

Celebrating Our Strengths and Confronting Our Challenges:

Transforming Our Schools through Collaborative Professional Learning

Dr. Reeves is the founder of The Leadership and Learning Center. He has worked with education, business, nonprofit, and government organizations throughout the world. The author of more than 20 books and many articles on leadership and organizational effectiveness, he has twice been named to the Harvard University Distinguished Authors Series. His monthly column on change leadership appears in Educational Leadership. Dr. Reeves was named the Brock International Laureate for his contributions to education. He also received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Parents Choice Award for his writing for children and parents.

For a free copy of all research slides, contact:

**Douglas B. Reeves, Ph.D.
DR Reeves@LeadandLearn.com**

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303.504.9312, ext. 512

**The
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and Learning
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Leadership Institute

June 21-23, 2009
Boston, Massachusetts

The
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Join **Dr. Douglas Reeves** and several other global educational minds, including Dr. Elle Allison, at The Leadership and Learning Center's fourth annual **Leadership Institute**. This yearlong support network is exclusively for educational leaders including superintendents, board presidents, chief academic officers, principals, and others who face the unique challenges of senior educational leadership.

The Leadership Institute begins with a two and one half day gathering in Boston, Massachusetts, where participants will share in **focused learning and collaboration with fellow colleagues and global educational leaders**. Packed with new research, powerful general sessions, and intimate **interactive learning sessions, this Institute has helped educational leaders** more profoundly impact student achievement, build strong partnerships with boards and communities, and develop streamlined action plans for more rapid integration.

Participants of the Leadership Institute will be empowered to:

- Identify and prioritize essential leadership actions
- Improve personal **leadership effectiveness**
- More successfully direct teams to **achieve desired results**
- More productively resolve dissenting opinions
- More efficiently **identify and address conflicting priorities**
- Inform decision-making processes with the latest research
- More easily prioritize and **tackle new initiatives**

What People Are Saying About this Institute

"I truly believe that your organization offers people working in the field with some of the best resources available to bring about meaningful change. The school I am principal of is a better place as a result of your work."

*Richard Brouillard, Principal
Beaver Dam Middle School*

During the Leadership Institute, Dr. Reeves and others will assist you to develop a personal, **prioritized 100-day action plan for immediate implementation**, and through **one-to-one coaching**, you will have a **non-biased sounding board** and your choice of either an **advisor for six months following the Institute or a comprehensive Hallmarks Performance Assessment** to help you make the best decisions for your schools and districts.

"I love the 100 day project. It will push me to make one of my many goals the top priority and actually make some progress. The strategies were practical and meaningful."

*Michelle Herron, Principal
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This curriculum is based on the newest research and **will include both general sessions and focused breakout sessions to meet the diverse needs of senior leaders.** Curriculum highlights will include the following:

- Leading in Times of Crisis
- Fitting New Initiatives into Existing Plans
- Identifying and Overcoming Resistance to Change
- Maximizing Team Collaboration and Planning
- Making the Most of Your First 100-Days
- Improving Leadership Effectiveness
- Assimilating New Leaders into Existing Systems

*“The information that comes from the Center is always top-notch.
It makes so much sense and helps me do my job so much more effectively.
Thank you!”*
*Liz Wicklander, School Improvement Specialist
Umatilla-Morrow ESD*

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Membership is for a term of one year and is limited to a maximum of 400 educational leaders throughout the world.

Leadership and Learning Live Vol. 2 DVD Series

Hosted by Dr. Douglas Reeves

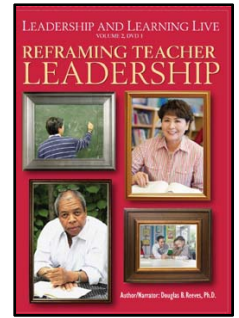
The
Leadership
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DESCRIPTION:

Leadership and Learning Live, Volume Two, continues the model of leadership development and educational practices introduced in *Leadership and Learning Live*, Volume One.

This subscription includes four self-contained DVDs which teach leadership and curriculum-based instruction. In each DVD, Dr. Reeves leads a study based on his latest research, publications, and keynote addresses.

