LEADERSHIP SUPPORT THROUGH THE
TRANSITION TO
TO STANDARDS BASED GRADING

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TRANSITION TO
TO STANDARDS BASED GRADING

Presented by Jean E. Selby

A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends who have stood behind me throughout this entire process. Without their encouragement and ability to continually cheer me on, even when I wanted to raise the white flag, this project would not have reached completion. My appreciation knows no bounds.
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ABSTRACT

Determining student’s grades has been the target of great debate, more recently, when considering the intent of both accuracy and fairness. Historically, grading has been a very traditional method of averaging all academics, behaviors, responsibilities, and any other chosen attribute, based on the teacher’s belief of what a grade should mean. These decisions have been made, allowing teacher autonomy, however dismissing the importance of leadership to positively impact a shift towards more effective practices. Typically these grading methods were based on a teacher’s personal experience in their academic life. Research has indicated that grades can serve to impact students in negative ways, can mislead us in what students actually know, etc., unless we become more focused on what a grade should mean. In addition, leadership can have a major effect on moving forward to shift our grading practices to help become more effective in reporting student achievement. Without support from leadership, working to begin focusing on the importance of what student grades should be made up of, teachers are likely to continue assigning arbitrary and subjective grades.

This case study will analyze participant interview data regarding teachers’ perceptions of their personal experience and beliefs with grading, related to their perception of leadership. These participants were in various places on the continuum of their growth and utilizing standards based grading, however, ongoing support was still requested. The district under analysis is in varying stages of shifting from traditional to standards based grading, and is continually evaluating the logistics of this movement. Recommendations and implications for leadership will be provided, conceptualized through the lens of teacher support and professional development.
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of teachers in the secondary educational setting, concerning the implementation of a new model of assessment and grading. The background of the study reveals that a majority of secondary teachers, situated in a particular school system in the Midwestern section of the United States, have typically utilized a traditional form of grading. This traditional style of grading measures student achievement on a ten base system, reflecting a spread of percentage points equating to a letter grade. This grading approach evaluates required essential learning targets for students in a more systematic and structured manner versus the traditional subjective approach. Some educators believe the ability to align with this assessment movement will have a positive impact on teaching and student outcomes. When an educator moves away from the traditional grading model and towards the standards-based assessment model, this requires a pedagogical shift, focused on a need of both administrative and collegial support.

Implementing organizational change requires “having practitioners base their interactions with clients and stakeholders on research findings within evidence based practices or practices with evidence based programs” (Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, Wallace, p.28, 2005). Even when the purpose is clear, the role of educational change begins to harvest feelings of anxiety and emotions. These are commonly recognized as those that appear when trends begin to present change in current practice. As a leader, one must acknowledge the legitimacy of precise structures necessary to implement such change. “Research, policy, and practice agendas related to implementation need to be nurtured, debated, studied, and translated into practical advice that can transform human services”( p.77).
Leaders can foster success in change efforts through daily interactions with members of the organization. During these interactions, leaders reinforce the desired values and behaviors of those members directly affected by the change (Bolman & Deal, 1997). The success of change is related to the relationships of leaders and their influence on those educators who are willing to change their practices. Therefore, when promoting a shift toward assessing students differently and to support the integrity of this initiative, leaders must show support of those educators involved.

Finally, this study is intended to inform leadership regarding teacher perception about leadership support, within the context of change from traditional to standards-based grading systems. Based on the research, on leadership and change implementation synthesized in the following chapter, this study will inform district leaders about what supports teachers believe they need to make fundamental changes in their approach to grading.

Purpose

This research explored how teachers perceived leadership support as they considered a change in their assessment strategies. In this case, assessment practices vary across this district. This research identified the teacher perceived challenges that accompany change in grading practices. The outcomes of this study will inform leaders of the impact and support structures necessary to effect change in teacher practices.

Research Questions

This research focused on a school district’s teachers and their perception of leadership support, while changing to the assessment approach of standards-based grading. The intent was to focus on what types of support are perceived by teachers to be needed from their
building leaders. The following research questions were explored to address the research purpose.

(1) What type of support do teachers, who are interested and engaged in this transition to standards-based grading perceive they are receiving from building leadership?

(2) What type of support do teachers, who are interested and engaged in this transition to standards-based grading, perceive they need to receive from building leadership?

Interviews were conducted to address the above stated questions. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest human subjects feel most comfortable and often instinctually give responses in the form of a story, where there exists a beginning (teachers perception of support prior to instituting a change in practice), a middle (the support of teachers during the implementation phase), and end (continuing support as implementation has occurred and the change in practice is solidified). The interview questions were developed to explore how participants perceive the support they feel necessary to make such a change, in addition to their interpretations of what they actually experienced to shift towards the standards based grading model.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual underpinning of this study was the conception of principals as instructional leaders, as they supported teachers in their approach to standard’s based assessment. This research drew upon the theories of change and the impact change makes on those involved. These two conceptual frameworks helped construct the collection and analysis of data from participants in this research.

The art of grading and providing support in student learning has long been held as a duty for individual teachers. This process has often been based upon loose parameters of
expectations, subject to the beliefs and structures of teachers’ own school district. The teacher has the ability to use differing criteria to grade a student, which may have a multitude of factors that appear vastly different from teacher to teacher, even if they are teaching the same content, at the same level. Dependent upon a student’s placement in any given classroom of the same subject and grade level, the academic grade could look vastly differently based on the teacher’s perception of what derives the “value of a grade”. This gives way to subjectivity and questionable accuracy as a measurement for student learning and success. Stronge (2002) indicates that the ultimate reflection of an effective teacher is student achievement results. This further illustrates the current concern of how traditional grading is not accurate or informed, but subjective in nature. To bring more uniformity and consistency to the process, some teachers have begun to evaluate and utilize a more informed approach based on learning standards.

The focus of this study is the standards-based grading being utilized by various teachers in the district investigated. This group of teachers is aware of multiple approaches and processes of which a grade can be assigned to reflect student learning. The concern is that an educator’s perception of a student or a multitude of many other non-academic factors can have a direct influence on the grade given, and is currently used by many teachers in this school district. Many teachers feel that to grade a student on any basis other than learning objectives is misinforming the student’s level of accomplishment and learning. These individuals have assessed their beliefs and have made strides to become immersed in the understanding and practice of standards-based grading, resulting in an approach which indicates learning growth versus subjective assessment. Grading based on the actual learning goals at any given grade level has helped these teachers to better assess students and their learning, better inform the stakeholders, and realize that grades can reflect the actual level of learning. Gusky (1994)
warns us that the issue of grading looms large on the horizon for many educators. With learning standards now developed in most states, educators now face the daunting challenge of how best to grade and report student learning.

As a result of increased external pressures to raise achievement levels in students, teachers need leaders to support their practice. Those teachers involved in this change process were asked to participate in the study since they are currently the ones who will know best what leader support is needed and when. Bosert (1982) saw the effective principal as one who continually strove to improve the quality of the staff’s performance and to improve teacher morale, both of which have an impact on student achievement. Concerning the relationship between leadership and teacher, one must value the support necessary to move certain initiatives forward. Sergiovanni (2005) suggested the principal serves as a leader of change, recognizing the responsibilities of leading as cultivating and building the leadership capacity of others. Within these parameters, teachers can become empowered to better serve student needs by informing them clearly of their level of success and of the specific knowledge gained.

As leadership should be a component of insuring support, this can have a substantial impact on those involved in any type of initiative such as changing grading practices. Senge (1996) supports the idea that a principal should function as the head of a team. He indicates that leaders are those people who “walk ahead”, people who are genuinely committed to deep change in themselves and in their organizations. They lead through developing new skills, capabilities, and understandings (p. 45). In light of supporting an organization’s vision and work to help change occur, this leadership component is of great importance when considering initiating the means and support for change.
Rost (1991), points to the nature of relational change as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (p.102). The intent of these relationships holds the importance of influence and strategic procedures to make things happen, while experiencing improvement in practices and outcomes. The impact of influence on another individual’s practice can constitute a desire to create different grading structures according to one’s perception of how to do things both differently and better, ending in both different desired results. This change creates a systematic shift in thinking while safely moving towards a different pedagogical reality in practice.

In this research, the change process can also be viewed as dynamic and in line with Lewin’s (1995), foundational suggestions that includes the processes of “unfreezing, changing, and refreezing” (p. 2). Schools find themselves in a continual process of change, as they attempt to improve as an institution, or as part of an overall political and/or social shift. This change can be complex and described by Fullan (1993) as, “contending with the forces of change which is a never-ending process of finding creative ways to struggle with inherently contentious factors” (p. 33). As organizations work within themselves to find common ground and a basis for change, we must consider the initial need and/or concern based on overall needs of everyone involved, which all may not share. Fullan (2006) indicates this in his theories of action, as he suggests “Shared vision and ownership is more an outcome of a quality process than it is a precondition. This is important to know because it causes one to act differently in order to create ownership” (p. 10).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of the literature reviewed for this research is on teacher perception, related to leadership support during the consideration and change in grading practices, or more
specifically, standards based grading. There are other aspects of the review: grading systems, the standards based movement, organizational culture, change, and leadership. Throughout this process, the research focus relates to instructional leadership and the cultural impact with change. Considering the framework of teacher perception, we have to consider the impact on whole organizations when making a major shift in practice, and how that may impact organizational change.

