and challenges in moving from a traditional grading model to SBG as identified by superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban area?

Overview of Methodology

To conduct the study, the researcher used a qualitative approach using semi-structured exploratory interviews. Interviews were conducted with superintendents and assistant superintendents in two suburban counties in New York State. The data were

collected using the REV app on an iPhone and analyzed through data reduction analysis by using NVivo 12.

Participants in this study are certified public school superintendents and assistant superintendents currently employed in suburban New York State public schools *(non-charter)* that serve a secondary school building or secondary school buildings. The selected population was presented with a series of questions. The questions, developed by the researcher, were aimed at determining levels of superintendent and assistant superintendent willingness to transition from a traditional grading model to SBG at the secondary level.

Significance of Study

Grading is an important study as grades are at the heart of the educational experience for all students (Brookhart et al., 2016). This study is significant in order to better understand why schools at the secondary level have not moved from a model of traditional grading to SBG. This study will also contribute to the literature and provide additional understanding of grading and reporting systems of schools while providing potentially significant information to educational leaders at both the district and building levels who are interested in leading a change in their school towards a SBG and reporting system.

Role of Researcher

The role of the researcher in this study is generate questions that target and generate multiple sources of information and evidence that results in fair and accurate depiction of superintendents' and assistant superintendents' willingness to transition from a traditional grading model to a SBG model. The researcher throughout this study will

implement this survey over a wide number of superintendents and assistant superintendents across suburban areas in New York State.

Researcher Assumptions

1) Since superintendent and assistant superintendent data is to be collected for the study, it is assumed that the respondents who agreed to participate offered their best and most honest responses in reporting their current practices and perceptions.
2) The voluntary participation of superintendents and assistant superintendents within school districts will generate sufficient responses to establish valid and reliable data.
3) The generalizability of the results obtained from this study may be limited by the nature of the superintendents and assistant superintendents selected for the proposed sample.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used consistently throughout the study:

Action-less mind — which Scharmer (2018) also referred to as 'analysis paralysis,' occurs when we "discuss things to death instead of exploring the future by doing" (p. 29).

Assistant superintendent — a person employed to guide and lead staff members in an official educational setting. This person has successfully completed a professional curriculum from an accredited leadership institution and holds an administrative certificate from the state of New York.

Best practice — a practice that is recognized as the most effective for a particular situation or environment. When data support the success of a practice, it is referred to as a research-based practice or scientifically based practice (State Education Resource Center (SERC), 2017).

Grading — the symbols assigned to individual pieces of student work or to compose measures of student performance on report cards (Brookhart et al., 2016).

Grade reporting — the method reporting of student learning that a school uses as a communication tool to students and parents (Guskey, 1994).

Knowing-doing gap — the gap between what is known, and action taken. (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000).

Secondary school/level — middle school and (typically grades 6-8) and high school (typically grades 9-12).

Standards — describe what students are expected to know and be able to do at each grade level and they are also known as expectations, outcomes, learning results, learning goals, etcetera. (O'Connor, 2009).

Standards-based grading (SBG) — a grading system where teachers communicate student learning relative to clearly defined standards and criteria (Spencer, 2012).

Student learning — what a student knows and is able to do with the acquisition of learned material; the product

Superintendent — a person employed to guide and lead staff members in an official educational setting. This person has successfully completed a professional curriculum from an accredited leadership institution and holds an administrative certificate from the state of New York.

Traditional grading — a grading practice, as defined by Jung and Guskey (2012), where "students receive a single letter grade or percentage for each subject or course that is a part of their instructional program" (p. 14).

Organization of Study

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction describing the problem under investigation and its background, its relevance to the field, the role of the researcher and the assumptions. Within this study, Chapter I discusses eight specific points: (a) an introduction describing the background of the problem; (b) the statement of the problem; (c) the purpose of the study; (d) the research questions; (e) the overview of the methodology; (f) the significance of the study; (g) the role of the researcher; (h) researcher assumptions; (i) definition of key terms of the study and (j) the organization of the study.

Chapter 2 of this study provides a strong theoretical basis for the dissertation by analyzing and synthesizing a comprehensive selection of appropriate related bodies of literature regarding the history of grading, grading practices, future vision of 21st century skills, leadership, and theories of change. Also, this chapter will serve as a way of identifying themes in the current research as well as how SBG is a best practice for grading. Within this chapter, the study's conceptual framework will be examined which will frame the research while also being used to facilitate the analysis of the findings.

Chapter 3 will provide a clear description of the research setting, research sample and data sources, methodology, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and limitations of this study. The goal of this chapter is to provide readers with a foundation for accepting (or not accepting) the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

Chapter 4 will outline the researcher's findings of the study, including the presentation of relevant qualitative data from the study produced. The findings are presented in a clear narrative form using different data points that are connected and

synthesized through practical explanatory text and visual representations. This chapter is the foundation for the analysis, conclusions, and recommendations that will appear in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 synthesizes and discusses the results of the study's research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework. Discussions within this chapter may include interpretations of any findings that were not anticipated when the study was first 134and what they truly mean to the field of study. The concluding chapter offers the researcher an opportunity to reflect thoroughly on the study's findings, and the practical and theoretical implications.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction to the Review of Literature

This chapter situates the study in the context of previous research and scholarly material pertaining to the study of the SBG and reporting and its effect on student outcomes. While presenting a critical synthesis of literature according to relevant themes and variables, this chapter will also outline the conceptual framework of the study. The researcher in this study attempted to identify the extent to which superintendents and assistant superintendents are willing to move from a model of traditional grading and reporting to SBG and reporting at the secondary level. Furthermore, the study attempted to unveil the perceived impediments to implementing SBG at the secondary level.

The content of the literature review is presented in eleven different sections; each of which contributes to a rationale for the proposed study by illustrating the importance of the research. The first section provides an introduction to the review of the literature as well as the organization of the chapter. The second section highlights educational and policy reforms in the United States to create a context for the study. This leads into the third section on assessments in education, both formative and summative, as many of the educational changes in the United States have led to an increased spotlight on this area of education. The fourth, fifth, and sixth sections relate to the history of grading practices, a review of different grading practices, as well as ways in which to reform the grading system. The seventh section relates to future 21st century skills students need to thrive. The eighth and ninth sections relate to educational leadership and theories of change which then leads to the conceptual framework in the tenth section. The eleventh section offers a summary for the chapter.

Policy Reforms: ESEA to ESSA

There is a growing sentiment and belief that we are graduating more students who are not ready to be competitive in today's global society. The desire for our students to have 21st century skills and knowledge is shared, but the way in which we obtain this goal is not. For many years there have been several pushes for reform to create the best fit educational practices for our students and our country. Although most political leaders and administrators are interested in creating the best system for our students, the focus persistently rests on increasing standardized assessments that test basic skills while destroying creativity and critical thinking as a means to an end (Sahlberg, 2011).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was developed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. As a part of Johnson's "War on Poverty," ESEA was aimed at equalizing educational opportunities for vulnerable students, such as students who come from poverty or from the inner-city areas. Prior to 1965, federal aid, if given at all, would be for specific areas as was the case with the National Defense Education Act of 1958 for math and science and the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 for vocational education (Gutek, 1986). This was a result of efforts that had failed in Congress as "both parties had opposed federal intrusion into education, an area that they reserved to local and state governments" (Gutek, 1986, p. 294). ESEA marked a shift in this former congressional philosophy as it was more a general assistance package. Gutek (1986) noted the following:

> The enactment of the ESEA set the basic directions in education that the federal government was to follow for the remainder of the decade. Its major focus was on educational innovation, with a

> special emphasis on the education of the disadvantaged. The federal government was to encourage programs to improve the education of the handicapped, those in poor areas, and bilingual education. (p. 295)

The act was supposed to be carried about for five years, but has been reauthorized several times by the federal government thereby making quality education a national commitment (Gutek, 1986).

This U.S. commitment to education was again brought to the forefront with the publication of the National Commission on Excellence in Education report, *A Nation at Risk,* in April of 1983, and view it "as the root cause of the standards movement in education" (Schimmer, p. 8, 2016). The *A Nation at Risk* report made the following claim:

> If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre education performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (p. 1)

In short, the report proposed that the nation had "lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 5-6).

To improve education, one reauthorization of ESEA was by President Bill Clinton and his administration in 1994, which was called the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), and was considered the most significant changes since ESEA was passed in 1965 (Education Week Research Center, 1994). The four key elements in IASA include high standards for all students to meet the needs of a complex and diverse society, teacher preparation and training to teach high standards, flexibility for local reform aligned with results, and engaging all community stakeholders in the educational process (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). This reauthorization was focused on making the system more equitable for low-income students and students of color, yet, it was argued that equity included achievement and the elimination of achievement gaps for all students. Furthermore, IASA requirements, along with national standards and testing projects, had not been completed by states which led to the changes in the early part of the 21st century (McDermott, 2011).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was the subsequent reauthorization of ESEA which brought on an era of accountability where all students were expected to be proficient (McDermott, 2011). The author continued:

> NCLB increased federal pressure on states for uniform accountability polices, in the name of increasing education equity. Federal authorities' pressure on states and localities to ensure educational equity had shifted from the earlier priority of

> desegregation to elimination of gaps among demographic groups' aggregate test scores. (p. 76)

This proved to be difficult for many as it was a shift from the past of a system that was designed to rank and order students through a solitary method of instruction. NCLB created a nation-wide focus on testing, and it exposed that grades in a classroom do not always reflect or predict what one may score on a standardized test. Some students who received a good grade in class did not score well on the test, and vice versa. The scores highlighted that grades do not reflect proficiency in learning at all (Vatterott, 2015). Although NCLB did focus on student gain scores, it drove teaching toward "test-centered skill work and away from responsiveness to students' interests and creativity, critical thinking, and deep understanding" (Saphier et al., 2017, p. 1).

The Race to the Top (RTT) initiative, launched in 2009 by President Barack Obama as a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), was a competition at the state district level to improve schools through an awards system. States were charged with the goal of improving teaching and learning in four key areas of reform which included the development of rigorous standards and better assessments, adoption of better data systems to monitor student progress, supporting the efforts of teachers and school leaders to improve, and an increased emphasis and resources to help the lowest-performing schools to turn those systems around (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). If districts were able to meet the demands, they then were awarded a monetary sum. The belief with RTT was that competition would "encourage transformative change within schools, targeted toward leveraging, enhancing, and improving classroom practices and resources" (The White House: President Barack

Obama, 2017, p. 1). Saphier et al. (2017) stated that RTT generated a massive development of materials for teacher evaluation and made teacher ratings give weight to student gain scores. The authors continued by highlighting that although this movement created rubrics which attempt to evaluate teaching, RTT focused on unreliable measures of student gains and a "neglect of the improvement of teaching in favor of the evaluation of teachers" (p. 1).

The Common Core State Standards initiative was originated from the governors of the states in 2009 and not the U.S. Department of Education. The goal was to create common, college and career ready standards that every child should know and be able to do by the time students graduate high school in order to be competitive in the global economy (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017). This move brought a spotlight onto deeper understanding content and application of knowledge (Saphier et al., 2017). "Nearly a decade later, the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, which sought to align what each state meant by proficiency, solidified the prominent (and quite possibly permanent) role of curricular standards within the modern classroom" (Schimmer, 2016, p. 9).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Barack Obama on December 10, 2015 which was a reauthorization of ESEA of 1965 with bi-partisan support. The law required, for the first time, that all students be taught to high academic standards. ESSA also maintained the expectation of accountability and change within schools that are not making sufficient progress while allowing for greater flexibility for schools and educators. Even though there have been many initiatives, the narrowing of the achievement gap has leveled off across the nation (Reardon, 2013).

Assessments in Education

As cited by Guskey and Jung (2013), The American Federation of Teachers, National Council on Measurement in Education, and National Education Association defined assessment as "the process of obtaining information that is used to make educational decisions, about students, to give feedback to the student about his or her progress, strengths, and weaknesses, to judge instructional effectiveness and curricular adequacy, and to inform policy" (p. 16). This process of obtaining information includes gathering information from a variety of sources such as tests, quizzes, written assignments, projects, notebooks, interviews, etcetera (Russell & Airasian, 2011). The data gathered from these various assessments are used by teachers to inform future instructional decisions based on student needs. The data are also used for program placements, assigning grades, and certifying students' competence (Guskey & Jung, 2013).

The concept of improving student learning using summative assessment is something that has been imbedded into our educational system for several years. This push began in the 1960's when tests were designed for the district level. They eventually ballooned to include standardized testing at the state levels. Furthermore, a national testing system was put in place during the 1970's and 1980's. In addition to all of this, in the 1990's, the United States began to take a look at international testing. President George W. Bush signed the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) in 2002 which reemphasized the use of standardized testing as a means of improvement (Stiggins, 2002).

Schmoker (2006) supports the claim that there are too many missed opportunities for assessing student learning in today's classroom by adding, "For the majority of lessons, no evidence exists by which a teacher could gauge or report on how well students are learning essential standards" (p.16). In order to gauge student learning, teachers need to judge what has been learned with the use of formative assessments before the learning process is evaluated through the use of summative assessments. Elton (1982) first linked the term "assessment for learning" to formative assessments which are assessments that are embedded within the teaching process during the learning process. This form of assessment becomes formative when the teacher takes in information from students and forms their next step of instruction (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007).

Unlike formative assessments, summative assessments are graded assessments that are given to students after teaching has occurred. They typically serve as a way to report a grade back to the students, parents, school, district, state, or nation. Some examples could be a chapter test, unit test, final exam, or even state exam. They are also an integral part of the education system. For example, tests can be used to look at how to realign a curriculum to better fit the standards and meet the needs of students. The problem that occurs is when it has become evident that a student, or even worse, a group of students, has missed the desired objectives. At this point, it is too late to go back and address the misunderstandings and misconceptions that the results indicate; all of which may have been potentially avoided with the use of effective formative assessment (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007). Guskey and Jung (2013) added, "The distinction between assessments for learning and assessments of learning is similar to the distinction between formative and summative assessments" (p. 52).

Summative assessments have been overused since the 1960's and a move towards improving formative assessments is the road that needs to be taken in order to improve educational practices, and therefore results (Black & Wiliam, 1998). A simple analogy to demonstrate the idea of formative assessment is learning how to drive a car. One does not pass the driving test by adding up all the "scores" earned while driving before the road test. Students take classes to receive feedback on how they are driving while they are driving. They may also drive with a parent or guardian who also critiques them during the process. These new drivers are assessed only at the end of the learning period, after teaching has occurred, which would be the summative assessment (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007).

After gathering data, it is essential that teachers provide students with quality feedback to their work and use the data to inform instruction. Feedback shows students what exactly their strengths and weaknesses are, and what it is that they can do in order to improve themselves and their work (Brookhart, 2006). Assigning grades is often overused, and feedback is not given as much as it should be. The grades tend to tell students that they have got it or not, and grades do not give direction on how to improve. In this case, grades are viewed as a reward or punishment, and some students may not even care as the grades may lead them to believe that they lack the adequate ability to perform a certain task (Black & Wiliam, 1998). The power of feedback is noted in review of research studies showed that performance was increased in 60% of the studies where quality feedback was provided. Moreover, when there was little or no difference in increasing student performance, the type and quality of feedback provided was

insufficient to let the students know what they needed to do to improve (Black et.al., 2004).

To this end, feedback "that focuses on what needs to be done can encourage all to believe that they can improve" (Black et.al., 2004, p. 18), and that students can succeed if they put in the effort. Feedback shows the students that they can do it, and how they need to go about achieving success (Stiggins, 2006). Hattie (2012) stated, "Feedback aims to reduce the gap between where the student 'is' and where he or she 'is meant to be' – that is, between prior or current achievement and the success criteria" (p. 129). Jung and Guskey (2012) highlighted, "The best feedback is both diagnostic and prescriptive. In other words, it helps teachers and students identify precisely what was learned well and where additional work maybe be needed" (p. 79).

Marzano (2010) defined educational research terms of meta-analysis and effect size. According to Marzano (2010), meta-analysis is defined by a:

> …summary, or synthesis, of relevant research studies. It looks at all of the individual studies done on a particular topic and summarizes them. This is helpful to educators in that a meta-analysis provides more and stronger support than does a single analysis (meta-analysis is literally an analysis of analyses). (p. 153)

Marzano (2010) defined effect size by the following:

> An average effect size tells us about the results across all of the individual studies examined. For example, let us say the purpose of the meta-analysis is to example the multiple studies regarding the effect of formative assessment on student achievement (that is, the

> effect of X on Y). An average effect size reports the results of all the studies included studies to tell us whether or not formative assessment improves student achievement and, if so, by how much. (p. 153)

Hattie (2012) further elaborated on the utility of using effect size as it allows researchers to compare a multitude of results of different measures over time. In his work, *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning* (2012), Hattie builds on his discoveries of interventions making a difference on student learning; discoveries that were based on over 800 meta-analyses of research articles. Hattie (2012) stated, "For any particular intervention to be considered worthwhile, it needs to show an improvement in students learning of at least an average gain- that is, an effect size of at least 0.40" (p. 3). This is what he called the "hinge-point" in order to label the effectiveness of an intervention as effective or ineffective.

Of the list of 150 influences that Hattie (2012) listed, feedback was ranked 10th overall with an effect size of 0.72 and formative evaluation ranked 4th overall with an effect size of 0.90. This confirms Page's (1958) findings in his 1958 study as grades were only seen as useful only when accompanied by specific and targeted feedback. When looking for the effect size of grading, the researcher in this study found the following in Hattie's (2012) work:

> Note that there is no discussion in this chapter on feedback relating to marking or grading. This is because the messages are about 'feedback in motion', primarily assisting all to move forward based on correctives and information that reduces the gap between where

> students are and where they need to be. Too often, comments on essays or other work are too late, too ineffectual, and ignored. As Kohn (2006, p. 41) noted: 'Never mark students while they are still learning.' Students see the mark, so often, as the 'end' of learning. The major reason relating to the nature and structure of these pieces of work that are graded is that they are the outputs of lessons and learning is more likely to occur during rather than after the learning is finished (or 'handed in'). Students soon realize the poverty of the feedback from such work other than a summative grading of the work: they look to the grade, and then to their friend's grades. The comments can provide justification for the grade, but there is little evidence that the comments lead to changes in student learning behaviors, or greater effort, or more deliberate practice- mainly because student see the 'work' as finished. (p. 152)

Hattie (2012) elaborated further on feedback by arguing that feedback works on four levels and addresses three questions. The three questions to be addressed through feedback are:

- Where am I going? (What are my goals?)
- How am I going? (What progress is being made towards the goal?)
- Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken next to make better progress?)

The first form of feedback is that of task and product level. This is the form that is most commonly used in classrooms and typically is used to indicate correct or incorrect responses. The second form of feedback is the process level where and allows for deeper learning and connection between ideas. The third level of feedback is self-regulation where the student monitors his or her learning process by evaluating the strategies used and is typically done by using probing questions. The last and fourth level of feedback is that of the self which is generally listed as praise. Such examples are 'Great job' or 'You're a great student.' Hattie warned about using this level of feedback as it has zero or negative effects on achievement.

With all the of the policy reform efforts, there was a change in terms of the development of accountability and standards systems. However, all of the programs have not led to significant and sustained student achievement (Saphier et al., 2017). This has led to a shift in thinking as the intent of assessments and what purpose they serve. Stiggins (2006) stated:

> Our assessment practices historically have been designed to promote accountability by separating the successful from the unsuccessful learners and highlights their differences. However, given the new mission of ensuring universal competence, assessments now must support the learning of all students so that all can succeed at meetings standards. The result must be balanced assessment systems and a fundamental rethinking of the dynamics of assessment in effective schools. (p. 3)

This reflects the change about how we think about assessments and has "led to the understanding that it is essential to make clear distinctions between assessment for learning and assessment of learning (Stiggins et al., 2004). The expression, "assessment for learning" was first used by Peter Mittler in 1973 when discussing special education students and the term did not gain widespread use until the late 1980s and early 1990s (Guskey & Jung, 2013). A new generation of assessments was explained by Martinez and Lipson (1989) in that new assessments developed by the Educational Testing Service which promoted feedback to students and teachers to inform learning. A study conducted by Black & Wiliam (1998) showed that assessment for learning had the potential to enhance student outcomes. Furthermore, Stiggins (2008) noted the importance of including students in the decision-making process as both the designers of the assessments as well as how and what results should be used when assessing for learning. O'Connor (2009) noted that this approach requires "a more complex system than traditional approaches, which emphasize simple scoring of answers or behaviors as right or wrong" (p. 4). Guskey and Jung (2013) summarized assessment for and assessment of learning as follows:

> Assessments for learning are designed to offer detailed feedback to students and teachers in order to guide instructional improvements and enhance achievements. Assessments of learning, on the other hand, are used primarily to document student attainments, certify competence or proficiency, and assign grades. Hence, the major difference between assessments for learning and assessments of learning relates to their purpose. Most writers consider assessments

> for learning to be any procedure or device that teachers use to gather evidence on student learning for the purpose of providing students with feedback on their learning progress in order to guide improvements in learning outcomes. (p. 52)

As a result, it is critical to define assessments and, in particular, the difference between formative and summative assessments and how they relate to assessing for learning or of learning.

Instead of looking at all the tests we could impose upon our students to meet the national standards and raise achievement, it is more important to look at what happens inside our classrooms to achieve this end (Black & Wiliam, 1998). When in the classroom, the teachers have the control to monitor exactly what our students are doing, and how their performances match up with objectives and standards. Gauging student performance can be conducted in several different ways, and these ways consist of the use of oral language, questioning, writing, and projects (Fisher & Frey, 2007). Once the performance is assessed, Spencer (2012) suggested that the work should be reported with the use of a standards-based report card. Spencer continued, "A standards-based report card contains an overall grade for each course but also indicates how well a student has mastered each of the class's several standards" (p. 5).

Grades in American Education

Guskey (1994) noted that student assessment has been a part of teaching and learning for centuries when ancient Greeks would assess students formatively as students would report what they had learned. It was not until the mid-1800s in the United States

where student progress began to be communicated. This was done by writing down what students mastered and at which point the students would move on to the next level.

Guskey (1996) describes the early educational structure of the United States as most school groups all students into one-room schoolhouses. Guskey (2015), noted that early reporting on student learning by teachers involved a visit to students' homes to orally communicate progress. This changed in the late 19th century as more students began to attend school which forced educators to group students into grades according to their age. Edwards and Richey (1947) noted how schools during the late 19th century were trying new ideas in education. One such idea was to use progress evaluations of students' work where "teachers would simply write down the skills each student had mastered and those on which additional work was needed" (Guskey, 1996, p. 14).

Compulsory attendance laws led to a dramatic increase in students attending high school (Guskey, 1996). These laws were created by states to require attendance at school as well as increase literacy rates and deter child labor practices of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (FindLaw, 2017). The first state to enact such a law in the United States was Massachusetts in 1852. The law made it mandatory for every city and town to offer primary school and was in contrast to what existed before as only those who were able to afford school did so by attending private schools. The law was also seen as a necessity to assimilate children into our society during the immigration periods of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (FindLaw, 2017).

Gutek (1986) illustrated how the number of public high schools increased from 500 to 10,000 from 1870 to 1910. It was at this point where teachers began to utilize percentages as a method to report student understanding of content which marked the

beginning of the grading and reporting system as we know it today (Kirschenbaum et. al, 1971). Schneider and Hutt (2014) stated, “In the face of this rapid expansion and depersonalization of schooling, administrators refashioned themselves as professional managers whose job was to manage burgeoning systems in the most efficient way possible” (p. 207). This was a natural shift as the demands of teachers increased coupled with the influx of students (Kirschenbaum et. al, 1971). Schneider and Hutt (2014) further elaborated on the how grades were now seen as a tool for external communication in lieu of internal communication between the school, students and parents. If the communication was to exist beyond the school, then it was believed that a common language of standardized grading was necessary which is why “grading remains a central feature of nearly every student’s school experience” (Schneider & Hutt, 2014, p. 202).

With the increased usage of grading systems to report student learning, Starch and Elliot published a report in 1912 and another report in 1913 to challenge percentage grades. Guskey (1994) summarized the two reports. The first report was based on the results of 142 teachers grading two papers on a 0 to 100 scale for an English class. The first paper received 15% failing marks while others, 12% of the teachers, rated the same paper with a score of 90 or more. The second paper earned scores with a 47-point range and some scores included highly subjective factors such as neatness. Starch and Elliot wrote a second report as critics to their first report stated that “good writing is, by nature, a highly subjective judgment” (p. 18). For this report, the authors used geometry papers which yielded a 67-point range while still including highly subjective judgments such as form and spelling. Carter (2016) added, “The conclusions that Starch and Elliot drew from this research were that one could discern very little about a student simply by

looking at the percentages grades they were awarded by their teachers, since those percentage grades meant such different things to different evaluators" (p. 16).

In 1918, this wide gap in grade ranges led to a shift away from percentage grades into systems that included a larger range and fewer categories. One such grading scale includes three-point scale where students are assigned categories of excellent, average, and poor. Another five-point grading scale consists of categories with excellent, good, average, poor, and failing along with the respective letters of A, B, C, D and F (Johnson, 1918; Rugg, 1918). Stiggins (1994) states that the use of letter grades requires the compilation of several variables and boiling them all down into a single letter. However, this grading scale became more common and remains the most prevalent grading scale used in the United States today (Brookhart et al., 2016).

To combat the persistent subjective nature of grading, the 1930s brought other systems into play with grading on the curve, pass-fail systems and a mastery approach. Marzano (2010) noted that grading on the curve is formulated when grades are assigned to students in relation to his or her peers in a given class. It was founded upon the assumption that intelligence is fixed and innate and that intelligence and school achievement are directly related (Middleton, 1993). To distribute grades, a top percentage was then assigned the highest grade and so on until the grades are evenly distributed (Corey, 1930). Davis (1930) even suggested the exact number of students that should be assigned the ranges of grades: 6-22-44-22-6. The pass-fail system originating from the 1930s only discerned between those who failed and those who had work that was deemed acceptable (Good, 1937). Finally, Hill (1935) and Heck (1938) pushed for a mastery

approach where students would only be allowed to progress through the system if and only when he or she would demonstrate mastery of the assigned skills or content.

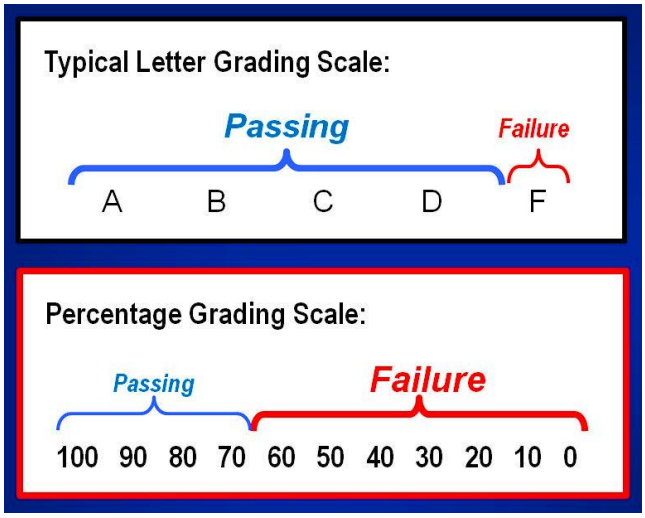
Throughout the 20th century, debates around grading only continued to increase and intensify. Page (1958) put the grades to the test by studying how student learning is affected by grades and teachers' comments. The study consisted of 74 teachers who administered a test and graded each paper by assigning a letter grade of A, B, C, D or F. Following the scoring process, the tests were randomly divided into three groups. The first group only received the grade assigned, the second group was given the grade plus a generalized comment such as keep it up and great work, finally the last group received a letter grade in addition to individualize comments. The same set of students was then given a subsequent exam and the results of the students were analyzed. Students in the second group scored significantly higher than those from the first group, and the students in the third group outperformed the second. Again, Page concluded the study by noting that grades can impact student learning but only when there is specific and targeted feedback from the teacher.

The latter part of the 20th led to the resurgence of percentage grades to replace letter grades. This was due in part to increased technologies and electronic grading software programs which are most commonly developed by technicians and not educators (Guskey, 2015). These grading systems favor percentage grades as they are easy to calculate and are easily understood by people. However, the modern grading scales differs greatly from the original implementation. Smallwood (1935) noted how percentage grading systems in the early 20th century set the average at 50 and grades

above 75 or below 25 were rare. Guskey (2015) highlighted how more than two-thirds of modern percentage grading scales denote failure, as noted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Grading Scales



Note. Grading and reporting student learning by Guskey, 2019, slide 23

Guskey (2015) also commented by noting, "Are unsuccessful students concerned about which of the sixty different levels of failure they achieved?" (p. 27) and "A grading scale in which two-thirds of the designated levels describe failure also implies that degrees of failure can be more finely distinguished than degrees of success" (p. 28). Furthermore, the author added:

> Most school leaders recognize the many inadequacies of current grading and reporting policies and practices. They know that teachers assign grades in highly idiosyncratic ways and use methods for determining grades that are rarely well aligned with the standards for student learning and related assessment procedures. (p. 10)

Grades across America have also been misleading about the degree to which students have been succeeding. This is due in part to the fact that parents and students are infatuated by grades and have been falsely led to believe that grades are the indicator of success (Vatterott, 2015). The author also noted that although high grades in high school do correlate to the ACT scores and first-year college grades as well as successful completion of freshman year. However, as grade point averages have risen over the year, there has not been proportionately higher scores on ACT exams. Goodwin (2011) noted:

> Between 1991 and 2003, the mathematics grades of high school students taking the ACT exam rose from a grade point average of 2.80 to 3.04, whereas their average score on the math portion of the ACT rose only slightly, from 20.04 to 20.55 on a 36-point scale. (p. 80)

Goodwin (2011) further noted that students with high grades are getting into college and succeeding in their first year, but still 30 percent of freshman at four-year colleges or universities will drop out, and Stewart (2012) found that only 54% of students entering college will complete a degree.

Although students may be good at the game of chasing grades, too many students are arriving at college ill-prepared with the tools and skills necessary to be successful after high school. Grades are not telling the story as to if high school students truly understand the concepts and standards or if their grades are padded with items do not demonstrate understanding of the material (Vatterott, 2015). Friedman and Mandelbaum (2012) commented on the current state of students who are entering college:

> About a third of first-year students entering college had taken at least one remedial course for reading, writing, or math. The number is even higher for black and Hispanic students. At public two-year colleges, that average number rises to above 40 percent. And having to take just one remedial course is highly correlated with failure to graduate from college. (p. 116)

The data show that too many of our students are not equipped for post-secondary success. It is time that the shift in grading and reporting reflect our needs to show what students learn as opposed to what students earn (Brookhart, 2017).

The grading problems were again brought to the forefront when Brimi (2011) replicated the two studies conducted by Starch and Elliott (1912, 1913) nearly 100 years before. In this study, Brimi asked 90 teachers to score a paper using a percentage scale of 0 to 100. The teachers also received 20 hours of professional development in order to be trained and calibrated to grade the assignment. Of the 90 teachers that were asked, 73 teachers rated the assignment and there was a 46-point range in the scores even after teachers received 20 hours of professional development which is a similar finding to the two studies conducted by Starch and Elliott. Guskey (2015) added, "So even if one accepts the idea that there are truly one hundred discernible levels of students' writing performance, it's clear that even well-trained teachers cannot reliably distinguish those different levels with accuracy or consistency" (p. 26).