Each DVD contains a companion book study guide which highlights discussion points and reflection questions. Included in this subscription or single DVD purchase is ongoing access to Dr. Douglas Reeves and other senior leaders input on your educational issues.



- DVD 1 – Reframing Teacher Leadership
- DVD 2 - Coaching for Success: New Research for Improved Personal and Organizational Performance
- DVD 3 – Writing to Learn
- DVD 4 – Leadership Maps

WHO WOULD BENEFIT:

Ideal for district, building, grade-level, and departmental professional learning communities.

FORMAT & COST:

Each DVD is approximately 60 minutes in length, with 10-15 minute segments followed by guiding questions for discussion.
\$99.00 individually or \$199.00 for a subscription to all four.

AVAILABILITY:

The first two DVDs are available, with each subsequent volume released on a quarterly basis.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, please contact us
at Info@LeadandLearn.com or by phone 866-399-6019 ext. 213.

Leadership and Learning Live Vol. 2 DVD Subscription

DVD 1 - Reframing Teacher Leadership

In this program, Dr. Douglas Reeves will share new research culled from demographically, economically, and linguistically diverse schools. From that research Dr. Reeves crafts a new framework for teacher leadership that genuinely leads to higher student achievement. In doing so you will learn the necessary environmental elements for effective teacher leadership, why teacher leadership starts with teachers observing the practices of other teachers, and how central office administrators can become the architects of teacher leader networks that encourage the sharing of effective instructional practice.

DVD 2 - Coaching for Success: New Research for Improved Personal and Organizational Performance

What do you do when just "getting results" is not longer enough to motivate a staff? In Renewal Coaching, Dr. Reeves and Dr. Elle Allison, explain that the essential intersection of personal and organizational effectiveness includes resilience and renewal, along with a focus on the greater good. Although this is supported by a deep body of research in organizational change, most change efforts remain focused on short-term fixes and, inevitably, lead to exhaustion and "initiative fatigue." If you need sustainable effective change, then Renewal Coaching can provide the support you need. The DVD includes practical exercises to take you through each step of the Renewal Coaching process.

DVD 3 - Writing to Learn

In this session, Dr. Reeves present a compelling case improvement of grading practices. He'll argue that school-wide implementation of a consistent and effective grading system will have an immediate impact on reducing failures and improving student achievement, teacher morale, student behavior, and parental engagement. In the DVD Dr. Reeves will lead interactive learning exercises: to teach the elements of effective grading, analyze common grading systems; experiment with alternative systems; create improved feedback strategies; and develop an implementation plan that participants can be immediately applied.

DVD 4 - Leadership Maps

The Leadership Map™ is a self-assessment tool designed to extend the knowledge and application of educational leaders. In this program Dr. Stephen White will discuss how Leadership Map™ challenges leaders to deepen their own knowledge and assess levels of implementation and application throughout the organizations they lead. For veterans and novices alike, the leadership Map™ system offers a comprehensive, standards-based, and reliable assessment of both leadership knowledge and skills.

**Celebrating Our Strengths and
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The Leadership and Learning Center

DReeves@LeadandLearn.com

(303) 504-9312, ext. 512

**You are a REVENUE SOURCE,
not an expense**

- 18,500 dropouts in New Jersey
- \$4.8 billion lost wages and productivity in ONE CLASS
- \$258.6 million in medical care
- \$189 million PER YEAR SAVINGS from a FIVE PERCENT REDUCTION IN MALE DROPOUT RATE

Source: Alliance for Excellent Education, February 2008

The Big Ideas for 2009

Leadership Matters

**Vision Is Necessary,
Not Sufficient**

**H.O.P.E.
Not Blind Faith**

What's New for 2009?

Renewal Coaching

Renewal Coaching

- Multi-dimensional Assessments – 7 scored and open-ended assessments – free at www.RenewalCoaching.com
- Clear distinction from consulting and traditional coaching
- “Moon Shot” focus on meaning and purpose

Source: Reeves, D.B. & Allison, E. (2009). *Renewal Coaching: Sustainable Change for Individuals and Organizations*. Jossey-Bass.