Teachers are under increased pressure to demonstrate how their students are improving academically. Teachers who implement instructional methods, which consider specific learning needs, produce gains in student achievement (Marzano, 2001). Our focus in education is on adequately evaluating the outcomes of student learning in order to impact student achievement. This in turn produces learners who can have a more informed and positive perception of their learning. According to Stiggins (2005), students move along from grade level to grade level developing their sense of self and competency from their successes and failures within the classroom. If this is true we must consider our assessment tools and their purpose in the classroom. If assessment reform is the key to improving teaching and learning, the factors behind this approach of standards-based grading can be a focus of how we better support students and their progression in learning. Related to a change, and how we consider assessing students, Wormeli (2006) concedes teachers and students benefit in a process that is both productive and nurturing. Therefore, as we evaluate the purpose of grading, our goal as educators should be to communicate with students and parents how student achievement indicates success or not.
Traditional Grading

In school systems, a district typically outlines a requirement for grading and grade reporting. Using a typical scale, this approach systematically produces a common ability to evaluate students on even interval or percentage breaks. This system is often reflected in a percentage or point system equating an A with a score or percentage of 90% - 100%, a B equating to an average of 80 % - 89%, a C equating to an average of 70% - 79%, a D equating to an average of 60% - 69%, and the end scale being represented by any student achieving a 0% - 59% receiving an F. Guskey (2001) asserts the current methods of assigning grades, carries a great level of subjectivity. Similarly, Glickman (2002) argues the common practices of adding up points, to assign grades, involves an extremely complex manipulation of numbers that can often times lead to error. In addition, “the most serious problem with grades is that they serve many functions with a variety of ingredients (i.e. achievement, attitude, effort, behavior, participation, attendance, etc.) which have been packed into grades so that they have become almost meaningless for the intent of their perceived purpose – communication” (O’Connor, 2001, p. 39). Without set criteria, the subjectivity of grading has no basis other than a comparison between fellow students or an arbitrary sense of good versus poor student work. While many districts have determined certain grading systems as appropriate and meeting their needs, the critical component in the grading cycle is the criteria individual teacher’s use to establish a grade and evaluate the achievement level of any student (Stiggins, 2004).

Practices in grading vary according to educators and their personal experiences and/or those from whom they have learned. While most educators “try to assign grades they believe are fair and equitable, research shows that teachers differ tremendously in the sources of evidence they consider in determining students” grades” (Guskey, 2010, p. 2). Based upon
tradition deeply embedded in many instructional institutions, the traditions of grading become obviously fractured and misaligned. When grades mean different things in different classrooms, how do we provide students with accurate feedback to inform them of true academic achievement? The problem leads one to think there has to be a more formalized approach to legitimize the meaning of grades, and in fact report this achievement in a more structured and meaningful way. Reeves (2006) suggests, “When it comes to providing students with feedback – and grading is one of the many powerful sources of feedback – then I will argue that the freedom long enjoyed by private practitioners must take place within boundaries of fairness, mathematical accuracy, and effectiveness” (p. 113-114). Due to the lack of formal training in grading and reporting of student achievement, our current educators use a variety of methods to do what they deem as fair grading and assessment, based on their personal perspective or what has been modeled previously in their educational experiences. As state and national standards are beginning to develop a more thorough outline in what students should know at each grade level, our approach to assessment can potentially become more streamlined with a standards based focus. Guskey advises, “for the sake of our students, improvements in grading practices and reporting forms are not just needed – they are imperative” (p. 5).

Standards Based Grading

Assessment reform is one of the most highly favored concepts in improving teaching, learning, and accountability for today’s educational systems (McMillan, 2001; Stiggins, 2005). Classroom assessment and grading practices are meant to enhance the learning process and to encourage new knowledge to be obtained (McMillan, 2007, O’Connor, 2007, Stiggins, 2004). The standards based grading method has become a factor in the ability to more accurately assess a student’s learning levels, and to further inform stakeholders of the
accomplishment toward learning standards. “In a standards based system, grading and reporting must be done in reference to specific learning criteria, rather than in reference to normative criteria or on the curve” (Guskey, 2000, p. 21). This increasingly popular approach to grading and assessment reporting, for teachers, has been an encouraging means of being better informed of their learner’s progress, of getting greater results via their assessment approaches, and having the ability to better inform stakeholders of the actual learning taking place.

O’Connor (2001) asserts, “Achievement needs to be defined clearly; in most states achievement is now defined by what is published in state standards of learning” (p. 39). Aligning our reporting process to standards set forth by state and national standards will help to better inform the level of success for our students and for all stakeholders. Indeed, this serves to help educational stakeholders continue to plan and align a more systematic approach to the incremental standards of learning objectives.

A change in this approach to grading may be a struggle for some. In order to fully achieve this initiative, it takes support and the involvement of both district and building leadership, and ultimately, the necessary reporting procedures and protocol to communicate and support what student progress and achievement should indicate. Guskey (2010) states that a carefully constructed standards based report card represents a better quality reporting tool, with detailed communication about student learning. He also suggests “it not only offers better and more detailed information about student learning to parents, students, and others, it also brings focus to improvement efforts when needed” (p. 201). Too often teachers become constrained and forced into using a reporting tool that does not align adequately in supporting a standards based assessment approach.
Based on the complexity of such a change to standards based grading, a limited, but growing group of individuals in this school district have established themselves as standards based practitioners. As this type of reform is both challenging and complex, it also appears to be growing ever so consistently, both locally and across the nation, as teachers become more informed and motivated by its ability to better define learning and achievement. This approach particularly aligns with our purpose as educators in informing our stakeholders with better information. Stiggins (2000) notes there has been a “demand for higher levels of competence for larger proportions of our students, which has brought about a demand for schools driven by expectations of high achievement, not merely rank order” (p. 413). Due to the positive and changing impact this is making with current participants, coordinated efforts must begin happening to support this practice. “For example, districts that have not made the necessary changes to align district reporting procedures with standards, may force individual teachers to continue long-standing classroom assessment and grading practices that are aligned with current traditional reporting procedures rather than state standards” (McMunn et. al, 2003, p. 5). To reverse the progression towards a more systematic and informed method of reporting student progress at this point, would be counterproductive to any schools goal of improving results. However, “large scale change in an organization is unlikely to be successful without the support of top management” (Yukl, 2006, p. 301). As research and approach to communicating achievement continue to evolve and change, so must the practices and procedures system wide.

Organizational Culture and Change

Consideration of the cultural environment is important when leaders consider how practice is both perceived and changed. Deal and Peterson (1999) indicated the concept of school culture has been overlooked and omitted from discussions surrounding school
improvement, despite the fact it is has been documented as having a substantial effect. As Martin (2002) looked at practices within an organization, she suggested, “what is important is not the cultural manifestations itself, but how people interpret it” (p. 91). Within the context of culture lies the heart of how many view change and how it occurs. We sometimes interpret the ability to change by how well our organization accepts or supports phases of change.

Defining culture holds many interpretations and indicators of what we would characterize as such. Culture has been defined many different ways. Some of the following words have been used to describe aspects of culture: assumptions, attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, ceremonies, covenants, dress, expectations, fairy tales, heroes, history, ideology, knowledge, language, laws, myths, norms, practices, purpose, rewards, rituals, stories, structure, symbols, traditions, values in a school (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Cavanaugh & Dellar, 1997a; Cavanaugh & Dellar, 1997b; Fiore, 2004; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Gruenert, 2000; Gruenert, 2005; Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Hopkins et al., 1994; Kilman et al., 1986; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999a; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999b; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Marzano et al., 2005; Morgan, 2006; Norris, 1994; Parish & Aquila, 1996; Peterson & Deal, 2002; Pritchard, Marrow & Marshall, 2005; Schein, 1992; Schein, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1984; Stolp, 1994, as cited in Mees, 2008).

Bolman and Deal (2003) suggest “over time, every organization develops distinctive beliefs and patterns”, which contribute to defining a specific culture (p. 231). It is also suggested that culture is both a product because of what was produced by those previously in the organization, as well as a process due to its renewal as new members enter and make the prior ways their own. Morgan (2006) contends, “Culture is not something that can be imposed on a social setting, rather it develops during the course of social interaction” (p. 132). Development of the culture influences the format, function, and facade of an organization.
As change becomes evident within the structures of any organization, culture can become impacted as some may disenfranchise themselves based on their beliefs. Morgan (2006) indicates, “it is a challenge of transforming the mind-sets, visions, paradigms, images, metaphors, beliefs and shared meanings that sustain behavior through which the desired new reality can be lived on a daily basis” (p. 138). Bolman and Deal (1997) point to four barriers in organizational change. First, the human resource frame highlights anxiety, uncertainty, feelings of incompetence, and neediness. This frame is supported by essential strategies to use to lessen the impact by training for new skills, participation and involvement, and psychological support. Secondly, the structural frame points to confusion, chaos and a loss of stability and clarity. Supportive strategies are typically renegotiating formal patterns and policies, in addition to communication needs. The third frame is political. Conflict between assumed winners and losers, and disempowerment create the need to build arenas for the purpose of building new coalitions where issues can be negotiated. The fourth and final frame is the symbolic frame. This focuses on wanting to hold on to the past, a loss of meaning, and losing purpose. Strategies of addressing these needs are creating transition rituals, mourning the past and celebrating the future (p. 321).

The will to resist change can greatly impact an organizational culture. Yukl (2006) points to “resistance to change as a common phenomenon for individuals and organizations” (p.285). He indicates the resistance is due to multiple factors and beliefs; lack of trust, change is unnecessary, change is not feasible, economic threats, high cost, fear of personal failure, loss of status or power, threat to values and ideals, and resentment of interference. A natural reaction to change can be resistance by a multitude of factors and feelings by those impacted the greatest.
A change process model was constructed by Lewin in 1951. Lewin proposed the change process is divided into three separate phases: “unfreezing, changing, and refreezing” (as cited in Yukl, 2006). He suggested in the unfreezing stage, individuals begin to realize things cannot continue the way they have always occurred. In the changing stage, individuals look for new ways of doing things with a new approach. In the last stage, the refreezing stage, a new approach becomes implemented and becomes the new norm. (p. 286).