The studies by Starch and Elliott (1912; 1913) and Brimi (2011) were highlighted by Brookhart et al. (2016) when the group of authors conducted a review of five types of grading studies and synthesized the findings. One area was that of early studies of the

reliability of grades on student work. They found that the differences in grading criteria, or lack thereof, attributed to the greatest variability in grades (Ashbaugh, 1924; Brimi, 2011; Eells, 1930; Healy, 1935; Silberstein, 1922). The authors also found another major source of variability in grading with teacher severity or leniency of grades (Shriner, 1930; Silberstein, 1922; Sims, 1933). Although the quality of student work and if the assignment was typewritten or handwritten did point to variability in certain cases, there was no definitive consistency of findings to draw an accurate conclusion (Brookhart et al., 2016).

Feldmesser, (1971); Frisbie and Waltman, (1992); and Linn, (1983), as noted by Guskey and Bailey (2001), classified the reasons as to why educators use various grading practices into six board categories. The first reason is to communicate the results of assessments, achievement, and progress to students, parents, and others. The second reason is for students to use the grades as a way to self-evaluate one's own progress in school. Next, grades are used as a tool to select and identify students into specific educational paths. Such uses include, but are not limited to, entry into gifted and honors programs, identification for special needs programs, or acceptance into colleges and universities. Another reason for grading is to provide students with an incentive to learn. The fifth reason for grading is that it is used as a means to evaluate programs and instructional techniques. Finally, the purpose of grading is to provide evidence of students' lack of effort or inappropriate behaviors in class. Furthermore, some educators use poor grades to pressure students to demonstrate more acceptable behaviors in the classroom.

When educators are asked to rank the importance of the six reasons for grading, they seldom agree (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). Although there has been ongoing debate over the optimal grading system, Guskey (1996) summarized the following points that researchers do agree on:

- Grading and reporting are not the essential components to quality instruction.
- There is not one single grading and reporting practice that is fit for all.
- No matter what grading and reporting system that is selected to be used by any given system, there will always be a level of subjectivity.
- Grades have some value as a reward, but no value as a punishment.
- Grading and reporting should reflect learning criteria and never on the curve.

Although researchers do agree on these points, however, grading systems have long been under public scrutiny dating back to Warren Middleton and his colleagues as they were charged to study grading procedures. This group, the Committee on Grading, published a report in 1933. When reflecting upon the work, Middleton stated, "Could order be brought out of such chaos? Could points of agreement among American educators concerning the perplexing grading problem actually be discovered?" (Guskey, 1994, p. 14).

Guskey (2015) noted several reasons as to why there is still a great deal of inconsistencies in grading practices in our schools today. One such reason is that undergraduate and graduate courses rarely discuss grading. This is coupled with the fact that schools seldom discuss grading unless there is professional development that is

centered around the implementation and usage of a grading software. Guskey further highlights that most teachers base their grading policies on practices that they observed or were subject to as students during their formative years. As primary and secondary schooling experiences vary greatly from person to person, so do the grading practices to which one was exposed. Guskey concluded with, “Even school leaders who have some knowledge of effective grading policies and practices typically find it difficult to challenge these long-held and deeply entrenched grading traditions” (p. 10).

Olson (1995) continues by stating that grades are "the primary, shorthand tool for communicating to parents how children are faring" (p. 24). However, this feedback is only useful when "it consists of information about progress, and/or about how to proceed" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 89). Marzano (2010) noted three different types of grading. The first form is norm-referenced grading which compares student to student performance, or as Guskey (2002) summarized as grading on the curve. O’Connor (2009) wrote that norm-referenced system ultimately sorts students into categories of students that are successful and others that are not successful regardless of how they perform at a given task. The second form which Marzano (2010) noted is self-referenced grading which compares a student’s performance to his or her previous performance. Finally, Marzano described SBG which compares a student’s performance to specific standards in a subject area where the student moves on to a higher skill set within a giving standard only when he or she has mastered lower levels of the specific standard. Additionally, Guskey (2002) highlighted criterion-referenced standards, which are like SBG, as they involve “clearly stated descriptions of performance that differentiate various levels of quality” (p. 27).

Marzano (2010) described the differences between SBG and standards-referenced grading. With standards-referenced grading, teachers give students feedback on their proficiency based on a set of standards, but they are not moved forwards or backwards to their level of proficiency. If the student is not able to meet the performance standard, that student will still move on to the next level nonetheless. In comparison, SBG gives feedback to the teacher and student which would then allow a student to work on standards that are more appropriate for the particular student. A student in this example would not move on to the next standard until he or she has demonstrated competence.

O'Connor (2009) added that a standards-based, criterion-referenced system, compares students' performance to standards and not to other students. Guskey (2000b) stated, "Strong research evidence shows that classroom grading and reporting should always be done in reference to specific learning criteria rather than in reference to normative criteria or 'on the curve'" (p.28). Guskey (2000b) further elaborated, "This means that teachers at all levels must identify what they want their students to learn, what evidence they will use to verify that learning, and what criteria will be used to judge that evidence" (p. 28). It is crucial, however, to clarify both the content standards, or what students are to learn at each grade level and what they are expected to do with the learned content, as well as performance standards, or the descriptions as to the minimum requirement to demonstrate how good is good enough (O'Connor, 2009).

Learning criteria provide students and parents with a clear picture as to what teachers expect student to know and be able to do with the material being learned. The learning criteria typically falls into three broad categories which include product, process, and progress criteria (Guskey, 2002). Product learning criteria relate specifically to what

the student is able to do, and grades and report cards are based purely "on final examination scores, final products (reports or projects), overall assessments, and other culminating demonstrations of learning" (Guskey, 2002, p. 29). The second learning criteria, process criteria, focus on how the student got to the final culminating summative assessment. This includes, but is not limited to, participation, effort, conduct, homework, attendance etcetera. The final criteria are that of progress learning criteria which focus on a highly individualized system where students are rated as to how far a particular student progressed compared to where they started.

As noted by Guskey (2002), Brookhart, (1993); Frary et al. (1993) agree that most teachers do not base their grades purely on product grades and typically use a combination of these three types of criteria. This adds to confusion as it becomes increasingly difficult to decipher what a grade means as there is a myriad of ways to combine the learning criteria to arrive at a final score which increases the likelihood of subjective and biased grades (Ornstein, 1994). Guskey (2002) demonstrated the following, "A grade of A, for example, may mean that the student knew what was intended before instruction began (product), didn't learn as well as expected but tried very hard (process), or simply made significant improvement (progress)" (p. 30). Guskey (2006) added:

> Developing meaningful, reasonable, and equitable grading policies and practices will continue to challenge high school educators. The challenge remains all the more daunting, however, if we continue to use reporting forms that require teachers to combine so many diverse sources of evidence into a single grade. Distinguishing

> specific "product" criteria on which to base an "achievement" grade allows teachers to offer a better and more precise description of students' academic achievement and performance. To the extent that "process" criteria related to homework, class participation, attitude, effort, responsibility, behavior, and other nonacademic factors remain important, they too can be reported. But they should be reported separately. Adopting this approach will clarify the meaning of grades and greatly enhance their communicative value. (p. 674)

Necessity for a Different Grading Paradigm

Grading solely on the "product" criteria is in contrast to many commonly used grading practices as described by Friedman and Frisbie (2000), which typically include other non-academic "process" factors which are calculated into the overall grade. Such factors include, but are not limited to, attendance, behavior, effort, etcetera. Marzano (2010) said that grades that include such factors create "grades [that] are so imprecise that they are almost meaningless" (p. 1). Brookhart et al. (2016) found, "Although measurement experts and professional developers may wish grades were unadulterated measures of what students have learned and are able to do, strong evidence indicates that they are not" (p. 835). Wormeli (2006) provided what grading systems should look like and what ought to be avoided:

> A grade is supposed to provide an accurate, undiluted indicator of a student's mastery of learning standards. That's it. It is not meant to be a part of a reward, motivation, or behavioral contract system. If the grade is

distorted by weaving in a student's personal behavior, character, and work habits, it cannot be used to successfully provide feedback, document progress, or inform our instructional decisions regarding that student—the three primary reasons we grade. (p. 19)Guskey and Bailey (2001) noted:

> Grading and reporting procedures must be tailored to fit very specific purposes. Expecting any grading procedure or device to satisfy multiple purposes is extremely dangerous. As we mentioned earlier, this is why so many report card reform initiatives fail miserably. Either they attempt to serve too many purposes with a single reporting device, or they expect that device to serve purposes for which it is ill suited. (p. 53)

Reeves (2008) added:

> Three commonly used grading policies…are so ineffective they can be labeled as toxic. First is the use of zeroes for missing work…Second is the practice of using the average of all scores throughout the semester…Third is the use of the "semester killer" – the single project, test, lab, paper, or other assignment that will make or break students. (p. 85-86)

Vatterott (2015) concluded, "If changing grading practices could precipitate broader changes in teaching and learning, it's possible that our mediocre academic standing in the world could be greatly improved" (p. 18).

Traditional grading practices, as defined by Jung and Guskey (2012), are when "students receive a single letter grade or percentage for each subject or course that is a

part of their instructional program" (p. 14). Westerberg (2016) noted that "in many school districts, board polices and negotiated contracts support the accepted norm of the teacher as the sole determiner of student grades, arrived at by whatever method and means she deems appropriate" (p. 7). Furthermore, when one uses traditional grading practices, it is impossible to determine what a student knows and is able to do with what he or she learned as teachers "combine numerous diverse courses of evidence into one mark" (Jung & Guskey, 2012, p. 15). Scriffiny (2008) added, "The system must not allow students to mask their level of understanding with their attendance, their level of effort, or other peripheral issues" (p. 72). O'Connor (2009) summarized, "The focus of traditional grading practices is to sort, select, and justify. Traditional grading practices emphasize the use of scores from assessments that are easy to quantify, such as selected-response items, especially multiple-choice questions" (p. 12). O'Connor (2009) commented on the role of the teacher where they "become 'bean counters'… adding up all the marks, bonus points, and minus points before using the calculator to divide by the total number of entries – to the second decimal point, of course" (p. 12). If we are to use grades in the service of learning to support and inform real learning, then we must move away from traditional grading practices (O'Connor, 2009).

Two other areas of grading studies and their findings as synthesized by Brookhart et al. (2016) include the relation of teacher assigned grades in comparison to student outcomes on known standardized test scores as well as teacher perceptions of grading practices. Brookhart et al. found four clear enduring findings as it relates to teacher perceptions of traditional grading practices (p. 828):

1) Teachers use a multitude of achievement and nonachievement factors in their grading practices.
2) Student effort is a key element in grading.
3) Teachers advocate for students by helping them achieve high grades.
4) Teacher judgement is an essential part of fair and accurate grading.

The authors also concluded the following with teacher assigned grades and student outcomes on standardized tests:

> Across 100 years of research, teacher-assigned grades typically correlate about .5 with standardized measures of achievement. In other words, 25% of the variation in grades teachers assign is attributable to a trait measured by standardized tests (Bowers, 2011). The remaining 75% is attributable to something else. (p. 822)

Brookhart and al. (2016) elaborated that the correlation of .5 is moderate and is neither strong nor weak. The findings were noted as important because they show that grades are not completely subjective, and they also show that traditional grading practices do not reflect what a student knows and is able to do with learned content thereby "refuting arguments that grades are a strong measure of fundamental academic knowledge, and remain consistent despite large shifts in the educational system" (Brookhart et al., 2016, p. 822).

When process and progress criteria are included into grading, it allows for "the inclusion of nonachievement factors in determining students' grades [is] often relate[d] to teachers' use of grades as rewards or punishments" (Guskey, 2015, p. 98). Furthermore,

separating academic from nonacademic grades allows for clarity to parents and pinpoints specific areas where a student needs to focus on for improvement (Heflebower et al., 2014). Although studies suggest that students do view grades as positive recognition of success, however, the authors stated, "No research supports the ideas that low grades prompt students to try harder" (p. 98). As such, it is suggested that educators find ways to motivate students to improve their work. This could be done through the use of an "incomplete" mark coupled with consequences, such as staying after school or during a lunch period to complete missing or unsatisfactory work. The shared belief of teachers within such a school is that failing marks offer students an easy way out (Guskey, 2015); "If it's not done well, it's not done!" (Guskey & Bailey, 2001).

In some cases, educators use points added to or subtracted from grades as ways to ensure compliance. The first from of is typically referred to as extra credit and such examples are students attending school functions such as plays and concerts or bringing in canned food for the holidays (Guskey, 2015). If extra tasks or assignments are directly related to standards for the course, then these items would not be extra (Westerberg, 2016). Westerberg added, "the situation actually becomes humorous if we are talking about standards-based grading: standards-based grades not based on course standards" (p. 17). Examples of the latter form of compliance could be when a teacher subtracts points for being late to class or using a cell phone during class (Guskey, 2015). In both cases, the addition or subtraction of points to a student's grade is not a reflection of what a student knows and is able to do. If a student misbehaves in class, it should be reported, however, as such actions are not "based on evidence of student learning, records of such

behaviors must be kept separate from grades designed to reflect students' achievement or academic performance" (Guskey, 2015, p. 100).

As previously mentioned, research does not support the notion that low grades encourage students to try harder. This too is true when students are given a zero as it usually results in a low grade which causes students to withdraw from learning (Selby & Murphy, 1992). Reeves (2004) added, "There might be a few people who are familiar with the research that asserts that grading as punishment is an ineffective strategy, but many of us curmudgeons want to give the miscreants who failed to complete our assignments the punishment that they richly deserve. No work, no credit- end of story" (p. 324). Although some teachers realize that they are penalizing students academically for a behavioral infraction, many still believe that such action is justified (Guskey, 2004).

Reeves (2004) further elaborated on the disproportionate nature of the zero when it is applied to a 100-point scale versus a four-point scale by providing the following example:

> 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. (p. 325)

When students neglect to turn in an assignment, they should be required to complete it instead of accepting that it is ok not to hand in work and reward a zero. If the grading system uses a practice of averaging scores, then the average is dramatically skewed and students are given little to no chance to rebound (Guskey, 2004). Only a few zeros can cause a student to fail the quarter, semester, or the entire course (Reeves, 2004). "If the grade is to represent how well students have learned, mastered established learning standards, or achieved specified learning goals, then the practice of assigning zeros clearly misses the mark" (Guskey, 2004, p. 51).

Guskey (2004) noted that it is essential to separate achievement grades from behavioral and "process" items. Both categories, however, should be reported with the process aspects falling into categories that are typically labeled as learning skills, work habits, or academic behaviors. Furthermore, at a minimum, grading scales should be moved from a 100-point grading scale to an A, B, C, D, F system or 1, 2, 3, 4. This change would allow teachers to "still assign zeros to student work that is missed, neglected, or turned in late [where] the effect of a zero is lessened because it is not so extreme" (Guskey, 2004, p. 52).

If educators base grades purely on achievement grades and academic performance, then one may question the necessity of reporting items such as work ethic, effort, and conduct if they will not impact a student's final course grade (Westerberg, 2016). The author elaborated by noting that these items do count and provided the following example:

> With rare exception, students who complete all their work and are engaged during class will perform better on summative

> assessments than they would have otherwise. If that is not the case for most students- that is, if students seem to perform about the same on summative assessments whether they do the work or not- one has to question the relevance and quality of classroom activities, assignments, and instruction in general. (p. 26)

Some may argue that there may be a student who could potentially do very well on summative assessments without doing any or all the work. In this case, the student may not be assigned to the right class and should be placed in a more fitting environment that meets the needs of this particular student. Westerberg (2016) concluded by stating, "To penalize or reward students academically for behavioral issues is to combine academic and work ethic performances- a violation of best practices in classroom assessment and grading" (p. 26).

Experts advise against the use of a single grade or project that decides the fate of a student as to whether he or she will pass or fail the course. The argument against such a practice is because there could be a critical error in measuring said assignment. Furthermore, logic does not prevail when a student has demonstrated satisfactory work throughout the semester or course yet ultimately fail due to one grade. Proponents of such a tactic state that it is justified as the given assignment took a great deal of time in or out of class to complete where, in reality, the importance is of the standard itself (Westerberg, 2016).

Many times, student grades are distorted by penalties assigned to late work. The problem with this scenario is that it miscommunicates achievement records as if the grades do not directly reflect what students have learned. This has been a longstanding

practice adopted by teachers as the belief is that such penalties ensure that students will turn their work in on time. Furthermore, it is believed that all students should get the same amount of time (O'Connor, 2011). O'Connor noted four problems with a practice of assigning penalties:

- It distorts the grade's representation.
- Accumulating petalites eventually lead students to the conclusion that it does not make sense to complete the work.
- Penalties do not work as students who turn in work late early in a course typically tend to hand work in late as the course progresses, proving that the penalty did not change a student's behavior.
- Timelines in the "real world" are not hard deadlines and are typically negotiated.

O'Connor (2011) further noted, "If we want students to be responsible and timely, then we can teach them and help them along the way, rather than assume they will learn through punitive policies" (p. 25). Such supportive practices provide a more accurate reflection of a student's achievement as well as what happens in the world beyond the classroom walls (O'Connor, 2011). Westerberg (2016) stated, "We would rather have students learn the targeted material a day or two late than not learn it at all" (p. 38).

When using averaging to come up with a final grade, it could make sense to use such a method when combing different standards or measurement topics. However, when used to average all assessments for a specific topic, it does not account for growth or the information learned throughout the unit (Westerberg, 2016). This is highlighted in Table 1, O'Connor (2009) illustrates how four different students progressed throughout a given

topic. By taking a deeper look at the data, one can clearly see how Jennifer and Stephen eventually mastered the material by the end of the unit, albeit at different rates. Karen made significant progress and proficiency but did not master the material while Alex stayed stagnant from beginning to end and failed to meet minimum course requirements. In this scenario, all students failed regardless of how they progressed throughout the unit and what they were able to demonstrate by the end.

Although most teachers use computerized grading programs, "at the end of the marking period, they combine these various measures and, with the help of the computer, calculate a summary score to the one-hundred-thousandth of a decimal point" (Guskey, 2002a, p. 775). This provides the illusion of greater objectivity due to the mathematical precision of the grades. However, the teacher still needs to decide what will go into the calculation, the weight of each category, and the method that one will use to summarize the information (Guskey, 2002a). It is also common where different teachers of the same course select different information, or in cases where the same information is selected, the weighting is different (Guskey, 2009). Furthermore, when teachers rate common summative assessments, those assessments are even graded differently as previously evidenced by Starch and Elliott (1912; 1913) and Brimi (2011). If schools wish to continue the practice of class rankings, separating academic and behavioral would allow for more accuracy in class rankings and calculated grade point averages as they would be purely reflective of students' academic performance (Stiggins, 2001; Wiggins, 1996). Guskey (2015) suggests that educators need to assess their purpose in the educational system; is it to select or develop students?

Table 1

Reflecting On…Problems with the Mean

Assessments in Order	Karen	Alex	Jennifer	Stephen
Assessment #1	0	63	0	0
Assessment #2	0	63	10	0
Assessment #3	0	63	10	62
Assessment #4	90	63	10	62
Assessment #5	90	63	100	63
Assessment #6	90	63	100	63
Assessment #7	90	63	100	90
Assessment #8	90	63	100	90
Assessment #9	90	63	100	100
Assessment #10	90	63	100	100
Total	630	630	630	630
Mean	63%	63%	63%	63%
Median	90%	63%	100%	63%
Mode	90%	63%	100%	?

Note. O'Connor, 2009, p. 155

He stated that if schools decide that the purpose is to select students, then they must continue to implement strategies and continue practices that widen the gap among our students. One such practice is poor teaching and Guskey (2015) noted, "If you want to accentuate the difference among students, then teach them as poorly as possible. A few students will be able to direct their own learning and will achieve at a high level, regardless of what a teacher does" (p. 60).

Another practice that is designed to select students noted by Guskey (2015) are the usage of college entrance examinations as they are developed "to accentuate the

differences among students in order to facilitate decisions about admission to selective colleges and universities" (p. 60). As college entrance exams such as the ACT and SAT are designed to highlight differences in students, when a particular question is answered by many of the test takers, that item, even if it asks about a vitally important question, is generally removed from the assessment in an attempt to ensure that differences are maximized. Guskey noted, however, that scores are more influenced by socioeconomic status and not by the quality of instruction received. Conversely, if the goal of educators is to develop talent instead of selecting talent, then all students should be given an opportunity to demonstrate what they know and are able to do when given a clear set of learning standards. Guskey (2015) elaborated:

> After clarifying those learning standards or goals, you then do everything possible to ensure that all students learn those things well. If you succeed, there should be little or no variation in measure of student achievement. If your teaching is optimally effective, then all should attain high scores on assessments on their learning, and all should receive high grades. When your purpose is to develop talent, this is precisely what you strive to accomplish. (p. 61)

If our goal is to develop our students, then why do we compute class rank? Guskey (2015) raised such points against this practice. Most schools generate a class rank by calculating a grade point average, or GPA. Lang (2007) noted that this practice is not consistent from school to school as some give equal weight to each course while other schools assign a weight to courses which are perceived to be more advanced courses.

Guskey (2015) stated, “Rank-ordering the students in every graduating class has nothing to do with developing students’ talent. Rather, it is unquestionably about selecting talent” (p. 61). The author continued by adding, “If we say our purpose is truly to develop the talents of students, then the process of class rank is unmistakably counter to that purpose” (p. 62). While some may argue that class rank is needed for college admissions and the application process, Hoover (2012) reported that only 19 percent of colleges give class rank “considerable importance.”

Reforming the Grading System: A New Paradigm

Wormeli (2006) stated that grades should inform both the student and the teacher with feedback as to document his or her progress and allow the teacher to make targeted moves in instruction to best help individual students. Westerberg (2016) added, “When we record progress by attaching assessment results to topic or unit standards, both academic and behavioral, students can more clearly see exactly what their strengths and weaknesses are” (p. 25). Heflebower et al. (2014) shared that, “Although the shift from traditional grading practices to standards-based grading may require educators, students, and parents to reframe their existing beliefs and expectation about grades, the benefits to all stakeholders are powerful enough to warrant the change” (p. 10). Reeves (2017) highlighted:

> When we explode the myths and establish constructive polices, the results are immediate. Reductions in failures, improvements in discipline, high levels of student engagement, and dramatic gains in teacher morale can be observed in months, not years. The ridiculous futility of five-year plans is replaced with an impact that

> teachers can see in six to eight weeks. Within a single semester, reduced failure rates lead to fewer repeaters, fewer dropouts, and more opportunities to teach elective courses that inspire students and engage teachers. (p. 50)

Guskey (2011) noted that challenging traditions would not be an easy task by stating, "They've been a part of our education experiences for so long that they usually go unquestioned, despite the fact that they are ineffective and potentially harmful to students" (p. 20). Jung and Guskey (2012) highlighted the typical sentiment with challenging traditions, "The old adage, 'Why fix it if it isn't broken?' rings true to many educators and parents alike. In no aspect of education is this more prevalent than in grading and reporting. Tradition dictates practice in grading and reporting more than in any other area of education" (p. 81).

Schmoker (2000) pointed out that the standards movement was creating a buzz in the world of education as "ironically, an analysis of the case against standards reveals its potential importance, especially for helping educators address profound gaps in the typical curriculum found in most schools" (p. 49). O'Connor (2009) noted that by the end of 20th century, 49 of 50 American states had adopted standards to drive the curriculum. These standards drive what should be learned by students at varying points in their education, but teachers are still left to decide how they will bring students to know and be able to do what was set forth by the standards (O'Connor, 2009). O'Connor (2009) noted a number of benefits that standards provide:

- Clear focus on what students should know and be able to do
- Common direction for all schools in an educational jurisdiction

- Greater equality in learning goals for all students
- Consistent basis for communication about student achievement to and among stakeholders
- Explicit and external basis for judging the success of teaching and learning

Marzano (2000) highlighted some problems that exist with the standards movement as those who opposed the movement claimed the following:

- There are too many standards, and many are not well written or sufficiently succinct
- Standards are straitjackets for teachers who take the life out of the classroom
- The standards create hoops for students to jump over because "the bar has been raised"
- The movement has caused the explosion of testing at district, state, and national levels.

Reeves (2001) suggested that these criticisms of standards are "a good rationale for the improvement of standards, [but] they are not arguments for the rejection of standards" (p. 6). Robinson (2015) said that "the standards movement came about because of legitimate concerns about standards in schools" (p. 24).

Pinkin (2016) noted that SBG takes place when student learning communicates how students are doing based on a set of standards. This is separate from standardized grading, which provides teachers with a consistent set of grading parameters and structure to be followed to increase consistency (Brookhart et al., 2016). Busick (2000) stated, "If grading and reporting do not relate grades back to standards, they are giving a

mixed message. Our grading practices must reflect and illuminate those standards" (p. 73). Therefore, it is recommended that SBG communicate how students are doing in relation to grade-level standards on a scale that describes performance of product and separate from process and progress (Guskey, 2009).

As to why educators should focus on standards, Pinkin (2016) stated, "Simply put, standards-based grading makes sense. It is the most accurate and honest grading method I have encountered thus far in my teaching career. Its benefits far outweigh its challenges" (p. 1). Standards are developed to help educators frame the curriculum in order to facilitate the design of the instruction and assessments. A standards-based report card allows teachers to report detailed student learning and feedback in relation to particular standards. In most cases, there are far too many standards to be reported on a single report card, so it is recommended that four to six standards be selected to be on the report card (Jung & Guskey, 2012). This helps to clearly identify exactly what students need to know and be able to do as a result of schooling (Heflebower et al., 2014) and grades will then reflect mastery of skills, not memory of content (Vatterott, 2015).

In the classroom, it is first important to outline what a student should know and be able to do by the end of the lesson. This is done by communicating mastery objectives that are student friendly and aligned to standards. Furthermore, assignments should be accompanied by "criteria for success," which clearly outlines what is expected of students. Both the mastery objectives and "criteria for success" take the guesswork out learning for students so that they are able understand what to do and demonstrate how to do it (Saphier et al., 2017).

The SBG classroom is characterized by heavy usage of formative assessment practices to inform instruction and remains nonpunitive as it is ungraded (Vatterott, 2015). Feedback is also prevalent and can be seen as "an ongoing between a teacher and his or her students designed to help students grow as vigorously as possible and to help teachers contribute to that growth as fully as possible" (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 11). When it is time for a summative assessment, the assessment should reflect what was learned as well as the student's last best effort to demonstrate learning (Vatterott, 2015). The author continued:

> In the standards-based classroom, summative assessments are not limited to paper-and-pencil test. Performance tasks such as a paper, a project, a demonstration, or presentation may also be used. Summative assessments are often common assessments (used for all sections of a course or all students in a grade level) and are typically organized by learning targets. (p. 67)

Vatterott (2015) also noted that when the assessment covers many learning targets, the scores should be broken down and separated by target. This allows teachers to compile evidence and student progress as it relates to a specific target and/or standard. With this evidence, students are graded on the most recent evidence replaces earlier evidence, so students are not penalized for not being there yet. This is similar to obtaining a driver's license as "drivers are not restricted by how many times they took the driver's test and their scores are not averaged together" (Vatterott, 2015, p. 70-71).

Jung (2009) explains that SBG is one of the greatest and most prevalent challenges to assign fair and meaningful grades to students with disabilities. The

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 and 2004 recognizes the critical need for Individualized Education Plan (IEP) teams to identify, monitor, and communicate progress for students with disabilities (20 U.S.C. § 1414(d) (1) (A)). However, with the lack of recommendations on grading, teachers have made informal and inconsistent grading adaptations on an individual basis (Polloway et al., 1994). Although students with disabilities should have IEPs that enable them "to achieve passing marks and advance from grade to grade" (*Board of Education v. Rowley*, 1982), assigning failing and passing grades that are not truly reflective of a student's work fails to provide accurate information to help inform decisions about necessary services or interventions (Jung, 2009).

Jung and Guskey (2007) developed the five-step Inclusive Grading Model which is "designed to engage teams in a collaborative process to determine achievement, or product, grades in a way that fits within a standards-based environment" (Jung, 2009, p. 31). The model's five steps includes:

1) Determine if Accommodations or Modifications are Needed
2) Establish Standards for Modified Areas
3) Determine the Need for Additional Goals
4) Apply Equal Grading Practice to Appropriate Standards
5) Communicate the Meaning of the Grades

Relating to step 1, Freedman (2005) noted that adaptations are those that provide access to the general curriculum but do not alter the standard; for example, large type print or an audio recording. A modification would alter the standard and grade-level expectations; for example, a 4th grade student who would have a standard modified to write organized

paragraphs using 1st grade vocabulary. In many cases, students will need a combination of accommodations and modifications to provide equitable access to the curriculum. These newly modified standards in step 2 are established and created in collaboration with the IEP team.

Step 3 of Jung and Guskey's (2007) Inclusive Grading Model notes the creation of additional goals, if necessary. It is possible that these goals may not be directly connected to a grade on the report card, however, it is important to report on them separate from the report card. Step 4 requires grading students based on the standards and not on the grade-level standard, if appropriate. Step 5 is of equal importance to communicate which, if any, grades are based on modified standards, at which point additional information would be supplied. Such notations on the transcript must not in any way identify the student as receiving special education services but using the term modifications is legal if modifications are available to any student who needs them (Jung, 2009).

Assigning grades to English language learners (ELLs), or students whose first languages is not English, also presents a challenging task. Again, as is the case with other student groups, there are numerous resources for teaching and assessment strategies, but very few address how to report fair, accurate, and meaningful grades to these students (Sampson, 2009). The issue with ELLs is that content standards are created with the assumption that learners have the ability to use English to access the content (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages [TESOL], 1997). The lack of English which may not allow ELLs to meet state standards and achieve on state assessments. Additionally, some ELLs enter with limited formal education form their native country

(Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). However, teachers are still expected to give students the opportunity to access the content appropriate to their developmental level, age, and level of proficiency (TESOL, 1997) through accommodations and/or modifications, as previously described by Freedman (2005). Gottlieb (2006) said that it is unfair to have the same expectations for students who may or may not have a solid foundation of education and that the "assessment of English language learners must be inclusive, fair, relevant, comprehensive, valid and yield meaningful information" (p. 14).

Sampson (2009) noted that amid the myriad of recommendations, it is important to separate the reporting of product, process, and progress (Guskey 1994, 1996, 2002, 2006; Guskey & Bailey, 2001; Stiggins, 2008; Wiggins, 1996). Sampson (2009) concluded that educators need to ask a series of questions should ask the following to determine student grades in a standards-based setting:

1) What standards are most appropriate for this student to pursue?
2) What will count as evidence?
3) What accommodations are necessary?
4) How well has the student achieved?

Along with the importance of asking these questions to making grades meaningful is effectively communicated the information to the ELLs and their parents/guardians. It is also critical to reevaluate student achievement and give students multiple opportunities to provide evidence of understanding on an ongoing basis for all students (Sampson, 2009).