Web 2.0 Dilemmas

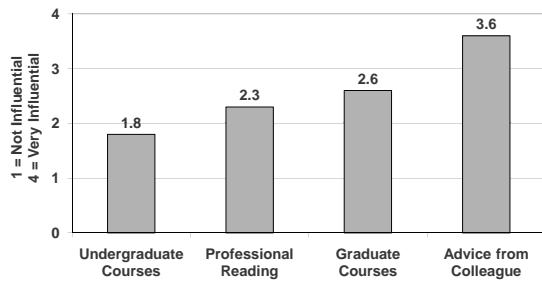
- Web 2.0 Dilemmas**
- High Tech vs. High Touch
 - Filters vs. Fountains
 - Partners vs. Promotion
 - Analysis vs. Anarchy

Teacher Leadership

Teacher Leadership

- It's a fact, not a choice – like gravity
- More powerful than hierarchy
- Dramatically accelerates speed and accuracy of communication
- Beyond the usual suspects

What Influences Teacher Professional Practice?



Source: Reeves, D.B. (2008). *Reframing Teacher Leadership to Improve Your School*. ASCD.

Learning Activity #1: What Do We Really Know?

- Select **JUST ONE** area of expertise
- Write **THREE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS** required for effectiveness

Leading Change

EVERY CLIENT faces change
The Center's "Change Readiness Assessment" is NEW

Change Readiness Assessment

Support/Demand for Change	Frustration: <i>"What is it you don't understand? We need change NOW!"</i>	Change-Ready Organization
	Denial: <i>"What? Me Worry?"</i>	Complacency: <i>"Things are fine as they are. Why change?"</i>

Organizational Change Capability

Source: Reeves, D.B. (2009). *Leading Change in Your School: How to Conquer Myths, Build Commitment, and Get Results*. ASCD.
 Free download at www.LeadandLearn.com

Teacher Stress and Anxiety

Teacher Stress and Anxiety

- Efficacy
- Stress, anxiety, and DECREASE
- Focus on GREATER GOOD builds efficacy

Data Teams

\$2 billion for “student information systems”
This will be WASTED WITHOUT
DATA TEAMS

Learning Activity #2: Hypothesis Generation

- Testable “If . . . Then . . .” statements
- If it is true, what would the data say?

Extracurricular Activities

**On the Chopping Block
Center research says they
HELP achievement and discipline**

Leadership Maps

**The intersection of student
achievement and the
“antecedents of excellence”**

Leadership Focus

Leadership Focus

- The Law of Initiative Fatigue
- The “Rule of Six”
- Principles of Focus:
 - Leverage
 - Implementation
 - Impact

Learning Activity #3: How Focused Are You

- | | |
|--|--|
| ■ New Initiatives in the past 24 months: | ■ Initiatives deliberately terminated in the past 24 months: |
|--|--|

A Better Way: Implementation Audit

- Review of 600 programs, including urban, suburban, and rural schools
- The variable is not brand name, but **IMPLEMENTATION**
- **EASIEST BUDGET CUTS:**
 - Programs with costs and low implementation
 - Programs with costs and minimal impact

Learning Activity #4: Influences on Practice

- Think of a particular change in the past year that you continue to use today
- What was the SOURCE of the change?

Core Research Findings

Results

Lucky

Leading

Losing

Learning

Antecedents of Excellence

90 90 90

- Free, not a program
- Persistent over time
- Collaborative scoring
- Multiple opportunities for success
- Nonfiction writing
- Laser-like focus on achievement

Collaboration

- The essence of PLC's
- Measureable - improves with practice - 19 to 92% agreement
- SAVES TEACHERS TIME - 45 minutes to 9 minutes

Learning Activity #5 and #6:

- What are the compelling questions you would like to investigate?
- What information would you need?