Cultural Change is time consuming and challenging, and it is not only possible, but necessary (Reeves, 2009). Moving towards a model of improvement and meaningful change requires a sense of “empowerment within people, with a sense of efficacy and the conviction their work matters” (Reeves, 2006, p. 78). In addition, Reeves suggests, individuals can be confident and proceed toward implementation once they have an understanding of the change. Initiatives should be directed by leaders who can influence the culture and be the steward of an organization’s vision and mission. Systematic ways of influencing lasting cultural change include creating the need for change within those with whom one works. As Bolman and Deal (1997) indicate, “leaders need the kind of versatility in thinking that fosters flexibility in action. They need the capacity to act inconsistently when consistency fails, diplomatically when emotions are raw, non-rationally when reason makes no sense, politically when confronted by parochial self-interests, and playfully when fixation on task and purpose seems counterproductive” (p. 377). Nothing ever remains the same in our worlds, and especially in education. Educational leaders must be ready to evolve with every change challenge and opportunity presented through this process.
Yukl (2006) espouses, “Successful implementation of change requires a wide range of leadership behaviors” (p. 302). He points to two areas of leadership behavior which are related yet different. These two categories are “political/organizational actions” and “people-oriented actions” (p. 302). Within the scope of political/organizational actions to create change, several factors are needed to bring about the desired results; determine who can oppose or facilitate change, build a broad coalition to support the change, fill key positions with competent agents, use task forces to guide implementation, make dramatic, symbolic changes that affect the work, and monitor the progress of change. People oriented actions include; leaders must create a sense of urgency about the need for change, prepare people to adjust to change, help people deal with the pain of change, provide opportunities for early successes, keep people informed about the progress of change, demonstrate continued commitment to the change, and empower people to implement the change. Supporting change initiatives through sustained efforts to support personnel will help to alleviate the unknown, build confidence in staff, and empower those necessary to see initiatives through the elements of a possible shift in how things evolve and change.

The culture of the school, coupled with high standards and expectations, provide us a framework with which to consider the organization and its ability to be progressive. Fullan (2002) leads us toward the idea that “leaders who have deeper and more lasting impact provide more comprehensive leadership than focusing just on higher standards” (p. 2). Considering how change is viewed, perception becomes reality for each individual involved and is dependent upon their personal experiences. Much like Hargreaves (2001) suggests, the nature of the emotional experience of a teacher about change depends on whether change is due to a mandate
or if it is self-initiated. This emotional experience of change has implications for how teachers perceive educational leadership.

Teacher perception of leaders and the support teachers receive related to change and/or implementation of new initiatives can be directly connected in how successful a program is or not. The more successful change can be perceived by teachers, the more positive their emotional reactions and willingness to be involved will be. Leithwood and Jantzi (1996) indicated certain variables influence teacher perceptions of leadership practices. They indicated that “doing good work on behalf of one’s school, and being seen to do such work, is likely the most powerful strategy for positively influencing teachers” perceptions of one’s leadership (p. 531). Many times the perceived effectiveness of leaders is measured by how their influence supports teachers through these ongoing change initiatives. A teacher’s perception of their building leader’s support could greatly impact the integrity of any new initiative, as well as teachers’ overall perception of the principal’s leadership. Anderson (1998) supported this when he suggested, “the potential of participation is most fully realized when the commitments and energies of democratic leaders are directed in concert with courageous followers toward the elimination of the institutional and psychological barriers to authentic forms of democratic participation” (p. 594).

The actual implementation of a program, with implementation being defined as “a specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions” (Fixsen et.al, 2005, p. 5), is critical if success is desired. This brings to light the approach behind any change process. The targeted focus of change in this study is no different. As related to this study, teachers will find change purposeful only if the evidence clearly shows a new approach can provide more informative and/or positive outcomes. As Fullan (2001)
suggested, leaders must always consider the coherence-making and meaning making of organizational members, since our complex societies inherently generate overload, fragmentation and non-linearity. It is therefore crucial for teachers to find meaning and see purpose in the change processes in which they are involved. The presentation and integration however, also has to be clearly strategic and purposeful by the leadership. As those involved consider this new approach to assessment, the leader has to consider all elements such as “make use of a range of data inputs to inform decision making, support the overall processes, and keep staff organized and focused on the desired clinical outcomes” (p.29). This further indicates the need for a building leader to pursue a clear plan of approach and support for this type of implementation to occur in an effective and efficient manner. Fullan (2001) concluded that leadership can be the most important factor influencing whether reform efforts are successful or not when implemented.

*Instructional Leadership*

“Instructional leadership models emerged in the early 1980’s, from early research on effective schools” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 329). Prior to this, there were neither coherent models nor validated instruments for the purpose of studying instructional leadership, as principals were expected to be the managers of their buildings. The public demands made it clear that no longer was management sufficient, as it began to become clear that principal leadership was a key component for more effective schools. The shift, which began in the 1980’s was a response to the public’s desire that schools raise standards and improve the academic performance of students (Hallinger, 1992; Leithwood, 1994). During this time there was a shift in attention to educational roles with both teacher and principals receiving more emphasis (Murphy, 1999). An assumption of this era was the principal should become directly
involved with the teaching and learning processes of their building. As a leader, one must anticipate what is required to manage and support change. While leaders are only seen as managers by many within an organization, Leithwood (1994) suggested that instructional leaders not only manage, but engage in behaviors such as supervision, coaching, staff development, and modeling designed to influence teachers thinking and practice.

Around the 1990’s, “researchers began to shift their attention to leadership models construed as more consistent with evolving trends in educational reform such as empowerment, shared leadership, and organizational learning” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 330). This 1990”s research also shifted the understanding of leadership “in new directions, focusing on the larger external forces that were shaping the future of schools” (Beck & Murphy, 1993). This evolution of the educational leadership role has been labeled as reflecting “second order” change, as it is a condition specifically focused on changing the organizations normative structure (Leithwood, 1994). This was also commonly related to transformational leadership, another leadership view and definition, based on roles during this era (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). This era was one in which theorists brought into question the validity of labels of the dynamics and structures of leadership. However, for the purposes of this work, the focus will remain on the understanding of instructional leadership.

Hallinger & Murphy (1985) conceptualized the most frequently used understanding of instructional leadership as having three dimensions: defining the school”s mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate. Within these dimensions, there are multiple functions which define what specifically support this work:

1. **Defining the School”s Mission.** A clear vision of what the school should be attempting to accomplish is communicated to students and staff in such a manner
that a shared purpose develops which unites the efforts of the school members. This dimension is characterized by: framing school goals and communicating schools goals.

2. **Managing the Instructional Program.** This dimension focused on those activities that involve the principal’s working with teachers in areas specific to curriculum and instruction. It is characterized by: supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating curriculum, and monitoring student progress.

3. **Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate.** The principal influences student success through the norms and attitudes of the staff and students. This dimension is characterized by: protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility and providing incentives for teachers, and developing and enforcing academic standards (p. 221-224).

Based on these leadership functions and behaviors, it is apparent this concept of leadership becomes technical and involved, but ultimately Marzano, Waters & McNulty (2005) indicate that a critical function of leaders is the knowledge to “do the right work” (p. 76) in their schools.

In more general terms, to understand a complicated concept like leadership, one must understand that the concept does not lend itself to one simple definition (Leithwood & Duke, 1999). It is a broad definition and understanding when considering the components associated with leading any group. Leithwood & Duke convey to us much the same understanding, “As complexity rises in leading, precise statements lose meaning and meaningful statements lose precision” (p. 46). In addition, research indicates that while the traits of principals are important, instructional leadership behaviors such as modeling what is expected,
communicating high expectations, challenging staff members, involving them in decisions, and providing them with professional development opportunities are more often associated with positive effects in schools (Kirby, Paradise & King, 1992). Therefore, it is evident the purposes and actions of instructional leadership may be more compelling indications of what will impact movement and change within a faculty.

*Leadership and Influence*

Yukl (2006) stated, “Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (p. 8). Making change within an organization has to take into consideration the relationships required to move individuals toward to right direction. Rost (1991) indicates “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes (p. 102) can bridge the understanding and response between stakeholders. Sergiovanni (1994a) recommends “schools be perceived as communities, in order that meaningful relationships and shared values become the foundation for school reform” (p. xix). Multiple perspectives of relationships and the influence over another can be perceived as beneficial or not. In addition, Sergiovanni (1994b) also discusses the characteristics, including the relational side, of such a leader and indicates there are descriptors to support his perception of effective leaders:

1. They will be people of substance.
2. They will be people who stand for important ideas and values.
3. They will be people who are able to share their ideas with others in a way that invites them to reflect, inquire, and better understand their own thoughts about the issues at hand.
4. They will be people who use their ideas to help others come together in a shared consensus.

5. They will be people who are able to make the lives of others more sensible and meaningful (p. 6).

The new approach to leadership has, at its foundation, relationships where “different settings and people evoke some qualities from us and leave others dormant” (Wheatley, 1992, p. 34). Therefore, leaders lead their schools through relationships, not rules, directives, or demands.

When dealing with staff, “professional relationships are central to the effective execution of many of the other responsibilities” (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005, p. 58). To garner buy-in from those we intend to influence, leaders must be seen as supportive through various means. This supportive nature “helps to build and maintain effective interpersonal relationships” (Yukl, 2006, p. 72). When managing people, it is imperative to be considerate and friendly toward people, which is more likely to win their friendship and loyalty. “The emotional ties that are formed make it easier to gain cooperation and support from people on whom the manager must rely to get the work done” (p. 72). In a variety of studies, this very element of leading has been studied. Yukl also stated that evidence from these various types of studies have shown a “weak positive effect on subordinate performance” p. 72). Each and every interaction a leader has with a staff member creates another definition in the relationship perspective of the staff member. Therefore, when considering a shift in the way a staff understands change in any area, the way a leader has previously interacted with this individual will precondition their acceptance and perception of any change suggestion. “Change leaders know that they do not change organizations without
changing individual behavior, and they will not change individual behavior without affirming the people behind the behavior” (Reeves, 2009, p. 10).

DESIGNS AND METHODS

Using a qualitative case study design, this research is focused on selected secondary teachers in a Midwestern school district and their perceptions about leadership support, while currently engaging in a change towards utilizing the practice of standards based grading. This case study design focuses on “the process of conducting the inquiry, the bounded system or unit of analysis selected for study, or the product, the end report of a case investigation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 42). My goal, within this study is to deepen the understanding concerning how teachers perceive the support they received from leadership as they participate in this newer approach to grading. Teacher participants in this study were purposefully selected for the purpose of interviews, to best help myself and others understand the connection between the research questions and answers.

Creswell (2003) suggests that human beings construct meaning as they experience and interact in the world due to their social perspective. As teachers become immersed in their experience of this grading practice, I have investigated their perception of leadership support based on the interactions and opportunities they encountered. I conducted 8 interviews of secondary teachers, and 4 interviews of curriculum coordinators, currently utilizing standards based grading and their perception of the leadership support they have received while transitioning to this type of grading. I focused and relied on what Patton (1990) refers to as “The logic and power of purposeful sampling, which lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about
issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful sampling*” (p. 169).

