

Detailed Grading and Reporting Update in Response to Questions

6.28.17 HUUSD School Board Meeting

By Sheila Soule, Director of Curriculum

- 1) *Why has Harwood decided not to use “assignment level gradient grading” (uses example schools and cites Great Schools as a reference).*

First of all- it is critically important to note that the reasons we are making changes to the grading and reporting system is as a response to the feedback received by parents and students. We have made three key changes as a result of the feedback

- 1) Changing from terms associated with the score points on our rubrics to their numeric equivalents
- 2) Providing on-demand web-based views of student performance both within and across courses
- 3) Showing decimal values to allow for greater differentiation and gradients between levels

The Harwood Leadership team has worked hard to reach consensus on their current system of grading and reporting having considered many options and models through site visits, consultation, and other methods of sharing across the state and country. We have developed a criterion referenced model for grading and reporting. **Criterion-referenced** assignments and assessments are designed to measure student performance against a fixed set of predetermined **criteria** or learning standards (performance indicators). These concise, written descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do are called rubrics. Our rubrics have 4 levels. In our current system of grading and reporting (PowerSchool) students can only be evaluated using the term associated with the rubric (beginning, emerging, proficient, or advanced). In the JumpRope system the evaluation will be numerically based and will allow for decimal values between levels. This will provide sufficient interval scores between levels and will allow students and parents to see increments of growth more clearly than our current model. We do not evaluate using a score between levels (i.e. giving grade on an assignment such as 3.25) because that would be subjective. The purpose of a criterion reference model is to eliminate such subjectivity.

- 2) *Why is Harwood convinced that its transcript will be acceptable to colleges when written documentation from actual college admissions officers say Harwood’s transcript (with limited gradients) will put students at a disadvantage.*

Harwood is “convinced” because we have received plenty of feedback throughout the process that our system works. We have exceptional leadership in our Guidance department and they have many resources and professional contacts with schools and colleges. We are absolutely confident in our model through the feedback we have been provided. As we have shared many times, it is a fact that as long as the school profile is comprehensive and understandable, and it clearly explains the rigor of the academic program, the technicalities of the school’s assessment and grading system, and the characteristics of the graduating class, the admissions office will be able to understand the transcript and properly evaluate the strength of a student’s academic record and accomplishments. In short, schools use so many different systems for grading, ranking, and tracking students that a school’s system can only be properly understood when a transcript is accompanied by a comprehensive school profile. A class rank or GPA, for example, doesn’t mean much unless the admissions office also has the “key” (i.e., the school profile) that it needs to understand the applicant’s academic accomplishments and abilities in context.

As described above, our transcript will show gradients. Further, colleges have repeatedly communicated that they are accustomed to receiving a wide variety of transcripts from students across the country and across the world. They have their own systems in place for interpreting what a transcript is communicating. Harwood’s

school profile report will communicate, in detail, a description of the grading and reporting model used. The concern raised about the level of difficulty reaching a four is a matter of personal opinion. It is not a college issue. [This](#) is the most recent list of what colleges have pledged regarding proficiency-based transcripts and diplomas.

- 3) *What is Harwood doing to minimize risk and to ensure that next year's PBL scoring and grading will be successful? What school, if any, is Harwood using as a model for its combination of grading, software, report etc to help ensure unexpected results do not occur?*

Harwood is not following any one model for grading and reporting. As communicated multiple times, there is no one system in Vermont being utilized. Teachers and school leaders are developing models that reflect the work happening in their schools. We have selected the best of what we have gleaned from many schools such as Baxter Academy (ME), Montpelier, CVU, Franklin West, Colchester and many other schools. We see our model as an improvement to the letter grade system which will help students and their parents understand what skills and concepts have been mastered, and where more focus is needed. We are also bringing teachers to a shared understanding of student performance relative to grading and reporting, which is also a huge improvement and far less subjective than the past.

- 4) *How will Harwood address the fact that PowerLaw penalizes good grades- especially at the start of the school year and penalizes any performance dip? What schools has Harwood spoken to who have a similar implementation and utilize PowerLaw?*

It is not a "fact" that PowerLaw penalizes good grades especially in the start of a school year. PowerLaw shows a trend in student performance over time. In a proficiency based system (particularly one that is criterion referenced) students have the opportunity to tune and improve their work to show growth based on feedback and the use of benchmarks of quality work. PowerLaw was selected by teachers in our system because it best matched their own professional judgement of student performance given multiple examples and is the one method backed by educational research. JumpRope reports PowerLaw is the most widely used of all options available. Some schools that use JumpRope allow individual teachers to decide what calculation method to use in their classroom. WWSU has asked teachers to select and implement the same model. In a proficiency model the focus is not on mathematical measures of achievement but rather toward qualitative descriptions evidence. In the old model students would try to game the system by trying to figure out exactly what score was needed to move their grade to one that they were satisfied with. In this model, students will need to focus on the quality of their work in order to improve.