Nonfiction Writing

- Free, not a program
- Persistent over time
- Key to reading comprehension
- Multi-disciplinary impact
- Multi-year impact
- Particularly for ELL students

Bell Curve to Mountain

- Why standards?
- Fair, effective, and **THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE** to the bell curve

Pygmalion Effect

- The research behind “high expectations”
- Ask, “What causes student achievement?”
- **THREE TIMES GREATER** gains when you attribute causes to factors we control

Critical Mass

- 200 Schools, 15 programs
- The variable is IMPLEMENTATION, not brand name
- 90% implementation levels had 2-3 times higher achievement than 10% implementation with the SAME INITIATIVE

Networks

- Level 1 – Contrived
- Level 2 – Spontaneous
- Level 3 – Co-opted
- Level 4 – Nurtured
- Level 5 – Value-driven

Monitoring

- Adult actions
- Constructive
- Frequent
- THREE TIMES HIGHER gains with high monitoring scores

Time

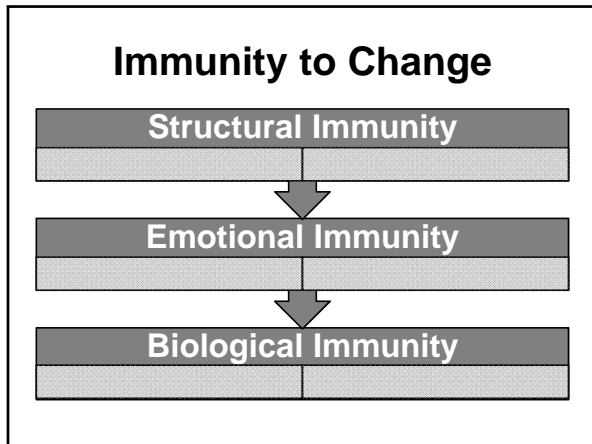
- Doubling time:
- HELPS electives
- HELPS advanced coursework
- HELPS funding by reducing dropouts
- HELPS teacher engagement by improving discipline

Power of Accurate Feedback

- Immediate impact on results
- Lower failures
- Better attendance
- Fewer suspensions
- Failure here undermines EVERY OTHER EFFORT in curriculum, assessment, and teaching

Learning Activity #7: Sample Action Research Project

- C
- C
- MA (Missing Assignment)
- D
- C
- B
- MA
- MA
- B
- A



Immunity Is Good, Right?

- “Natural or acquired resistance”
- “Exemption from obligation, service, duty”
- “Insusceptibility”
- “Unaffected” – as in “immune from criticism”

Structural Immunity

- Technology Beats Instruction
- Lawyers Beat Evaluation
- Agendas Beat Priorities

Biological Immunity

- Reptilian Brains
- Competent Jerks
- Anxiety and Distress

Emotional Immunity

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

How Do You Overcome Immunity?

- What does not work:
 - Policy
 - Persuasion
 - Theory
- We already know what succeeds and fails for organizational change

Overcoming Immunity to Change

- Identify what does NOT change
- Behavior precedes belief
- 100 Days – not five years
- Stop waiting for universal buy-in
- Visible and specific leadership actions

Visible and Specific Leadership Actions

- Culture
- Clarity
- Communication
- Compulsion
- Compassion

Culture

- What does NOT change
- Leadership actions
- Scut Work

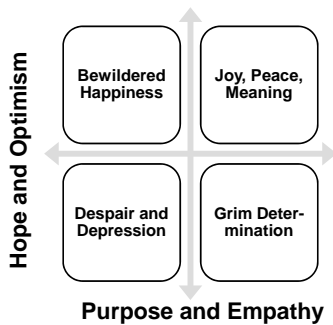
**Activity #8:
Cultural Impact on Immunity to
Change**

- What are some vivid visual indicators of culture?
- Which parts of culture are within your influence?

Creating H.O.P.E.

- Hope – The best days are in the future
- Optimism – Things are getting better
- Purpose – People count on me
- Empathy – The pain of other people affects me deeply

H.O.P.E. Matrix



How Leaders Build H.O.P.E.

- Make an **EXTERNAL** focus part of every staff meeting, board meeting, and public forum
- **Treasure Hunts** – identify, document, and replicate effective practice
- **Personal and specific appreciation**

Resilience and Renewal for Leaders

- **“Moon Shots”** [Hamel, Gary. Moonshots for Management. *Harvard Business Review*. Feb 2009]
 - 1) **Serve higher purpose**
 - 2) **Community and citizenship**
 - 3) **Reconstruct foundations**
 - 4) **Eliminate pathologies of hierarchy**
 - 5) **Reduce fear and increase trust**
- **Resilience Inventory** [Reeves, D.B. & Allison, E. (2009). *Renewal Coaching: Sustainable Change for Individuals and Organizations*. Jossey-Bass.]