Merriam (1998) refers to purposeful sampling as a study “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned (p. 61). Within this sampling I did what Merriam suggested as “first determining what selection criteria are essential in choosing the people or sites to be studied”. My interviewees were selected based on their active engagement in standards-based grading, at the high school level of the secondary structure in this school district. I used this type of representation due to its characteristics of a “typical sample, reflecting the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest, because they are unique or atypical” (p. 62). “As I collected and analyzed data, the basis of “theory or general pattern of understanding emerged as it began with initial codes, developed into broad themes, and coalesced into a broad interpretation” (Creswell, 2003, p. 182).

I used specific data, such as participant interviews with those who are actively using standards based grading to collect enough information to formulate meaning. This took place in what Creswell (2003) refers to as the “natural setting” (p.180), to “develop a level of detail about the individual or place and to be highly involved in actual experiences of the participants”. Investigating the lives of others and their reality created a need to ensure the dependability and credibility to make sure this research is conducted in a way that it generates trustworthy results (Merriam, 1998). The data is trustworthy to account for credibility and dependability. This data was also analyzed by asking questions of the data, developing analysis from the information collected, coding the data, clustering commonalities, and eventually validating the data for the purposes of dependability (Creswell, 2003). As I continued to look at
various components of this research to construct meaning, I did “seek to describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205).

Based on this qualitative data collected, the general determination of credibility is based on a variety of approaches. The first approach of examining collected interview data allowed me to use this information to begin to see and then determine themes, or “triangulate” the data (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). Considering the legitimacy of findings, or more importantly the accuracy, I used “member-checking” (p. 196) to double check the outcomes of my understanding from interviews reflecting the intent of participants in the study. Utilizing these approaches, in addition to “peer debriefing” (p. 196), this helped to assure the dependability and accuracy of my findings (Merriam, 1998). In addition, Merriam suggests, “the more grounded in supporting detail a researcher’s findings are, the more credible and trustworthy they are” (p. 152).

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This study should serve to inform interested district personnel, specifically district leaders, about the perception of teacher’s perceptions of administrative support as they change to standards-based grading. To continue expecting increased results and growth in student achievement, educators persist in searching for practices to better meet student needs. As Collins (2001) discovered, leaders who have a deeper and more lasting impact, provide more comprehensive leadership by offering support and not by focusing only on higher standards. This study will provide insight into what levels of support are current realities and what is needed to shift toward perceived positive assessment approaches. The study’s results will ultimately help leaders understand the benefits and/or implications of their actions as educators work to improve in their assessment practices.
FINDINGS

Three broad themes became obvious based on teachers interviewed, as they spoke to the shift in thinking about student assessment and what impacted or encouraged changes in their practice. These themes focused on principal leadership, teacher leadership, and personal beliefs. The theme of principal leadership emerged as interviewee responses focused on trust, professional development, and culture. The second theme was defined when teacher leadership structures within the school setting (such as executive councils, professional learning teams, and collegial modeling) were utilized to strengthen understanding and practice. The third theme, personal beliefs, was revealed as teachers felt strongly about the subjectivity of grades, a student’s ability to play the game of grades, and the accuracy and/or meaning of a grade. Responses are delineated in these findings indicated by interview number, page number, and line number.

Principal Leadership

Principal leadership is clearly a factor in how school initiative or change can be perceived as either effective or not. A leader must understand and carry a vision of what is possible, how to get there, and what it takes to make it happen, as one considers the future of enhancing school programs and procedures. School goals have to be continually framed and communicated by the principal, including what the principal must do to ensure that clear and measurable goals are focused on the academic progress of its students (Hallinger, 2003). Good principals take the risk of expecting best practices from teachers, in order to realize what it takes to make excellence a reality through continual renewal. Trust, professional development,
and culture all constitute an important piece of this continual work to make gains in practice and student outcomes.

Trust

Trust became one of the sub themes when teachers responded to their perceived needs concerning principal leadership. Teachers’ feeling trusted, allowed for trial and error in approaches or systems that eventually may have ended in something other than the intended target. The unexpected outcome, however, was acceptable to the principal and was then supported for effective practice and professional growth. “I have the most supportive administration and staff you can possibly imagine, so you just know, and like having sort of the freedom to try new things” (I.4, P.87, L.141). The ability to feel support of the principal while experimenting with protocol was clear. The perception of the principal in this secondary setting proved to elicit support and trust from many. As one interviewee suggested, “We really want what is best for our kids and we are going to move in that direction and he trusts us” (I.3, P.83, L.236).

According to Marzano (2005), “Specific actions leaders must exhibit include knowing the concerns of the employees, knowing what motivates employees, and knowing the necessary conditions for employees to operate at levels of maximum effectiveness (p.16). As a practitioner, one must feel compelled to continue renewing ones skills which leads to formulating more effective practices without the threat of consequences. As an interviewee suggested, “My principal said, I want teachers to make mistakes every day in order to learn, that is a neat message from up above” (I.6, P.100, L.249). Trust exuded by building principals in this setting, allows for experimental practices that continue to help move teachers to new levels of competence, including assessment practices.
Professional Development

The second sub theme under principal leadership focused on the opportunity for professional development. Many times when we think of professional development, it creates a preconceived notion of a distant location or conference setting outside of the school setting. From these interviews, it became evident that professional development was, in a sense, the ongoing study of materials and experiences within house, allowing for teachers to build their capacity of understanding. For example, it was stated, “The grading articles that the principal brought in, there were articles all the time and then you know, I have twitter so I signed up for these national guys that are on twitter, and I read articles that they send” (I.7, P.107, L.242). Another stated, “My building specifically took on some literature, exploration, and reading on this area and didn’t really force us, so we were exposed to many types of grading practices and approaches and theories as a community, and we discussed and talked about them” (I.1, P.69, L.44). Not only have these teachers felt immersed in information helping them feel more aware about a new approach to grading, they feel professional development is helping them gain new insight and knowledge, which is necessary for personal growth.

The obvious message has been that teachers see the principal as valuing building capacity both directly and indirectly with teachers who are focused on the study of new methodologies. It was also clear suggestions in both practice and study were provided, not forced. “I feel like they are kind of in it with us, but they are not on top just watching over us and directing us, but helping with all of this planning and things, and trying to help us go in that direction, but not really dragging us along” (I.4, P.89, L.233). Considering the principal’s role in leading professional development, Wilmore (2002), suggests that principals should “provide staff development on basic and alternative models of assessment, how to disaggregate and
analyze test scores and other forms of measurement, and how to use the results for enhanced teaching and learning” (p.30). We may then conclude that professional development in and of itself can simply be making others more aware. In addition, providing information through professional documents and research suggests allowing teachers the freedom to embed new applications into their practice.

Culture

Culture is the third sub theme that emerged from the theme of principal leadership. Interviewees indicated their place of work feels as if it is an arena which encourages renewal. Much like one individual stated, “All of us are kind of encouraging one another, but it is the administration that is going „Yes”, this is how we are going to do this and you know, we will help you figure this out and we are kind of as a building, we are going to make that shift” (I.4, P.88, L.184). Specifically, when there is visible allowance for trial and error, as indicated by the teachers, this indicates a cultural acceptance and safety net for those willing to enhance current practice. Pointedly, we can make the assumption that building leadership is a pillar of support within this culture of expectations, and sends the message the experimentation can be risked without the fear of failure. Agreeing with this perception about leadership as more of a formality is an individual who stated, “He (referring to building principal) recognizes innovation and I think that has always been the culture here” (I.6, P.103, L.257). This is an important element as Yukl (2006) describes this type of change in culture as “an organizational approach seeking to improve human capability, commitment, and creativity by increasing individual and organizational learning, strengthening cultural values that support flexibility and innovation, and empowering people to initiate improvements” (p. 289).
Utilizing symbolism, leaders are culturally aware as they “seek to use the best in an organization”’s traditions and values as a base for building a culture that provides cohesiveness and meaning, articulating a vision that communicates the organization”’s unique capabilities and mission” (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p.290). The display of symbolic leadership seems to be ongoing in this particular setting of support as individuals feel a sense of encouragement from building leadership. A balance of expectations and support allows for innovative freedom without the feel of top-down pressures. As suggested by another interviewee, “I don’t want it to be a top-down thing, but this is how we do things and this is what we do, and so here are some things that you guys can do to practice this” (I.2, P.76, L.137).

It can be both a desire and delicate balance, as a principal, to want to see your building move ahead while encouraging others to embrace change in exchange for better results. However, this balance must compliment the values aligned with the cultural aspects within the current learning environment. In this study, and the setting it investigates, renewal is valued and leadership is expected to continue to provide support. It is also apparent that a new approach to assessment has already been established for those in this study.

Teacher Leadership

“Teacher leadership is a concept that extends far beyond just a slogan and has become an integral part of education reform” (Reeves, 2009, p.137). Teacher leaders lead a variety of ideas, initiatives, groups, etc. in schools. This integral structure of leading allows the work between colleagues to take on the roles and responsibilities of change. Regardless of the type of change, reflective practice on how to assess students fairly is sure to be the platform for the many views on which approach is best. Ownership in the way individual teachers determine how to assess student learning and then representing that in a final grade is highly emotional.
Teachers leading teachers through this process of evaluating how we do business is much less threatening than top down initiatives. Often the influence of teacher leaders can bring about a more logical and systematic approach. Through various teacher leadership groups and initiatives, work to standardize grading seems to be taking hold.

**Executive Council**

The executive (leadership) council is a representative group of teachers, elected by their peers, who are charged with focusing this building’s professional development. As one individual explained it, “They are the governing body for school improvement and so they, under their preview, they look at the two biggest things for leading what you are talking about, and the biggest things overall is guiding the professional learning teams” (I.5, P.92, L.150). Another stated, “The executive council is an elected group of teachers that kind of leads instructionally and helps kind of build up the school culture” (I.3, P.83, L.247). This group works to understand and create the sense of urgent and necessary professional movement within the building. By making sense of how to enhance current practice, this group then provides the next tier or structure of professional study groups (ie. shared planning groups within various areas of content) with the focus and/or work to move forward teacher study and practice. In essence, “Effective professional development allows teachers to learn from and teach their fellow faculty members, through continued discussions, demonstrations and assistance” (NAESP, 2001, p.45).