SBG does come along with challenging grading practices that have long been a part of teachers' repertoire. Pinkin (2016) stated, "Standards-based grading challenges many grading practices teachers feel very strongly about: assigning zeroes (which I no

longer do), accepting ‘late’ work (which I now always do), and allowing re-dos and re-takes (which I allow without limits)” (p. 1). Brookhart et al. (2016) added, “The understanding and support of teachers, parents, and students are key to successful implementation of SBG practices, especially grading on standards and separating achievement grades form learning skills” (p. 828). Without all stakeholders sharing a common goal, it could potentially derail transformation of grading practices from a traditional to SBG model. Pinkin (2016) concludes:

> Implementing SBG has been a bit of a culture shock for both students and parents, simply because it is entirely different from everything they have ever known about grades. Focusing on more quantitative and individualized feedback requires some flexibility, open-mindedness, and a lot of trust in teachers. Though this shift in mindset is certainly an initial challenge for parents and students, it is a necessary one. The benefits and progressive thinking behind SBG far outweigh the challenges of implementing the practice. We have gone long enough assigning subjective and arbitrary numbers to student performance, and it is time that our communication of student progress reflects students learning, and student learning only. (p. 2)

Meaningful grading and reporting practices should, at a minimum, include both formative and summative practices (Reedy, 1995). Wemette (1994) noted that most parents would rather report cards every 6 weeks in lieu of every 9 weeks. Guskey and Bailey (2001) found that it was not necessarily that parents would like report cards more frequently, but

that they would like to have more information on a consistent basis. The duo noted that because “they perceive report cards as the primary and sometimes only source of such information, most parents indicate they want to receive them more often” (p. 53).

A reporting system should not solely be limited to report cards. It is crucial for reporting systems to include several reporting tools where each item serves a specific purpose. The purposes of the reporting tools need to be clearly outlined and the set of tools to be used will typically vary from each level of schooling based on school and student needs (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). Similarly, multiple indicators of grading evidence should be used when grading and reporting student learning. Research confirms that most teachers use multiple sources of evidence, however, there is a great deal of variance as to which sources are used and how they are combined to report out (Cizek et al., 1996; McMillan et al., 1999). Furthermore, grades are typically a combination of product, process, and progress criteria (Brookhart; 1993, 1994). Note in Table 2, Guskey and Bailey (2001) outlined the associated tools of a multifaceted reporting systems (p. 54) and sources of grading and reporting evidence (p. 61).

Guskey (2015) commented on reporting systems by stating, “The best report cards clearly communicate what students were expected to learn and be able to do, how well they did those things, and whether or not that level of performance is in line with expectations set for this level at this time in the school year” (p. 17). The reporting systems, he noted, must have enough information to help inform parents but not too much information as to confuse and overwhelm parents.

Table 2

Tools of a Multifaceted Reporting System; Sources of Grading and Reporting Evidence

Tools of a Multifaceted Reporting System	Sources of Grading and Reporting Evidence
Report Cards	Major Exams or Compositions
Notes Attached to Report Cards	Class Quizzes
Standardized Assessment Reports	Reports or Projects
Phone Calls to Parents	Laboratory Projects
Weekly/Monthly Progress	Students' Notebooks or Journals
School Open-Houses	Classroom Observations
Newsletters to Parents	Oral Presentations
Personal Letters to Parents	Portfolios or Exhibits of Students' Work
Evaluated Projects or Assignments	Homework Completion
Portfolios or Exhibits of Students' Work	Homework Quality
Homework Assignments	Class Participation
Homework Hotlines	Work Habits and Neatness
School Web Pages	Effort
Parent-Teacher Conferences	Attendance
Student-Teacher Conferences	Punctuality of Assignments
Student-Led Conferences	Class Behavior or Attitude
	Progress Made

Note. Guskey & Bailey, 2001, p. 54, p. 61

Guskey and Bailey (2001, p. 53) further elaborated that schools must clearly define the purpose of grade reporting by asking three questions:

- What information do we want to communicate?
- Who is the primary audience for that information?
- How would we like that information used?

Guskey (2015) noted that a distinction must be made as to if "grades recorded on the report card [are] based on assessment results or on standards" (p.17). Nonetheless, Guskey (2015) added that all standards-based grades are a result of assessments of student learning, in which case assessments that are given to students could be used to assess one or several standards. To clarify, "Instead of recording a single grade for a total assessment, teachers should record multiple grades, each grade based on how well student performed on the aspect of the assessment related to that specific standard" (p. 18).

When asked "Who is the primary audience?", parents and educators gave varied responses depending on the grade level. Most of those associated with the elementary level stated that parents are the primary audience whereas many stakeholders at the secondary levels note that parents and students both serve as the primary audience. Moreover, the report cards for colleges and universities are solely for the use of students (Guskey, 2015). Some suggest that audiences for report cards could include colleges and universities, however, Guskey (2015) articulates a clear distinction between report cards and transcripts:

> Transcripts are official records that may be shared publicly with a variety of agencies, including other schools, colleges and universities, government and civil service organizations, and prospective employers. Report cards, however, are considered private documents of communication between schools and parents and/or students. In most cases, transcripts also record students' cumulative academic histories, whereas report cards typically

include information about performance during a single terms or academic year. (p. 19)

Whether the targeted audience be parents or students, report cards are a part of the reporting process which is intended to provide information to enhance student learning while providing a sense of direction by identifying students' strengths and areas of needed focus (Guskey, 2015).

Guskey and Bailey (2010) recommend that the purpose be spelled out in a bold box to clearly articulate what will be communicated, to whom, and the goal of such communication. Furthermore, it will minimize miscommunication and potential misunderstandings. They provided an example of a statement where the parents and the students are the recipients of the report card:

> The purpose of this report card is to communicate with parents and students about the achievement of specific learning goals. It identifies students' levels of performance with regard to those goals, areas of strength, and areas where additional time and effort are needed. (p. 36)

Guskey (2015) summarized the purpose of grade reporting by stating, "Once decisions about purpose are made, other critical issues about the form and structure of the report card, as well as issues related to broader grading and reporting policies and practices, will be much easier to address and resolve" (p. 21). Guskey and Jung (2012) also noted four essential steps in grade reporting reform to ensure that the reporting system reflects best practices:

- Be clear about the purpose.
- Use multiple grades to report student learning.
- Change procedures for selecting the class valedictorian and eliminate class rank.
- Give honest, accurate, and meaningful grades.

Guskey and Bailey (2001) noted several items that should be included in a grade reporting form. The duo clearly noted that there is not a one size fits all form as different settings and audiences will dictate the specific needs each individual community. A reporting form should, at a minimum, include detailed information about students' strengths and weaknesses while also being easily understood by all stakeholders. Just as grades should separate product and process information, the form should also reflect this practice with multiple sections for reporting. Guskey and Bailey (2001) outlined that the most effective reporting forms should strive include the following components (p. 168):

- Checklists that show students' progress toward subject area standards.
- Narratives to clarify student strengths or area of concern in each subject.
- Ratings of the student's work habits or social development
- Records of attendance and special services
- Sections for students to complete on self-assessment and goal setting
- Reports of progress on portfolio or service learning requirements
- Space for parents' comments, questions, and signatures

When creating the form, it is essential that the form and all the components be created and agreed upon by all stakeholders including, but not limited to, teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Furthermore, the form should be clearly

communicated with drafts of the forms given to parent focus groups for feedback. When the final forms are adopted, it is important that the forms be consistent across grade levels and from building to building within the district. The frequency of the forms should also be agreed upon but should not be the sole source of information as a multifaceted system would best serve various needs within each community (Guskey & Bailey, 2001).

Brookhart (2017) offers some suggestions on how to assess readiness for change as schools begin "talking the big questions about grading purpose, where you and your district are now, and where you want to go" (p. 152). Brookhart (2017) noted that

> grading on student achievement is at the heart of any policy designed to support student motivation to learn…In grading, the main philosophical difference is between those who believe that grades are wages that students earn for compliance with teachers' assignments and requests, and those who believe that grades are indicators of learning and achievement. (p. 149)

This initial "gap analysis" will provide members the opportunity to reflect upon current practices and start the conversations. To do so, Brookhart suggests that teachers and administrators review the grading strategies listed in Table 3 and note whether they agree or disagree with them.

Once these strategies have been rated, Brookhart (2017) suggests that groups can then begin to evaluate the data by noting which ones where faculty members unanimously agreed or disagreed while stating why members felt the way they did. This process will then lead participants to dive deeper into issues and mixed responses as the conversations begin. Both Reeves (2016) and Brookhart (2017) state that discussions should not start with generalized discussions on grading overall as conversations will stall.

Table 3

Grading Strategies That Support and Motivate Student Learning

Strategies for Grading Individual Assessments	Strategies for Assigning Report Cards
• Communicate clear learning targets	• Grade on standards
• Make sure assessments are high quality	• State grading policy clearly
• Use formative assessment during learning	• Keep standards-based record
• Inform students	• Use multiple measures
• Grade achievement, and handle behavioral issues behaviorally	• Maintain standards-based meaning when blending evidence
• Grade individuals	• Involve students

Note. Brookhart, 2017, p. 42

Jung and Guskey (2012) noted that tackling this change confronts longstanding traditions that are not rooted in research. The duo suggested that efforts to improve "must be multifaceted and must approach change from a systematic perspective, addressing change at all three levels simultaneously" (p. 87). These three levels include changes in behaviors with teachers, administrators, and higher education.

The authors noted that policies offer direction and guidelines, yet teachers still "have great latitude in determining their classroom grading policies and practices, especially when it comes to assigning grades to struggling learners" (Jung & Guskey, 2012, p. 76). Teachers, according to the authors, must then consider the following to facilitate change: implement practices that are based on research and not tradition, know the difference between accommodations and modifications, think big, but start small, and initiate frequent, high-quality communication with families. Administrators should: become knowledgeable, share information of SBG with all stakeholders, take an active

role in exploring change, and support teachers through the implementation and change process. Finally, Jung and Guskey (2012) commented on how higher education can help these change efforts by: making grading policies and practices part of the coursework, model the best practices when grading student performance, embed the task of grading and reporting in both the coursework and student teaching, provide teachers with specific and directive feedback on their grading policies and practices, and partner with districts and schools to discuss and improve grading policies and practices. The authors conclude by emphasizing, "Only those change efforts that integrate changes in the actions of teachers, administrators, and institutions of higher education are likely to attain a high level of success and be sustained over time" (p. 87).

Westerberg (2016) outlined seven components that help sustain the transition from a traditional grading model to SBG. These components include training, time, technical assistance, compatible software, outreach assistance, input, and individualized handholding and accountability. First and foremost is communicating the purpose to all stakeholders as to why the change is taking place along with targeted, sustained, and ongoing training to ensure a positive effect on the change along which would then impact student achievement. The author offers insight and suggestions as to when and how such professional development could take place. These suggestions include released time during the day, summer paid work, and delayed starts. Other options included offering to pay retired teachers as well as slightly increasing class sizes. In doing so, it is possible that all or a portion of a teacher's schedule would be dedicated towards curriculum writing and development.

Technical Assistance, as described by Westerberg (2016), involves the creation of descriptive scoring scales and writing valid and reliable assessment tasks aligned to those scales. This could be the work of contracted specialists or outside consultants. Outreach assistance involves providing all district employees with talking points and responses to anticipated questions to help support those who may be confronted with questions which might be intended to derail the transition. One such "elevator speech" was offered by Heflebower et al. (2014), "We are revising our grading practices to be aligned to the standards students must meet. That way, grades will be a clearer indication of what students have learned, not simply a measure of how much work they can turn in or how hard they might try in class. Learning is the indicator of success" (p. 95).

In all cases, leadership must pay close attention to the software that the system uses early on in the implementation process to ensure compatibility of alignment between the grading system developed and the communication through student information management systems. Technical problems and the lack of a teacher-friendly data entry and data management system can easily spoil district's efforts to transition. Furthermore, input from stakeholders to offer suggestions to modify and/or improve the system without straying away from the purpose of the transition will ease tensions. Additionally, it is important to hold all district employees accountable and work with members on an individual basis to ensure that all are responsible for implementation and does not become a top down, under supported initiative; "what gets talked about, supported, and monitored gets implemented" (Westerberg, 2016, p. 98).

Guskey (2015) noted three factors that impede long withstanding change when reformers attempt to challenge grading practices. This first is that reformers fail to fully

articulate and communicate the main purpose of grading. Secondly, reformers typically lack the ability to fully understand the change process. Two such pitfalls are ignoring the power of tradition and not communicating with all stakeholders involved. Finally, the third factor is that many reformers focus solely on the report card alone which leads the report card to become "a target of discontent and a lightning rod for controversy" (p. 12). Guskey further detailed, "In many cases, for example, forms either offer insufficient detail for parents who are seriously concerned with helping their children or provide so much detail that it creates a bookkeeping nightmare for teachers and overwhelms parents with information they may not understand or know how to use" (p. 12). Guskey and Bailey (2001) noted recommendations for future change:

> Reform initiatives that set out to improve grading and reporting procedures must begin with inclusive, broad-based discussions about purpose that involve various stakeholders. The major focus of these discussions should be what message is to be communicated through grading and reporting, who is the audience or audiences for that message, and what is the intended goals of the communication. Once decisions about purpose are made, other critical issues about form and structure will be much easier to address and resolve. (p. 52) …Efforts that focus on particular tools without first considering their purpose inevitably fail (p. 54).

O'Connor (2009) expressed that the change to standards-based systems holds promise if "teachers are assisted appropriately in aligning curriculum, instruction, assessment, grading, and reporting" (p. 12). Heflebower et al. (2014) added that:

> motivating and moving a school or district toward standards-based grading requires a strong, committed leader with a long-term vision and a detailed plan that allows all stakeholders to collaborate toward a final goal: a grading and reporting system that clearly communicates what student know and are able to do. (p. 87)

Future Ready Skills

Wagner (2008) defined the global achievement gap as the gap "between what our more academically able students are being taught versus what they will need to succeed in today's world" (p. 43). Wagner (2008) outlined seven survival skills our children need to succeed in the 21st century as:

> the universe in which our children must compete and succeed has been rapidly transformed by groundbreaking and rapidly evolving technologies, as well as by the stunning economic growth of countries such as China, India, Thailand, the Philippines, and many more. (p. 9)

Friedman (2007) called this the "flattening of the world" where the playing fields are being leveled as:

> it is now possible for more people than ever to collaborate and compete in real time with more other people on a more equal footing than at any previous time in history of the world – using computers, e-mail, fiber-optic networks, teleconferencing, and dynamic new software. (p. 8)

Wagner's (2008) work highlights seven survival skills which are then needed to be successful in the 21st century are:

1) Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
2) Collaboration Across Networks and Leading by Influence
3) Agility and Adaptability
4) Initiative and Entrepreneurialism
5) Effective Oral and Written Communication
6) Assessing and Analyzing
7) Curiosity and Imagination

These skills, suggested by Wagner (2008), will help as the current jobs that one is hired for today may not exist in the future and collaboration is needed to solve complex and unforeseen challenges in an everchanging world.

According to Robinson (2015), there are four basic purposes of education which are economic, cultural, social, and personal. He then goes on to note how we need to think of what students need to know and be able to do in terms of competencies as opposed to learning conventional curriculum of segmented subjects. Competencies "should evolve from the beginning of education and be practices and refined throughout their lives with increased confidence and sophistication" (p. 141). Robinson outlined the eight competencies which are supported by the four basic purposes of education:

1) Curiosity- the ability to ask questions
2) Creativity- generating and applying new ideas
3) Criticism- analyze information and formulate opinions
4) Communication- clear expression of thoughts and feelings
5) Collaboration- working with others
6) Compassion- ability to empathize

7) Composure- balance of the inner and outer worlds

8) Citizenship- constructively engage with society

The author wrote, “Students who leave school feeling confident in these eight areas will be well equipped to engage in the economic, cultural, and social, and personal challenges that they will inevitably face in their lives” (p. 141).

Friedman (2016), commented on current trends in our changing world as outlined by economist James Bessen as “the skilled part of each job requires more skill and rewards more skill, and the routine repetitive part, which can much more easily be automated, will pay minimum wages or just be given over to a bot” (p. 226). Although many current jobs will become obsolete, many new jobs will likely be created requiring new types of work and skills (Herold, 2017). Friedman (2016) continued by adding:

> Our educational systems must be retooled to maximize these needed skills and attributes: strong fundamentals in writing, reading, coding, and math; creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration; grit, self-motivation, and lifelong learning habits; and entrepreneurship and improvisation- at every level. (p. 226)

Zhao (2012) highlighted:

> The traditional education paradigm may have worked before but is no longer adequate for the changed world. The efforts to develop common curriculum, national and international, are simply working to perfect an outdated paradigm. The outcomes are precisely the opposite of the talents we need for the new era. It is the wrong bet for our children’s future. (p. 45)

Today's educational system needs to develop students' entrepreneurial spirt of "inspiration, creativity, direction action, courage, and fortitude" (Martin & Osberg, 2007, p. 32-33) so that people can "take advantage of what has been made possible by globalization and technological changes to create jobs" (Zhao, 2012, p. 66). However, The World Economic Forum (2011) added:

> It is not enough to add entrepreneurship on the perimeter- it needs to be at the core of the way education operates. Educational institutions at all levels (primary, secondary, and higher education) need to adopt 21st century methods and tools to develop the appropriate learning environment for encouraging creativity, innovation and the ability to think 'out of the box' to solve problems. Embedding entrepreneurship and innovation, cross-disciplinary approaches and interactive teaching methods all require new models, frameworks and paradigms. It is time to rethink the old systems and fundamentally "reboot" the educational process. (p. 6)

Couros (2015) challenges both students and all of those involved in education to be innovative which he defines as "a way of thinking that creates something *new* and *better*" (p. 19). The author wrote, "The truth is innovation—in our thinking as individuals and as organizations—is within easy reach; no dramatic shifts required" (p. 20). The innovator's mindset outlined by Couros builds upon Dweck's (2006) work on fixed and growth mindsets. Dweck (2006) states how a fixed mindset where your abilities, intelligence, and talents cannot be changed whereas a growth mindset is one

where abilities, intelligence, and talents can be grown or developed over time. Couros' (2015) innovator's mindset takes Dweck's (2006) work a step further where this mindset is defined as the "belief that the abilities, intelligence, and talents are developed so that they lead to the creation of new and better ideas" (Couros, 2015, p. 33). Couros noted the eight critical characteristics that are necessary for an innovator's mindset:

1) Empathetic
2) Problem Finders/Solvers
3) Risk Takers
4) Networked
5) Observant
6) Creators
7) Resilient
8) Reflective

As the innovator's mindset is for everyone involved in education, Couros cautioned:

> The hope that our students become innovators in schools that do not have educators who embody the same mindset is, at best, wishful thinking. If we do not model these characteristics and the willingness to innovate inside of the box, why would our students do anything different? They won't. (p. 58)

Educational Leadership

Bass (1981) noted that leadership "occurs universally among all people regardless of culture, whether they are isolated Indian villagers, Eurasian steppe nomads, or Polynesian fisher folk" (p. 5). Leithwood and Louis (2012) describe educational leadership as the balance between the two core functions which are providing direction

and exercising influence. The core practices of leadership, according to Leithwood and Louis (2012), are setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and improving the instructional program. The authors elaborated:

> Leadership is all about organizational improvement. More specifically, it is about establishing agreed-upon and worthwhile directions for the organization in question and doing whatever it takes to prod and support people to move in those directions…Leadership is about direction and includes. Stability is the goal of what is often called management. Improvement is the goal of leadership. (p. 4)

Kotter (2012) wrote how management is "a set of processes that can keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly" (p. 28) whereas leadership, according to Kotter, "Defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles" (p. 28). Simply put, management makes an organization go and leadership makes an organization go forward.

Collins (2001) embarked on a voyage in his book, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*, with hopes of answering the question: "Can a good company become a great company and, if so, how?" (p. 5). One unintended finding in his research was that all the good to great companies possessed what he coined to be "Level 5 leadership." On the initial onset of research, the team made it a point to look beyond the leader and look for deeper answers and truth as to how success was achieved. However, it was a consistent finding that all successful companies had Level 5 leadership, and comparison companies who did not become great and were in the same

industry with similar resources lacked Level 5 leadership. The author described a Level 5 leader is an "individual who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will" (p. 21). They do so by employing all 5 layers of the level 5 hierarchy and putting the institution first. The hierarchy ranges as follows: the highly capable individual at Level 1, Level 2 as a contributing team member, a competent manager at Level 3, an effective leader for Level 4, and finally a Level 5 executive who builds enduring greatness (Collins, 2001).

Collins commented on the importance of Level 5 leadership by stating, "Level 5 leadership is not just about humility and modesty. It is equally about ferocious resolve, an almost stoic determination to do whatever needs to be done to make the company great" (p. 30). Couros (2015) shared an example of the fate suffered by companies who lacked such leadership, as was the case with the advent of the Internet in the movie rental industry. "Companies that took advantage of new technology, like Netflix with its DVD-by-mail and online streaming options, are thriving. Meanwhile, companies, like Blockbuster, that refuse to let go of outdated business models experience a slow, painful death" (p. 16).

Leithwood and Duke's (1999) research led to the suggestion of six major categories that are prominent in school leadership: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, participative leadership, contingent leadership, and managerial leadership. Instructional leadership focuses "on the behaviors of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students" (p. 47) whereas transformational leadership focuses on "the commitments and capacities of organizational members" (p. 48). Moral leadership includes the "values and ethics of

leadership" (p. 50). Participative leadership involves the "decision-making processes of the group" (p. 51) while contingency leadership is the result when "leaders respond to the unique organizational circumstances or problems that they face" (p. 54). Finally, managerial leadership is the "functions, tasks, or behaviors of the leader" (p. 53). Marzano et al. (2005) noted how leadership traditions and beliefs are similar in schools as they are in other institutions, and leadership is "considered to be vital to the successful functioning of many aspects of a school" (p. 5). The authors conducted a meta-analysis of 35 years of research in education and they concluded that school leadership does in fact have a significant impact on student achievement. From their research, they identified 21 responsibilities of the school leader (principal) and referred to the behaviors as responsibilities "because they are, or at least should be, standard operating procedures for effective principals" (p. 62). The authors did admit that these responsibilities were not new to the field, but what they did add, however, were the correlations of the behaviors or responsibilities with student achievement. The 21 responsibilities and their respective correlations (r) from Marzano et al. (2005) which listed in alphabetical order are provided in Table 4. The authors intentionally listed the responsibilities in alphabetical order to highlight that they are all important and the rank order can and will change based on the perspective for which they are employed.

Link (2019) reviewed research from 1981 to 2016 and found 21 studies that reviewed research on school leaders and grading. Link stated:

Table 4

21 Responsibilities of a School Leader and Correlations (r)

Responsibility	Correlation (r)	Responsibility	Correlation (r)
Affirmation	.19	Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	.20
Change Agent	.25	Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	.25
Contingent Rewards	.24	Monitoring/Evaluating	.27
Communication	.23	Optimizer	.20
Culture	.25	Order	.25
Discipline	.27	Outreach	.27
Flexibility	.28	Relationships	.18
Focus	.24	Resources	.25
Ideals/Beliefs	.22	Situational Awareness	.33
Input	.25	Visibility	.20
Intellectual Stimulation	.24		

Note. Marzano et al. (2005) p. 42-43

> The major finding from these studies of the relationship between the school leadership and grading is the vital importance of the principal. The principal's leadership can enable or deter successful implementation of more effective school grading practices. Districtleaders and parents can be instrumental in grading reform, but their influence is comparatively minimal. (p. 171)

The author highlighted that district leaders do offer a positive influence in supporting the change in grading systems, however, "Without the school principal's direct involvement and overt support, grading reforms won't be realized" (p. 183).

Theories of Change

Marzano et al. (2005) noted that there were two factors that lay beneath the 21 responsibilities, and these two factors are first-order change and second-order change. First-order change can be described as an incremental which is an extension of the past whereas second-order change is a deep change and a break from the past. The authors noted, "Incremental change fine-tunes the system through a series of small steps that do not depart radically from the past. Deep change alters the system in fundamental ways, offering a dramatic shift in direction and requiring new ways of thinking and acting" (p. 66). Table 5 highlights the characteristics of first and second-order changes.

Table 5

Characteristics of First-Order Change and Second-Order Change

First-Order Change	Second-Order Change
• Is perceived as an extension of the past • Fits within existing paradigms • Is consistent with prevailing values and norms • Can be implemented with existing knowledge and skills • Requires resources currently available to those responsible for implementing the innovations • May be accepted because of common agreement that the innovation is necessary	• Is perceived as a break from the past • Lies outside existing paradigms • Conflicts with prevailing values and norms • Requires the acquisition of new knowledge and skills • Requires resources currently not available to those responsible for implementing the innovations • May be resisted because only those who have a broad perspective of the school see the innovation as necessary

Note. Marzano et al., 2005, p. 113

The authors commented on the difficultly of second-order change by stating, "It makes sense that we would tend to approach new problems from the perspective of our experiences—as issues that can be solved using our previous repertoire of solutions…Unfortunately, solutions to most recurring modern-day problems require a second-order perspective" (p. 67).

The Future-Ready Superintendents Leadership Institute (2014) came together to make a call to action for students in Texas, and the call to action is similar to what is seen around the United States. They stated:

> Glance into a majority of classrooms throughout our state today and you will find most still mirror those of 'the good 'ole days.' The teacher remains the controller of knowledge while students sit as silent consumers of their teacher's wisdom. Some classrooms have been equipped with more modern resources and there are isolated examples of student-centered classrooms. (p. 7)

The group continued, "We must move beyond the debates and unite in a shared understanding that we must prepare our students for their future through the transformation of teaching and learning" (p. 7). This starts with Sinek's (2009) work, which encourages organizations to create long-lasting success by starting from the inside out with the "why," or the shared purposes and beliefs behind the work that is done, next move to the "how" and then the "what." Most people and organizations, according to Sinek, start from the outside with the what as everyone knows what they do, and some can describe how they do it, but very few are able to articulate why they do what they do.

Robinson (2015) commented, "We need a radical change in how we think about and do school—a shift from the old industrial model to one based on entirely different principles and practices" (p. 25). Jung and Guskey (2012) wrote, "It is especially difficult when the change involves challenging long-held traditions. But when those traditions lie in opposition to current knowledge about best practice and may actually bring harm to students, especially those who are struggling learners, pressing for and facilitating change

is imperative" (p.86).

Schlechty (2009) wrote how it is time for America to realize "that the education of children is now rooted in infertile soil and to recognize that if education is to be improved, schools must be transplanted into a more nourishing environment" (p. 5). The purpose of schooling today, according to the author, is to give students access to a quality education. In today's climate, quality education is defined as "that form of instruction that has the most immediate impact on standardized test scores and by testing only those things that can be standardized" (p. 5). Schlechty (2009) added:

> The problem is that the type of instruction that is adequate to ensure that students can write on a standardized form a brief descriptive paragraph about a poem may not be the same type of instruction that will inspire students to write a poem- or to create a novel experiment to test or verify some proposition of concern to them. It is certainly not the type of instruction that will inspire the development of the skills, attitudes, and habit of mind that appear in listings of the skills needed for the workforce of the twenty-first century. It is not the type of instruction that will prepare students to learning in an increasingly digitized environment. (p. 6)

The time to change is now, as Robinson (2015) commented:

> Organizations thrive by adapting to their environments. This process depends on the flow of fresh ideas and the willingness to try new approaches. The role of a creative leader is not to have all the ideas; it is to encourage a culture where everyone has them. (p. 205)

In Pfeffer and Sutton's (2000) book, they searched to find out the following in organizations: Why knowledge of what needs to be done frequently fails to result in action or behavior consistent with that knowledge? They coined the *knowing-doing problem* as the challenge of turning knowledge into action and the *knowing-doing gap* as the gap between what is known and action taken. This gap is highlighted by Reeves (2016):

> 'But who is going to tie the bell on the cat?' So ends the tale of the council of wise mice who were unanimous in their opinion that the threatening cat should have a bell tied around its neck, a solution that all agreed would make sense, save the lives of mice, and not harm the cat. Unfortunately, however thoughtful and rational their deliberations, the mice were unable to move from policy to implementation. Such moves require courage and the willingness to confront risks. So it is with grading policies. (p. 121)

Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) looked to uncover barriers and sources that prevent knowledge from taking hold in organizations. One main finding was to debunk the myth that people are largely a part of the problem, but they found that "differences across firms come more from their management systems and practices than from differences in the quality of their people" (p. 6). For this reason, they focused their work on management practices that contribute to or reduce the knowing-doing gap.

In an attempt to measure the knowing-doing gap, Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) asked restaurant managers what they thought should be done and if it was actually implemented in terms of enhancing a restaurant's financial performance. It was a repeated finding that

there were significant gaps in the things that should be done and what is known. The authors stated, “Anyone can read a book or attend a seminar. The trick is in turning the knowledge acquired into organizational action” (p. 25). Knowledge, then, is acquired “through practice, performance, and failure [which] is indispensable for organizations of all sizes and types” (p. 27).

One barrier to implementing knowledge and ultimately change, according to Pfeffer and Sutton (2000), is that organizations “often behave as if the present were a perfect imitation of the past” (p. 69). This occurs even when people “realize that a new problem confronts the organization, problem solving means finding practices from the organizations past that seem right for solving the present problem” (p. 69). The authors continued:

> The almost mindless reliance on how things have been done in the past means that translating knowledge into action, to the extent this involves any change, is difficult. Excessive reliance on the organization’s memory means that existing practices are rarely thought about, let alone questioned or examined to see if they make sense in the context of what managers know they are trying to accomplish. Even when people know that existing ways of doing things are flawed, they are often afraid to raise objections or to suggest new ways of working. (p. 70)

To that end, Robinson (2015) wrote:

> Change is often the result of many complex forces interacting with each other…How quickly they change will depend, in large part, on the vision of the

> people who run them, especially the principals, on how they set expectations, and where they draw the lines of permission. (p. 194)

Couros (2015) added:

> Education cannot become the new Blockbuster where we refused to embrace the new in hopes that the old ways will suffice. In a world that constantly changes, if our focus is to only maintain what's already been done, we are bound to become worse. (p. 27)

Barriers are also common in education when facing change. Tucker (2019) offers some insight into many of the barriers that exist from a teacher's perspective:

> Change requires time, energy, and resources, all of which are in short supply at most schools. Our jobs are demanding and multifaceted. Teachers do not simply prepare and facilitate lessons. They attend meetings, communicate with parents, asses student work, meet students' emotional needs, and juggle the many district mandates that some their way. It's not surprising that most teachers feel they do not have the time or energy to experiment with new teaching strategies or technology tools.(p. 1)

When attempting to implement change that is unfamiliar, it can be scary and cause stress. Teachers, according to Tucker, would ask, "Why try something new when what I am doing is working" (p.1)? The author added, "Unfortunately, just because something works does not mean it is working well or that it is the optimal way to go about a job or task" (p. 1). To combat the barriers, Link (2019) wrote, "For improvements in grading policies and practices to occur, principals must remove existing obstacles to change and

ignite the enablers to implementing effective grading practices" (p. 188). In order to help facilitate change, Link noted that principals must "rely on (1) communication, (2) collaboration, (3), training, and (4) time to guide their work" (p. 188).

Fullan's (2008) work offers six secrets of change to coordinate enduring and long-lasting change, which are listed:

1) Secret One: Love your employees
2) Secret Two: Connect peers with purpose
3) Secret Three: Capacity building prevails
4) Secret Four: Learning is the work
5) Secret Five: Transparency rules
6) Secret Six: Systems learn

Although Fullan states that all secrets are equally important, and each one must be given equal care and attention, the rest of the secrets fall apart with the absence of the secret one which is noted as the "foundation secret" (p. 37). Fullan highlighted the importance of relationships through the work of Barber and Mourshed (2007) by noting, "The quality of the education cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" (p. 8). The key to this secret is by "helping all employees find meaning, increased skill development, and personal satisfaction in making contributions that simultaneously fulfill their own goals and the goals of the organization (the needs of the customers expressed in achievement terms)" (Fullan, 2008, p. 25). Sirota et al. (2005) observed millions of employees and found that the three factors of fair treatment, enabling achievement, and camaraderie motivate employees.