Hallmarks of Resilience

- **Balance rigidity and flexibility**
 - **Reciprocity - integrally related to Resilience**
 - **Sense of history – from adversity to renewal**
 - **Exercise of control, mastery, impact in decisive, consistent, and visible ways**
- [From Reeves & Allison, *Renewal Coaching: Sustainable Change for Individuals and Organizations*, Jossey-Bass, 2009]

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Science in the Spotlight Pages 92-94

Leading to Change / How Do You Change School Culture?

Douglas Reeves

Consider the following laments that I have heard recently from school leaders: “We can't change the grading policy—it's part of our culture.” “Public displays of data won't work here—the culture won't allow it.” “The parents just don't understand—you can't change the culture by passing a law.” Each of these statements includes the word *culture*, but the meaning of the term ranges from policies and procedures to personal preferences to deeply embedded belief systems.

Cultural change, although challenging and time-consuming, is not only possible but necessary—especially in organizations in which stakeholders use the word “culture” as a rhetorical talisman to block leadership initiatives, stifle innovation, and maintain the status quo. In the last decade, the education standards movement has taught us that policy change without cultural change is an exercise in futility and frustration.

How do you change the culture of schools? When it comes to lasting cultural change, four essentials are consistent across many leadership contexts.

First, *define what you will not change*. Identify specific values, traditions, and relationships that you will preserve. Rather than make every change a battle that exhausts political capital and diminishes trust, effective leaders place change in the context of stability. They take care not to convey the message, “Everything you have been doing in the past was ineffective, and your experience and professional judgment are irrelevant.” A more thoughtful message is, “I am only going to ask you to engage in changes that will have meaning and value for you and every stakeholder we serve.” For example, many schools have cherished traditions of excellence in athletics, music, or art—traditions that can be threatened when the leader says that academic achievement must be the top priority. Effective change leaders identify and build on traditions rather than compete with them. The trophy case bursting with evidence of athletic championships can share space with exceptional student artwork, outstanding science projects, and superb essays.

Second, *recognize the importance of actions*. Speeches and announcements are not enough. To lead challenging reform efforts, you must be willing to make personal changes in decision-making policies (Who has the authority to decide what?); personal time allocation (Which



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January 2007

meeting invitations do you accept and which do you decline?); and collegial relationships (Do you make time to listen to the personal stories of your colleagues?).

The greatest impediment to meaningful cultural change is the gap between what leaders say they value and what they actually do. Staff members are not seduced by a leader's claim of "collaborative culture" when every meeting is a series of lectures, announcements, and warnings. Claims about a "culture of high expectations" are undermined when school policies encourage good grades for poor student work. The "culture of respect" is undermined by every imperious, demanding, or angry e-mail and voice mail coming from the principal. Leaders speak most clearly with their actions. When staff members hear the call for transformation from a leader whose personal actions remain unchanged, their hope turns to cynicism.

Third, *use the right change tools for your school or district*. Christensen, Marx, and Stevenson (2006) differentiate *culture tools*, such as rituals and traditions; *power tools*, such as threats and coercion; *management tools*, such as training, procedures, and measurement systems; and *leadership tools*, such as role modeling and vision. Leaders must choose the appropriate change tools on the basis of a combination of factors, including the extent to which staff members agree on what they want and how to get there. Leaders who approach reform determined to apply a particular change method are making the mistake of the person holding a hammer who therefore sees only nails.

Fourth, *be willing to do the "scut work."* In *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World*, Tracy Kidder (2004) describes a renowned infectious disease specialist and leader in international health care. Farmer has revolutionized the beliefs and practices of stakeholders ranging from the poorest rural villagers in Haiti to the faculty of Harvard Medical School to policymakers at the United Nations. Combining his extensive field experience with sophisticated research and medical analyses, Farmer has upended traditional notions of health care. What does Farmer cite as one of his secrets? The willingness to do "unglamorous scut work."

Although education leaders must make speeches and attend board meetings, leaders aspiring to change school cultures will take the risk, as Superintendent Stan Scheer of Murrieta Valley Unified School District in California has done, of taking a turn as a substitute teacher or spending time with bus drivers at 5:00 on a frosty morning. When the school leader puts down the briefcase and picks up a stack of trays in the cafeteria or a pile of writing portfolios for personal review, then everyone knows that the leader takes every job in the school seriously. If you believe that every job has value and there is no such thing as unimportant work in schools, then demonstrate that belief through your actions.