The executive council includes “six members of our teaching staff nominated by their peers and they lead what is called „shared planning‟. So, they set the agenda for meetings where teachers from different disciplines get together and concentrate/talk about and share 45 minutes about big picture questions like grading” (I.1, P.70, L.55). This ownership in overseeing the
change within teaching practices can be a daunting task when attempting to motivate a staff to move in the right direction. The building principal is also a member of this group as the work towards professional development is considered and decided. The principal’s role, outside of the norm of helping to guide the decisions, is to “carefully design and nurture the conditions that promote learning for all – individuals, teams, and organizations” (Kaser, Loucks-Horsely, Mundry & Stiles, 2006, p.139). This impact, however, is making great strides in getting the interest levels to peak so the work continues to evolve. Knowing this team is working as building leaders, along with the principal, they constitute a shared understanding and vision of how to enhance and extend current practices to reach better results.

Professional Learning Teams – Shared Planning

Based on the focus of the Professional Learning Communities initiative in this district, a need for educational systems to be reflective practitioners for sustained and substantive improvements in practice is a must. The desire to improve the work is understood and supported by both district and school goals. To build the capacity of school personnel to function at the level of collaborative inquiry, one interviewee conveyed this understanding, “I think the most support that a teacher needs and that I needed was just the other teachers working collaboratively with me, my people, and my department chairs to say it is okay to almost empower you to think outside the box” (I.3, P.80, L.66). This evidence leads one to understand the approach of working with colleagues to embrace the ideologies which can help strengthen the desire to forge ahead with the work and try new techniques to build a true community of learning. As Senge (1990) implied, “The most successful corporation of the future will be a learning organization” (p.4).

Considering the shift to new realities and practice, one individual stated,
“I really just needed somebody to talk to, somebody to think through with me, somebody who was kind of in a similar spot and wanting to think about the same things I was thinking about, and just brainstorming ideas about how we can do this, what is a good way to do this, and then figure out how to make that work in my classroom with a particular course that I was teaching” (I.5, P.91, L.58).

The ability to step out onto new limbs of understanding becomes challenging and is sometimes daunting when teachers feel they are not alone in the effort. These responses indicate that the work together in groups based on teachers” similarities helps to distinguish the feelings of working in solidarity. The National Middle School Association issued a paper titled This We Believe, with strategies for school improvement and called for the following:

“Building a learning community that involves all teachers and places top priority on the education and healthy development of every student, teacher and staff member … professional development should be integrated into the daily life of the school and directly linked to the school’s goals for student and teacher success and growth. To meet these goals, people work together in study groups, focus on learning results, analyze student work, and carry out action research” (2003, p.11).

The awareness and impact of collaborative efforts are clear and feedback indicates this approach yields rich results, as attested to in an interview, “I think the PLC piece is huge, that makes it and I do not want this to sound ugly, but it makes it more difficult for somebody to shut their door and do what they want, even if they continue to do that, they are part of a PLC, and they will hear conversations that will at least start them thinking” (I.9, P.122, L.236).

Contrary to traditional approaches of everyone for themselves, this setting has become progressive through collaboration.

Modeling

The phenomenon of modeling is two-fold. Not only does the principal have to model support for working to move learning in the right direction, teachers also use the proponents of leadership to help their colleagues move as well. Building principals help model this initiation
of change and as one person stated, “So I have been blessed here, really lucky to be in this environment, and it is just, I think we have just been lucky to continually have leaders that are, that are just stepping up to lead the change” (I.3, P.84, L.282). Principal leadership has impacted this desire to continually improve by their display of both providing the materials and dialogue, as well as the interest in sustaining a learning community through their actions. As Fullan (2007) indicated, “I know of no improving school that doesn’t have a principal who is good at leading improvement” (p. 160). Teachers in this setting have a sense of urgency to continue developing their skills, while receiving what is perceived as support from the principal. These individuals were clear that the principal “is involved and buys into it” (I.3, P.83, L.228).

The second tier of modeling happens between classroom teachers. As the trust becomes built between teachers in this setting, the openness to make one’s classroom available to others has become a practice. One individual responded by suggesting, “The struggle is with what I’m doing is something very different that what I have ever done before, that is an emotional piece, and if you see a peer do that, or even through an intermediate, like a person in resource saying that Mr. X has his supplement and it works in his class, so maybe he could do it in here, even that class, that helps too” (I.1, P.71, L.109). Teachers need to see something work successfully many times before buying into a certain methodology. They also need to “see effective instructional strategies in action before they can make them their own” (Casey, 2011, p.25). Another respondent stated,

“A colleague of mine was doing it (standards based grading) and you know, it”s like huh, interesting and you know, once you saw it work and so I know, what were some of the complications, but what were the huge payoffs, that made you more interested and that is when I started doing more research myself on it….so you see a content or grade level has been able to do it and do it successfully and
Modeling/coaching can be deemed critical when others see certain approaches or techniques work successfully and want to apply them to their own practice. In this case, as another indicated, “It is harder to completely do something new in your practice if you haven’t practiced it or seen it happen before” (I.9, P.121, L.166). A shift in thinking and the realization of improved methods are in place as this community of learners continues working collaboratively with each other, for the sake of all students. “When a school has a healthy culture, the professionals within it will seek the tools that they need to accomplish their goal of universal student achievement; they will give a school new life by overcoming the staff division that halts transformation” (Muhammad, 2009, p. 16).

**Personal Beliefs**

The third theme, not originally an inquiry of my research but which became an unexpected outcome, became evident as teachers talked about their perceptions concerning grading practices. As indicated earlier, grading is a topic that can become emotionally charged with personal convictions. Teachers either choose to grade students based upon what their own personal experiences were in education or what they deem necessary for reporting how a student learns, which can embody multiple elements academic or not. As Bolman & Deal (1997) propose, “In a world of people and groups with very different interests and worldviews, justice is never easy to define, and disagreement about criteria is inevitable” (p. 348). This applies to the elements of grading which can be distinguished by many factors, some of which are not academic related, as the conflict between varying schools of thought suggest. Teachers indicated their views on grading, by the nature of how they personally understand grades.
Some teachers feel grades are an injustice to the integrity of reporting actual student success. These elements were bound in three categories; subjectivity, the game of school, and accuracy. 

*Grading is Subjective*

“Every day you can look at two kids in the same biology classes in different sections sitting there studying close to the same base of knowledge, one is going to pass and one is going to fail, and it is not based on what they know” (I.1, P.70, L.83). Teachers feel a sense of frustration in the variance of how grades are assigned, and what that means between like classes, but different teachers. “It should be acknowledged that, although most teachers” decisions are based on professional judgment, some are based on emotion” (O’Connor, 2009, p.19). Multiple facets of teacher choice in what makes up a grade can send different messages in how a student’s grade is perceived, then calculated. While some of those interviewed held onto the virtue that teachers want to do what is best for kids, it was clear grading is still very much a choice of what the teacher feels should make up a grade, therefore there is a lack of consistency and cohesiveness between teachers when it comes to what the grade ultimately reflects. “The private nature of grading and the dramatic inconsistency in approaches within departments in high schools and colleges and between classrooms in elementary schools means that educators have major problems to address” (p. 21).

How do we manage trying to balance what seems like inequitable advantages and disadvantages for those students being most impacted by our divisive and variance in grading protocol? Stiggins (2000) suggests that we have an ethical and pedagogical responsibility to understand and apply only acceptable grading practices. Teachers felt there are ways to “take the randomness out of grading” (I.11, P.131, L.187). Another felt that there are “example after example on how a grade does not, a traditional grade does not reflect a student”s learning, and
it can be punitive” (I.12, P.136, L.43). It seems that leadership needs to reinforce the suggestion that we must align and strengthen the meaning of grades, as O’Connor (2001) alluded to, “Principals have a critical role in minimizing the misuse and misinterpretation of report card grades. They must ensure that the grading practices used in their schools are based on quality assessment principles, and they should work with their entire faculty to develop a quality assessment environment” (p. 37).

Determining the level of subjectivity within grades has been a sensitive issue for a long time, and as one teacher implied, “I really need to pass them on accurately as possible to their next teacher and the logical way to do that is to have their grade reflect their learning as opposed to things like pure effort, participation, etc.” (I.8, P.112, L.31).

Playing the Game of School

“The game of school may be pervasive, but it is also a wobbly tyrant, vulnerable to the onslaught of any group of kids, with active minds who are fired up to do their own learning” (Fried, 2005, p. 198). Teachers responded that students know how to play the “game of school”, in that they are “point grabbers that has nothing to do with the learning” (I.6, P.97, L.82). We have students who are doing what it takes to get the points for a specified level in grading adequate to fit their own, or their parent’s, expectations. Teachers feel students know how to manipulate our traditional letter grade system to make it work for them, without ever really harnessing the possibilities of learning. As students have progressed through a system of points equivalent to a letter grade, based on homework, attendance, effort, etc., these have become variables of which have been reflected in grades. Teachers interjected this is not how to adequately assess the learning, these are responsibilities that do not measure achievement, or what students actually know. As one person responded, “I would have loved a chance when I was in high school to, to be able to focus on standards, rather than the school game, and I was
convinced by being a special student, by deciding for myself and my peers, I was not good at school” (I.1, P.73, L.239).

Based on the approach of standards based grading, teachers feel that they have a better understanding of when a student truly has mastered the learning, and can get students to buy into what they actually need to know. They also feel students are able to begin expanding their learning and are beginning to make richer connections based on standards, versus the traditional work completion for example. One teacher implied, “I think if I knew that you could demonstrate your knowledge in different ways or that school was not about checking off boxes perfectly, it was instead about expanding your knowledge base, I maybe would have bought in sooner as a student and then I would have had more choices post-secondary and I would have had more choices in life” (I.1, P.73, L.241). Teachers want their students to ultimately maximize their learning to a sufficient level to be able to reach mastery. Various indicators however, in grading, can skew our understanding of any student’s level of accomplishment.