Fullan's (2008) second secret involves connecting peers with a purpose to glue the organization together. This is where "leaders have to provide direction, create the conditions for effective peer interaction, and intervene along the way when things are not working as well as they could" (p. 49). This addresses what he calls the "too tight-too lose dilemma" (p. 37). When the right connections are made with a higher purpose in mind, knowledge flows and identities are defined which allows the organization to adhere. This in turn builds upon the third secret of capacity building, which is achieved without criticism and punitive consequences as "problems get solved when people believe that they will not get punished for taking risks" (p. 60-61). When there is fear within a system, Fullan notes, it causes individuals to focus on themselves and not the system. This is counterproductive to systemic change efforts as "you actually have to motivate hordes of people to something" (p. 63). Capacity building, according to Fullan, first starts with hiring the right people who may not be the smartest but have the greatest potential.

Learning on a consistent basis coupled with innovation set the tone for the fourth secret of learning is the work. The essence of this secret "concerns how organizations address their core goals and tasks with relentless consistency, while at the same time learning continuously how to get better and better at what they are doing" (Fullan, 2008, p. 76). Consistency and innovation must go together, according to the author, and it is achieved by learning in context. Traditionally, "Professional development programs or courses, even when they are good in themselves, are removed from the setting in which teachers work" (p. 86). Fullan (2008) stated, "Building continuous improvement into the culture of the organization is the backbone of Secret Four" (p. 81). This improvement is

done in concert with secret five where transparency rules and is defined as "assessing, communicating, and acting on data pertaining to the what, how, and outcomes of change efforts" (p. 93). This secret is best achieved by "calling for measurements that focus on selected outcomes and specific actions" (p. 94) and are used as a tool for improvement.

The first task of the sixth and final secret is to employ the first five secrets. The sixth secret entails systems learn, which refers to Senge's (1990) work with systems thinking. Fullan (2008) stated, "Senge's remedy was to increase the capacity to think systemically, in terms of the system as a whole, which would not resolve the problem, but would increase the probability of getting some of it right" (p. 110). The second task of the sixth secret is to be humble and confident at the same time to navigate a world filled with uncertainty. In other terms, leaders must "be confident that they have taken into account all possibilities and have made the right choice under the circumstances, even though something may go wrong" (p. 117). Fullan concludes by stating:

> The six secrets give us a lot of food for thought. The reciprocal and synergistic relationships among them put successful action well within our reach. Because we can begin putting the secrets into practice without further study, they are immediately useful. The evidence across a range of situations tells us that people who employ the secrets gain more satisfaction and greater productivity, beginning a virtuous cycle in which the secrets become even more valuable. (p. 135)

Kotter (2012) states that "methods used in successful transformations are all based on one fundamental insight: that major change will not happen easily for a long list of reasons"

(p. 22). The author goes on to offer an eight-state process of creating major change which correlates to what he calls the eight fundamental errors which impede transformation efforts. Table 6 illustrates the fundamental errors which are aligned with the eight-stage process of creating major change.

Table 6

Kotter's Common Errors and The Eight-Stage Process

Common Errors	The Eight-Stage Process
• Allowing too much complacency	• Establishing a sense of urgency
• Failing to create a sufficiently powerful guiding coalition	• Creating a guiding coalition
• Underestimating the power of vision	• Developing a vision and strategy
• Under communicating the vision by a factor of 10 (or 100 or even 1,000)	• Communicating the change vision
• Permitting obstacles to block the new vision	• Empowering broad-based action
• Failing to create short-term wins	• Generating short-term wins
• Declaring victory too soon	• Consolidating gains and producing more change
• Neglecting to anchor changes firmly in the corporate culture	• Anchoring new approaches in the culture

Note. Kotter, 2012, p. 16, p. 23

When establishing Kotter's (2012) first stage sense of urgency, it is important to highlight crises, potential crises, competitive realities, and major opportunities. The second stage then involves compiling a team that will be charged with leading the change efforts which also creates a sense of team. The team then creates the vision and strategies to direct the change efforts in attainment the vision while also communicating and

modeling the change vision through a myriad of outlets in stages three and four respectively. With the vision in mind, stage five invites change agents to rid obstacles that impede change efforts while refining and developing systems. This is done through the encouragement of risk-taking and out-of-the-box thinking. Generating short term wins in stage six takes place when wins a created through planning and then recognizing and rewarding those involved in making the wins possible. The seventh stage then leans on the wins and successful implementation of the previous six stages to further refine and adapt structures, systems, and policies in alignment with the transformation vision with the people who can bring the change to fruition. The eighth and final stage anchors the new approaches into the culture by connecting new behaviors and organizational success. Kotter (2012) summarizes the eight-stage process:

> The first four steps in the transformation process help defrost a hardened status quo. If change were easy, you wouldn't need all that effort. Phases five to seven then introduce many new practices. The last stage grounds the changes in the corporate culture and helps make them stick. (p. 24)

The author also noted that change efforts often consist of smaller projects that follow the same process and that "all change efforts end up operating in multiple stages at once but initiating action in any other order [than what was listed] rarely works well" (p. 26).

Scharmer's (2016a) work with Theory U offers a perspective which is not solely reliant on the past. Scharmer (2016b) commented on Theory U by stating, "It's on one hand a framework, on the other hand it's a method which is a set of tools and practices that actually allows you to move from one state of the social field that's operating, say, in

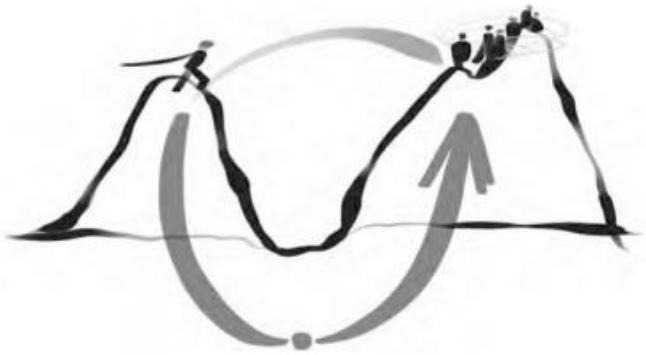
a very reactive way, to another state of the social field that's more generative and more co-creative." Scharmer (2018) continued:

> We live in a moment of profound possibility and disruption. A moment that is marked by the dying of an old mindset and logic of organizing. And one that is marked by the rise of a new awareness and way of activating generative social fields. What is dying and disintegrating is a world of ME First, bigger is better, and special interest group-driven decision making that has led us into a state of organized irresponsibility. What is being born is less clear. It has to do with shifting our consciousness from ego-system to eco-system awareness—an awareness that attends to the well-being of all. (p. 3)

Scharmer (2018) offered a visual representation that depicts our challenges today (see Figure 2). The image, according to Scharmer (2018), shows how a world, with structures of the past, is dying on the left-hand side and how the right-hand side is a world with new mental and social structures. The challenge is to "figure out how to cross the abyss that divides the two: how to move from 'here' to 'there'" by breaking from a "current reality that is driven by the past to an emerging future that is inspired by our highest future potential" (p. 4).

Figure 2

The Challenge of Disruption



Note. Scharmer, 2018, p.4

Scharmer (2018) notes how there are two sources of learning: by reflecting on the past and by sensing and actualizing emerging future possibilities. Although learning from the past is necessary, according to Scharmer, it is not always sufficient. "All disruptive challenges require us to go further. They require us to slow down, stop, sense the bigger driving forces of change, let go of the past and let come the future that wants to emerge" (Scharmer, 2018, p. 10). This requires *presencing*, a word that is a combination of the words "sensing" and "presence," which Scharmer (2018) noted as the ability to "sense and actualize one's highest future potential" (p.10). This is the move from the "ego" (I) to the "eco" (we).

In developing Theory U, Scharmer (2016a) highlights the process of the U with seven subtle shifts in cognitive spaces and six thresholds. The seven shifts of attending to and co-shaping the world include: downloading, seeing, sensing, presencing, crystallizing, prototyping, and performing, whereas the six thresholds between these shifts are: suspending, redirecting, letting go, letting come, enacting, and embodying. Downloading is represented by old patterns from the past resulting in status quo. Seeing

emerges when we suspend our old thinking and begin to see objects in the world in a new light. When we redirect our outward attention inward, we then are able to sense wider and deeper by allowing the system to see itself. Awareness continues by letting go of the old and connecting to the source when one enters presencing which allows "participants and the system to sense and see itself in terms of both the current reality and the future that wants to emerge" (p. 39). By letting the future come, the vision and intention crystalize. Enacting is when one begins to bring the new into reality leading to prototyping, or learning by doing, which is guided by 'being in dialogue with the universe' (p. 39). Finally, when the new is embodied it is performed "from the larger eco-system (as opposed to from the observing self)" (p.39).

To achieve successful change and intervention, Bill O'Brien, as quoted in Scharmer (2016a), stated that it depends on "the interior condition of the intervener" (p. 6). Scharmer (2016b) elaborated:

> The success of what I do as a leader, as an innovator, as a change maker, depends on the inner place—depends on the source from that I operate. So, it's not what I'm doing, or not only what I'm doing, it's not only how—the process I'm applying to a situation—but it's the source that I am operating from.

Scharmer (2016a) called this the blind spot, or the "place from which our attention and intention originates" (p. 5). In order to connect to this place or source, leaders are invited to ask themselves two questions: "Who is my Self? What is my Work?" (p. 43). "One self is the person or community we have become as a result of a journey that took place in the past. The other self is the person or community we can become as we journey into the

future. It is our highest future possibility" (p. 41). Presencing, then, is "when these two 'selves' start talking to each other" (p. 42). On the contrary, absencing is the opposite of presencing which "facilitates a disconnect (denying, de-sensing) from the world around us, from the world that is emerging (absencing), which results in blaming others (an inability to reflect) and destruction (of trust, relationships, nature, and self)" (Scharmer, 2018, p. 31).

Scharmer (2016a) suggested that "we lack a new social leadership technology," and without this new technology, "change-makers and leaders don't really shift [cognitive] fields but end up with more of the same" (p. 40). This new type of social technology is "based on three instruments that each of us already has—an open mind, an open heart, and an open will—and to cultivate these capacities not only individually but also collectively" (p. 40). Scharmer (2016a) makes the distinctions between these three instruments. An open mind is the ability to access one's intellectual intelligence with the ability to see with fresh eyes and curiosity. The ability to access one's emotional intelligence is that of the open heart by looking at problems from all angles, both from your own angle as well as all other stakeholders, with compassion. Finally, open will is the ability for one to access spiritual intelligence while being able to let go of the old and let the new possibilities emerge with courage.

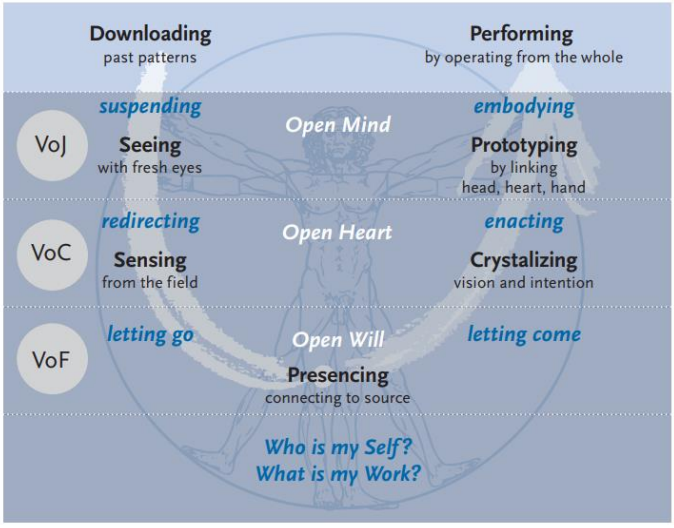
There are, however, potential roadblocks when attempting to cultivate these three instruments of the open mind, heart, and will which prevent moving down the left side of the U (Scharmer 2018). According to Scharmer (2016a), there are three enemies that impede this inner work to come to fruition. These enemies are referred to as the "three inner voices of resistance, three enemies that can block the entrance to one of the deeper

territories" (p. 43) and are the Voice of Judgment (VoJ), the Voice of Cynicism (VoC), and the Voice of Fear (VoF). The Voice of Judgement involves judgments that are based on past experiences and patterns and blocks the gate to the open mind. Suspension of this voice leads to inquiry and curiosity. The Voice of Cynicism blocks the gate to the open heart where the suspension of this voice leads to vulnerability to be creative. Finally, the Voice of Fear blocks the gate to the open will and is referred to the fear of stepping into the unknown. Scharmer (2016a) states, "Dealing with that voice of fear is the very essence of leadership: to facilitate the letting go of the old 'self' and letting come the new "Self" (p. 44).

Theory U is shown in Figure 3 which includes the compilation of the seven cognitive shifts, the six thresholds, the three instruments, the three enemies to the instruments, and the two questions connecting to the source:

Figure 3

Theory U



Note. Scharmer, 2016a, p. 43

Two barriers to moving up the right side of the U include the avoidance of two challenges: mindless action and action-less mind. Mindless action occurs when we "blindly implement abstract ideas without any learning" (Scharmer, 2018, p. 29). Action-less mind, which Scharmer (2018) also refer to as 'analysis paralysis,' occurs when we "discuss things to death instead of exploring the future by doing" (p. 29). To fight these two challenges, as well as the three enemy voices, it is important to 'stay with it,' which means, "Holding the space for something to be born that is not quite there yet—building and evolving the holding space for something new to develop and be born" (p. 29). Scharmer also cautioned, "It is important neither to intervene too frequently by jumping in, nor to disengage by turning another way" (p. 29).

The number one challenge faced by leaders today, as voiced by Scharmer (2018), is to "enable stakeholder groups that need each other to change the system to move from me to we—that is, from ego-system awareness to eco-system awareness" (p. 75). To do so, Scharmer (2016a) offers a method that includes, what he calls, five movements of the U process. These movements are: co-initiating, co-sensing, co-presencing, co-creating, and co-evolving. The first movement of co-initiating requires participants to connect with one another to change around a shared intention. The second movement involves all stakeholders to observe with an open mind and heart from all angles. The next movement involves co-presencing allows participants to "connect to the future that wants to emerge through you" (p. 18). The fourth movement is that of co-creating where learning occurs by prototyping and learning by doing in order to bring the new into reality on a smaller scale. Finally, the fifth and final movement is co-evolving which involves scaling the work to the larger eco-system.

Conceptual Framework

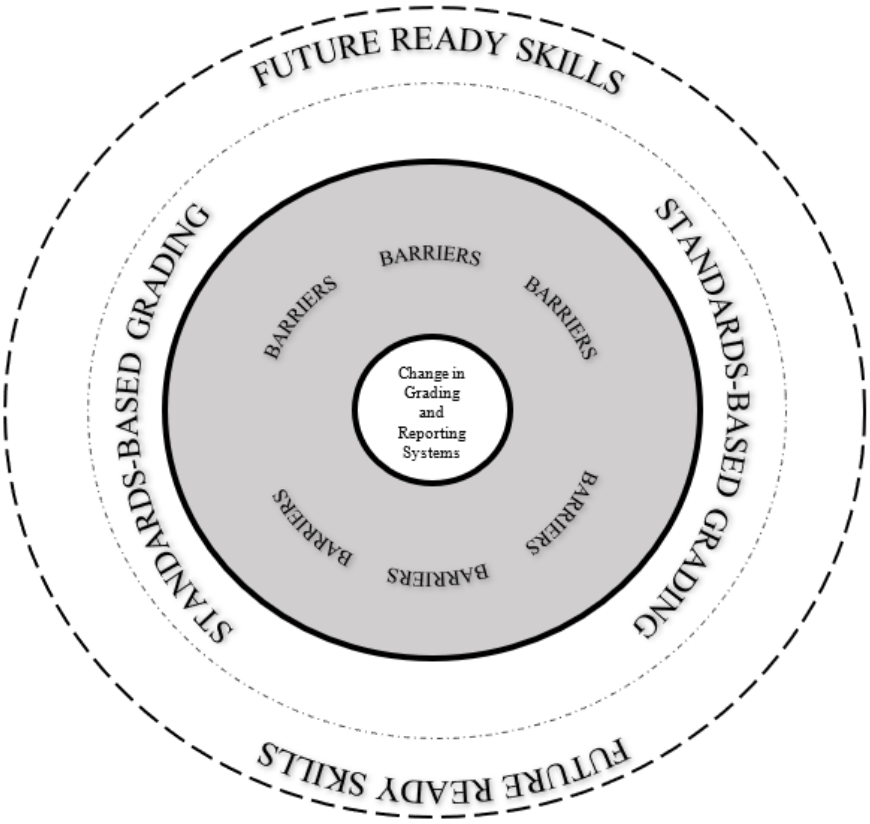
According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), a conceptual framework "explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, variables, or constructs – and the presumed interrelationships among them" (p. 20). The conceptual framework proposed for this study is grounded in the need for a change in the grading and reporting systems at the secondary level. The proposed conceptual framework is based on the importance of understanding the barriers of SBG implementation at the secondary level in order for our students to be future ready.

When viewed through this lens, the barriers of SBG implementation should be considered while implementing educational change and policy within schools or school districts. The implementation of standards has given both teachers and administrators valuable insight regarding curriculum development and the grading and reporting process, and to the potential impact a SBG and reporting system has on student outcomes.

The researcher proposes to analyze and evaluate data through a qualitative approach. This study, conducted through the use of superintendent and assistant superintendent interviews, will focus on barriers to SBG implementation and the willingness of these leaders to lead change at the secondary level. The visual model presented in Figure 4 represents the conceptual framework of this study:

Figure 4

Conceptual Framework Diagram



Summary

Our country has gone through a myriad of changes and transformations on multiple levels, and our educational system has attempted to adapt to the changing needs. Such changes have brought about the case for and development of standards. These standards are tied to skills that we want our students to be able to cultivate as they are thrust into a future filled with uncertainty. It is the duty of educational leaders to exercise the leadership skills that they possess in order to change and adapt our systems to reflect the outcomes expected for students, both in terms of skills and standards to be learned.

O’Connor (2009) summarized with the following:

> Global economic changes, together with the development of standards and our new understanding about learning, are leading to significant changes in the ways children are taught and the ways in which they are assessed. There has been a move to authentic learning—learning that is relevant to students and to the real world—and to authentic assessment—assessment that provides students with opportunities to demonstrate what they know, can do, and are like. These approaches have moved classroom assessment away from emphasis on paper-and-pencil methods (especially an almost exclusive reliance on multiple-choice questions) toward the use of a broader array of assessment methods with an emphasis on performance assessment. (p. 12)

To reiterate what was previously mentioned, Rosales (2013) noted that the transition to SBG is well underway at the elementary level. However, the majority of U.S. secondary schools continue to use traditional grading practices (O’Connor, 2011). As we have changed the ways in which we teach and assess our students, why have we neglected to change our grading and reporting systems, particularly at the secondary level?

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The following research questions helped guide the study and are directly tied to the purpose of the research. These questions were aimed to guide the study throughout the multiple phases and help to delineate the scope of the project.

1) To what extent do superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban setting believe in the importance of SBG at the secondary level?
2) How would superintendents and assistant superintendents describe the change process with regard to moving from a traditional grading model to SBG at the secondary level?
3) What are the perceived barriers and challenges in moving from a traditional grading model to SBG as identified by superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban area?

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to identify the extent to which district level administrators are willing to change from a traditional grading system to a SBG and reporting method at the secondary level. More specifically, this research attempted to discover the views of superintendents and assistant superintendents in changing from a traditional grading and reporting system to a SBG model at the secondary level. Unveiling the perceived impediments to implementing a SBG system at the secondary level was done by focusing on districts that have not implemented SBG at the secondary level and currently have a traditional grading model.

This was done through the involvement of superintendents and assistant superintendents in schools that have not implemented SBG at the secondary level and currently have a traditional grading model.

This chapter on methods and procedures is organized into ten sections: (a) research questions; (b) introduction; (c) rationale for research approach; (d) research setting/context; (e) research sample and data sources; (f) data collection methods; (g) data analysis methods; (h) issues of trustworthiness; (i) limitations and delimitations; (j) summary.

Rationale for Research Approach

To conduct this study, the researcher used a qualitative research paradigm, by using semi-structured exploratory interviews. Yin (2011) noted that "the allure of qualitative research is that it enable you to conduct in-depth studies about a broad array of topics, including your favorites, in plain and everyday terms" (p.6). Yin listed five features of qualitative research (p. 7-8):

1) Studying the meaning of people's lives, under real-world conditions;
2) Representing the views and perspectives of the people in a study;
3) Covering the contextual conditions within which people live;
4) Contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behavior; and
5) Striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone.

The data and information gathered in this study were based on a phenomenological study, which "describes the meaning for several individuals of their

lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2006, p. 57). Cohen et al. (2018) wrote, "Phenomenological research is based on the view that our knowledge of the world is rooted in our (immediate) experiences, and the task of the researcher is to describe, understand, interpret and explain these experiences" (p. 300). Furthermore, they noted, "The distinctive feature of phenomenological research is its focus on the subjective experience of the participants, which are at the heart of the research" (p. 301). In this study, the researcher described what the participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon, which is the concept of changing from a traditional model of grading to a SBG and reporting system at the secondary level.

Research Setting/Context

For this study, the setting included school districts which have secondary schools with varying demographics in two suburban New York State counties. These districts, at the time of the study, have a traditional grading and reporting systems. Participants in this study were certified public school superintendents and assistant superintendents currently employed in a New York public (non-charter) school who serve secondary schools which currently use a traditional grading and reporting model. Rosales (2013) noted that the transition to SBG is well underway at the elementary level, but the majority of U.S. secondary schools continue to use traditional grading practices. For this reason, the research setting focused on secondary schools.

Research Sample and Data Sources

Cohen et al. (2018) noted in reference to phenomenological research, "To understand the meaning that participants give to the experiences typically requires in-depth, open-ended and often unstructured interviews with the participants" (p. 301).

Therefore, to conduct this study, the researcher used a qualitative phenomenological approach using semi-structured exploratory interviews. Participants in the study were certified public school superintendents and assistant superintendents currently employed in a New York public (non-charter) school that serves secondary schools in two suburban New York State counties. The selected population was presented with semi-structured exploratory interview questions related to general background information, the importance of SBG, change, and barriers.

Throughout the study, ethical implications were taken into consideration. Ethics has been defined as "a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others" (Cavan, 1977, p. 810). Such considerations include, but are not limited to: confidentiality and anonymity, gender, age, ethnicity, tampering with data, presenting all relevant data, making false recommendations, etcetera. Table 7 depicts the study's research questions, data sources, and methodologies used.

Data Collection Methods

For this study, the researcher constructed a letter to solicit district superintendents and assistant superintendents to participate in semi-structured exploratory interviews. This letter was sent by email to the presidents of the superintendents' associations of the two suburban counties.

Table 7

Chart of Research Questions, Data Sources, and Methodology

Research Question	Data Sources	Methodology
To what extent do superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban setting believe in the importance of SBG at the secondary level?	Semi-structured exploratory interviews with superintendents and assistant superintendents.	Analysis of interviews by determining emerging themes and patterns.
How would superintendents and assistant superintendents describe the change process with regard to moving from a traditional grading and reporting model to SBG at the secondary level?	Semi-structured exploratory interviews with superintendents and assistant superintendents.	Analysis of interviews by determining emerging themes and patterns.
What are the perceived barriers and challenges in moving from a traditional grading and reporting model to SBG as identified by superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban area?	Semi-structured exploratory interviews with superintendents and assistant superintendents.	Analysis of interviews by determining emerging themes and patterns.

Note. Research Questions developed by the author.

The questions, developed by the researcher, are based upon the questions driving this study. They were aimed at determining general background information as it relates to grading, standards, and grade reporting. Furthermore, the questions were crafted to determine the importance of SBG at the secondary level, how superintendents and assistant superintendents would make a change from a traditional model to a standards-based model, and what, if any, the barriers and challenges are to making such a change.

Responses will be digitally recorded using an iPhone and the app called Rev. Table 8 shows the variable sets and the grouping of questions.

Table 8

Variable Sets and Grouping of Questions

Variable:	Question(s):
General Background: Traditional Grading	1
General Background: Standards-Based Grading	2
General Background: Standards	7, 8, 22
General Background: Grade Reporting	3, 4, 9, 10
General Background: Final Open-Ended Question	24
Research Question 1: Importance	5, 6, 11-13
Research Question 2: Change	14-16, 19
Research Question 3: Barriers	17, 18, 20, 21, 23

Note. Responses were recorded and transcribed using the *REV* iPhone application.

Data Analysis Methods

Once the interviews were conducted, the data was collected and analyzed. To analyze the findings of the interviews, the researcher thoroughly read and listened to all transcribed responses to ensure accuracy. Each typed transcription was noted as to who was talking during the interview and was noted by participant number and the interviewer (the researcher). Furthermore, the semi-structured exploratory questions asked in the transcriptions were highlighted yellow and numbered accordingly. If the question was not asked for a particular participant, it was noted and highlighted in red. Finally, probing

questions that were separate from the set of semi-structured exploratory interview protocol were numbered and highlighted in blue.

Saldaña, (2013) wrote, “In qualitative data analysis, a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes” (p. 4). The author continued, “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p.3). Saldaña (2013) also noted how codes can “sometimes summarize, distill, or condense data, not simply reduce them” (p. 4). Themes then emerge after the first cycle coding methods (initial coding) and the second cycle coding methods (grouping initial summaries) where themes are defined as “an outcome of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded” (p. 14).

The twelve interview transcriptions were imported and further analyzed using the open-ended coding software NVivo 12 Plus in order to create frequency word charts to identify emerging themes, patterns, and descriptions amongst the responses. The transcriptions were reviewed and coded to identify key statements and then the statements were coded and organized into meaningful categories.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative studies, validity is noted as “a demonstration that a particular instrument in fact measures what it intends, purports, or claims to measure” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 245). The face and content validity of the survey were verified by a non-biased review from members of the 2018 Ed.D. cohort at St. John’s University. Their feedback

was given for how the content was laid out before them and the clarity at which the questions were being asked. All feedback was analyzed, and the instrument was adjusted accordingly.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study is limited to two suburban counties in New York State is, in and of itself, a limitation to this study. Also, only superintendents and assistant superintendents were canvassed to participate. Furthermore, interviews offer many advantages as it allows the researcher to gain detailed information for sampling. However, this may also present a disadvantage as little is known about the actual subjects who participate. Additionally, self-selection to participate in an interview allows individuals to voluntarily participate or decline and/or ignore participation leading to a systematic bias.

Summary

This chapter presents a research agenda comprised of a qualitative methodology to gauge the willingness of superintendents and assistant superintendents to move to a SBG and reporting system at the secondary level. Furthermore, this study sought to unveil the barriers to implementing SBG in two suburban counties in New York State at the secondary level. A detailed research plan was presented, including descriptions of the qualitative plans used to guide these methods to produce a comprehensive investigation into the grading and reporting systems used in schools.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to identify the extent to which district level administrators are willing to change from a traditional grading system to a SBG and reporting method at the secondary level. More specifically, this research attempted to discover the views of superintendents and assistant superintendents in changing from a traditional grading and reporting system to a SBG model at the secondary level. Unveiling the perceived impediments to implementing a SBG system at the secondary level was done by focusing on districts that have not implemented SBG at the secondary level and currently have a traditional grading model.

Research Questions

The following research questions helped guide the study and are directly tied to the purpose of the research. These questions were aimed to guide the study throughout the multiple phases and help to delineate the scope of the project.

1) To what extent do superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban setting believe in the importance of SBG at the secondary level?
2) How would superintendents and assistant superintendents describe the change process with regard to moving from a traditional grading model to SBG at the secondary level?
3) What are the perceived barriers and challenges in moving from a traditional grading model to SBG as identified by superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban area?

Introduction of Results

Within the study, the researcher conducted semi-structured exploratory interviews with superintendents and assistant superintendents to identify the extent to which they are willing to change from a traditional grading system to that of standards-based grading (SBG) at the secondary level. Furthermore, the interviews attempted to unveil the perceived impediments to implementing a SBG system at the secondary level.

In total, twelve participants took part in the semi-structured exploratory interviews which consisted of six superintendents and six assistant superintendents from two suburban counties in New York State. The participants represented eight different school districts. Table 9 presents and statistically describes the primary role and/or position of the interview participants; participation by superintendents and assistant superintendents both equaled 50%. Semi-structured face-to-face exploratory interviews with open-ended questions were used to gather in-depth and detailed descriptions by each participant. Information gathered during the interviews was intended to move from general topics to more specific insights. The data analysis focused on the analysis of interviews by determining emerging themes and patterns.

Table 9

Frequency Chart Indicating Primary Role/Position of Interview Participants

Role	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Superintendent	6	50.0	50.0
Assistant Superintendent	6	50.0	100.0
Total	12	100.0	

Note. Position held by interview participants.

The participants were first asked a series of background information questions, as noted in Table 10. These questions were related to gender, number of years in education, the current role in which they are serving, how many years they have served in that capacity, if they have been involved in the implementation of SBG and at what levels, as well as if their current district has a SBG system of grading and reporting and at what levels.

Table 10

Oral Questionnaire of Background Information of Interview Participants

1) Gender: male, female, or prefer not to answer?
2) How many years have you been in education?
3) What is your current role?
4) How many years have you served in this capacity?
5) Have you been involved in the implementation of SBG at the elementary level, secondary level, neither, or both?
6) Does your district have SBG at the elementary level, secondary level, neither, or both?

Table 11 presents the frequency and percentages of gender of the interview participants. As the table indicates, the majority of interview participants, 58.3%, consisted of male participants and the remaining 41.7% represented female participants. The majority of total male participants is the result of one more male superintendent participating as there was an equal split of male and female assistant superintendent participants.

Table 11

Frequency Chart Indicating Gender of Interview Participants

Role/Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Superintendent- Female	2	16.7	16.7
Superintendent- Male	4	33.3	50.0
Assistant Superintendent- Female	3	25.0	75.0
Assistant Superintendent- Male	3	25.0	100.0
Preferred not to answer	0	0.0	100.0
Total	12	100.0	

Note. Distribution based upon participant identified gender.

Table 12 presents the frequency and percentages of years of experience in their role that the interview participants held at the time of the interviews. As the table indicates, the majority of interview participants, 58.4%, have been in their current roles 1-5 years, and 33.3% have been in their current roles for 6-10 years, and the remaining 8.3% have been in their current role between 11-20 years.

Table 12

Frequency Chart Indicating Years of Experience in Role of Interview Participants

Years of Experience in Role	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-5 Years	7	58.4	58.4
6-10	4	33.3	91.7
11-15	0	0.0	91.7
16-20	1	8.3	100.0
Total	12	100.0	

Note. Participant identified years of professional experience.

Table 13 presents the frequency and percentages of years of experience in their education that the interview participants held at the time of the interviews. As the table indicates, the majority of interview participants, 91.7%, have been in education for more than 16 years where two participants have served for more than thirty years. Twenty-five percent of participants served in education in the 16-20, 21-25, and 26-30 ranges respectively for a total of 75%. One participant fell within the range of 6-10 years.

Table 14 presents the frequency and percentages of interview participants that have been involved in the implementation of SBG at the time of the interviews. The frequency chart also indicates at which grade level where the involvement of implementation took place. As the table indicates, the majority of interview participants, 58.3%, have been involved in the implementation of SBG, yet only 2 participants, or 16.6%, have participated in the implementation of SBG at the secondary level. Five participants, or 41.6%, have not been involved in implementation of SBG at all.