Power law is predictive. It's a formula designed to predict the score a student would receive NEXT based on a trend. That means a student can receive a 4 without receiving 4s every time. So a student who starts at a 1 but ends up with a series of 4s will receive a 4. That formula rewards learning instead of punishing students for starting at different places. A decaying average, which weights more recent scores over older scores to emphasize growth, also rewards learning, but cannot result in a 4. A mean does neither. To receive a 4 on a mean score, a student would have to receive nothing by 4s on every assessment. Opponents may be arguing that the student who gets 4s all along is disadvantaged if a different student ends up with a 4 but didn't start there. That, in fact, is the point of learning, and it's the basis for a criterion referenced system.


The main issue with Power Law is that it works better with more scores, so any example that uses 4 scores can be rigged to produce an odd result. The school has compacted its set of performance indicators to address that issue. It may be true that Power Law will not work as well early in a year as it does as more evidence of learning is entered into the system. It is also essential to know that PowerLaw is only used in calculating a student score at the assignment level within a course. To aggregate scores to the proficiency level and aggregate them again to

the proficiency level across courses a weighted average is applied that takes into account how many times a particular indicator has been assessed.

5) How will the 9th Grade Transcript be updated to reflected the 2016-17 School Year?

A Transcript is the official record of student performance that is shared with colleges when a student applies. It is different than the report card. We have made two changes to our proficiency system as we head into next school year. The grading and reporting system changes as described above based on the feedback from many throughout the year. And a consolidation of our proficiencies and performance indicators into a smaller more refined set (eliminating duplication and redundancy). Combined- these changes require careful attention to crosswalking student performance onto the transcript. Foremost, it is important to understand what will be represented on the proficiency-based transcript and how.

There are now ten Proficiencies (down from 17) that will be shown on a student transcript. Under each proficiency will be a summary of the courses that contributed to the overall score on the transcript in each year of high school. A draft/ sample is shown below (note this is not an actual transcript):

		HARWOOD UNION HIGH SCHOOL OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT 458 VT RT 100 MORETOWN VT 05660				Student Name: Address:			
		Student ID# Grade Level Date of Enrollment: Advisor:							
(802) 882-1100		Fax (802) 882-1199		www.harwood.org					
Graduation Date:				Cumulative GPA:					
Overview of Experiences by Grade Level									
Grade 9	Type	Grade 10	Type	Grade 11	Type	Grade 12	Type		
Humanities	Course	Three Democracies	Course	American Studies	Course	AP Literature	AP		
Earth Science	Course	Sophomore Eng	Course	Chemistry	Course	AP Physics	AP		
IMP 1	Course	Biology	Course	IMP 3	Course	AP Calculus	AP		
French II	Course	IMP 2	Course	Pre-Calculus	Course	French V	Course		
Health	Course	French III	Course	French IV	Course	UVM- French Studies	College		
Band	Course	PE	Course	Psychology	Course	Band	Course		
Soccer	Sport	Band	Course	Band	Course	Soccer- Team Captain	Sport		
		Soccer	Sport	Soccer	Sport				
Communication						(Score)	Learning Experiences		
Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12		Experiences Completed	Experiences Required
Humanities	3.0	More examples		More examples		More examples		English	4
Earth Science	2.0							Global Citizenship	8
Health	3.0							STEM	6
IMP 1	2.0							Wellness	4
French II	3.0							Arts	1.0

The scores for the 9th grade year have been verified by asking teachers to validate student scores on performance indicators (PI) and cross-walking those PIs under the new/proper proficiency headings. A numeric score will be substituted for the term associated with the score the student received (B-1, E-2, P-3, and A-4). We did not recalculate grades or scores using a different methodology than was used throughout the year because it would potentially result in retroactively changing the meaning of the feedback students had been given throughout the year which was unacceptable. The school report will be detailed to describe the changes in the grading and reporting system between the student's freshman and sophomore year.

If you have questions about this report please contact Sheila Soule ssoule@wvsu.org