Based the analogy of Ken O’Connor’s ‘Packing the Parachute’ problem, a teacher responded,

“If a kid can make a great parachute and he can do it right away, and the other kid can’t do it, but he is going to get all the points along the way and at the end he is going to fail his test because he covered his bases, he was on time, he turned everything in, but the kid that can make a better parachute was late and he has essentially a C in parachute making because of behavioral issues – we’ve got an issue there because I want the kid that can make a parachute right” (I.7, P.105, L.106).

A standards-based approach can help us to align the learning and assure that we are providing more detailed information about a student’s learning. Teachers are poised to continue making this shift as one responded, “It is truly you know, best for kids. They know what is expected of them and they know, you know we are practicing ways that they are going to be
tested instead of just, you know, just kind of a surprise, as you know, random things that you are giving them” (I.4, P.85, L.50).

Accuracy in Student Assessment

“We know that the most effective grading practices provide feedback that is accurate, specific, timely, and designed to improve student performance” (Reeves, 2009, p. 99). There was a consistent message in feedback suggesting teachers agreed whole heartedly with this statement. Not only in just information gathering, teacher’s felt it would help to be more accurate in order to have “more accurate assessment data, which means that you can do more for students who do not get it and more for students who do get it” (I.1, P.71, L.138). Aligning with the awareness of differentiation and doing what is best for kids, they felt less threatened by having to establish individually what to teach. Standards are helping to align the thinking and ultimately show what our students know. Guskey & Bailey (2010) specifically state, “Standards specify the particular knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions that we hope students will gain through interactions with teachers and fellow students in school learning environments” (p. 13).

Ultimately, grades are a gateway for multiple things for students as they are assessed for transition between grades, transition to advanced classes, awards, scholarships, etc. This makes it even more important, in the eyes of our teachers, for our grading system to accurately reflect what kids know in systematic sense of fairness. No matter what students enter into after school, our accuracy impacts their success. “Getting an arbitrary grade for a project doesn’t make much sense to me because when I go into industry, they don’t ask me how many A’s did I get, they ask me what I can do, and that is most important” (I.11, P.130, L.30). Assessing students and
preparing them for their chance at multiple opportunities lays a heavy and probably the most important burden on educators. Teachers feel,

“Standards Based Grading helps you focus much more on what does the student know and what do you want them to know. So you have certain objectives or standards that you want students to be able to master, whether that is to move on to the next grade level or to the next course in a series of courses and you’ve identified those. They are clearly communicated to students and other stakeholders and at that point the teacher then decides how to best assess those” (I.9, P.118, L.36).

The importance of allowing students the ability to be fairly and accurately assessed is in the true sense of the word “essential” for the purpose of what we do as educators. We impact and can influence many things in a young person’s life by how we interact with it. As Reeves (2009) indicates, leaders can positively impact our school environments by providing the essentials of support in teaching, leadership, time, and feedback to ensure the plausibility of what we are to become to ensure success for all students. As leaders, we must embrace the opportunity to do what is best for our students and push forward to assure we are assessing student achievement fairly and accurately, as this runs parallel to our certain purpose as educators. The teachers in this school concur.

APPLICATION OF PRACTICE

Prior to, and even more throughout this study, I realize I value greatly the consideration of the transition from traditional to standards based grading. The understanding of this work and its impact on how we can support and further enhance our current practices and reporting made it appealing to both initiate and complete this project for a better understanding. From my personal investment and interests, considering the purpose and need for change, I have realized that my current involvement will be a testament to helping accomplish this shift in practice. As this work continues in my district, my personal experience has been shaped by
various roles that I find myself in. Not only from what I have been immersed in as a leader, we also have the need to align with the state adopted common core standards. This is the perfect storm for change and realignment, and finding the strategic plan for getting it done is critical to our success.

In a leadership role, my personal understanding and convictions have taken place by learning as much as I can by the current research and practices in place at various schools and districts within the state and beyond, focused on the standards based grading model. Through school district visits, professional development at national conferences, current practices of teachers in district, and personally taking on professional readings and research, I have gathered many insights and pieces of information to continue shaping my own understanding. In observation of actual practices, reading, and the various arenas at which I have come into contact with standards based grading, creating the purpose for change is necessary and has been a mission of mine. The leadership component, whether in the form of a building leader or more informal leaders such as teacher leaders, is important when considering how or who has to create the purpose for change.

My current leadership team, in the school I lead, consisting of department chairs, counselors, and balanced representation from other departments have delved into the focus of standards based grading. Utilizing this time with this group of professionals, we focus on the important work of best practice. In this case, we are doing a book study on Ken O’Connor’s (2009) How to Grade for Learning. This group is committed to this work while understanding the need for a balanced approach to grading, and are ready to see movement in this area in our building. These individuals have become the informal leaders, creating conversations with others, and utilizing these strategies, in order to begin allowing others to begin understanding
as well. This helps to begin widening the scope of understanding, adding to the value of necessary change in the eyes of others.

Not only do the formal leaders in my school’s leadership team help to drive the work to get things done and set the tone for change, my professional learning teams also meet every other day to continue working towards a change. These teams are comprised of the same content area teachers who meet to look at planning, data, and to consider how to differentiate their instruction to reach greater results. As my more formal leaders begin to “set fires” of information and demonstration across the building, these teams will also be able to consider new directions and tools to impact their current work, as they interact and notice what is taking place with the aforementioned group. This system of modeling and information sharing will hopefully begin to increase the desire to see things differently, while creating a sense of urgency in wanting different results garnered by new methods.

In addition, I am currently leading a district learning team, made up of other district principals, as we are currently investigating the approach of standards based grading. This team is comprised of formal leaders, who are helping to research and plan for a possible district shift in this direction. As we begin to look at other districts and gather information on how others have made this shift, we hope to realize the ability to conquer such a change in our district. This will be a huge pedagogical shift for those teachers currently practicing a very traditional model of grading, while moving towards this relatively newer model of assessment. Strategically speaking, our initial work has to consider creating a need, driving the purpose behind this shift to a new model, and making sense of it to all stakeholders.

Throughout this work, my personal investment will hopefully spiral into a change for the future. By helping support and initiate change within my own building, while also leading
a district wide effort, the winds of change will hopefully shift in the right direction as we move forward with this initiative. Our focus has to remain on what is best for our students, which is directly impacted by how we operate and utilize methods of reporting student progress. This approach has many positive attributes which can help to realize advantages of specific feedback for students and parents. This work stands to create a rich system of value added conditions which will help support our purpose in educational outcomes.

SUMMARY

As indicated by the results of this study, multiple influences helped condition teachers for change. Three major influences were found to have the greatest impact as to why teachers may change their grading practices from a traditional approach to a more informed approach, standards based grading. The three influences that most impacted teachers were principal leadership, teacher leadership, and teacher’s personal beliefs.

Principal leadership, which was the study’s original focus and assumed the biggest impact, was obviously an important role with those teachers interviewed. Teachers indicated that building leadership, both principals and assistant principals, must be knowledgeable and purposeful while helping teachers to increase the effectiveness of their professional knowledge and practice. As Yukl (2006) states, “Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree what needs to be done and how to do it” (p. 8). Indicating that it is important to be led, teachers felt it justified to believe principal leaders should position themselves to stay abreast of new trends and information necessary to help move a building in the right direction. Additionally, teachers felt part of this movement should reflect the opportunity for professional development. Various versions of professional development were described as “in house” learning, such as focusing on professional literature, and personal
learning to enhance their knowledge base, all the while being directed by the larger message from building leaders.

Another element of principal leadership, tied to the aspect of learning, informs us how culture impacts the transition of any new practice and/or methodology. As Tierney (1988) suggests, “An organization”s culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it. It concerns decisions, actions, and communication both on an instrumental and symbolic level” (p. 3). Teachers teased out what they understood as building goals by how the principal shaped his views on, in this case, grading approaches. Teachers, therefore, focused on how to improve their pedagogy to align their expectations to support building work. This also led to further insight of leadership, besides just that of a building principal, and there was a focus on other leaders, particularly the assistant principal, but also on the leadership of teachers.

The findings of this study point to the second influence to promote change focused on teacher leaders. As individuals interacted with one another in this setting, it is evident their learning “involves the practices of multiple individuals and occurs through the complex network of relationships and interactions among the entire staff of the school” (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007, p. 68). The accuracy of this statement is parallel to the events happening in the setting of this study, as teachers learned from their colleagues. Various leadership opportunities were available to teachers, and were created to formulate a support network where all educators increased their knowledge and ability to grow professionally. From the executive council team members who have developed and promoted building goals, through more informal leadership groups within content areas, teachers displayed their leadership effectiveness by typical, and not so typical, grass roots efforts.
Professional learning teams consisted of content area teams and were formed to study and discuss their vision in practices and approach to grading student achievement, all based on and led by research. This was part of the cyclical change process which was generated by the building leadership via the executive council, and then filtered into discussions within these content teams. Through these discussions and sharing of experiences, interest led to collegial modeling and allowed for teachers to grow through observed practices. Working together, these teams and teachers grew exponentially by creating the learning amongst themselves. With major changes occurring due to this collaborative type practice, the vision of change is being met. Bruffee (1999) said it best as he suggested, “although we learned a lot from what we read, we learned a lot more form what we said to one another about what we read. Each of us began to change, and we discovered that the most powerful force changing us was our influence on one another” (p. 9).

The third and final influence revealed in this study pertained to personal beliefs of teachers. Not only have teachers impacted each other’s practice or thinking, personal biases or perceptions have impacted choices. Clearly, teachers felt strongly about their ownership in grades and what that meant to each individual, deriving meaning by how they delivered the mark of progress on each student assessed. Teachers felt many times, students were given grades based on very subjective means. This was a strong indication that teachers held personal stakes in leading their own charge for how they determine what grades mean to them. Burns (1978) suggested, “Real change means the creation of new conditions that will generate their own changes in motivation, new goals, and continuing change” (p. 441). Teachers felt their own manipulation of the grading system or approach was how change happened. The teachers
sought to remediate what they felt was inaccurate within the process of realignment to “make things right and just”.