Table 13

Frequency Chart Indicating Years of Experience in Education of Interview Participants

Years of Experience in Education	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
6-10	1	8.3	8.3
11-15	0	0.0	8.3
16-20	3	25.0	33.3
21-25	3	25.0	58.3
26-30	3	25.0	83.3
30-35	2	16.7	100.0
Total	12	100.0	

Table 14

Frequency Chart Indicating Grade Level and Involvement in SBG Implementation of Interview Participants

Grade Level of Implementation	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Elementary Level	5	41.7	41.7
Secondary Level	0	0.0	41.7
Neither Elementary or Secondary	5	41.7	83.4
Both Elementary and Secondary	2	16.6	100.0
Total	12	100.0	

Table 15 presents the frequency and percentages of interview participants that currently have the presence of SBG in their districts at the time of the interviews. The frequency chart also indicates at which grade level SBG currently exists. It is important to note that although some participants noted that they have been involved in SBG implementation at the secondary level, there were not any participants that currently have a SBG grading and reporting model at the secondary level in their district. The involvement of implementation at the secondary level took place during a previous experience and is not currently used in his or her current role. As Table 15 indicates, the majority of interview participants, 75%, have SBG at the elementary level, and three participants do not have a SBG grading and reporting system at any level within their respective districts.

Table 15

Frequency Chart Indicating the Grade Level and Presence of SBG of Interview Participants

Grade Level of Implementation	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Elementary Level	9	75.0	75.0
Secondary Level	0	0.0	75.0
Neither Elementary or Secondary	3	25.0	100.0
Both Elementary and Secondary	0	0.0	100.0
Total	12	100.0	

Note. Grade level experience identified by participant.

Development of Semi-Structured Exploratory Interview Questions

The researcher initially developed 20 un-biased, open-ended questions to solicit lengthy and descriptive answers rather than closed-ended questions. The subject matter of these questions was based upon the questions driving this study. They were aimed at determining general background information as it relates to grading, standards, and grade reporting, the importance of SBG at the secondary level, how superintendents and assistant superintendents would make a change from a traditional model to a standards-based model, and what, if any, barriers and challenges exist in making such a change.

The terms and language of the semi-structured exploratory interview questions were those that participants could easily understand given their knowledge of the field, language skills, cultural background, age, gender, etcetera. The questions were developed to be as short and specific as possible to avoid confusion amongst the interview participants. Question number 7, 9, 18, and 22 were added following interviews with participants 1, 2, 3, and 4. Participant 1 was not asked questions 7, 9, 18, and 22.

Question number 22 (teacher understanding of standards) was added for Participants 2 through 12. Participant 2 was not asked questions 7, 9, and 18. Following Participant 2, question 7 (where standards pulled from) and question 18 (reporting SBG from high school to colleges) were added for Participants 3 through 12. Participants 3 and 4 were not asked question number 9 (reporting system alignment with state standards) and this question was added for Participants 5 through 12. This question was added for clarity as question 8 asks about the grading system aligning with state standards. Question 9 asks about the reporting system aligning with state standards. Additionally, as is the case with semi-structured interviews, a series of varying probing questions were asked to each participant based upon certain responses. Table 16 presents the final 24 semi-structured exploratory interview questions used within this study. These questions and also be seen in Appendix E.

Findings from Qualitative Data

Following the transcription and thorough reading of all responses, a general inductive approach was used for analysis of the semi-exploratory data by using the open-ended coding software, NVivo 12 Plus. As described in Chapter 3, there were eight variable sets which included background information for traditional grading, SBG, standards, grade reporting, and a final open-ended question in addition to the variable sets that were directly tied to the three research questions that have guided this study which include importance, change, and barriers.

Table 16

Semi-Structured Exploratory Interview Questions

Exploratory Interview Questions
1) How would you describe a traditional grading and reporting system?
2) How would you describe a standards-based grading and reporting system?
3) What is the purpose of a grading and reporting system?
4) Does your current grading and reporting system at the secondary level achieve the intended purpose or purposes that you described in the previous question? Why or why not?
5) To what extent is a grading and reporting system necessary at the secondary level?
6) In your estimation, what should a grading and reporting system look like at the secondary level?
7) Where would you pull standards from for your grading and reporting system?
8) How, and to what degree, does your district's grading system align with state standards?
9) How, and to what degree, does your district's reporting system align with state standards?
10) How would you describe your current grading and reporting system? Do you believe it most closely aligns to a traditional or standards-based model?
11) In your opinion, is a standards-based grading and reporting system worthwhile at the secondary level? Why or Why not?
12) What skills do students need to be prepared for the future?
13) What would your ideal school of the future look like and would SBG be included in this?
14) Would you be willing to lead change from a traditional to a standards-based model of grading and reporting at the secondary level? Why or Why not?
15) (If answered yes to question 14) What specific steps would you take in leading a change initiative from a traditional to a standards-based model of grading and reporting?
15) (If answered no to question 14) What are the contributing factors as to why you would not lead this change effort?
16) How would you describe the change process?
17) What barriers and challenges would you foresee if attempting to move from a traditional model to a standards-based model?
18) Is it a significant hurdle to report SBG to colleges in lieu of a traditional grading and reporting system?
19) Explain how you would characterize the degree of difficulty in implementing a change from traditional to SBG model of grading and reporting?
20) What conditions restrict your ability to implement a SBG model of grading and reporting?
21) What conditions would need to be present to implement a SBG model of grading and reporting?
22) How do you perceive teacher understanding of standards?
23) Are there competing initiatives and/or work that is more important than SBG?
24) Anything else you would like to add?

General Background Findings: Traditional Grading

As related to traditional grading, the researcher asked Question 1 which was, "How would you describe a traditional grading and reporting system?" This question attempted to gain a sense as to the general understanding of a traditional grading system as understood by superintendents and assistant superintendents that participated in this study. In general terms, traditional grading was explained as a system that is typically an alpha or numeric rating that is based on a 100 point scale or an A, B, C, D, and F. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 3:

A traditional grading a reporting system uses either alpha or numeric reading with a range that's associated with a student's percentage of achievement for whichever class they're assigned to.

Participant 5:

On a scale, usually numeric or alpha, zero to 100, where 100 is best and zero is worse. Or A is best and F is worst.

Participant 9:

Number graders, zero to 100. Perhaps, you know, check plus, check minus, depending on the grade level. Could be letter grades as well.

Participant 12:

I would describe traditional grading and reporting systems as those that are based on a more traditional 0 to 100 scale with an arbitrary determination at 65% as somehow passing.

It was also common for participants to note that traditional grades attempt to be very specific but fail to provide feedback. Traditional grades, as explained by participants, attempt to give a precise number on the 0 to 100 scale but no direction as to where to go next. Furthermore, it was noted that the number grade earned by students does not indicate what he or she learned during the course.

The following responses were recorded:

Participant 2:

> I would say that traditional grading is sometimes not an indication of what the student has learned, or an indication of how capable the student is. It's maybe more an indication of how good of a student the student is, but not necessarily what the student can do after the course that he or she couldn't do before the course. I think people probably thought that or believed that it is designed to prove what students are able to do. I feel like a lot of times it just proves what students are able to memorize.

Participant 3:

> When we use our alphanumeric scoring system at the secondary level parents can clearly see whether their child is performing well or their performance needs to be improved. But it does not provide any specific guidance as to what their area of deficiencies may have been if they are not performing well in a particular subject.

Participant 5:

They are a way to label and differentiate between students' performance, but it doesn't truly capture a student's performance. An 89, 88, 87, 86, 85 to me, are pretty much the same student.

Participant 11:

When I think traditional grading and reporting systems, I think it's too specific. And what I mean by too specific is I think the traditional reporting system identifies kids as a number. So you think of a typical zero through 100, to be so precise to say that a child is a 91 or an 89 or a 99, I think it's exactly what it says. I think it's way too traditional.

It was also prevalent that participants stated the conglomerate nature of traditional grading where various factors are combined and averaged together. Participants noted factors such as homework, participation, quizzes, tests, effort, behavior, which are then put together resulting in the number grade. This resulting number grade is then communicated to students and parents on a report card. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 1:

And what's making up that number? Is that number truly representative of a student who really achieves? I have a lot of conversations with teachers about what goes into their grades, homework and participation and test performance, and what are we communicating about a student's level of preparation based on how

we count all those factors. What's a passing grade, what's a failing grade, what's mastery, what is exceptional in terms of achievement related to the grade reporting scale?

Participant 6:

I would describe it as averages, where a lot of factors get thrown into the pot. And the pot is a general pot and it's kind of mixed with some academic numbers, some behavioral participation numbers, some may be homework numbers, and it all gets averaged.

Participant 9:

Traditional grading accounts for assessments, effort, participation.

Participant 10:

Quiz grades, homework grades, effort grades, assessment grades that are averaged in a system that the parents are able to view, and it's very traditional.

Another common finding as related to background information on traditional grading was how participants noted that traditional grading is a system that has been established several years ago. It was noted that it is a system that people are used to and is likely the same system when participants in the study attended school at the secondary level themselves. Participant 10 noted that the traditional grading system was the same for "teachers' grandparents."

The following responses were recorded:

Participant 8:

I don't think that there have been many changes to grading and reporting specifically to traditional grading and reporting especially at the high school level. I would say that the grading that we use at the secondary level is probably the same exact grading system that I had when I went to high school in the late 1970s.

Participant 10:

Because the way teachers were graded, the way teachers' grandparents were graded, the way everyone has always been graded has been on this 100 point system as they got older. It's happened throughout their high school and secondary experience.

Participant 11:

So I think that it's a system that we're used to, but I also think it's a system that I think we've relied on for too many years and I think that the worst part of it, is that it can lead children down a path of having a sense of either a false sense of security or feeling inept.

General Background Findings: SBG

In regard to SBG, the researcher asked Question 2 which was, “How would you describe a standards-based grading and reporting system?” As a whole, SBG was described as a grading system where learning is assessed separately from behavior and participation and the grade is reflective of student learning. Participants noted that the

system allows for students to keep growing and learning towards goals, standards, concepts, learning targets, etcetera.

The following responses were recorded:

Participant 2:

> I would say that there's a certain level of proficiency or expertise that you want students to meet. And that a teacher allows and enables the student to keep progressing and keep working toward that level or toward that goal until the student can prove that he or she's capable.

Participant 6:

> There is a clarity to the learning standards that is understood at a deeper level. And students are assessed individually, their capacity toward that learning standard. In standards-based grading, learning is assessed in one venue, and behavior, participation, and anything else is assessed separately.

Participant 9:

> Standards based focuses deliberately on student understanding of specific concepts. Learning targets, derived from standards. There is no allowance or grades for effort, and for participation. It really is all about student learning.

Another common thread between responses showed that SBG provides students with more concrete feedback. Previously, it was noted with traditional grading that it was perceived to be too specific, but in terms of trying to pinpoint a grade to a specific

number on a 0 to 100 scale. In this case, participants noted that SBG provides specific areas of performance as it relates to student learning. The following responses were recorded:

> *Participant 4:*
>
> I think standard-based grading is progress within a specific standard or area to try to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses of students in a more accurate method.
>
> *Participant 5:*
>
> To me, standards based is more qualitative. It gives you more specific indicators of students' performance. It gives you specific indicators of what they are proficient in and what they are deficient in. It gives you a clearer picture of where to move forward. If you said someone had an 89 in math, that's good. You know where they are compared to other students. But if you said that the student is able to do multiplication without using the table, the student can go up to the sixes in multiplication tables. You could say the student has difficulty conceptualizing numbers, things like that. That indicates to the parent and the teacher and whomever else, where the student is strong and where the student needs direction.

In addition to SBG providing specific feedback, participants stated how the SBG system provides a growth mindset for students. It allows for students to improve upon what they have done instead of settling for a number grade received. It is individual for students as

participants stated how it provides next steps in addition to where he or she may be succeeding or may need more work, as related to standards. The following responses were recorded:

> *Participant 7:*
>
> Students can become more empowered instead of passive recipients of just this is the grade you got. It's more about, what can I do to improve that?
>
> *Participant 11:*
>
> I think it gives a different picture, it paints a different picture of success, and I don't want to say failure, but almost like success and not there yet. Because if you're thinking about standards based grading, it gives me a sense of where I'm succeeding and gives me specific feedback to areas where I need a little bit more support.
>
> *Participant 12:*
>
> I look at that as more of a rubric based association with standards. One that really reflects a more developmental growth type approach of students finding themselves on a spectrum of levels, as it relates to those standards.

General Background Findings: Standards

There were three questions related to standards which were Questions 7, 8, and 22. The questions respectively asked where superintendents and assistant superintendents would pull standards from for a grading and reporting system, if the district's grading system aligns to standards, and the perception of teacher understanding of standards.

As reported by the participants, curriculum and instruction are aligned to state standards, unless there is an absence at the state level in which case standards would be pulled from a national organization. The area of technology was provided as an example in New York State where there is a lack of state standards. Teachers are teaching and grading on state standards which are used, in conjunction with state exams, as the umbrella and driving force for curriculum and instruction. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 1:

I'd say our grading system is tightly aligned with state standards. Particularly at the secondary level where many courses end at a state exam.

Participant 3:

We are teaching content based upon the state standards and we're designing our lesson plans and curriculum guides around state standards and then assessing which percentage of that information the students are demonstrating mastery in, I'd say it's aligned, as an umbrella. Every subject has the standards associated with them.

Participant 8:

The changes in the standards at the national and then trickling down to the state level has actually helped because every department has really had to review their curriculum, make changes to align to the standards, compared to 10 years ago when

nobody even really I think knew what the state standards were, or 20 years ago, let's say.

Although it was reported that curriculum, instruction, and grading are aligned to state standards and assessments, the degree to which teachers fully understand what the standards are, particularly at the secondary level, remains varied. Based on participant responses, the curriculum is built based on state standards and there is a focus on instruction based on the curriculum guides. Grading is then based upon the curriculum which is built on standards. Nonetheless, it is reported that work needs to be done in order for teachers at the secondary level to dive deeper past the curriculum to have a solid understanding of the standards upon which the curriculum was built. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 2:

I don't know, I would say that's mixed. I would say some people really have delved into them, and then I would say other people are just kind of tell me what I need to do.

Participant 3:

The high school teachers don't typically think in terms of standards, though. We would still use the state-given standard.

Participant 4:

At the elementary level, very good. At the high school level, it's different.

Participant 8:

I think to a degree at the high school level, but to a greater degree at the elementary level.

Participant 9:

I think it really depends on the teacher, the discipline, the level. I think some teachers take the time to unpack standards, and really understand them, and can derive learning targets. I think other teachers are happier to see standards listed in, you know, the first page of a curriculum guide, and don't think much about them. They just think about delivering the curriculum.

Participant 12:

Our first priority in our district, teacher's ability to teach, has not had the proper emphasis on understanding the standards upon which their instruction should be taking place, we have a lot of work to do on that.

Participants noted a frustration with standards due to the changing nature at the state level and subsequent changes of standards. One participant noted how the standards are not new, but they change. As noted, the changes in standards presents an issue for teachers as they are "constantly doing the same things over again rather than, 'Okay we understand the standards, now what?'"

The following responses were recorded:

Participant 7:

I think there's probably a frustration because they have changed fairly regularly, so it feels like you're constantly doing the same thing over again rather than, "Okay we understand the standards, now what?" And let's go deeper and try new things. But if you look at math and how many times they've had changes, I think it probably gets frustrating for them.

Participant 8:

We're in a time of flux where there are changes being made, not just in the ELA and math standards, but social studies, science, the fine arts, etcetera. So I think they [standards] would have to come from the standards that are adopted at the state level, which also presents a problem because they're in flux.

General Background Findings: Grade Reporting

There were four questions related to grade reporting which were Questions 3, 4, 9, and 10. Question Number 3 and 4 asked superintendent and assistant superintendent beliefs as to the purpose(s) of a grade reporting system and if their current reporting system achieves the intended purpose(s) that he or she identified. Question Number 9 and 10 asked if their current reporting system aligns with standards and if they perceive that the grading system in his or her district more closely aligns with a traditional or a standards-based system.

Participants stated that the purpose of grade reporting is to communicate with students, parents, and teachers feedback related to student growth over a period of time. The grade

reporting is supposed to give parents an opportunity to provide support and guidance to students at home. Furthermore, the purpose of grade reporting, as reported, is to give feedback to the teacher in order to make strategic pedagogical shifts to match and meet the needs of students. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 4:

It should be to benchmark where a student is and how far along. What kind of progress or growth they've made over time.

Participant 6:

It's to let the student and parent know exactly where they stand relative to their own learning. It serves as an academic transcript for the school. And it gives teachers information about the progress of their classroom, so that they can then design instruction around that assessment.

Participant 10:

To inform students about how they're progressing with regard to different standards and content, inform parents about how students are progressing.

Participant 11:

In theory it's supposed to provide feedback to the teacher so that they can improve their instruction. It's to provide feedback to students, it's to provide feedback to their parents, but I think ultimately it's supposed to help us shift our pedagogy to meet the needs of our students.

Participant 12:

To provide feedback to students, parents. As well as to determine the appropriate strategies and approaches towards instructional decisions.

The previous question asked what the purpose of a grading and reporting system is, as identified by superintendents and assistant superintendents in two suburban counties in New York State. Question number 4 was then designed to determine if the current grade reporting system at the secondary level achieves the intended purposes outlined by participants in Question Number 3.

Although grade reporting was noted as useful for the promotion and progression of students to the next level, it falls short as it is not detailed enough as outlined by Participant 5. School districts who participated in this study communicated that their current reporting system does not provide the specific and valuable feedback to students, parents, and teachers. Additionally, the reporting systems, as detailed by participants, contain information that is in addition to learning, such as participation grades and effort. Participant 8 called the reporting system as a "conglomerate of grades based on a whole quarter."

The following responses were recorded:

Participant 5:

It leaves a lot to be desired. Like I said, to say that a student got an 89 in the class ... and got an 89 in biology, so to say that that student should not go to an AP science class next year because he got an 89, to me I don't think that does the student justice. I think

if you were able to say, “Well, he was strong in these certain concepts that would help him in AP chemistry, or whatever class he’s going to take next.” I think that that would be more productive.

Participant 6:

In some ways, but it’s kind of a murky mix right now at the secondary level.

Participant 7:

I think in some ways, but it can do better at the secondary level. The report card itself doesn’t give students specific feedback on areas where they could improve. I think the assignments in the majority of classes do provide specific feedback or strategies that they can use to improve, but the report card itself doesn’t highlight discreet skills that students need to work on. Unless it’s in the comments section. But even those tend to be pretty general. And work habit instead of content specific.

Participant 9:

I don’t believe it does, because student grades are not only about their learning at this point in time. It’s also about participation and effort, so no.

Participant 12:

No.

As previously mentioned, teachers are teaching and grading on state standards which are used, in conjunction with state exams, as the umbrella and driving force for curriculum and instruction. However, it was well noted that the reporting systems, especially at the secondary level, are not exactly aligned to standards. On the contrary, there was evidence that some elementary levels have grading systems that are aligned with standards. The development of reporting systems aligned to standards at the secondary level is something that participants are looking to do and are not there yet. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 3:

I think the bigger question is, how do you report it? In our elementary schools we've developed a system to do that, and we look to do the same at the high school.

Participant 5:

Not at the high school level, not at all. Our elementary report cards, I think, absolutely coincides with state standards. They were actually developed with the state standards in mind.

Participant 6:

We've been attentive to the standards at the high school. I'm not sure that our reporting system is as attentive. We've been more attentive in our instructional practices than in or reporting practices.

Participant 8:

I don't think that our current grading system aligns with the standards yet at the secondary level.

Participant 10:

I would have to say not exactly.

Question Number 10 asked participants to identify if their grading and reporting system more closely aligns with a traditional or standards-based model at the secondary level. All twelve participants were unanimous in that grading and reporting systems in their districts were reflective of a traditional model. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 1:

What I see is very traditional, and I think that we're probably leaving a lot on the table with that model.

Participant 4:

Oh, it's traditional. It's clearly traditional.

Participant 7:

I think that the report card itself is more traditional.

Participant 10:

Certainly traditional. Quiz grades, homework grades, effort grades, assessment grades are averaged in a system that the parents are able to view, and it's very traditional.

General Background Findings: Final Open-Ended Question

The final question that was given to participants at the end of the semi-structured interview asked if the participants wanted to add anything further to the conversation. Many participants stated how they enjoyed the conversation and that it is a timely topic to be exploring. It also got many of the participants to think about grading and current grading practices that are taking place in their schools at this time. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 3:

I think it's as good topic to be exploring. I think that it is surprising to me that so many elementary programs have readily made changes to standards based assessments for students, and it's almost commonplace at the elementary now where it remains probably far more rare at the secondary level.

Participant 5:

I actually appreciate the conversation. It's not a conversation I have had in a while, and it actually led me to go back and look at our elementary report card.

Participant 7:

It was fun knowing that you were coming because it gave me the opportunity to reflect on it a little bit and say, you know it wasn't really a heavy lift for us to do this at the elementary level, and then it's got me wondering if it would be ... If it might be more possible than I think at the secondary level.

Participant 8:

Yeah, I would like to add that I think it's a very timely topic… It might be just the right time to kind of launch this type of conversation.

Participant 9:

I love this topic, and it is so worth further discussion in my district.

Participant 12:

We spend our days focusing on instruction and writing, and research and other components of an educational program. Until this interview, I haven't thought about grading for probably a couple years. Thank you for the interview.

Research Question 1

To what extent do superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban setting believe in the importance of SBG at the secondary level?

Questions 5, 6, and 11 to 13 were all directed at this research question to derive if superintendents and assistant superintendents believe in the importance of SBG at the secondary level. Questions 5 and 6 were aimed to discover if grading and reporting is necessary at the secondary level and what should a grading and reporting should look like at the secondary level. Question number 11 directly asked participants if a SBG and reporting system would be worthwhile at the secondary level. Question 12 asked what skills students need to be prepared for the future where Question 13 asked participants what their ideal school of the future would look like and if SBG would be included in it.

Question 5 specifically asked, “To what extent is a grading add reporting system necessary at the secondary level?” Participant 5 stated, “It’s absolutely necessary because our education system is so steeped in tradition.” Participants noted that a critical element of grading and reporting is the necessity to communicate to parents and students where the student is on the continuum of learning. The grading and reporting systems are important to identify strengths and areas of opportunity to grow. In some cases, it could provide direction to students as to what career and/or education path to choose. It was also common for participants to highlight how grading and reporting systems are needed for academic transcripts for the college application process in order to communicate progress and achievement to colleges and universities. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 7:

> I think it's a necessary evil in a way, in terms of students’ post-graduation plans. Colleges want to know how students did, what kind of performance they had, and it provides that information and I think it helps give students an indication of where they are and what they might want to pursue moving forward.

Participant 8:

> I do think it's necessary for a number of reasons, including but not limited to, the whole college application process and we know that students make a lot of decisions and decisions are made about them largely based on their grades.

Participant 11:

I think it's very necessary. I think you need something in place to give feedback to kids. Whatever it looks like, it certainly could be quantitative data, it could be qualitative data, all data is good data if it's used the right way.

Participant 12:

I think it's so important to have a grading system and reporting system that is understood. That is the strength of the 0 to 100, 65 and above system. It's clear, it's simple. The only problem is it's not particularly valid, I would say.

As Question 5 asked if grading and reporting is necessary whereas Question 6 asked what a grading and reporting system should look like. The system, as reported by participants, should allow for students to grow and show growth over time and be consistent while providing clarity and understanding as to what is expected for students to know and be able to do. Grading and reporting should be tied to standards and goals/learning targets. The system should report strengths and weaknesses relative to the agreed upon standards and learning outcomes for students. Furthermore, the grading and reporting system should have equitable grading ranges. As a whole, a grading and reporting system should help a student understand the criteria for successful work related to standards and/or goals while communicating to families student progress and ways in which supports and/or enrichments can be provided to students to deepen learning. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 1:

I think the most important elements of a grading system are that it's designed to allow for opportunity for students, designed to encourage student achievement, and that it's consistent.

Participant 4:

It should be how a student is progressing and identifying a weakness or a goal that they're working on, and then showing proof or evidence that they succeeded in that task.

Participant 6:

I think there has to be a lot more clarity and differentiation relative the learning standards. So right now, we have kind of a one size fits all for everything. We have one report card and everybody uses it. I think it's important that we start to nuance the standards differently, and then be able to design a reporting system that gives clarity to where the student's learning is relative to those standards in different content areas.

Participant 9:

Ideally, teachers are sharing with students a set of learning targets that are distilled or derived from standards in the different academic areas, and students are able to understand exactly what those targets are at the beginning of the term, so that they can see where they are on that continuum throughout the term.

Participant 10:

I think that understanding the difference of a 100 point system, because we're not really using it effectively having an F be a 55 or a 65, you're missing, you're weighting basically the 65 to 100 in a different manner than you're weighting the zero to 65, so I think having equal increments between levels in a standards based system is essential.

The two previous questions asked if grading and reporting systems were necessary and what it should look like at the secondary level. They were again aimed at ascertaining the level of importance of a grading and reporting system. The participants noted that a grading and reporting system is important while naming elements and outcomes of an ideal system. Interview Question 11 asked, "In your opinion, is a standards-based grading and reporting system worthwhile at the secondary level? Why or Why not?"

Participants noted that SBG is worthwhile at the secondary level as it allows for students to develop a growth mindset. Learning for students is more than just a number, and a SBG and reporting system shows students his or her progress in relation to a standard or goal. The number grade, as reported, does not inform students as to what direction he or she should take next. Participant 12 noted that SBG would allow for better awareness and feedback as putting a number and a generic comment on a report card "is the least informative feedback." The following responses were recorded:

Participant 2:

Yeah, I think it would be worthwhile because, especially we've been doing a lot of work in our district with growth mindset, so I think they can go hand in hand. I think they could definitely dovetail nicely. I think meeting or exceeding a standard and knowing that you could constantly be working toward a standard would be beneficial to students.

Participant 7:

Absolutely. My hope would be that if you made the transition to [standards-based grading] that it would take the emphasis off of a grade, and it would put the emphasis more on learning.

Participant 10:

Absolutely. I think it would give more information back to students about how they're performing and progressing, give more information to parents about how their children are doing, and it would serve the purpose of informing rather than just providing a number.

Participant 12:

I think it would help ultimately students to have a better opportunity to progress in their learning. And for them to have a better awareness of their strengths and areas of need for development. I think the concept of putting a number on a report card, with a comment, "Pleasure to have in class" is the least

informative feedback that I can think of. Yes, I think it would help students to grow.

Question 12 asks participants what skills are important for students to have in order to be future ready. Participants noted that the jobs of the future require students of today to be problem solvers, thinkers, and innovators. Versatility is important so that future employees can change and be flexible and adaptable. Skills needs call for students to move away from rote memorization of material to application of knowledge in new situations. Furthermore, participants noted how communication and collaboration across international and diverse fields are essential components that will be required in order to be future ready. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 5:

They need to be innovators. They need to be thinkers. They need to be able to be versatile and adaptable to whatever comes their way. Because things are changing. Jobs aren't the traditional jobs that they used to be. If a student is agile and able to move from one focus area to another and be versatile like that, I think they'd fare much better. Communication skills are always important, no matter if it's 1920 or 2030. The ability to communicate your ideas is always going to be important, to communicate effectively. I think a big part of helping a student to be successful moving forward, is to have a student who is more global. More able to identify with other people. To be empathetic and be able to put themselves in other

people's shoes, so that you're able to understand and work with diverse people.

Participant 6:

I think that's one of the moments of clarity that we're really working at, is to prepare students for their future, not our past, right? So really understand what that future holds. Jobs that haven't been created, problems that don't exist, creativity that's international, use of technology, as learning communities can be so diverse, and not contained to one physical area.

Participant 8:

I think it's clear that students need to go beyond rote memorization and just retrieval of facts and more critical thinking skills, communicating and collaborating with others, finding and assessing their own information, research, asking questions rather than just finding answers.

Participant 11:

Traditional ways of grading are really still in the world of rote memorization. Can I give you a task and you complete it? But now the tasks have changed. They need to be able to problem solve, they need to be able to work in teams. They need to be able to figure out a way to succeed after failure, they need to understand that failing is okay.

Student skills needed for the future were the essential components of Question 12 whereas Question 13 asks participants, “What would your ideal school of the future look like and would SBG be include in this?” Participants stated they would move away from the traditional model to a SBG and reporting system as it is a move away from the rigid aspects of the past. Furthermore, SBG is more closely aligned with skills and desired outcomes for the future. Schools would have more problem and project-based learning to mimic real-life applications and opportunities for students to identify a problem and research possible solutions. It was noted, however, that the schools of today resemble the schools of the past. It was voiced that there is a sense of urgency today that has not existed before here in the United States, even though the United States has traditionally been behind future trends in education.

The following responses were recorded:

Participant 1:

> My ideal school would be one with fewer hurdles and roadblocks. I would want to see a school of the future where we said, "I can't," or "We can't," less. Allowing students to move through curriculum at a pace that makes sense for them. Allowing students to pursue courses of interest and passion while also getting a broad-based educational foundation. Would standards-based grading be included in something like that? Yes. Because if we're moving away from some of the rigid aspects, well, what's one of the most rigid aspects we have? It's grading, right? A 65 is passing, but a 64

is not. It's a one-point difference. I mean, it's almost statistically insignificant.

Participant 2:

Yeah, I think it would be included in it. I think there'd be more long term projects. Maybe things that had more application, maybe things that mimicked more closely work environments, which require interpersonal skills. Ideal school demonstrates a lot of flexibility to meet the needs of the learner. I think that the key concern about schools right now is that many, many classes are a one size fits all approach. There are many classrooms that still resemble classrooms you could've walked into a 100 years ago with desks in a row and textbooks as their main focus as a resource.

Participant 4:

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. I think from a growth mindset perspective of deliberate practice and achieving goals, very specific goals, standard-based grading works hand in hand. My ideal school would be all project-based learning. That still covers all the content we need to cover, but not be so dogmatic about it. And we could then take problem-based questions and have children work together to solve those problems.

Participant 6:

> Yeah, I think standards-based grading is much more aligned to the skills and dispositions students will need in their future. And traditionally, US education has been slow in responding to future trends. Everything we read now, Thomas Friedman is the most simplistic voice for the future in his most recent book, "Thank You for Being Late," is profound and we've looked at those trends. But, you read anything now, and you're seeing ... there's an urgency to it that I haven't seen in the last decade of really preparing students differently. I think because the world is changing so fast.

Figure 5 is a word frequency diagram highlighting the frequency of words used within all interview responses related to the first research question. The words which appear the largest are the most frequently used words, and the words which are small reflect words used less often. This diagram represented the top 100 used words throughout all interviews. It can be observed that the following emerging themes represented in this diagram are learning and communicate.

The first research question in this study asked, "To what extent do superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban setting believe in the importance of SBG at the secondary level?" Interview questions related to this first research question asked participants to state if grading and reporting is in fact necessary and what it should an ideal system look like at the secondary level. In addition, the researcher then asked if SBG would be worthwhile at the secondary level.

Figure 5

Word Frequency for Research Question #1

Finally, participants were asked what skills students needed to be prepared for the future and if his or her ideal future school would include SBG at the grading and reporting system.

Participants noted that a grading and reporting system is in fact necessary at the secondary level. It was further explained that this particular system should allow for student growth and communicate to students and parents where students are in relation to his or her learning. It was found that participants do believe that SBG is worthwhile at the secondary level and the skills students need to be future ready could fit nicely with a SBG and reporting system. Thinking skills were predominant in what is needed through problem solving and innovation, coupled with the ability to communicate and collaborate while being flexible, resourceful, and gritty.