Meaningful school improvement begins with cultural change—and cultural change begins with the school leader.

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Douglas Reeves is Founder of the Center for Performance Assessment, 800-844-6599, ext. 512;
DReeves@LeadAndLearn.com.

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Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)

1703 N. Beauregard Street, Alexandria, VA 22311 USA • 1-800-933-2723 • 1-703-578-9600

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Teaching Students to Think Pages 85-87

Leading to Change / Effective Grading Practices

Douglas B. Reeves

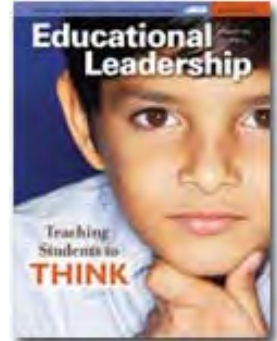
If you wanted to make just one change that would immediately reduce student failure rates, then the most effective place to start would be challenging prevailing grading practices. How can I be so sure? Try this experiment in your next faculty meeting. Ask your colleagues to calculate the final grade for a student who receives the following 10 grades during a semester: *C, C, MA (Missing Assignment), D, C, B, MA, MA, B, A*. I have done this experiment with thousands of teachers and administrators in the United States, Canada, and Argentina. Every time—bar none—I get the same results: The final grades range from *F* to *A* and include everything in between.

As this experiment demonstrates, the difference between failure and the honor roll often depends on the grading policies of the teacher. To reduce the failure rate, schools don't need a new curriculum, a new principal, new teachers, or new technology. They just need a better grading system.

Ineffective Grading

The results of my experiment are not surprising. Guskey and Bailey (2001) and Marzano (2000) have synthesized decades of research with similar findings. Neither the weight of scholarship nor common sense seems to have influenced grading policies in many schools. Practices vary greatly among teachers in the same school—and even worse, the practices best supported by research are rarely in evidence.

For example, the most effective grading practices provide accurate, specific, timely feedback designed to improve student performance (Marzano 2000, 2007; O'Connor, 2007). In the best classrooms, grades are only one of many types of feedback provided to students. Music teachers and athletic coaches routinely provide abundant feedback to students and only occasionally associate a grade with the feedback. Teachers in visual arts, drafting, culinary arts, or computer programming allow students to create a portfolio to show their best work, knowing that the mistakes made in the course of the semester were not failures, but lessons learned on the way to success. In each of these cases, "failures" along the way are not averaged into a calculation of the final grade.



February 2008

Contrast these effective practices with three commonly used grading policies that are so ineffective they can be labeled as toxic. First is the use of zeroes for missing work. Despite evidence that grading as punishment does not work (Guskey, 2000) and the mathematical flaw in the use of the zero on a 100-point scale (Reeves, 2004), many teachers routinely maintain this policy in the mistaken belief that it will lead to improved student performance. Defenders of the zero claim that students need to have consequences for flouting the teacher's authority and failing to turn in work on time. They're right, but the appropriate consequence is not a zero; it's *completing the work*—before, during, or after school, during study periods, at "quiet tables" at lunch, or in other settings.

Second is the practice of using the average of all scores throughout the semester, a formula that presumes that the learning early in the semester is as important as learning at the end of the semester (Marzano, 2000; O'Connor, 2007). Interestingly, when teachers and administrators have been students in my graduate courses, they routinely insist that they should be evaluated on the basis of their understanding at the end of the semester rather than their work throughout the term.

Third is the use of the "semester killer"—the single project, test, lab, paper, or other assignment that will make or break students. This practice puts 18 weeks of work at risk based on a project that might, at most, have consumed four weeks of the semester.

A small but growing number of school systems are tackling the issue head-on with comprehensive plans for effective grading practices. (The policy developed by one such district, Grand Island Public Schools in Nebraska, is available at <http://wikiassessments.editme.com/files/GradingandReporting/G%26R%20Guiding%20Docs.pdf>.)