Teachers also felt students played the game of grades with traditional grading to accommodate their personal or parental expectations. This view seemed to strongly encourage teachers to find a way to make grading more meaningful and a more positive impact on students. The big picture idea was that students played a point’s race for certain levels of a grade, whether that was an A, B, C, or D, based on the traditional percentage grading scale. “Just enough to pass a class” was the motto for many. Based on how much is enough to be successful, without putting too much pressure on themselves, teachers felt students were just wanting to meet the mark of success, or barely passing, without concern for excelling to reach their true academic potential.

Finally, teachers held the belief that by shifting to standards based grading, the meaning of a grade would not get lost as in traditional grading. The accuracy needed to best assess a student, then provide feedback from the assessment, became a battleground for teacher considerations of how to characterize learning by a grade. This belief had an obvious and great impact on each person’s will to do what is best for students and to accurately help to promote student efficacy. Teachers were willing to continue struggling with how to report the most detailed grade to increase the likelihood students would take on a more vested approach in their learning. If this happened, it would take the place of playing the game of grades. This, in turn, helped turn classes into arenas of risk taking, not frivolous and subjective mechanisms not related to learning. Students could feel secure in taking risks or challenging the unknown since this type of creative learning was encouraged. Therefore, teachers were absolved from having
to create poorly illustrated grade cards of ambiguity, based on traditional approaches, and were free to move toward reporting of progress in authentic ways.

Consequently, teachers were finding various ways to grow professionally by the presence of one influence or the combination of some or all influences. Some were impacted by the three influences, as others were involved and changed by a single influence. No matter how the change occurred, it was clearly a demonstration of will that these teachers wanted to find a way to better communicate the academic achievement of students. More balanced and rich information, to help justify what a student grade means, provided these teachers a better way to communicate and provide feedback to students and their parents.

CONCLUSION

Any type of change results in multiple competing interests when individuals are involved and personally vested in the process. Based on this study, I continue to realize how important leadership is, and how it impacts the change process, when moving a building towards improvement. Regardless of how principals see change impacting a move in the right direction, or what one perceives as the right direction, moving a system of individuals is difficult. Leaders of change have to possess a talent in balancing a vision, knowledge, and the process of getting the right people on board so they can help with the change process. Not only principals, but teachers have to be involved in this effort to help successfully generate interest and support for change. Holding high expectations for students and adults, a leader must continually align decisions with school goals, and as in my personal practice, keep moving forward searching for methods of improving current practices based upon research.

As an educational leader, I have worked hard at building relationships with my teachers. This allows teachers to feel understood, supported, and trusted with their decision
making, while it also encourages them to trust me. Having multiple conversations (both formal and informal) with teachers, I began the process to build a shared interest in seeking change in several areas, a major one being a move toward standards based grading. As I began to better appreciate these interactions, I became more aware of teacher needs in their overall understanding and professional development. While trying to determine who could lead, who needed more information, and who was here to just do their job, I had to become the appraiser of needs to bring together individuals who were at different levels of understanding.

While investing in the mission of teacher growth (by helping them attain a broader perspective with professional materials, meetings, and other various avenues) I began to see fires being lit and excitement begin to grow, invoking further interest and shifts in thinking among those involved. Through this phenomenon, a change in culture began to appear as discussions began revolving around different ways of thinking (ie. how we better assess students to get a clearer picture of their learning). As this began to occur, more interest was driven by those currently involved in this work, as they began to listen to conversations and see examples of current practices different than their own.

This work then gave way to allowing my teachers to become the instructional leaders by modeling to others and showcasing their work. Teacher’s mentoring other teacher’s has allowed me to step back and watch the development of individuals who would otherwise not be as vested or intrigued by top down initiatives that originated with the principal. While the teachers may not view themselves as leaders, their impact on this process has driven more interest and following that if I had directly requested or required such a change. Again, the trust in current relationships between teachers, supported by the culture within this building,
has secured the formula for getting this done among colleagues. In this non-evaluative setting, teachers know it is non-threatening and are more willing to be risk-takers.

More formally, the teacher leader groups in this study hold the capacity of leadership in the eyes of the staff. This has a great impact giving the ownership of professional growth to the teachers, as the principal is behind the scenes, supporting informally in any way possible. These teams, such as executive council, are the flagship for improvement in this setting and will become a new approach for restructuring in my building for the 2013-14 school year. This will help me to further allow the insight and leadership skills of my teacher leaders to push the work which needs to get done through the means of feedback and coaching, again, taking out the threat of top-down management.

Valuing this collegial trait within a professional setting, teachers find themselves working in professional learning teams, such as what we currently do in our school setting. The PLT structure supports the current trends and development in how we do and plan our business. Teachers openly discuss their teaching approaches and outcomes, comparing moments of success or not, then make adjustments accordingly to become more effective. In this study, teachers continued speaking of collaboration and teamwork and how powerful they had become in their daily thinking, planning, and approach to teaching. Taking risks and reflecting on their current teaching strategies are elements which are important and relevant to professional growth and are enhanced through teaming. This type of joint effort has been a powerful practice in my current building as we continuously strive to grow both personally and professionally within our circles of learning.

Although teachers own their practices, they are not aware of the huge degree of ownership they also have in leading our professional growth. Traditionally, teachers lead in
more formal capacities such as team leaders, department chairs, etc. Through the process of experience and honing their skills, some informal leaders have become more formal, mentoring others and working to help build a broader understanding of how to manage the learning more effectively. The evidence of this practice is paying off with huge dividends, as there is an increase in the excitement to embrace change and this will only serve to benefit our students. Within my leadership team, department chairs are currently studying a book written by Ken O’Connor (2009), which investigates the standardized grading phenomena. These individuals have taken on a broader understanding and are developing better competence in assessing student achievement. This endeavor is another illustration of how I see my teachers becoming more empowered to want to help others understand different views and practices.

Developing their interest in new approaches, teachers have perceptions which allow them to attribute an understanding with certain credible strategies in assessment. Based on fairness, these teachers excitedly responded to the idea of grades and the nature of subjectivity, a huge concern when each teacher assesses differently from classroom to classroom, and from one grade to the next. This issue in and of itself creates vivid discussions when teachers from various experiences are involved. Teachers view certain traditional teachers being the gatekeepers to student success or the inhibitors of it and their approach to grading is associated with whether students succeed or not. Affording students the grace of accurately assessing their knowledge vs. using a multitude of other factors, not related to academics, is only just. The lack of the accuracy certain approaches to grading causes then, is an injustice. The importance of our role as educators is to make certain grades are given to reflect what students know, and not how well they do school.
The value of feedback is an absolute critical component that can yield results or not from students. Students should have the ability to use critical and rich feedback to propel their learning, instead of understanding it as a monitoring tool only, when looking at their achievement. Student achievement is a component of which leaders can use to help evaluate the teacher’s ability to be successful with students, however, this feedback must contain clear elements of various measures. Hattie (2008) suggests, The art of teaching, and its major successes, relate to “what happens next” – the manner in which the teacher reacts to how the student interprets, accommodates, rejects and/or reinvents the content and skills, how the student relates and applies the content to other tasks, and how the student reacts in light of success and failures. Finding multiple ways to evaluate both the educational process and student learning, all is relevant within the structures of support for all students. As the component of teacher evaluation becomes more closely tied to student achievement, it becomes evident that student growth will become more relevant that high stakes state and or national testing measures. As feedback is a critical component of the learning process, the education community must realize that standardized grading will benefit all teachers and students, in addition to providing a more accurate picture of student growth.

Teachers often feel students have come to understand that in school, the commitment to show up, turn in all homework, and participate in class, is equivalent to high achievement. The standards based camp seems more determined to help students become intrinsically rewarded by their academic knowledge and continued successes. These teachers referred to this student practice as knowing how to “play school well”. Students meet all the expectations to get the points, however, the reported grade gives a false sense of the level of knowledge truly gained. This continues to be a conversation in my building as I challenge the status quo.
and ask why some students struggle more with the actual learning as compared to being rewarded for behaviors. Ongoing scrutiny will be afforded to this topic as we continue exploring ways to assess students more accurately.

When individuals enter the field of education, they have the desire to help students do well. Often, however, when they become teachers this goal isn’t as easily defined and somewhat unintended consequences sometimes lay in the wake. We all want to do what is best for students, but unfortunately, if what we feel is how we should do things based on the way it was done to us, we end up with an unfortunate outcome, such as taking away the credibility of a grade. If this happens, the lack of informing students on how they grow as a student is opposite compared to what our intentions originally were. In many school improvement initiatives, including standards based grading, teachers felt motivated that they are able to get students to realize the impact of increasing their knowledge base without the risk of embarrassment or failure. Within the standards based grading movement, the ultimate goal is to continue working to get students to learn, not putting time limits on their rate of learning. This, again, resulted from the need to insure student learning and continuing to support those efforts until successful, instead of students assessed and graded based on when the teacher felt was the appropriate time when they should know the material. Traditionally, time was the constant and learning was the variable. Consequently, with standards based grading, teachers have come to realize time has to be the variable so learning becomes the constant.

Perception is reality to each and every individual. We cannot fault teachers for doing their best and doing what they know. Our job as leaders is raising the awareness and allowing a variance in understanding so we can allow learning to continue for the adults, so we can
then be the best for our students. This happens to be important in all facets of teaching, however, the impact of grading and the message we send to students and parents, can be damaging or encouraging. As a leader, my resolve is to continue helping teachers to evaluate practices, such as grading, until we determine what we do is fair and just for students. We have to determine and be convinced that our reporting sends an accurate picture of the achievement levels of students. This will be a huge pedagogical shift for many, but worthy of the efforts it will take to get there.
REFERENCES


Bass.
Hallinger, P. (1992) School leadership development: evaluating a decade of reform,


Quarterly, 32(4), 512-538.


May 8, 2012

Ms. Jean Selby
3900 E. Biggs Road
Ashland, MO 65010

Dear Ms. Selby:

Your research proposal entitled “Leadership Support through the transition to standards based grading” (CPS ID# 334) has been approved. Dr. Jolene Yoakum, will serve as your district contact for the study. You may contact Dr. Yoakum at 214-3411 regarding details of your study.

Best wishes for success in your research.