Finally, participants spoke about his or her ideal school and what it would look like. Reponses on the school design reflected work that would cultivate skills that were identified in the previous question. Such work would include problem and project-based learning that is real and relevant. A SBG and reporting system, according to the participants, would more closely align to the work and desired outcomes for student learning. In closing, it was overwhelmingly noted that SBG would be included in his or her ideal school design.

Research Question 2

How would superintendents and assistant superintendents describe the change process with regard to moving from a traditional grading model to SBG at the secondary level?

Questions 14 to 16 and 19 were aimed at the change process in general as well as the change process that would pertain to moving from a traditional grading and reporting model to that of SBG at the secondary level. Specifically, Question 14 asked if participants would be willing to lead change. Question 15 asked what steps the participants would take in leading the change initiative from a traditional grading and reporting system to SBG and Question 16 asked how they would describe the change process in general terms. Question 19 asked how participants would characterize the degree of difficulty in implementing a change from a traditional grading and reporting system to a standards-based system.

Regarding superintendent and assistant superintendent willingness to lead change, responses where varied. There were some who were eager to lead the change, and others who were not ready to lead the change at this time. For those who were willing to lead

the change, some of the participants noted that it would be in the best interest of the students. One participant noted that they are currently in the process of starting the conversations for the secondary level. Participant 9 stated that they now have tools now at their disposal to be able to make such a change possible. The following responses were recorded of those who were willing to lead:

Participant 3:

100%. Because I think it's in the best interest of the children. I think that taking a holistic approach at assessing students is the right way to do it. I think we are well beyond in our understanding of high stakes testing and grades being based upon formal written assessments. There are some students who simply just don't perform that way. So being more holistic in our evaluation of students and including portfolio assessments and demonstrations and lab work and things like that gives a better overall view of the child's performance.

Participant 4:

I'm always willing to lead change. It's what gets me up in the morning.

Participant 11:

Absolutely. Because I think it's good practice for kids. I think ... I had a former mentor who always said that at the end of the day you want to put your head on the pillow, knowing that you made the

best decision for kids. And I feel like that, if that decision were made, I feel like it would be in the best interest of kids.

There were also some participants that were not willing to lead change at this time. In two cases, they were not willing to do it at this time where one participant noted that they would be willing to do it in the future. Another participant spoke about how it would be a desired future outcome, but not something that they would currently undertake as there are other areas that are taking precedence. The following responses were recorded of those who were not willing to lead:

Participant 5:

No. Not at this point in my life.

Participant 10:

Is it something that would look to, towards in the future? Yes, but it's not something that I'm willing to put on my shoulders right now.

Participant 12:

To be realistic about it, I would say we're endeavoring in three or four areas of importance. I would see that as a desired outcome of the work we're doing to integrate teaching, foster partnerships between teachers, and helping them to come to the realization that we need to do better in providing students that feedback. I wouldn't take it necessarily as a first step priority, but certainly is one that I would see as a hopeful and desired outcome of the changes we're putting into place.

Additionally, there were participants who were willing to lead, but stated that he or she would not be the driving force behind the change in making it come to fruition. The role in leading the change by superintendents and assistant superintendents would be supportive in nature to help facilitate the process. Although central office administrators could mandate whatever they would like, Participant 4 said that this change would not work unless the building principal is "willing to do the work." Participants also stated that there needs to be buy-in from other leaders in the district. Sustained change would not come from central office, but would come the building level, mainly with the principals leading the charge as they would have the greatest impact at the grassroots level. Furthermore, if the change is only spearheaded by one or two people with pure intentions and research to back it, the change would not be successful. This would be true at both the building and district levels as the buy-in needs to be reciprocal. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 2:

So yeah, I'd be willing to lead it, but I don't feel qualified to lead it. So, I would more be willing to facilitate it and support it and empower those who are capable of leading it.

Participant 3:

I don't think it's done from central office. I think it's done at the building level. I think it's something that the principal would have to be inspired to do and lead the charge. It really is the principals who have the greatest impact on what's going to happen within the instructional program. And I think the principals would really need

to be on board and inspired to make that change in order to have the desired impact on faculty.

Participant 4:

It's really a building-based thing. I can mandate whatever I want, unless my building principal and their either department chairs or assistant principals, other administrators ... Unless they're willing to do the work, it's not going to work.

Participant 9:

I've seen it on the other end where if change comes from one or two key people who could have the greatest intent and research behind them as well, it won't be as successful as if you have a group of people who represent all the different roles in the district.

Participant 11:

You got to get buy-in from the other leaders in the district. So if you have a high school principal, high school APs, directors, who are all experienced secondary people, who buy into this, they are the people who can now get buy in from the teachers in the department, and the lead teachers in the departments, they can start moving that train forward to take the first step.

Question 15, which relates to the second research question, asked, “What specific steps would you take in leading change initiative from a traditional to a standards-based model of grading and reporting?” Participant responses to this question fell into three categories: supporting the why based on research and professional development,

involving people to cultivate buy-in, and building off of and connecting to the work that has already been done by teachers.

The first category, supporting the why based on research, should be achieved by professional development around SBG. Participants voiced that this training should inform teachers and stakeholders why making such a shift would be beneficial to students. The reasons for the shift should be connected to relevant research on the benefits and pitfalls of making a change to a SBG and reporting system so that teachers will "believe what you believe." Furthermore, the training should provide teachers with foundational knowledge as to what SBG is in addition to professional development related to what the standards are so that teachers can then grade and report on those standards. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 2:

I think we need to do some instruction on what standards-based grading is, and why standards-based grading benefits students. Then give explicit instruction on what it is and how to implement it and then expect people to begin implementing.

Participant 3:

I think the primary objective would be to provide professional development in the area for teachers to understand the value of making the shift. Again, if you're going to make a large cultural shift at the secondary level to a new scoring system regardless of what it is, the teachers would need to have a good understanding of how it will help children in order to make that change. If teachers

don't see the value I don't think it would be implemented effectively.

Participant 6:

We are very attentive to Simon Sinek, Lead From the Inside Out. So you need to start with why, right? And you need to understand that in your organization, people are not going to care about change until they believe what you believe.

Participant 8:

First I think there would have to be a lot of research and a lot of understanding about the benefits and the possible pitfalls.

Participant 11:

You really want to educate the teachers as well. And as you implement that, you really can't do standards based grading unless they truly understand what the standards are, they understand what the research is.

The second area that participants noted as a step in changing from traditional to SBG was involving people into the process to cultivate buy-in. The people or stakeholders involved in this process, as per the participants, includes colleagues and follow administrators, teachers, and committees which would consist of various members within the school community. The importance of identifying and communicating to community members the pros and challenges of making such a shift was reported. One participant explained the pros and challenges in terms of motivating and restraining forces. This participant went on to elaborate the importance of identifying those forces

and then nullifying the restraining forces as they are difficult whereas the motivating forces have enough energy on their own. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 6:

I think one of the important factor is to understand motivating and restraining forces, to clarify in your community, what would be motivating, what would be restraining. And then instead of intuitively pushing the motivating forces harder, I think you have to pick one or two restraining forces and mitigate them, so that you mitigate the restraints. Because it makes sense, it just makes common sense and the movement has enough energy on its own. But it's the restraining forces that are difficult.

Participant 7:

I would try to work with a group of teacher leaders to figure out what our path might be. For me I like it to be organic, I think sometimes other people need it to be a little bit more linear. Maybe there are some big guide posts that you would have along the way in terms of, first we're going to build understanding, then we're going to pilot, we're going to celebrate success.

Participant 8:

There would also need to be a lot of committee work and support from all stakeholders. There'd have to be a great deal of communication around it.

Participant 9:

> Step one would be to probably create a presentation with colleagues, fellow administrators who understand the reasons behind moving to that system, and bringing that to a curriculum committee, where we can analyze it, understand the pros and the challenges. I won't say cons, the challenges, and developing an approach from there. Really, to cultivate buy-in. So you have to start by getting a groundswell of support behind the idea of exploring it.

The third area of responses related to interview Question Number 15 suggested that teachers build off of work that they are already doing when changing from traditional to SBG. This will aid in bridging the gap between what is currently done and what is expected after and during SBG implementation, as evidenced. This could start by starting slow and then building up to a full-blown overhaul by working with one unit or one assessment. Participant 7 then suggested capitalizing on teacher experiences in order to build capacity. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 4:

> The data collection piece is the first hill to climb to demonstrate that you can do it in another way than giving a test and getting an 80 or a 90. So, said differently, if you take existing work and modify it to standards-based data collection, you're way ahead of the curve.

Participant 7:

I think I would just build peoples understanding of what it is and how it might be different, and I would probably ask, or try to find where it was happening already, and then ask some of those people to help build capacity among more of the faculty.

Participant 11:

You give them an opportunity to test it out. So instead of just an overhaul, "Next year we're doing it, let's try this out. What if we tried in one unit? What if we build one assessment with standards-based grading, and took a look at it?" They could see the value of it and then that could build on it.

One participant suggested starting the conversation with SBG at the secondary level by discussing homework as a way to get people thinking about grading. This could be done by looking at research and asking teachers to think about homework and predict the ranking of potential impact on students learning. As the rating and impact of homework on student learning was ranked 94th by Hattie (2012), it could, according to the participant, give teachers an opportunity to discuss.

Question 16 asked participants to describe the change process in general terms. One participant cautioned about using the word change and instead offered the suggestion for leaders to use the term “improvement.” According to this participant, people are not willing to change, but it is hard to push back against improvement. In general terms, participants noted that change should be supported by a vision and should be in the best interest of students that is results oriented. Teacher leadership should be fostered through

ongoing professional development which is rooted in research to gather data and information; data that could also be gathered from site visits to investigate challenges and successes of the desired change. By building teacher capacity, the change can be built out on a larger scale once piloted in a classroom, then department, building and eventually the district. Committees to involve stakeholders would be coupled with potential presentations to the Board of Education. Overall the change process requires persistence and ongoing communication. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 2:

> So, what I prefer to use is really improvement. I think that's a much healthier approach to it. People are uncomfortable with change, that's been my experience. I think first people need to understand the why is it important or the why is it necessary. Then I think if you're asking people to change, only to change, that it could embolden them to resist the change. I think it's difficult for a person to argue against improvement, or to rail against improvement.

Participant 3:

> I think you need to create a road map of from where you are to where you want to be, and then create checkpoints along the way of how to get where you want to be effectively. If you begin with professional development for teachers so they have an understanding for the value, then perhaps you're piloting a system in one specific classroom and having others observe the outcomes.

Then perhaps you're trying at a grade level and then shifting to the building and then shifting to the district level. It would have to involve parent forums so they understand. It would have to involve presentations at the board level so the Board of Education is on board with any big cultural shift like that. There would have to be committees assemble for people to do the research. Site visits to places who have already made these changes to see how they're working, what obstacles they came up against.

Participant 4:

Slow, glacial. What I found over the years is when you demonstrate why we want to change and how it benefits kids, most teachers get on board. So, you develop your vision, you communicate that out, and you have to be persistent and you have to get people on board to support that change. There has to be some incentive for change, whether it be some type of reward at the end, or in your vision, you have to outline why this change is a reward for you, or why it is the best thing to do. So, communicate it, get people to support it, and be persistent.

Participant 11:

Change process is difficult. Change ... It's funny, if you look at what people's opinions are in the beginning and their opinions at the end, I think change is very difficult in the beginning because of people's human instincts. Typically

there's a little bit of fear, a little bit of anger, a little bit of resentment. But once that heavy lifting gets done and they see some of the results, it becomes second nature to them. And I think in the end, if it's right for kids it wins out.

Participant 12:

I'm a strong believe in teacher leadership in bringing about change. I think it's very important to bring on teachers in their professional development. And then utilize those teachers in a turn key type model.

The final interview question relating to the second research question asked participants the degree of difficulty in changing from a traditional grading and reporting system to that of a standards-based system at the secondary level. This particular change was characterized as a "heavy lift" and one that is "daunting."

The following responses were recorded:

Participant 1:

Gosh. I mean, it's a heavy lift. I also perceive that there would be large challenges to making a move to standards-based. That's not necessarily to say that the challenges are about standards-based. I think there's challenge in change. I think you're probably looking at a lengthy overhaul process. With the potential that, at the end of all of it, you don't make the change.

Participant 5:

I would say the highest level of difficulty.

Participant 8:

It would be quite a heavy lift.

Participant 9:

As daunting as it is, a change of this magnitude would be a five

[out of five].

Figure 6 is a word frequency diagram highlighting the frequency of words used within all interview responses related to the second research question. The words which appear the largest are the most frequently used words, and the words which are small reflect words used less often. This diagram represented the top 100 used words throughout all interviews. It can be observed that the following emerging themes represented in this diagram are research, community, and development.

Figure 6

Word Frequency for Research Question #2

The second research question in this study asked, “How would superintendents and assistant superintendents describe the change process with regard to moving from a traditional grading model to SBG at the secondary level?” Interview questions related to this second research question asked if superintendents and assistant superintendents would be willing to lead change from a traditional grading and reporting model to SBG at the secondary level. The researcher then asked what specific steps would be taken in changing from a traditional to SBG. Next, a question was asked to participants to describe the change process in general terms. Finally, participants were asked to qualify the degree of difficulty if changing from a traditional model to SBG at the secondary level.

There was a mix of sentiments in terms of those who were willing to lead change and those who were not willing to lead the change at this time. Also, there were participants that would be willing to lead in the sense they would oversee and support the process, but that the change process itself would not be at the district level but at the building level where there would be the greatest impact.

Steps in the change process related to the shift from traditional to SBG and reporting at the secondary level fell into three categories. Steps included developing and articulating why such a change should in fact take place through professional development training. The why should be in the best interests of students and student outcomes while also being rooted in proven research. Another noted element for this change included the involvement of stakeholders in order to create buy-in. Participants stated that it would be unlikely for sustained change to take place if there is only one or two people behind the change, even if research supports such a move. Finally, it was

noted that teachers build upon their current work to change from traditional grading to SBG. Participants noted that this should be done slow by working with a single assessment or unit, and then leveraging these teachers to build capacity.

The change process in general terms for Question 16 built and expanded upon the participant responses from interview Question 15. In both cases, participants noted the importance of professional development, teacher leadership for building capacity, and the involvement of stakeholders. Responses to Questions 15 and 16 also highlighted the need for committees and doing what is in the best interest of students. Question 16, however, added the insight as to how the term "improvement" could replace the word "change." Furthermore, Question 16 added additional items to consider for change such as presentations to the Board of Education and site visits as well as highlighting the importance of communicating and being persistent.

Research Question 3

What are the perceived barriers and challenges in moving from a traditional grading model to SBG as identified by superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban area?

Questions 17, 18, 20, 21, and 23 attempted to unveil the perceived barriers and challenges that would be faced in moving form a traditional grading model to SBG as identified by superintendents and assistant superintendents. Question 17 asked participants what the perceived impediments they would see if attempting to move from a traditional model of grading and reporting to SBG. Question 18 asked superintendents and assistant superintendents if it would be a significant hurdle to report a SBG and reporting system to colleges in lieu of a traditional approach. Interview Question 20

asked what conditions restrict or would restrict the ability to make this shift whereas Question 21 asked what conditions would need to be present to make this change. Finally, Question 23 asked if there were competing initiatives and/or work that is more important than SBG.

Participant responses to interview Question 17, which relates to the third research question, fell into three categories: colleges, change itself that is difficult, and teachers. For the first category of colleges, there would be a fear, on the part of stakeholders, of putting students in a disadvantage in relation to the college application process and acceptance to college. Participants would not want to jeopardize work and efforts in getting students to college. There is an unknown link between secondary schools and colleges and universities. The following questions surfaced:

- Are colleges and universities on board with this change?
- Do colleges want to see and rely upon traditional grade point averages?
- What evidence do we have that shows SBG will work for the college application process?
- How would colleges and universities be able compare students for acceptance?

The following responses were recorded:

Participant 1:

Our commitment to working with students to pursue the most competitive post-secondary options they can, would probably prevent any change like this in the immediate, because we don't want to do anything to jeopardize that work. And we don't know

enough about this. I don't know enough about this, to say that it wouldn't matter.

Participant 5:

The change would be nearly impossible at this point, unless you get the colleges on board. Because that's the ultimate goal, post high school. I would think most schools would say, most districts would say, that their post goal is to have students prepare for colleges and careers, mainly colleges. So, if the colleges aren't on board, then we're not playing with everyone we need on the field.

Participant 10:

I think the biggest issue is with respect to colleges and universities who are looking for grade point averages.

Participant 12:

I think they [parents] would be confused and might feel that their children were put at a disadvantage in the college application process should they not be able to be compared with others in other high performing communities for their success in the college application process.

For the second category of change, superintendents and assistant superintendents reported that change in general is difficult and this particular change requires one that confronts deeply rooted and embedded traditional practices of the past. This change would likely be, as evidenced by responses, confronted with resistance mainly from parents and teachers as a standards-based system would not be what they were used to or

have experienced. The sentiment that would arise from parents and teachers, “Why would we embrace a massive undertaking to change our system if our high school has consistently and repeatedly obtained high results?” The following responses were recorded:

Participant 1:

Well, change is difficult, right? That's a barrier in and of itself. I think there's emotional resistance to change. I think you have a population of students whose parents almost all attended schools on a traditional grading model, so that's difficult, too, right? You have teachers who are used to it, kids who are used to it, parents who are used to it, administrators who are used to it. That's tricky, right?

Participant 4:

Well, it's really the change of tradition.

Participant 5:

This community is so traditional and so used to the exceptional results that we get here, that if we tried to start teaching and/or grading in a different way, that they thought would put their children at a disadvantage, they wouldn't go for it at all. Barriers would be the parents. It would be the students, it would be the community that it used to having certain results. I don't think anybody is willing to tolerate "What if we change this, and things don't go well?"

Participant 8:

Any change is met with resistance, this is not how we did it, this is not how I did it, especially in a traditional community where many parents went to high school. It was good for me, why the change?

Participant 9:

Why go down this difficult road if, you know, 98% of our kids are graduating, 80% of them are getting into four year schools, etcetera?

Participant 12:

The structures are so embedded as to what means passing or failing, that a standards-based system somehow would threaten the ability of people to understand the very means by which kids are assessed. It's a massive undertaking. In at traditional community like ours it would be mind-blowing.

Finally, the last category of responses for Question 17 is that of teachers. It was stated that there may be some teachers who are resistant to change for several reasons. One reason is that the way in which teachers grade today could be the way that they have graded for decades, or for several years at a minimum. Also, not only would this practice of SBG be new for already overwhelmed teachers, it would ask some to change their practices when they may grade traditionally with success. As Participant 11 stated, "And sometimes when you make change it doesn't mean that a system or traditional way of doing things was necessarily bad, it's just you're always looking for what could be better." Furthermore, this change would require a shift in the day-to-day practices related

to how assessments are graded and reported. This would likely generate a fear for teachers. Finally, those who would be involved today in making such changes may not even see the results of the efforts as this change could take several years.

The following responses were recorded:

Participant 2:

Sometimes we have teachers that just want to take the easiest path, or the path of least resistance and changing your whole grading system, one that you've been using for 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, close to 30 years is not a desirable task out of the gate, right?

Participant 3:

There would be some teachers resistant to change just because it's something new and something new to learn and an additional burden and teachers are, some teachers regularly feel overwhelmed. So, adding a new layer of change to them may continue that feeling of overwhelmed and they may be somewhat resistant to it. It's doing something differently than what people had experienced on their own and may cause some concern just by the nature of change.

Participant 8:

I think that another impediment would be teachers who are very used to grading traditionally making a shift, because I think it's not just shifting what's on the report card, but it means shifting how classroom work is assessed. How their classroom exams and

quizzes are quantified, how rubrics are used, or to what degree they could be used more.

Participant 9:

This would be fundamentally changing the way most teachers do business in the classroom, and I think that would be scary for them, and you have to massage that anxiety and make it safe for them to feel that and know that there would be support to help them through that. Some human beings are always going to be motivated by what's easiest and best for them. It doesn't matter how good something sounds. One of the challenges is ... and this is in, what's that book? “Good to Great,” where you have to have people on board who are motivated in knowing that they're cultivating the ground, the seeds, for something whose real benefit they may not even see. In other words, a challenge is courage in knowing that the rewards of this may not be seen during some of our tenure. This could take five, six, seven years.

Participant 11:

I think the biggest barrier is working with some staff members who have been doing the same thing for decades and have seen success. And sometimes when you make change it doesn't mean that a system or traditional way of doing things was necessarily bad, it's just you're always looking for what could be better. Sometimes that's tough for people to see.

Interview Question 18 asked superintendents and assistant superintendents, “Is it a significant hurdle to report SBG to colleges in lieu of a traditional grading and reporting system?” The responses mostly stated that that it would be difficult to report SBG in lieu of a traditional grading and reporting system. Many participants are unsure what it would look like otherwise in terms of sending SBG transcripts to colleges, both from the student perspective as well from the perspective on the college admission side. The traditional, according to some participants, allows colleges to compare students from different parts of the country as well as two students from the same school.

On the contrary, however, three participants noted how it would not be a significant hurdle to report SBG in lieu of a traditional system. If the focus was really on preparing students to challenges at the post-secondary level, then how students are graded and what is reported should not be a determining factor. Moreover, one participant stated that college admissions officers take application packets and manipulate them according to the process at that particular college or university. Lastly, Participant 9 stated that reporting a SBG and reporting system would be a benefit for students as colleges are unable to determine “what the heck a 104 average means at this high school for a student, versus a 98.” Nonetheless, it was clear that participants felt there is a need to investigate this more in order to make a determination. The following responses were recorded where it would be a significant hurdle:

Participant 1:

> I have a hard time peeling away the post-secondary application process and a traditional public high school will have a difficult time navigating students matriculating through a college

application process without some sort of grades. I think a traditional grading system was probably responsive to post-secondary education institutions.

Participant 5:

We need traditional because I don't think they have any mechanism to work with that type of data outside of the school to interpret or appreciate what we would do if we changed to a standards-based system. Society is set up a certain way. There's the high and there's the low. There's not the continuum on a level, "Oh, well he understands this concept, but this one not so much." A college wouldn't interpret that and say, "Okay, I can compare him to someone in Michigan, a student in 12th grade in Michigan. His standards compare to this student's 95." I can easily compare a 95 average and a whatever on the SAT

Participant 7:

I think it would be really difficult. I think it's a necessary evil in a way, in terms of students' post-graduation plans. Colleges want to know how students did, what kind of performance they had, and it provides that information. I think if you're going to a college that also values that [SBG] it would be wonderful. I wonder if it's an impediment for students who want to go to more traditional schools. It probably puts more of a burden on the admissions officers but I don't know. Maybe it doesn't actually have a negative

impact and they like students who come from those kinds of environments, but I think it would definitely be something we would have to look into more.

Participant 10:

I believe it would be. I don't have any research that says that it would or wouldn't be. I think that if you have 200 kids out of a class of 600 that all have fours, how do you distinguish between them? So, I think we need to come up with some sort of system that colleges and universities would understand.

The following responses were recorded where it would not be a significant hurdle:

Participant 3:

I do not. You know what, if we're preparing our students effectively for post-secondary challenges how they are evaluated should not be on the list. We're trying, as we discussed earlier, to build the correct work ethic and the correct work habits and self-advocacy and self-reliance. So, I would hope that regardless of what scoring system is in place at the high school level, the college they elect to attend, how they are assessed, shouldn't influence how they perform.

Participant 4:

No, I think college admissions offices manipulate the transcripts in so many different ways that I don't think it's that big of a deal.

They rip down the weighting. You report everything you do and then they do what they're going to do anyway.

Participant 9:

I actually think that it could be a benefit, because I think that colleges don't have a sense of what the heck a 104 average means at this high school for a student, versus a 98. I think colleges care most of all about the rigor of coursework, and honestly, standardized tests.

As it relates to the third research question, Question 20 asked participants what are the conditions that restrict their ability to implement a SBG model of grading and reporting. It was highlighted that there is an uncertainty as to how it would look at the secondary level in New York State with courses that end with a New York State Regents exam. Participants also verbalized that traditional and long-standing beliefs on the part of teachers, administrators, and parents who value the traditional grading and reporting system as one that is valid, fair and appropriate. Additional conditions that restrict the ability to change is the comfort level with teachers and the traditional system that is currently in place and that this is something "that's not to be dismissed." Furthermore, there are not many districts that are known to have implemented SBG at the secondary level. To end, a significant condition that restricts the ability to change from a traditional grading and reporting system to SBG is time. With all that is mandated, there is little time left to work on important things in which districts would like to invest. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 1:

We give New York State Regents exams at the end of a course. Those are graded on a 100-point scale. What does that mean to a school that only does standards-based grading? Do you employ standards-based grading except at the end of June when you give the test? I'm not sure what that model looks like.

Participant 6:

Teacher practice and beliefs, long-standing established comfort of teachers. And that's not to be dismissed. So, it will take a lot of conversation with teachers.

Participant 7:

I think time and capacity. When I say capacity I mean bandwidth. There's so much that's not optional and then there's all the things that you know are good and important, and then there's so little space left that these really important things are always fighting for priority.

Participant 10:

Conflicting initiatives, a lack of understanding as to how this would play out with students when they graduate, as far as college entrance. There are not many districts, to my knowledge, that have fully engaged in this to lead the charge. I would probably want to see how it played out in some other places first with this particular initiative.

Participant 12:

> Traditional perceptions of grading systems. The understanding and confidence in a system that doesn't make any sense. The fear of changing the system and the consequences that students could face in that regard. The very deeply held beliefs of the teachers and leaders, and parents, and students that the system is actually one that is valid, fair and appropriate, even though it's not.

In contrast, Question 21 asked what conditions would need to be present to implement a SBG and reporting model. Superintendents and assistant superintendents highlighted that there needs to be a culture of trust that has a shared philosophy where teachers would feel safe to take risks. Professional development time to meet for teachers to learn about relevant research and the benefits for students. This is coupled with communication to all stakeholders, including parents, on why it is a benefit for students and how it will work with colleges. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 2:

> In no specific order, but, research, articles, and studies, that clearly prove the benefit of standards-based grading, because people are skeptical and people like their autonomy so they're going to use their autonomy as a shield to progress if you don't have evidence to prove that standards-based grading would be to students' benefit. Trust, you would need to have earned trust of the faculty and administrators. If they don't trust you, and if they don't believe that you'll see it through, then I think you might be destined for failure.

Participant 4:

I think you definitely need resources in terms of teacher meeting time. You need a point person that's a teacher to lead the charge. You need a back-end system that gets you the data. And then you need a whole parent education piece about how and why we're doing it.

Participant 6:

It's not going to take educating parents on what standards-based means, it's just going to take having them understand how standards-based will be a pathway to getting accepted to a great college. We'd have to have some evidence that it's going to work with the colleges.

Participant 9:

You'd have to have a district where the superintendent and the Board of Education were lock step in philosophy. A place where teachers feel safe to take risks. They would be more likely to jump in on an effort like this if they knew that they would not be judged, or if there missteps, that they would be okay.

One final condition that would need to be in place was a suggested partnership and movement amongst neighboring towns, districts, and states. The partnership would allow for districts to partner in bringing about a collective change, one that would have to be across levels from primary to secondary to higher education. The concept was that

districts would not want to be alone in changing against the long-standing practice of a traditional grading and reporting system. The following responses were recorded:

Participant 5:

> It would have to be a bigger picture than just the high school, or just one district, or just one town, or just one state. Almost like common core. It would have to be a federal initiative, and we'd have to have higher education on board. Education K through college.

Participant 8:

> It would also be something that I would want to discuss with colleagues because sometimes when you make change like this you can have their support if it's not just something that's done in your district, but across various districts.

Participant 12:

> I think it has to be a movement, you know? The concept of not sharing class rank, was only successful because it was clearly communicated by the college, as well as the data, that ranking was hurting kids in their ability to access better colleges. It took come courageous schools somewhere to make the change, to prove that that was not the case. Maybe that's what is needed. Unless you can make the argument that the 65 and above system is hurting kids, you're not going to be successful in changing.

The final question relating to the third research question is Question 23 which asks, “Are there competing initiatives and/or work that is more important than SBG?” Many participants noted a plethora of initiatives that are taking place right now in their respective districts. The fear of taking on SBG is that it could potentially derail other items that are being worked on at this time. Participants also noted that there is work around educating teachers on the shifts/changes that have taken place in regard to content standards. Although there are always competing initiatives, the question remains as to which one takes the first priority at any given time. As Participant 12 stated, “And for whatever reason, grading doesn’t always fall to the top of that priority list.” The following responses were recorded:

Participant 3:

> In three years, three big changes. If we were to look at moving to a standards-based scoring assessment where is that in the queue? If we're just adjusting to this shift, that shift, now this is another shift, where is it in our list of priorities and will we be attentive enough to make it happen effectively? There are always competing initiatives. I won't necessarily say it's more important. It's which have we prioritized at this moment.

Participant 8:

> Yeah, I do think so. We've been doing a lot of work with technology integration, we've been continuing our work with the importance of carefully planned lessons. We continue our literacy

work. So, I am always hesitant to bring in another initiative that could be seen as contrary or counter to existing initiatives.

Participant 10:

I would have to say at this point, in my situation, yes. Implementing, a lot of different shifts and standards with ELA and math, there's a shift in social studies, at the secondary level, science. So, to overall a grading system at this point would be challenging.

Participant 12:

Change is difficult to make, and one has to make decisions about what the most important things are. And for whatever reason, grading doesn't always fall to the top of that priority list.

Figure 7 is a word frequency diagram highlighting the frequency of words used within all interview responses related to the third research question. The words which appear the largest are the most frequently used words, and the words which are small reflect words used less often. This diagram represented the top 100 used words throughout all interviews. It can be observed that the following emerging themes represented in this diagram are colleges, change, and teachers.

The third research question in this study asked, "What are the perceived barriers and challenges in moving from a traditional grading model to SBG as identified by superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban area?" Interview questions related to this third research question asked superintendents and assistant superintendents as to the barriers he or she would foresee if attempting to change from a traditional

Figure 7

Word Frequency for Research Question #3

grading and reporting system to SBG.

The researcher then asked if it would be a significant hurdle to report SBG to colleges and universities in lieu of a traditional grading and reporting system. Next, two questions were asked. The first question sought to determine what conditions restrict their ability to implement SBG at the secondary level while the following question asked which conditions would need to be present in order to change. Finally, participants where asked if there were competing initiatives and/or work that is more important than SBG.

There were three main barriers that were identified which included change itself, colleges, and teachers. With change, there are deeply rooted practices that have been in places for several years, which would be met with resistance. Stakeholders would want to know the reason for changing, especially if the results have been favorable. The next barrier was that of colleges and the college application process. There is a fear of

jeopardizing student acceptance into colleges if secondary schools were to have a SBG and reporting system. There were also several unknowns as to what SBG at the secondary level would look in regard to the application and acceptance process and how colleges would receive, assess, and compare eligible student applications. Finally, teachers posed an additional barrier as this is a change that will require much more than an overhaul of the report card. The change would require other potential elements to change such as assessments and rubrics. Additionally, many teachers have been using the same grading system for years and may not see the end results of efforts that could take several years to implement.