But even in districts that have attempted to put effective grading policies in place, enforcement is often inconsistent. Grading seems to be regarded as the last frontier of individual teacher discretion. The same school leaders and community members who would be indignant if sports referees were inconsistent in their rulings continue to tolerate inconsistencies that have devastating effects on student achievement.

High-Stakes Grading

The Alliance for Excellent Education estimated that the annual cost of high school failure exceeds \$330 billion ("An Economic Case," 2007). Some of these failures are no doubt caused by excessive absences and poor student performance. But, as the experiment at the beginning of this column clearly indicates, many failures are caused by the differences in teacher grading policies.

Do another experiment: Randomly select 30 course failures from the last semester, and determine the cause for failure. Two common causes are missing homework and poor performance on a single major assignment—a term paper, lab, or project. What would it mean to your school if you could reduce the number of failing grades resulting solely from uncompleted homework?

The stakes of grading practices are not limited to student failure. When grading policies

improve, discipline and morale almost always follow. For example, Ben Davis High School in Indianapolis, Indiana, achieved a remarkable reduction in course failures through focused attention on improved feedback and intervention for students (Reeves, 2006). I recently checked in with the school, and Principal Joel McKinney reported that the success of this challenging urban school (74 percent free and reduced-price lunch, high mobility, and increasing numbers of English language learners) did not stop with reducing 9th and 10th grade failures. As of fall 2007, enrollment in advanced placement classes had increased 32 percent; suspensions had declined 67 percent; elective opportunities in music, art, and technology had increased; class cuts and tardiness had fallen significantly; teacher morale and school climate had noticeably improved—and the course failure rate had continued to decline (personal communication, December 5, 2007). When schools take steps to reduce failures, lots of good things happen.

The Steps to Take

Although changing grading systems is a challenging leadership task, the benefits are so great that it's worth doing.

First, create a sense of urgency. Identify the exact cost of inconsistent grading practices. How many failures can we prevent this semester if we improve our grading practices?

Second, identify teacher leaders who are already improving policies. Chances are that some teachers in your school have already eliminated the use of the average and the zero on a 100-point scale and created meaningful opportunities for corrective feedback outside of grades. Provide a forum for these teachers to share their insights with colleagues and lead the effort to develop improved policies.

Third, get the facts; gather evidence that will create a rationale for decision making. At the end of the day, your choices about teaching practice must be guided by evidence, not opinions. For example, although many people sincerely believe that giving poor grades as a punishment is effective, Guskey (2000) has marshaled 90 years of evidence to the contrary.

Fourth, reassure parents, students, and teachers that certain things will *not* change. Students will still have letter grades, transcripts, honor rolls, individualized education plans, and everything else that they have counted on as part of their grading system. What they won't have is irrational grading policies that give students widely different grades for the same work.

The benefits of effective grading practices are not limited to a reduced failure rate—although that benefit alone is sufficient to justify change. When student failures decrease, student behavior improves, faculty morale is better, resources allocated to remedial courses and course repetitions are reduced, and resources invested in electives and advanced courses increase. When was the last time a single change in your school accomplished all that?

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Douglas B. Reeves is Founder of the Leadership and Learning Center; 978-740-3001; DReeves@LeadandLearn.com.

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The Case Against the Zero

Even those who subscribe to the “punishment” theory of grading might want to reconsider the way they use zeros, Mr. Reeves suggests.

BY DOUGLAS B. REEVES

THIS IS not a trick question. If you are using a grading scale in which the numbers 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0 correspond to grades of A, B, C, D, and F, then what number is awarded to a student who fails to turn in an assignment? If you responded with a unanimous chorus of “zero,” then you may have a great deal of company. There might be a few people who are familiar with the research that asserts that grading as punishment is an ineffective strategy,¹ 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.

Groups as diverse as the New York State United Teachers and the Thomas Fordham Foundation rally around this position.² Let us, for the sake of argument, accept the point. With the grading system described above, the failure to turn in work would receive a zero. The four-point scale is a rational system, as the increment between each letter grade is proportionate to the increment between each numerical grade — one point.

