Knowing that Feedback is Essential to Learning:
Is it possible to equitably "Grade" in this Crisis?

All schools in the state are in a similar situation as we are all closed, likely for the remainder of the year. We are all wrestling with what to do with distance learning. Unlike a snow-day, there are some unique challenges around equity that come with a closure for the remainder of the year; it is unlikely that any school can guarantee 100% of their students will have access to either the materials and resources, or teachers' expertise, to bring up their grades. It is equally unlikely that access can be guaranteed, fair (either access to internet, support or to devices) and balanced. Additionally, we believe <u>feedback is essential to student growth</u>. We believe it is essential that students who are working receive feedback from teachers. Because of this, our team reviewed the following approaches/situations to see how others are handling feedback and grading to determine if we could, with any modifications, consider a way to provide feedback AND equitably grade our students for their time out of school.

Some of the many topics considered as part of the scenarios below included: GPA, Scholarships, Class Rank, Transcripts, NCAA/Other Rules, Student Record, Student Mental Health, Consistent Grading Practices, etc.

Approach #1: Grading as normal.   This approach would call for grading assignments as was done previously. This will look different depending on the school/philosophy but, assuming a traditional 100 point scale where students are ranked for their work, higher quality work would get a higher grade. Also, traditionally, grades may be boosted by increased work/effort, revisions, etc.

   Issues – The issues here are obvious in a situation where we know…
   a) not all students will have: equal access, opportunities to connect online, adequate access, appropriate devices or appropriate number of devices in their home (i.e. multiple students competing for one computer), resources to use, supports at home, etc., and
   b) not all teachers will provide equal or even similar: quality instruction, access, opportunities to connect, feedback, etc. (without substantial training, etc.)

   Result: Clear disparities that already exist will be greatly expanded between students who do and can, and those who don't and can't. The "haves" are significantly more likely to have a higher grade than those students who do not have as much (access, resources, support, etc.).

Approach #2: Grading without penalty from March 13th moving forward – i.e. a student's grade can improve with new work but not go down (from whatever it was prior to the shutdown). This approach would grade new work. It may allow students to revise prior work (prior to shutdown) to improve their score. This approach would not penalize students who do not complete work or do less work. This approach may allow grades to be boosted by increased work/effort, revisions, etc.

   Issues – The issues here are less obvious but still exist…
   a) not all students will have: equal access, opportunities to connect online, appropriate devices or appropriate number of devices in their home, resources to use, supports at home, etc., and

b) not all teachers will provide equal or even similar: quality instruction, access, opportunities to connect, feedback, etc. (again, without lack of training)

Result: Students who are well-sponsored, who have a parent or support person at home to help guide them, and who have continuous access to internet & appropriate technology, will be able to do more, connect more, and will likely be able to improve their scores more. Those students who do not – will not. Really, the disparities raised in approach #1 are very similar here.

Approach #3: Pass/Fail – i.e. work will be graded but will result not in an average, but a pass-fail, of whatever work is assigned. A pass/fail may be given for the quarter, for the year, or other variation. In this approach student work would be graded and feedback given which would result in a final grade being issued of P (pass) or F (fail). It may allow students to revise prior work (prior to shutdown) to improve their scores, or it may not. This approach would penalize students who do not complete work or do insufficient work. This approach may allow prior-grades to be boosted by increased work/effort, revisions, etc. (process may differ)

Issues – The issues here are perhaps even less obvious, but still exist. In this scenario it remains:
a) not all students will have: equal access, opportunities to connect online, appropriate devices or appropriate number of devices in their home, resources to use, supports at home, etc., and
b) consistent approaches to P/F expectations will be very challenging systemically especially between teachers, departments, etc. and… not all teachers will provide equal/similar quality instruction, access, opportunities to connect, feedback, etc. (again, without lack of training)

Result: Students who are well-sponsored, who have a parent or support person at home to help guide them, and who have access to internet/technology will have a greater chance of passing from the outset vs. those who do not have these supports/access.

In each scenario, it is clear that those students with less supports and more barriers to success are significantly more likely to fail or be at a disadvantage vs. their more well-sponsored peers. With the work our district has done to become trauma-informed, knowing 60-70% of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch, and considering the clear inequities discussed above, we see no way to equitably grade our students. The underlying point is that we are unable to devise a grading structure which doesn't create inequities that would avoid the likely potential long-term negative impacts on a student's transcript/permanent record.

Feedback without Grading: Without the option to "grade", we believe it remains essential to provide students feedback. As a result, we are working to utilize Powerschool as a means to track student participation (both in online learning sessions as well as work completion/ submission) to have a measure of student participation. We will develop guidance for staff that will be consistent with our Level 1 and Level 2 educational opportunities to begin implementing, by grade-span, after April vacation.

Thank you,
MSAD54