Answers varied slightly when looking as to if it would be a significant hurdle to report SBG system to colleges. Many participants stated that it would be difficult as again they are unsure what it would look like for students and for admissions officers. The traditional system, however, does allow colleges and universities to compare students which is a benefit and "necessary evil" of traditional grading and reporting methods. Three participants did note that it would not be a hurdle to report with SBG to colleges. This was due to the fact of the perception that colleges admission processes take the application packets and pulls them apart as necessary for that particular institution. Also, it was voiced that the focus should be on learning and teaching students the skills to be successful at the post-secondary level and the way in which it is reported should not be a factor. Finally, one participant noted that colleges would be in favor of SBG as they are not able to decipher what goes into a 104 and how it differs from a 98.

Conditions that restrict the ability for superintendents and assistant superintendents to implement SBG at the secondary level were identified by the

participants. Many of those who would be involved in the process are uncertain as to what SBG would and should look like, which is coupled with the fact there are not many known districts that have made the move to SBG. Many people, including teachers and parents, value the traditional models as they are used to and perceive it to be a valid instrument. Teachers are comfortable with this grading system as many have used it for several years. Time is both a condition that restricts as well as condition that would be needed to make this shift. The time would be needed to provide professional development for teachers to learn about relevant research and the benefits for students. Another condition that would need to be present is how SBG would work with colleges and how it would benefit students. Finally, it was noted that partnerships with neighboring districts and/or states would be beneficial so that the change would be a collective and not isolated effort.

Participants voiced how they all have several initiatives that are always in the works, and the potential work with SBG could derail work that is currently being done. There are always competing initiatives, however, grading never seems to make it to the top of the priority list.

Summary of Findings

The semi-structured exploratory interview questions fell into eight areas, five of which were background information areas and three areas that were directly related to the three research questions driving this study. The first four background information areas were traditional grading, standard-based grading, standards, and grading reporting. Additionally, there was one area of background information that was a final open-ended question at the end of the interview.

In regards to traditional grading, it was noted as a system that is typically on a 100 point scale or using an A, B, C, D, or F. Participants noted that this grading and reporting system fails to provide students, teachers, and family members with specific feedback and a direction as to what steps to take next. It was also noted that this system has been long-standing and includes multiple variables when arriving at a final grade. On the contrary, participants highlighted how SBG is more reflective of student learning where learning is separate from behaviors and participation. Additionally, this grading and reporting system provides concrete feedback to students, teachers, and family members as to what next steps could and should be. Lastly, SBG allows for and facilitates a growth mindset.

The third and fourth areas for background information were standards and grade reporting. Standards were noted to be aligned with state standards and are embedded into the curriculum and instruction, however, the deep understanding of these standards at the secondary level is varied and work is needed in this area for improvement. It was also noted that there is a changing nature with standards. Grading is based on curriculum which is then based on state standards. Grade reporting, on the other hand, is not aligned to state standards. Participants stated that the purpose of a grade reporting system was to communicate to students, teachers, and family members where a student is in relation to his or her learning and help guide what next steps to take. Those who participated in this study reflected that their current grading and reporting systems do not fulfill the intended purpose(s) that they reported. Also, their current grading models are reflective of traditional grading and reporting systems.

The first research question asked, “To what extent do superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban setting believe in the importance of SBG at the secondary level?” Interview Questions 5 and 6 respectively asked if grading and reporting is necessary and what should the system look like at the secondary level. Interview Questions 11, 12, and 13 asked if SBG is worthwhile at the secondary level, what skills students need to be future ready, and if their school of the future would include SBG.

Participants stated that grading and reporting is essential at the secondary level. It is essential in order to communicate to students, teachers, and parents. Even more important was the necessity to report grades for the college application process. In terms of what an ideal grading and reporting system should look like, those interviewed stated that the system should be tied to standards and goals/learning targets while providing and communicating feedback. The system, as reported, should communicate student strengths and weaknesses relative to agreed upon standards to deepen student learning.

SBG, according to participants, was highlighted as being worthwhile at the secondary level in order to develop a growth mindset. The SBG system communicates to students where they are relative to his or her learning and the current traditional system with a number and/or letter grade is not informative as it does not provide what direction he or she should take next.

Related to the future, participants noted that students need to be problem solvers, thinkers, innovators while being versatile and collaborative in diverse fields. Students need to apply knowledge in new situations which contrasts rote memorization.

Participants' schools of the future would include SBG as it was seen as a system that is more closely aligned with the desired skills and outcomes for the future.

The second research question asked, "How would superintendents and assistant superintendents describe the change process with regard to moving from a traditional grading model to SBG at the secondary level?" Interview Question 14 asked participants if they were willing to lead change whereas Questions 15 and 16 respectively asked about the change process as it relates to moving from traditional to SBG and about the change process in general terms. Finally, Question 19 asked about the perceived degree of difficulty if making this shift.

Question 14 had varied responses where some were willing to lead and others were not ready at this time but would consider in the future. One participant would not be willing to at this time. Of those who were interested, it was stated that it would be in the best interest of the kids. Also, some who were willing to lead proposed that it would not be an initiative that they feel would come from central office, rather it would be something that would be done at the building level with central office support.

In terms of Question 15 and the specific steps to be taken to facilitate the change process, participants outlined that it is key to provide and/or conduct research to support and develop as to why the change should take place. Furthermore, it was essential to involve the community of stakeholders and provide professional development, particularly for staff members. This could help teachers leverage their previous work to match it to a model of SBG. Change, in general terms, also noted the requirement for professional development that is rooted in research in order to build a vision and capacity. Also, the involvement of the community is critical, coupled with persistence

and ongoing communication. As a whole, the change process in moving to SBG was deemed to be a very heavy lift.

The third research question asked, "What are the perceived barriers and challenges in moving from a traditional grading model to SBG as identified by superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban area?" Interview Question 17 asked the perceived barriers and challenges that would be foreseen if attempting to make this change. The following question asked if it would be a significant hurdle to report SBG to colleges. Questions 20 and 21 respectively asked the conditions that restrict and the conditions that would need to be present to move from a traditional model to a SBG model of grading and reporting. Interview question asked if there were competing initiatives or work that is more important than SBG.

Participants noted the six barriers of colleges, change itself, colleges, teachers, time, initiatives, and tradition. With change itself, SBG confronts a deeply rooted tradition and would be met with resistance by teachers and parents with the fear of putting students at a disadvantage. There is also a reported fear of the unknown with SBG and how colleges would deal with these transcripts for the college application process. Teachers were presented as a barrier as they are already overwhelmed, may grade traditionally with success, and are used to doing what has been done in the past. Time is a valuable commodity which is in short supply for teachers as well as for the participants in this study as many other initiatives currently use dedicated time. Also, this change would shift many day-to-day processes and results may not be seen for several years.

In most cases, participants stated that it would be a significant hurdle to report SBD to colleges, although three participants respectively voiced that it should not matter

what is reported, colleges rip apart the application packets in any way they see fit, and that colleges are not able to make sense of a 104 grade point average versus a 98. Nonetheless, this is a reported condition that warrants an investigation as to how this would work with colleges. Other conditions that restrict implementation were the value that is placed on the traditional model, the comfort level with the traditional system on the part of teachers, the fact that there are not many known districts that have made this transition, and the lack of time. Conditions that would be needed are a culture of trust where teachers feel safe to take risks, professional development time for teachers to meet and learn about relevant research, partnerships with neighboring districts, and an assurance as to how it will work with colleges. These conditions that restrict or those that are needed to be present are in addition to the many ongoing initiatives that are currently taking place in the districts that participated in this study.

CHAPTER 5 ANALYSIS, SYNTHESIS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to identify the extent to which district level administrators are willing to change from a traditional grading system to a SBG and reporting method at the secondary level. More specifically, this research attempted to discover the views of superintendents and assistant superintendents in changing from a traditional grading and reporting system to a SBG model at the secondary level. Unveiling the perceived impediments to implementing a SBG system at the secondary level was done by focusing on districts that have not implemented SBG at the secondary level and currently have a traditional grading model.

This chapter includes the following sections: (a) introduction; (b) discussion; (c) research question 1; (d) research question 2; (e) research question 3; (f) unanticipated findings; (g) conclusions; (h) limitations; (i) recommendations for future practice; (j) recommendations for future research.

The following research questions helped guide the study and are directly tied to the purpose of the research. These questions were aimed to guide the study throughout the multiple phases and help to delineate the scope of the project.

1) To what extent do superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban setting believe in the importance of SBG at the secondary level?
2) How would superintendents and assistant superintendents describe the change process with regard to moving from a traditional grading model to SBG at the secondary level?

3) What are the perceived barriers and challenges in moving from a traditional grading model to SBG as identified by superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban area?

The semi-structured exploratory interview questions, developed by the researcher, are based upon the questions driving this study. They were aimed at determining general background information as it relates to grading, standards, and grade reporting. Furthermore, the questions were crafted to determine the importance of SBG at the secondary level, how superintendents and assistant superintendents would make a change from a traditional model to a standards-based model, and what, if any, barriers and challenges exist in making such a change.

Discussion

The United States has had a long-standing tradition of changing policies to improve our educational system to offer our youth the opportunity to be future ready. This was first started with Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" with the creation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which marked a shift in the philosophy of the government to be committed to education on a federal level (Gutek, 1986). Although it has been reauthorized several times, the United States have still fallen short as evidenced by the *A Nation at Risk* report. Notably it stated, "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre education performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1).

Subsequent pushes to reform education through the reauthorization of ESEA include the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994, No Child Left Behind Act

(NCLB) of 2001, and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015; all of which are in addition to Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Race to the Top (RTT) of 2009. With all of these initiatives, the narrowing of the achievement gap has leveled off across the nation (Reardon, 2013).

One benefit of the initiatives over the years was the focus on the curricular standards. Schimmer (2016) highlighted, "Nearly a decade later, the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, which sought to align what each state meant by proficiency, solidified the prominent (and quite possibly permanent) role of curricular standards within the modern classroom" (p. 9). What has not changed, however, is our grading and reporting systems.

Gutek (1986) illustrated how the number of public high schools increased from 500 to 10,000 from 1870 to 1910. It was at this point where teachers began to utilize percentages as a method to report student understanding of content which marked the beginning of the grading and reporting system as we know it today (Kirschenbaum et. al, 1971). Schneider and Hutt (2014) stated, "In the face of this rapid expansion and depersonalization of schooling, administrators refashioned themselves as professional managers whose job was to manage burgeoning systems in the most efficient way possible" (p. 207). Schneider and Hutt further elaborated on how grades were now seen as a tool for external communication in lieu of internal communication between the school, students and parents. If the communication was to exist beyond the school, then it was believed that a common language of standardized grading was necessary which is why "grading remains a central feature of nearly every student's school experience" (p. 202).

This common language of traditional grading is what has plagued many American schools since the beginning of the 20th century, for well over a hundred years, when percentages were first used to report student learning. Traditional grading is a grading practice where "students receive a single letter grade or percentage for each subject or course that is a part of their instructional program" (Jung & Guskey, 2012, p. 14). This way in which grades are reported "have been a part of our education system since the time our great-grandparents were in school" (Guskey, 2015, p. 1). Participant 10 highlights this statement as it was voiced, "The way teachers were graded, the way teachers' grandparents were graded, the way everyone has always been graded has been on this 100 point system as they got older."

Participant responses in this study aligned to the aforementioned definition of traditional grading, and they voiced how the traditional way of grading fails to provide adequate feedback as there are many factors that are combined to result in a percentage grade. This adds to confusion as it becomes increasingly difficult to decipher what a grade means as there is a myriad of ways to combine the learning criteria to arrive at a final score which increases the likelihood of subjective and biased grades (Ornstein, 1994). Participant 6 reflected on traditional grading:

> I would describe it as averages, where a lot of factors get thrown into the pot. And the pot is a general pot and it's kind of mixed with some academic numbers, some behavioral participation numbers, some may be homework numbers, and it all gets averaged.

Guskey (2006) emphasized, “The challenge remains all the more daunting, however, if we continue to use reporting forms that require teachers to combine so many diverse sources of evidence into a single grade” (p. 674). Guskey (2015) added:

> Most school leaders recognize the many inadequacies of current grading and reporting policies and practices. They know that teachers assign grades in highly idiosyncratic ways and use methods for determining grades that are rarely well aligned with the standards for student learning and related assessment procedures. (p. 10)

Regarding SBG, participants voiced how learning is assessed and reported separate from behavior and participation which further supports Guskey (2006). Marzano (2010) said grades that include a myriad of factors create “grades [that] are so imprecise that they are almost meaningless” (p. 1). SBG, according to participants, is a grading and reporting system that is focused on learning. Participants also noted that SBG provides a deeper level of clarity and gives concrete feedback and next steps for learners. One participant commented on SBG and clarity by saying:

> There is a clarity to the learning standards that is understood at a deeper level. And students are assessed individually, their capacity toward that learning standard. In standards-based grading, learning is assessed in one venue, and behavior, participation, and anything else is assessed separately.

Heflebower et al. (2014) said that separating academic from nonacademic grades allows for clarity to parents and pinpoints specific areas where a student needs to focus on for improvement. Feedback shows students what exactly their strengths and weaknesses are, and what it is that they can do in order to improve themselves and their

work (Brookhart, 2006). Assigning grades is often overused, and feedback is not given as much as it should be. Feedback and next steps allow learners to develop a growth mindset. Dweck (2006) writes how a fixed mindset where your abilities, intelligence, and talents cannot be changed whereas a growth mindset is one where abilities, intelligence, and talents can be grown or developed over time. One participant voiced, "I think from a growth mindset perspective of deliberate practice and achieving goals, very specific goals, standards-based grading works hand in hand."

Of the list of 150 influences that Hattie (2012) listed, feedback was ranked 10th overall with an effect size of 0.72. This confirms Page's (1958) findings in his 1958 study as grades were only seen as useful only when accompanied by specific and targeted feedback. Hattie (2012) stated, "Feedback aims to reduce the gap between where the student 'is' and where he or she 'is meant to be' – that is, between prior or current achievement and the success criteria" (p. 129). Jung and Guskey (2012) highlighted, "The best feedback is both diagnostic and prescriptive. In other words, it helps teachers and students identify precisely what was learned well and where additional work maybe be needed" (p. 79). The concept of feedback and growth mindset are noted in the response by Participant 7, "Students can become more empowered [with feedback] instead of passive recipients of just this is the grade you got. It's more about, 'What can I do to improve that?'"

Spencer (2012) communicated that SBG is a grading system where teachers communicate student learning relative to clearly defined standards and criteria. Pinkin (2016) noted that SBG takes place when student learning communicates how students are doing based on a set of standards. Wormeli (2006) stated that grades should inform both

the student and the teacher with feedback as to document his or her progress and allow the teacher to make targeted moves in instruction to best help individual students. Westerberg (2016) added, “When we record progress by attaching assessment results to topic or unit standards, both academic and behavioral, students can more clearly see exactly what their strengths and weaknesses are” (p. 25). This is evidenced by Participant 4 who stated, “I think standard-based grading is progress within a specific standard or area to try to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses of students in a more accurate method.”

When asked about standards, participants reported that curriculum and instruction are aligned to and derived from state standards. Furthermore, assessments are developed with standards in mind. Participant 3 stated:

> We are teaching content based upon the state standards and we're designing our lesson plans and curriculum guides around state standards and then assessing which percentage of that information the students are demonstrating mastery in, I'd say it's aligned, as an umbrella.

By default, the grading system is aligned to standards as teachers are teaching and designing assessments based on state standards. There is not, however, an overt and widespread understanding of standards by teachers. This means that although the curriculum is built based on state standards along with a focus on instruction and assessment, teachers, with a varied understanding of standards, at the secondary level would find it difficult to decipher as to which standards an assessment is assessing. The elementary level was noted as having a greater and deeper understanding of standards, which supports Rosales (2013).

Participants stated that the purpose of a grade reporting system was to communicate to students, teachers, and family members where a student is in relation to his or her learning and help guide what next steps to take. Grade reporting, on the other hand, is not aligned to state standards. Those who participated in this study reflected that their current grading and reporting systems do not fulfill the intended purpose(s) that they outlined. Participant 11 elaborated:

> In theory it's supposed to provide feedback to the teacher so that they can improve their instruction. It's to provide feedback to students, it's to provide feedback to their parents, but I think ultimately it's supposed to help us shift our pedagogy to meet the needs of our students.

Furthermore, participants' current grading models are reflective of traditional grading and reporting systems.

Olson (1995) states that grades are "the primary, shorthand tool for communicating to parents how children are faring" (p. 24). However, this feedback is only useful when "it consists of information about progress, and/or about how to proceed" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 89). Guskey (2000b) wrote, "Teachers at all levels must identify what they want their students to learn, what evidence they will use to verify that learning, and what criteria will be used to judge that evidence" (p. 28). Busick (2000) stated, "If grading and reporting do not relate grades back to standards, they are giving a mixed message. Our grading practices must reflect and illuminate those standards" (p. 73). This is reflected by Participant 5 who stated:

> To me, standards-based is more qualitative. It gives you specific indicators of students' performance. It gives you specific indicators of what they are proficient

in and what they are deficient in…'Your student is a 75,' that doesn't really help them.

Participant 11 adds:

> Traditional ways of grading are really still in the world of rote memorization. Can I give you a task and you complete it? But now the tasks have changed. They need to be able to problem solve, they need to be able to work in teams. They need to be able to figure out a way to succeed after failure, they need to understand that failing is ok.

Research Question 1

To what extent do superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban setting believe in the importance of SBG at the secondary level?

This research question is aimed at determining the extent to which superintendents and assistant superintendents believe in the importance of SBG at the secondary level. Is this work worth doing? If the belief is that this work is not worth it, then SBG could die on the vine and we move on to the next initiative.

To gather a sense as to the importance of SBG, interview questions, in addition to overtly asking if SBG is worthwhile at the secondary level, were crafted to determine if grading in and of itself is necessary at the secondary level. Responses for the necessity of a grading and reporting system were overwhelmingly in favor of a grading and reporting system. It was stated that it is critical to communicate feedback to parents and students where the student is on the continuum of learning, identify strengths and areas of opportunity. This is confirmed by Hattie (2012) as he highlights three questions to be addressed through feedback are:

Where am I going? (What are my goals?)

- How am I going? (What progress is being made towards the goal?)
- Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken next to make better progress?)

Additionally, participants stated that a grading and reporting system is necessary for academic transcripts for the college application process. Some suggest that audiences for report cards could include colleges and universities, however, Guskey (2015) articulates a clear distinction between report cards and transcripts:

> Transcripts are official records that may be shared publicly with a variety of agencies, including other schools, colleges and universities, government and civil service organizations, and prospective employers. Report cards, however, are considered private documents of communication between schools and parents and/or students. In most cases, transcripts also record students' cumulative academic histories, whereas report cards typically include information about performance during a single terms or academic year. (p. 19)

Whether the targeted audience be parents or students, report cards are a part of the reporting process which is intended to provide information to enhance student learning while providing a sense of direction by identifying students' strengths and areas of needed focus (Guskey, 2015).

Participant responses related to what a grading and reporting system should look like at the secondary level included responses that describe a SBG and reporting system. The system, as reported by participants, should allow for students to grow and show

growth over time and be consistent while providing clarity and understanding as to what is expected for students to know and be able to do. Grading and reporting should be tied to standards and goals/learning targets. The system should report strengths and weaknesses relative to the agreed upon standards and learning outcomes for students. As a whole, a grading and reporting system should help a student understand the criteria for successful work related to standards and/or goals while communicating to families student progress and ways in which supports and/or enrichments can be provided to students to deepen learning.

These insights support Spencer (2012), who defines SBG as a grading system where teachers communicate student learning relative to clearly defined standards and criteria. Participant responses also mirror Guskey and Bailey (2001) who noted that a reporting form should, at a minimum, include detailed information about students' strengths and weaknesses while also being easily understood by all stakeholders. Guskey (2015) commented on reporting systems by stating:

> The best report cards clearly communicate what students were expected to learn and be able to do, how well they did those things, and whether or not that level of performance is in line with expectations set for this level at this time in the school year. (p. 17)

To get to the heart of this research question, participants were asked two direct questions to determine the importance of SBG at the secondary level. The first direct question (Interview Question 11) asked if a SBG and reporting system is worthwhile at the secondary level. All participants noted that SBG would be worthwhile at the

secondary level as it would put the focus on student learning and away from grades. Participant 12 stated:

> I think it would help ultimately students to have a better opportunity to progress in their learning. And for them to have a better awareness of their strengths and areas of need for development. I think the concept of putting a number on a report card, with a comment, 'Pleasure to have in class,' is the least informative feedback that I can think of. Yes, I think it would help students to grow.

This echoes the thinking of Vatterott (2015). Although students may be good at the game of chasing grades, too many students are arriving at college ill-prepared with the tools and skills necessary to be successful after high school. Grades are not telling the story as to if high school students truly understand the concepts and standards or if their grades are padded with items that do not demonstrate understanding of the material (Vatterott, 2015).

The second direct question (Interview Question 13) in determining the importance of SBG at the secondary level asked if participants would include SBG in his or her ideal school of the future. The unanimous response was again overwhelmingly yes, which solidifies the importance of SBG at the secondary level as evidenced by Participant 3 who said, "If you were starting with a blueprint from the ground floor, yes, I think alphanumeric scores would be abandoned and rubric based, standards based assessments would be more in line with best practice."

In summary, superintendents and assistant superintendents who participated in the study do strongly believe in the importance of a SBG and reporting system at the secondary level. Grading and reporting is necessary to communicate to parents, students,

and teachers where students are in relation to his or her learning. Grading and reporting should also give feedback and direction as to identify next steps that need to be taken to further learning. When identifying what a grading and reporting system should look like, participant responses aligned with a SBG model and did not reflect the current traditional model of grading and reporting. Finally, the two direct interview questions are the ultimate determining factors in answering this research question. These questions asked if SBG and reporting would be worthwhile at the secondary level and if the participant's ideal school of the future would include SBG. In both cases, superintendents and assistant superintendents in this study voiced that that SBG is worthwhile and that their schools of the future would include this system.

Research Question 2

How would superintendents and assistant superintendents describe the change process with regard to moving from a traditional grading model to SBG at the secondary level?

The second research question was created to gain a sense as to how superintendents and assistant superintendents would describe the change process if making the move from traditional grading and reporting to SBG. This was done with the hopes of gaining insight as to what specific steps could and should be taken with this move.

Regardless of the leader's willingness to lead change, questions were asked about change process in general terms. Additionally, those who were willing to lead change were asked how they would lead this specific change initiative. Responses fell into three categories: supporting the why based on research and professional development,

involving people to cultivate buy-in, and building off of and connecting to the work that has already been done by teachers.

Supporting the why based on research is relative to Sinek's (2009) work which encourages organizations to start with the "why," or the shared purposed and beliefs behind the work that is done. In this case, the development of the why is based on cultivating a shared belief and purpose for making the shift from traditional to SBG. The development of the why relates to a participant who voiced, "So you need to start why, right? And you need to understand that in your organization, people are not going to care about change until they believe what you believe." This needs to be done in conjunction with professional development, which is reflected in the statement by Participant 2, "We need to do some instruction on what standards-based grading is, and why standards-based grading benefits students." This complements Participant 3 where it was stated that the "primary objective would be to provide professional development in the area for teachers to understand the value of making the shift."

Community involvement was also paramount in regards to the change process to cultivate buy-in. The community of stakeholders includes, but is not limited to, teachers, administrators, parents, students, the board of education. The importance of identifying and communicating to community members the pros and challenges of making such a shift was reported. One participant explained the pros and challenges in terms of motivating and restraining forces. This participant went on to elaborate the importance of nullifying the restraining forces as they are difficult whereas the motivating forces have enough energy on their own. This concept mirrors Link's (2019) insights, "For improvements in grading policies and practices to occur, principals must remove existing

obstacles to change and ignite the enablers to implementing effective grading practices" (p. 188).

The final specific step regarding change from traditional to SBG, as identified by participants, involves starting slow while connecting to and building upon previously completed work which will aid in bridging the gap between what is currently done and what is expected after and during SBG implementation. As previously stated, curriculum, instruction, and assessments are aligned to and derived from state standards. There is not, however, an overt and widespread understanding of standards by teachers. Changing from a traditional system of grading to SBG will challenge our traditions as "they've been a part of our education experiences for so long that they usually go unquestioned, despite the fact that they are ineffective and potentially harmful to students" (Guskey, 2011, p. 20). Nonetheless, the groundwork has been laid as curriculum, instruction, and assessments are aligned to and derived from state standards. To support this notion, Couros (2015) wrote, "The truth is innovation—in our thinking as individuals and as organizations—is within easy reach; no dramatic shifts required" (p. 20).

In general terms, change was noted to be best supported by a vision which is guided by keeping the best interests of students in mind. Teacher leadership and capacity should be fostered by ongoing professional development that is again rooted in research. Community involvement and persistent communication were also noted as paramount to facilitating sustained change. Participant 2 did suggest the usage of the term "improvement" in lieu of "change" as "people are not willing to change, but it is hard to push back against improvement."

Superintendents and assistant superintendents in this study described the change from traditional grading and reporting model to SBG at the secondary level to be a "heavy" lift and one that is "daunting." This degree of difficulty in change is best described by Marzano et al. (2005) first and second-order change. First-order change can be described as incremental change which is an extension of the past whereas second-order change is a deep change and a break from the past. The authors noted:

> Incremental change fine-tunes the system through a series of small steps that do not depart radically from the past. Deep change alters the system in fundamental ways, offering a dramatic shift in direction and requiring new ways of thinking and acting. (p. 66)

This change in grading and reporting systems at the secondary level most closely aligns with second-order change as all of the key attributes of second-order change are relevant to this magnitude of change. Table 17 reintroduces the characteristics of first and second-order change.

Marzano et al. (2005) commented on the difficultly of second-order change by stating, "It makes sense that we would tend to approach new problems from the perspective of our experiences—as issues that can be solved using our previous repertoire of solutions…Unfortunately, solutions to most recurring modern-day problems require a second-order perspective" (p. 67).

Table 17

Characteristics of First-Order Change and Second-Order Change

First-Order Change	Second-Order Change
• Is perceived as an extension of the past	• Is perceived as a break from the past
• Fits within existing paradigms	• Lies outside existing paradigms
• Is consistent with prevailing values and norms	• Conflicts with prevailing values and norms
• Can be implemented with existing knowledge and skills	• Requires the acquisition of new knowledge and skills
• Requires resources currently available to those responsible for implementing the innovations	• Requires resources currently not available to those responsible for implementing the innovations
• May be accepted because of common agreement that the innovation is necessary	• May be resisted because only those who have a broad perspective of the school see the innovation as necessary

Note. Marzano et al., 2005, p. 113

Heflebower et al. (2014) shared that, "Although the shift from traditional grading practices to standards-based grading may require educators, students, and parents to reframe their existing beliefs and expectation about grades, the benefits to all stakeholders are powerful enough to warrant the change" (p. 10).

In summary, the second research question sought to describe the change process with regard to moving from a traditional grading and reporting model to SBG at the secondary level. This specific change process is best viewed and framed through the lens of Kotter's (2012) Eight-Stage Process. Kotter wrote:

> The first four steps in the transformation process help defrost a hardened status quo. If change were easy, you wouldn't need all that effort. Phases five to seven then introduce many new practices. The last stage grounds the changes in the corporate culture and helps make them stick. (p. 24)

The following eight steps organize participants sentiments through Kotter's (2012) Eight-Stage Process framework. The first four steps, as described by participants, include the establishment of "why," community involvement, development of a vision, and communication. Steps five to seven involve building teacher capacity through professional development rooted in research, starting slow and building upon existing work, piloting SBG first in a classroom, then a department, then building, and eventually the district. The eighth and final stage sustains change by anchoring it into the culture.

Research Question 3

What are the perceived barriers and challenges in moving from a traditional grading model to SBG as identified by superintendents and assistant superintendents in a suburban area?

The third and final research question was created to gain insight from superintendents and assistant superintendents into the perceived barriers and challenges in moving from a traditional grading model to SBG at the secondary level. The driving force behind this question was to arm educators with knowledge and an understanding of potential barriers and challenges. With this information, the hope is that educators would be able to mitigate the barriers and challenges if and when attempting this change to avoid derailment and assure sustained change.

Interview Question 17 asked participants what barriers and challenges they would foresee if attempting to move from a traditional model to a standards-based model. This question yielded three barriers to SBG implementation which fell into the categories of colleges, change itself, and teachers. The fear of putting students at a disadvantage in relation to the college application process and ultimate acceptance to college was

identified as the key restraining force and most significant barrier and impediment with regard to SBG implementation at the secondary level.

Overall, the unknown link between secondary schools and colleges and universities left participants unsettled with unanswered questions: Are colleges on board with this change? Do they rely upon traditional grade point averages? Will SBG work for the college application process? How will colleges compare students for acceptance? Although there might be answers to these questions, they are unknown for the participants in this study. Participant 1 stated, “Our commitment to working with students to pursue the most competitive post-secondary options they can, would probably prevent any change like this in the immediate, because we don't want to do anything to jeopardize that work.” Participant 5 voiced, *“*The change would be nearly impossible at this point, unless you get the colleges on board.” In terms of reporting SBG to colleges in lieu of a traditional system, Participant 7 said:

> I think it would be really difficult. I think it's a necessary evil in a way, in terms of students’ post-graduation plans. Maybe it doesn't actually have a negative impact and they like students who come from those kinds of environments, but I think it would definitely be something we would have to look into more.” Participant 10 added, “I believe it would be. I don't have any research that says that it would or wouldn't be.

Three participants stated that reporting this reporting system to colleges would not be a significant hurdle, however, they also did not state or have insight as to how colleges would receive a student from a school that uses a SBG and reporting model. One participant said the colleges should not be concerned with the way in which students are

being evaluated. Participant 3 elaborated, “Regardless of what scoring system is in place at the high school level, the college they elect to attend, how they are assessed, shouldn’t influence how they perform.” Participant 4 stated, “College admissions offices manipulate the transcripts in so many different ways that I don’t think it’s that big of a deal.” Finally, Participant 9 highlighted, “I actually think that it could be a benefit, because I think that colleges don’t have sense of what the heck a 104 average means at this high school for a student, versus a 98.” If these claims are in fact true, we would need to have clear evidence as to how colleges and universities would accept such grades. This would ease the fears of administrators, teachers, parents, board of education members, and students alike.

The second barrier of change, as reported by superintendents and assistant superintendents, is due to the fact that change itself was identified as difficult; especially this change which confronts deeply rooted and embedded traditional practices of the past. Participant 1 voiced, “Change is difficult, right?” That’s a barrier in and of itself. I think there’s emotional resistance to change.” Guskey (2015) articulated that reformers typically lack the ability to fully understand the change process, which the author identified as one factor that impedes long enduring change. Moreover, the author stated, “Even school leaders who have some knowledge of effective grading policies and practices typically find it difficult to challenge these long-held and deeply entrenched grading traditions” (p. 10). Kotter (2012) supports superintendent and assistant superintendent sentiments by stating, “methods used in successful transformations are all based on one fundamental insight: that major change will not happen easily for a long list of reasons” (p. 22).

A sentiment was shared by participants as it relates to change was, “Why would we embrace a massive undertaking to change our system if our high school has consistently and repeatedly obtained high results?” Participant 8 stated:

> Any change is met with resistance, this is not how we did it, this is not how I did it, especially in a traditional community where many parents went to high school. It was good for me, why the change?