But the common use of the zero today is based not on a four-point scale but on a 100-point scale. This defies logic and mathematical accuracy. On a 100-point scale, the interval between numerical and letter grades is typically 10 points, with the break points at 90, 80, 70, and so on. But when the grade of zero is applied to a 100-point scale, the interval between the D and F is not 10 points but 60 points. Most state standards in mathematics require that fifth-grade students un-

Missing assignment: **F**

*DOUGLAS B. REEVES is the chairman and founder of the Center for Performance Assessment, Boston, Mass. His most recent publications are *Assessing Educational Leaders* (Corwin Press, 2004) and *Accountability for Learning* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2004).*

derstand the principles of ratios — for example, A is to B as 4 is to 3; D is to F as 1 is to zero. Yet the persistence of the zero on a 100-point scale indicates that many people with advanced degrees, including those with more background in mathematics than the typical teacher, have not applied the ratio standard to their own professional practices. 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.

There are two issues at hand. The first, and most important, is to determine the appropriate consequence for students who fail to complete an assignment. The most common answer is to punish these students. Evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, there is an almost fanatical belief that punishment through grades will motivate students. In contrast, there are at least a few educators experimenting with the notion that the appropriate consequence for failing to complete an assignment is to require the student to complete the assignment. That is, students lose privileges — free time and unstructured class or study-hall time — and are required to complete the assignment. The price of freedom is proficiency, and students are motivated not by threats of failure but by the opportunity to earn greater freedom and discretion by completing work accurately and on time. I know my colleagues well enough to understand that this argument will not persuade many of them. Rewards and punishments are part of the psyche of schools, particularly at the secondary level.

But if I concede this first point, the second issue is much more straightforward. Even if we want to punish the little miscreants who fail to complete our assignments — and I admit that on more than one occasion with both my students and my own children, my emotions have run in that direction — then what is the fair, appropriate, and mathematically accurate punishment? However vengeful I may feel on my worst days, I'm fairly certain that the appropriate punishment is not the electric chair. Even if I were to engage in a typically fact-free debate in which my personal preference for punishment were elevated above efficacy, I would nevertheless be forced to admit that giving a zero on a 100-


point scale for missing work is a mathematical inaccuracy.

If I were using a four-point grading system, I could give a zero. If I am using a 100-point system, however, then the lowest possible grade is the numerical value of a D, minus the same interval that separates every other grade. In the example in which the interval between grades is 10 points and the value of D is 60, then the mathematically accurate value of an F is 50 points. This is not — contrary to popular mythology — "giving" students 50 points; rather, it is awarding a punishment that fits the crime. The students failed to turn in an assignment, so they receive a failing grade. They are not sent to a Siberian labor camp.

There is, of course, an important difference. Sentences at Siberian labor camps ultimately come to an end, while grades of zero on a 100-point scale last forever. Just two or three zeros are sufficient to cause failure for an entire semester, and just a few course failures can lead a student to drop out of high school, incurring a lifetime of personal and social consequences.

This issue is as emotional as anything I have encountered since the phonics versus whole language debate. Scholars regress to the persuasive tactics of professional wrestlers (no offense intended to wrestlers — this article will generate enough hate mail as it is), and research and logic are subordinated to vengeance masquerading as high standards. Because the emotional attachment to the zero is so strong, I have given up advocating that 50 points should represent the lowest grade. What I do think we can do to preserve some level of sanity in our grading system is to return to a four-point system. A's no longer equal 100 points, but four points. If there is a need for greater specificity, then we can choose an infinite number of digits to the right of the decimal point and thus differentiate between the 3.449 and 3.448 to our heart's content. But at the end of the day in such a system, the F is a zero — one point below the D. It is fair, accurate, and, some people may believe, motivational. But at least the zero on a four-point scale is not the mathematical travesty that it is when applied to a 100-point system.

1. Thomas R. Guskey and Jane M. Bailey, *Developing Grading and Reporting Systems for Student Learning* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2001).

2. Clarisse Butler, "Are Students Getting a Free Ride?," *New York Teacher*, 2 June 2004, available at www.nysut.org/newyorkteacher/2003-2004/040602grading.html; and Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, "Minimum Grades, Minimum Motivation," *The Education Gadfly*, 3 June 2004, available at www.edexcellence.net/foundation/gadfly/issue.cfm?id=151#1850. 

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