Participant 9 voiced, “Why go down this difficult road if, you know, 98% of our kids are graduating, 80% of them are getting into four year schools, etcetera?” Jung and Guskey (2012) echoed this typical sentiment with challenging traditions:

> The old adage, ‘Why fix it if it isn’t broken?’ rings true to many educators and parents alike. In no aspect of education is this more prevalent than in grading and reporting. Tradition dictates practice in grading and reporting more than in any other area of education. (p. 81)

Tucker (2019) summarizes this concept by adding, “Unfortunately, just because something works does not mean it is working well or that it is the optimal way to go about a job or task” (Tucker, p. 1). This mirrors Participant 11 who said, “Sometimes when you make change it doesn’t mean that a system or traditional way of doing things was necessarily bad, it’s just you’re always looking for what could be better. Sometimes that tough for people to see.”

The third barrier that was yielded by Interview Question 17 was that of teachers. Participants reported that this is due to the fact that many teachers grade the way they were graded, they are already overwhelmed, it would require asking teachers to change when they may grade traditionally with success, it would require a shift in how teachers

grade and report on assessments, and some teachers may not see the finished product as this change effort could take years. These concepts are supported by Participant 2 who said, “Sometimes we have teachers that just want to take the easiest path, or the path of least resistance and changing your whole grading system, one that you’ve been using for 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, or close to 30 years is not a desirable task.” Participant 3 said:

> Adding a new layer of change to them may continue that feeling of overwhelmed and they may be somewhat resistant to it. It’s doing something differently than what people had experienced on their own and may cause come concern just by the nature of change.

These ideas are supported by Pinkin (2016) as she states that SBG does come with along with challenging grading practices have long been a part of teachers’ repertoire. Jung and Guskey (2012) note that policies offer direction and guidelines, yet teachers still “have great latitude in determining their classroom grading policies and practices, especially when it comes to assigning grades to struggling learners” (p. 76). Teachers, according to the authors, must then consider the following to facilitate change: implement practices that are based on research and not tradition, know the difference between accommodations and modifications, think big, but start small, and initiate frequent, high-quality communication with families. Administrators, as per Jung and Guskey, on the other hand, should: become knowledgeable, share information of SBG with all stakeholders, take an active role in exploring change, and support teachers through the implementation and change process. Teachers are overwhelmed as they have a plethora of items to tend to that occupy much of their valuable time, efforts, and energy. Tucker

(2019) added, “It’s not surprising that most teachers feel they do not have the time or energy to experiment with new teaching strategies or technology tools” (p. 1).

Interview Questions 20 and 23 added three more distinct barriers in response to this third research question which were time, tradition, and initiatives. Time was also a considerable restriction to SBG implementation and this is reflected when Participant 7 remarked, “There’s so much that’s not optional and then there’s all the things that you know are good and important, and then there’s so little space left that these really important things are always fighting for priority.” Tucker (2019), previously quoted, did express that there is a lack of time for teachers to explore. Westerberg (2016) outlined seven components that help sustain the transition from a traditional grading model to SBG, and time was one of the seven components mentioned. The author offers insight and suggestions to create time. A few of the suggestions included release time during the work day, summer paid work, delayed starts, offering to pay retired teachers as well as slightly increasing class sizes to dedicate all or a portion of a teacher’s schedule towards these efforts.

Many participants offered a plethora of initiatives that are taking place right now in their respective districts. There is a general fear that taking on this change in conjunction with the other ongoing initiatives it could potentially derail other efforts. Although there always seems to be competing initiatives, the question remains which one takes the first priority at any give time. Participant 3 stated, “If we’re just adjusting to this shift, that shift, now this is another shift, where it is in our list of priorities and will we be attentive enough to make it happen effectively?” Participant 8 voiced, “I am always hesitant to bring in another initiative that could be seen as contrary or counter to existing

initiatives." Finally, Participant 12 replied, "Change is difficult to make, and one has to make decisions about what the most important things are. And for whatever reason, grading doesn't always fall to the top of that priority list." These comments align with Link (2019), citing Guskey (2015), as she wrote, "School leaders play a critical role in grading reform, even though available research evidence shows they rarely take on the challenge" (p. 157).

Tradition was the remaining barrier that surfaced in this study. Participant 6 commented on tradition by saying, "Teacher practice and beliefs, long-standing established comfort of teachers. And that's not to be dismissed." When Participant 12 was asked what barriers restrict the ability implement SBG, the response was:

> Traditional perceptions of grading systems. The understanding and confidence in a system that doesn't make sense…The very deeply held beliefs of the teachers and leaders, and parents, and students that the system is actually one that is valid, fair, and appropriate, even though it's not.

The notion of clinging to the past was presented as a barrier to change by Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) who stated, "organizations often behave as if the present were a perfect imitation of the past" (p. 69). The difficulty of confronting tradition is supported by Jung and Guskey (2012) who wrote:

> It is especially difficult when the change involves challenging long-held traditions. But when those traditions lie in opposition to current knowledge about best practice and may actually bring harm to students, especially those who are struggling learners, pressing for and facilitating change is imperative. (p.86)

In summary, superintendents and assistant superintendents who participated in this study identified six barriers in moving from a traditional grading model to SBG at the secondary level in two suburban counties in New York State. The six barriers are colleges, change in and of itself, teachers, time, initiatives, and tradition. The key restraining force to change was identified as colleges and the associated college application process. Another barrier that surfaced as a significant challenge to this change was time. This leads into the barriers of change in and of itself, teachers, and other competing initiatives as they all would need a great deal of time to bring about a change in the grading and reporting system to SBG. Finally, tradition also plays a monumental role as this barrier challenges everyday business and the status quo that has been in place in the majority of secondary schools since the early 20th century.

The purpose of this study was to identify the extent to which district level administrators were willing to change from a traditional grading system to a SBG and reporting method at the secondary level. More specifically, this research attempted to discover the views of superintendents and assistant superintendents in changing from a traditional grading and reporting system to a SBG model at the secondary level. Unveiling the perceived impediments to implementing a SBG system at the secondary level was done by focusing on districts that have not implemented SBG at the secondary level and currently have a traditional grading model.

Related to the first purpose of this study, Interview Question 14 directly asked participants if they would be willing to lead this change effort. Although all participants stated the importance of SBG, not all were willing and ready to lead change efforts. Three participants did not want to lead change as it was one participant noted that “it’s

not something that I'm willing to put on my shoulders right now." Another participant stated, "I wouldn't take it necessarily as a first step priority, but certainly is one that I would see as a hopeful and desired outcome of the changes we're putting in place." The last participant voiced, "No. Not at this point in my life."

Additionally, there were those who were willing to lead change, yet they noted how sustained change would not come from central office, but would come from the building level, mainly with the principals leading the charge. Participant 3 voiced, "I don't think it's done from central office. I think it's done at the building level." Participant 4 echoed these remarks by contributing, "It's really a building-based thing. I can mandate whatever I want, unless my building principal and either their department chairs or assistant principals, other administrators…Unless they're willing to do the work, it's not going to work." This is consistent with Link's (2019) findings where she highlighted the importance of the principal by stating, "The principal's leadership can enable or deter successful implementation of more effect school grading practices" (p. 171). The author added that district leaders do offer a positive influence in supporting the change in grading systems, however, "Without the school principal's direct involvement and overt support, grading reforms won't be realized" (p. 183).

The second purpose of this study, attempting to unveil the perceived impediments to implementing a SBG and reporting at the secondary level, yielded six distinct barriers and/or challenges based on several interview questions. Colleges and the associated application processes proved to be the largest barrier and key restraining force to immediate and sustained change. Other barriers include change in and of itself, teachers, time, competing initiatives, and time.

Unanticipated Findings

It is interesting to note that the final question given to participants at the end of the semi-structured interview asked if the participants wanted to add anything further to the conversation. Many participants stated how they enjoyed the conversation and that it is a timely topic to be exploring. It also got many of the participants to think about grading and current grading practices that are taking place in their schools at this time. One participant stated, "We spend our days focusing on instruction and writing, and research and other components of an educational program. Until this interview, I haven't thought about grading for probably a couple years. Thank you for the interview."

What is even more interesting was how many participants reflected upon elementary schools as it relates to SBG. Participant 3 stated:

> I think that it is surprising to me that so many elementary programs have readily made changes to standards based assessments for students, and it's almost commonplace at the elementary now where it remains probably far more rare at the secondary level.

This and other comments support and reaffirm the premise behind the purpose of this study as Rosales (2013) noted that the transition to SBG is well underway at the elementary level whereas O'Connor (2011) noted that the majority of U.S. secondary schools continue to use traditional grading practices.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to identify the extent to which superintendents and assistant superintendents are willing to change from a traditional grading and reporting system to a SBG system at the secondary level. Furthermore, the study attempted to

unveil the perceived impediments to implementing a SBG system at the secondary level. After the final stages of this research study, the researcher has made the following conclusions:

- A great deal of efforts and emphasis on students graduating high school and attending colleges has taken place within the districts that participated in this study. The change to a SBG and reporting system has the potential to derail those efforts. It will be impossible for change to happen without mitigating the barrier and key restraining force of colleges.
- If our ideal schools of the future would include SBG, and if our ideal reporting system reflects that of SBG, why do we hang onto the traditional model? The districts and the suburban counties that participated in this study are mostly steeped in tradition. There is also a prevailing sentiment is that no one wants to be the lone wolf and tackle this challenge in isolation. This is similar to making the decision to close school for a day based on inclement weather conditions; no one wants to be the only one who made the call. Coalitions must be created to share ideas, best practices, success and failures in the hopes of helping others in making the shift. Although districts are independent of one another, we are collective in our goals of preparing our students to be future ready.
- Although teachers were identified as a barrier, they are an integral component to facilitating and achieving change. To do so, professional development rooted in research is required to give teachers a solid foundational understanding as to why the shift is needed. Considerable amount of time is needed to be dedicated to this endeavor, and it is imperative to create time.

- The work with SBG in the two suburban counties in New York State that participated in this study would not require dramatic shifts in the thinking related to curriculum, instruction, and assessments. It will, however, force educators to think drastically different as to how we grade and report on student learning.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study is limited to two suburban counties in New York State is, in and of itself, a limitation to this study. Also, only superintendents and assistant superintendents were canvassed to participate. Furthermore, interviews offer many advantages as it allows the researcher to gain detailed information for sampling. However, this may also present a disadvantage as little is known about the actual subjects who participate. Additionally, self-selection to participate in an interview allows individuals to voluntarily participate or decline and/or ignore participation leading to a systematic bias.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Traditional grading and reporting systems stifle the development and refinement of students' future ready skills. A SBG and reporting system allows for the cultivation of these future ready skills. Reflecting back to the original problem statement within this study: Although times have changed, and research suggests that grading systems ought to move from traditional grading practices to SBG, the problem remains that very few schools in New York State have made the shift to SBG. This is supported by O'Connor (2011) who noted that the majority of U.S. secondary schools continue to use traditional grading practices. As such, this section provides four tables and two figures with the hopes of providing a potential catalyst for future thought and conversations related to SBG, particularly at the secondary level.

Policymakers and practitioners first need to develop their "why" as Sinek (2009) suggests. Couros (2015) believes "education's *why* is to develop learners and leaders who will create a better present and future" (p. 18) and his *why* is to develop "schools that help individuals embrace the innovator's mindset" (p. 19). Our *why* is to create future ready students by cultivating students' future ready skills and Table 18 offers a Menu of Future Ready Skills that should be reflected upon when articulating the *why.* It can be used to develop one's personal *why* or the *why* for educational organization. The Menu of Future Ready Skills combines the work of Wagner's (2008) Seven Survival Skills, Couros' (2015) Eight Characteristics of the Innovator's Mindset, and Robinson's (2015) Eight Core Competencies. An attempt was made to align/group the skills, characteristics, and competencies to see how some of the models may or may not align. Nonetheless, the collective efforts and ideas of these authors serves as a consolidated starting point when developing the *why* of students' future ready skills.

Table 18

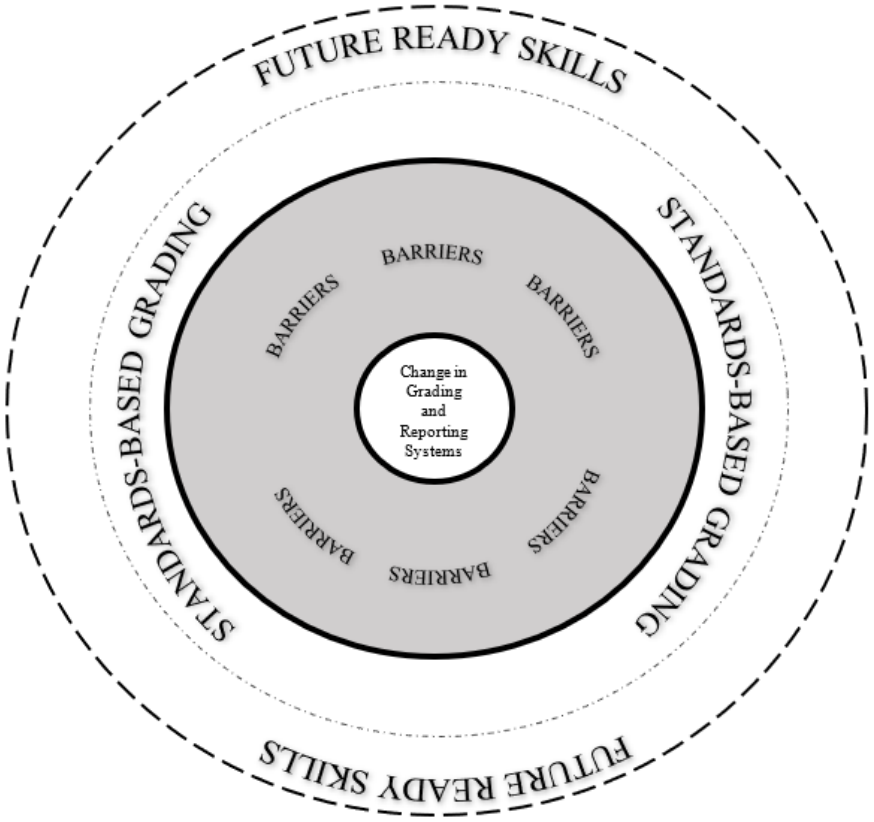
A Menu of Future Ready Skills

Seven Survival Skills	Eight Characteristics: Innovator's Mindset	Eight Core Competencies
• Curiosity and Imagination • Critical Thinking and Problem Solving • Initiative and Entrepreneurialism	• Risk Takers • Problem Finders/ Solvers • Creators	• Curiosity • Creativity
• Effective Oral and Written Communication • Collaboration Across Networks and Leading by Influence	• Networked	• Collaboration • Communication • Citizenship
• Agility and Adaptability	• Resilient	• Composure
• Assessing and Analyzing	• Reflective • Observant	• Criticism
	• Empathetic	• Compassion

Note. Seven Survival Skills, Wagner, 2008: Eight Characteristics: Innovator's Mindset, Couros, 2015: Eight Core Competencies, Robinson, 2005

Figure 8

Conceptual Framework Diagram: Initial

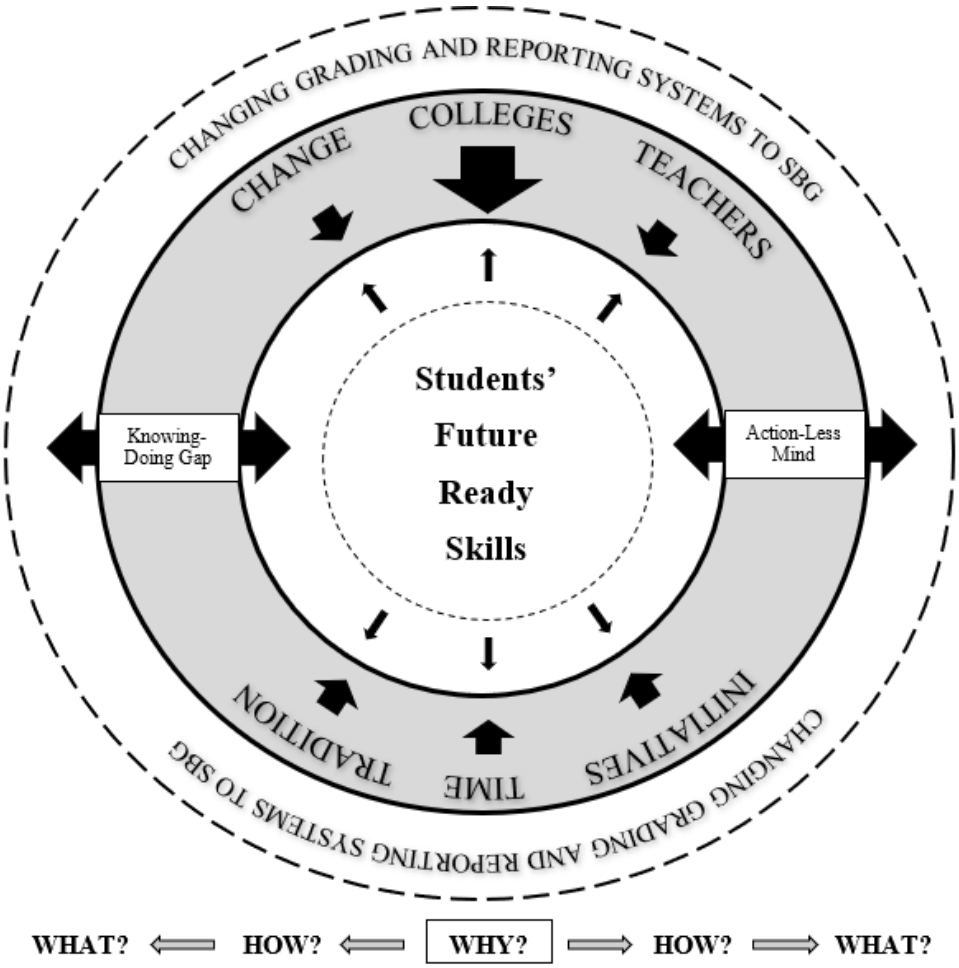


The revisited conceptual framework in Figure 9 puts students' future ready skills at the heart of the framework as students are the center of all the work that we do; it is our *why*. The dotted circle around future ready skills shows how the skills are ready to expand. The smaller arrows in the center pointing outwards represent the motivating factors for change. However, these motivating factors and the ultimate outward expansion of students' future ready skills are smothered by the greater restraining forces/barriers, which are represented by the larger arrows pointing inwards in the gray shaded area. The circle beyond the dotted line of students' future ready skills and the

circle beyond the named barriers remain solid bolded lines as the barriers continue to prevent and stagnate the realization of needed change.

Figure 9

Conceptual Framework Diagram: Revisited



The greatest barrier is colleges which is represented by the largest restraining arrow at the top/center of the gray area. This revisited framework now includes the knowing-doing gap from Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) and the action-less mind from Scharmer (2018) to the left and right of students' future ready skills. These two pathways are the bridges to achieve the needed change in our grading and reporting systems to facilitate the development of students' future ready skills. Administrators must act on

what is known to be best for students based on current and available research. Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) voice the knowing-doing gap as the gap between what is known, and action taken whereas the Scharmer's (2018) action-less mind is talking things to death instead of exploring the future by doing. Otherwise stated, the knowing-doing gap is the gap between where we are and where we need to be, and action-less mind is the absence of risk-taking and exploring the future by doing.

The *why*, how, and what at the bottom of the revisited conceptual framework reflecting Sinek's (2009) work. The *why* is at the center and works outwards in both directions to leading to the how and the what. These three questions along the bottom are positioned to align to the three main headings of each circle area within the conceptual framework which are: students' future ready skills (the *why*), the barriers as identified by this study (the how), and the outermost heading of changing grading and reporting systems to SBG (the what). Once we develop our *why* based on students' future ready skills, a change to a SBG and reporting system is realized by mitigating the restraining forces. A SBG and reporting system allows for the cultivation of students' future ready skills and acts as a catalyst for the rapid development of these skills.

Action can be achieved by addressing the restraining forces, and in particular, the restraining force of colleges. Without mitigating this key restraining force, change will not come to fruition. Once the key restraining force of college is mitigated, SBG needs to become the central initiative for the district attempting change, thereby eliminating this barrier. That action will subsequently allow for time, in addition to time that can be created by district and building administrators as offered by Westerberg (2016) (release time from duty periods, time during faculty or department meetings, delayed starts,

superintendent conference days, in-house conferences, devoting a portion of a teacher's workload to be dedicated to this cause, etcetera). Change and tradition can be confronted by building capacity with teachers through professional development that is rooted in research which is then followed by community involvement of all other stakeholders.

The fuel to bring this change to fruition includes the reciprocal trust and calculated risk-taking (fighting off Scharmer's (2018) *mindless action*) on the part of both teachers and administrators where both understand that failing forward is an acceptable option. Partnerships with neighboring districts and schools is also critical as educators endeavor in this change; all of which is fueled by doing what is right for our students and their futures by developing students' future ready skills.

Note the key change in terminology in the previous paragraph as this research was initially focused on superintendents and assistant superintendents at the district level. The researcher has intentionally used the term "administrators" as a change of this magnitude will not happen without the administrative support at both the district and building levels. Table 19 offers a summary of the suggested steps and fuel to combat barriers for SBG implementation at the secondary level.

Superintendents and assistant superintendents in this study described the change from traditional grading and reporting model to SBG at the secondary level to be a "heavy" lift and one that is "daunting."

Table 19

Suggested Steps and Fuel to Combat Barriers for SBG Implementation at the Secondary Level

Area	Action
Suggested Steps	1) Mitigate the key restraining force of colleges 2) Make SBG the core district and/or building initiative 3) Provide professional development rooted in research 4) Involve teachers to build capacity 5) Create time 6) Centralize the community of stakeholders for sustained change
Fuel For Change	*Trust, Calculated Risk-Taking, Failing Forward, Partnerships, Students' Future Ready Skills*

This change in grading and reporting systems at the secondary level most closely aligns with second-order change, as outlined by Marzano et al. (2005), as all of the key attributes of second-order change are relevant to this magnitude of change. Most notably, second order changes are perceived as a break from the past and may be resisted. Table 20 suggests what the researcher is calling a "Second-Order Action Plan for SBG" that is rooted in research as a way to offer solutions to second-order change.

Finally, Table 21 outlines and summarizes the change process as described by participants in this study and builds upon Kotter's (2012) work. The left side of the table represents Kotter's Eight-Stage process as it was initially created by the author and the right side offers a change model for SBG as described by participants in two suburban counties in New York State.

Table 20

Solutions to Second-Order Change with SBG and Second-Order Action

Second-Order Change	Second-Order Action Plan for SBG
• Is perceived as a break from the past	• Break from the past and allow Theory U's future to emerge, (Scharmer, 2018)
• Lies outside existing paradigms	• Let go of traditional practices and paradigms that are not in the best interests of our students, (Jung & Guskey, 2012; Zhao, 2012)
• Conflicts with prevailing values and norms	• Avoid the knowing-doing gap, (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000)
• Requires the acquisition of new knowledge and skills	• Embrace the Growth Mindset, (Dweck, 2006)
• Requires resources currently not available to those responsible for implementing the innovations	• Employ the Innovator's Mindset (Couros, 2015)
• May be resisted because only those who have a broad perspective of the school see the innovation as necessary	• Establish a Sense of Urgency, (Kotter, 2012)

Note. Second-Order Change, Marzano et al., 2005, p. 113

Table 21

Kotter's Eight-Stage Process and Change as Described by Participants

The Eight-Stage Process	Change as Described by Participants
• Establishing a sense of urgency	• Establish the "why"
• Creating a guiding coalition	• Community involvement
• Developing a vision and strategy	• Develop a vision
• Communicating the change vision	• Communication
• Empowering broad-based action	• Build teacher capacity through professional development rooted in research
• Generating short-term wins	• Start slow and build upon existing work
• Consolidating gains and producing more change	• Pilot in a classroom, then department, then building, and eventually the district
• Anchoring new approaches in the culture	• Sustain change by anchoring into the culture

Note. The Eight-Stage Process, Kotter, 2012, p. 23

Recommendations for Future Research

Throughout the final stages of this research study, recommendations for future research have surfaced.

First, as indicated from the limitation sections of this study, this study was limited to two suburban counties in New York State which is, in and of itself, a limitation of this study. It would be a recommendation of the researcher to replicate this study in other geographical regions of New York State or the United States to more insight on this topic. Two recommended questions that to be added are, "To what extent does a traditional grading and reporting system foster skills that students need to be prepared for the future?" "In your estimation, would a standards-based grading and reporting system foster student skills needed for the future? Why or why not?"

An additional recommendation, related to the sentiment amongst participants, would be to replicate this study with building principals. Although this research offered a perspective with central office administrators, it would be curious to see results from the building level.

The next recommendation, built upon the previous two recommendations, would be to replicate this study with teachers. Although they were noted as a barrier to change, they are also an essential component of the school community and are key to sustained change.

Finally, an investigation is warranted in regard to SBG and reporting from high schools to colleges. What evidence exists as to how colleges and universities value and/or understand a SBG and reporting system? How will a SBG system work for the college application process and how will colleges compare students for acceptance with the

absence of a traditional grading model? This is a critical investigation that is paramount in mitigating the key restraining force of colleges, as determined by this study.

APPENDIX A IRB CERTIFICATION

fhi360
THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES

FHI 360

certifies that

Timothy D. McCarthy

has completed the

RESEARCH ETHICS TRAINING CURRICULUM

November 10, 2018

APPENDIX B IRB APPROVAL MEMO

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

MEMO

Institutional Review Board
Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Tel 718-990-1955
digiuser@stjohns.edu

Date: January 23, 2019

To: Timothy D. McCarthy

CC: Dr. Anthony Annunziato
Dr. Rene Parmar
Dr. Mary Beth Schaefer

Dr. Marie Nitopi
IRB Coordinator
Tel 718-990-1440
nitopim@stjohns.edu

Protocol # 0119-214
Protocol Title: A Qualitative Analysis of Interviews on the Willingness of Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents to Change from a Traditional Grading and Reporting System to Standards-Based Grading Model at the Secondary Level

Please be advised that your human subject protocol has been reviewed by the IRB and is considered approved/exempt. You are free to begin your project.

Since the proposal is exempt, no further follow-up by the IRB is required. Please notify the IRB of **any** deviation from your proposal since any change may require IRB review and approval.

Best wishes for successful pursuit of this research.

****It is imperative that you keep this on file where it can easily be accessed. You will need to provide copies of this document when involved in further correspondence with the IRB. The IRB will provide you with an additional copy of this document only in the case of an emergency.****

APPENDIX C INTERVIEW SOLICITATION LETTER

February 4, 2019

President of Superintendent's Association Name
Title
Address
Address

Dear President Name:

In accordance with my recently submitted and approved research plan through the School of Education at St. John's University, I am looking to conduct interviews with superintendents and assistant superintendents. Responses to these questions are crucial in providing the necessary information I need to effectively answer my research questions found within my study, which is being conducted under the supervision of my mentor, Dr. Anthony Annunziato.

The purpose of my study is to identify the extent to which superintendents and assistant superintendents are willing to change from a traditional grading system to that of standards-based grading (SBG) at the secondary level. Furthermore, the study will attempt to unveil the perceived impediments to implementing a SBG system at the secondary level. This will be done through interviews and the involvement of superintendents and assistant superintendents in schools that have not implemented SBG and currently have a traditional grading and reporting model. All superintendent and assistant superintendent names and school information will be removed from the study for privacy.
Enclosed you will find a sample of my questions, which have been validated and approved through the International Review Board.
Your response and valuable time are greatly appreciated, I look forward to hearing from you if you are interested in speaking with me more about this opportunity.
Sincerely,

Timothy D. McCarthy
Doctoral candidate, St. John's University

APPENDIX D CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

February 4, 2019

The purpose of the consent form is to give potential subjects a single document that includes all the information they need to make an informed decision about participating in research and to indicate their agreement to participate under the stated conditions.

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about the capacity of assistant superintendents and superintendents to change from a traditional grading model to a standards-based grading model at the secondary level. This study will be conducted by Timothy D. McCarthy, The School of Education, St. John's University, as part of his doctoral dissertation. His faculty sponsor is Dr. Anthony Annunziato, The School of Education.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Complete an oral questionnaire about your background (age, gender, education, etc.).
2. Take part in one interview relating to changing from a traditional grading model to a standards-based grading model.

Your interview will be audio-taped. You may review these tapes and request that all or ay portion of the tapes be destroyed. Participation in this study will involve 30 minutes of your time. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator better understand the capacity of assistant superintendents and superintendents to change from a traditional grading model to a standards-based grading model at the secondary level.

Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained by keeping consent forms separate from data to make sure that your name and identity will not become known or linked with any information you have provided.
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. For interviews, questionnaires or surveys, you have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer.

If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Timothy D. McCarthy at 516-532-6451, timothy.mccarthy10@my.stjohns.edu, St. John's University, Long Island Graduate Center, 120 Commerce Drive, Hauppauge, New York 11788, or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Anthony Annunziato at 718-990-7781, annunzia@stjohns.edu, St. John's University, Long Island Graduate Center, 120 Commerce Drive, Hauppauge, New York 11788.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440.

___ Yes, I give the investigator permission to use my name when quoting material from our interview in his dissertation, presentations, and/or publications.

___ No, I would prefer that my name not be used.

You have received a copy of this consent document to keep

Agreement to Participate

_____ _____

Subject's Signature Date

APPENDIX E SURVEY INSTRUMENT: SEMI-STRUCTURED EXPLORATORY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Q #	Questions to be asked
1	How would you describe a traditional grading and reporting system?
2	How would you describe a standards-based grading and reporting system?
3	What is the purpose of a grading and reporting system?
4	Does your current grading and reporting system at the secondary level achieve the intended purpose or purposes that you described in the previous question? Why or why not?
5	To what extent is a grading and reporting system necessary at the secondary level?
6	In your estimation, what should a grading and reporting system look like at the secondary level?
7	Where would you pull standards from for your grading and reporting system?
8	How, and to what degree, does your district's grading system align with state standards?
9	How, and to what degree, does your district's reporting system align with state standards?
10	How would you describe your current grading and reporting system? Do you believe it most closely aligns to a traditional or standards-based model?
11	In your opinion, is a standards-based grading and reporting system worthwhile at the secondary level? Why or Why not?
12	What skills do students need to be prepared for the future?
13	What would your ideal school of the future look like and would SBG be included in this?
14	Would you be willing to lead change from a traditional to a standards-based model of grading and reporting at the secondary level? Why or Why not?

	Yes, willing to:	No, not willing to:
15	What specific steps would you take in leading a change initiative from a traditional to a standards-based model of grading and reporting?	What are the contributing factors as to why you would not lead this change effort?
16	How would you describe the change process?	In general, how would you describe the change process?
17	What barriers and challenges would you foresee if attempting to move from a traditional model to a standards-based model?	What barriers and challenges would you foresee if attempting to move from a traditional model to a standards-based model?
18	Is it a significant hurdle to report SBG to colleges in lieu of a traditional grading and reporting system?	Is it a significant hurdle to report SBG to colleges in lieu of a traditional grading and reporting system?
19	Explain how you would characterize the degree of difficulty in implementing a change from traditional to SBG model of grading and reporting?	Explain how you would characterize the degree of difficulty in implementing a change from traditional to SBG model of grading and reporting?
20	What conditions restrict your ability to implement a SBG model of grading and reporting?	What conditions restrict your ability to implement a SBG model of grading and reporting?
21	What conditions would need to be present to implement a SBG model of grading and reporting?	What conditions would need to be present to implement a SBG model of grading and reporting?
22	How do you perceive teacher understanding of standards?	How do you perceive teacher understanding of standards?
23	Are there competing initiatives and/or work that is more important than SBG?	Are there competing initiatives and/or work that is more important than SBG?
24	Anything else you would like to add?	Anything else you would like to add?

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