Sincerely,

Sally Beth Lyon
Chief Academic Officer

sk

cc: Dr. Jolene Yoakum
    Mr. Chip Sharp
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions for Research

1. Tell me about your interest in seeking change from traditional to standards based grading?

2. Tell me about your experience as you made this pedagogical transition to standards based grading.

3. What type of support(s) did you feel you needed when you made the decision to transition to standards based grading?

4. Describe the support, if any, you received from colleagues?

5. Can you describe any other support(s) you may have received which were beneficial considering your need to understand this approach to grading?

6. What types of support do you feel are necessary and/or beneficial as one considers a shift from traditional grading to standards based grading?
7. Do you have any other information or insight you would like to share with me now that we have completed the list of questions I had for you today?

Follow up Questions:

8. What type of support, related to this transition, have you requested from leadership?

9. What type of support does the leadership currently provide you?

10. What type of support do you feel you still need from leadership?

11. Do you feel the support you received helped you? Why or Why not?

Expand Questions:

-What does that mean?

-Tell me about that….

-When you say_______, what do you mean?
Verbal Consent to Participate in an Interview

Researcher’s Name(s): Jean Selby
Researcher’s Contact Information: jselby@columbia.k12.mo.us 573-808-5509

Project Title: Exploration of Teacher's Perception of Leadership while Changing to Standards Based Grading

YOU ARE BEING ASKED TO VOLUNTEER TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
You are being asked to participate in a research study. This handout explains how the research is being done to help understand what type of support you received while transitioning to standards based grading.

When you are invited to participate in research, you have the right to be told about the study procedures so that you can decide whether you want to agree to participate. There may be words in this form that you do not know. Please ask the researcher to explain any words or information that you do not understand.

You have the right to know what you will be asked to do so that you can decide whether or not to be in the study. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You may refuse to be in the study and nothing will happen. If you do not want to continue to be in the study, you may stop at any time. Deciding to participate or not to participate will not have an effect on you with the district.

WHY IS SHE DOING THIS STUDY?

I am furthering my insights into how support is offered and/or requested by those teachers participating in the transition from traditional to standards based grading. Many times when new initiatives are available to those wishing to make changes, the supportive structures and experiences within this transition framework vary from participant to participant. This study should help provide a clearer picture of the types of support both needed and necessary to adequately support participants in transition.

WHAT AM I BEING ASKED TO DO?

There are two parts to this project. Part one will be a 30-45 minute interview. Part two will be a follow-up interview, if necessary, to clear up and expand on information gathered in the first interview. If necessary, the second interview will take about 30 minutes.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE IN THE STUDY?

There will be approximately 12 people interviewed for this study.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?
Your participation will benefit the understanding of how support, or lack thereof, for teachers experiencing transition in assessment practices, either benefits or inhibits their ability to be successful.

**WHAT ARE THE RISKS TO BEING IN THE STUDY?**
There are not risks to participating in this study. Your identity will be protected and you will remain nameless in this study. If at, any time, you decide to stop participating in the study, you are free to do so.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your name and other information that can be connected to you will be recorded in a way that protects your identity. Information will be locked away during any time it is not being used by the researcher.

The data will also be kept confidential and viewed only by the researchers and members of a committee of professors at the University of Missouri.

**WHAT WILL I RECEIVE FOR BEING IN THE STUDY?**

You will not be paid for your participation in the study.

**WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?**

Please contact Dr. Joe Donaldson of the Department of Educational Policy Leadership and Analysis, College of Education, University of Missouri, Columbia, 202 Hill Hall, Columbia, Missouri 65211, if you have questions about the research. You may ask questions, voice concerns or complaints to the investigator.

**Investigator Contact Information**

Jean Selby  
3900 E. Biggs Rd., Ashland, Mo. 65010  
573-657-9263  
dmgkdb@mail.missouri.edu.

**WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT MY RIGHTS, CONCERNS, COMPLAINTS OR COMMENTS ABOUT THE RESEARCH?**

You can contact the Campus Institutional Review Board if you have questions about your rights, concerns, complaints or comments as a research participant.

**Campus Institutional Review Board**

483 McReynolds Hall  
Columbia, MO 65211  
573-882-9585  
E-Mail: umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu  
Website: http://www.research.missouri.edu/cirb/index.htm

64
August 7, 2012

Principal Investigator: Selby, Jean E
Department: Ed Leadership & Pol Analysis

Your Application to project entitled Teacher Perception of Leadership Support While Transitioning to Standards Based Grading, was reviewed and approved by the MU Campus Institutional Review Board according to terms and conditions described below:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>IRB Project Number</th>
<th>1202344</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funding Source</td>
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<td>Initial Application Approval Date</td>
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The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All unanticipated problems, serious adverse events, and deviations must be reported to the IRB within 5 days.
3. All modifications must be IRB approved by submitting the Exempt Amendment prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk.
4. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
5. The Annual Exempt Certification Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date.
6. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.
7. Utilize the IRB stamped document informing subjects of the research and other approved research documents located within the document storage section of eIRB.

If you have any questions, please contact the Campus IRB at 573-882-9585 or umcresearch@missouri.edu.

Thank you,

Charles Borduin, PhD
Campus IRB Chair
APPENDIX E

DEFINITIONS

Implementation – To integrate or start a new initiative into an existing educational setting, in order to enhance current educational structures.

Standards Based Grading – The evaluation and reporting on student academic growth, based on pre-determined learning standards. Not allowing for subjective decisions by teachers to include non-academic issues in grades (e.g. attendance, attitude, effort, etc.).

Change – The transition of one’s mindset or practice to a new set of circumstances or practice.

Culture – Over time, this becomes developed based on interactions and observations, to include the norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals within an organization.

Transformational Leadership – The ability of a leader to be a role model for followers, helping to inspire them to acquire new or different understandings, in order to enhance current practices or programs.

Teacher Leadership – The ability of a teacher to take on a role in which he/she helps other teachers to understand new philosophies or practices to increase one’s capacity. In addition, this teacher may demonstrate ideal practices for others to replicate.

Professional Learning Team – A group of teachers of the same content or focus, who work to analyze certain information, data, or outcomes, in order to strategize and initiate change for more positive outcomes in practice.
APPENDIX F

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leadership Support Through the Transition to Standards-Based Grading

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to look at the leadership support necessary to initiate and sustain change when implementing a new grading system, such as shifting from traditional to standards based grading.

Problem

As teachers begin to become interested in a shift from traditional to standards based grading, what degree of support do they perceive they need and/or are receiving from building leadership?

Major Findings

- The move from a traditional approach to standards based grading must have the support of building leadership, including the leader’s full understanding and expertise.
- This type of change must come with necessary support in professional development from building leadership.
- Structures of support need to be in place to allow content teachers time to work in learning teams to develop plans.
- Teacher leaders are important informal leaders, as they serve to lead others and model new and existing practices.
- Teachers must feel a culture of trust in order to feel supported when trying new approaches to implement perceived effective and/or new practices.

Recommendations

- Leaders must continue supporting new approaches and techniques in assessment which incorporates moving towards evaluating learning standards.
- Leaders must continue facilitating a building schedule to include collaboration time for teachers to evaluate assessment strategies.
• Leaders must have the knowledge and a vision for moving a building and initiatives forward, to continually renew practice.
• Districts must continue exploring how to support the reporting of grades in a new and systematic way to support standards based grading.

References


Jean: Mary, I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me with afternoon. I want to thank you for taking the time. I will not take much of your time, however, I understand you have been working on transition or you have transitioned towards a Standards Based Grading protocol. My goal today is to gain an insight from you regarding this transition and your experience with this process. During the course of my doctoral studies, Standards Based Grading has become a focus and I feel that by gaining insight from a practitioner such as yourself, the information will lend itself nicely to my study. At the end of my study I would be more than happy to share my findings with you, if you are interested. As I stated, your insight will be very helpful, therefore, please share with me what you feel is most important related to the questions I ask of you today. I do plan to record this interview today in order to review it for themes related to my study. Do you approve of me recording this interview?

Mary: Yes.

Jean: Thank you. And if you are ready, we will begin the interview.

Mary: Okay.

Jean: Okay, Mary, first question, can you tell me about your interest in seeking a change for more of a traditional approach to Standards Based Grading.

Mary: I am an adult with reading and writing disability and I went through traditional standardized school system with that disability. And the way that I process information and repeated it or demonstrated it is not like my peers. I think the Standards Based Grading appeals to me because I feel like students in my same position have a better chance of demonstrating the depth of knowledge instead of mastering the game.

Jean: Can you talk to me a little bit about mastering the game?

Mary: Well, one of the other things that have I gotten really good at was that I could take tests without studying because tests are formulated in the way we approach things that are the same over and over again, so I would be able to not concentrate on the content and concentrate on what I thought was going to be on the test and checking it off a list instead of the overall, like the big macro picture, the big standard, so that is many places where I felt like I could have gone much more in depth and learned more, but I didn't because that part was done.

Jean: Can you kind of talk to me a little bit about that experience as you were making that kind of pedagogical transition to Standards Based Grading?

Mary: first, what I should have said, was that my building specifically took on some literature, exploration and reading on this area and didn't really force us, so we are exposed to many types of grading practices and approaches and theories as a community and we discussed and talked about them. I think made it a lot easier for myself to make that jump was that we were as a building, we were exposed to this kind of information and
not forced, so it was kind of a choice instead of being slammed down our throats, which I think was helpful.

Jean: Okay, and who was allowing that to be a choice?

Mary: We have this executive counsel, which is six members of our teaching staff nominated by their peers and they lead what is called shared planning, so they set the agenda where teachers from different disciplines get together and they concentrate and talk about and share 45 minutes about big picture questions like grading, and so we had articles and we discussed and went over, and so I heard a PE teacher, I heard an English teacher, I heard a biology teacher and we all discussed and I think that open discussion continuing - it happened over numerous periods, allowed us to not think that the jump was so big or that we had to do it all at once.

Jean: Well, when you made the shift and when you finally decided I am going to Standards Based Grading, what type of support did you feel like you needed when you were going to decide to go that direction?

Mary: Most of my grading even now is participation and resource, but what I do do is I work with all these teachers when they send students to our room with their assignments and then I look at grades every day with the students that are assigned there and so it became very clear which teachers were basing it on Standards and Mastery versus the more traditional little pieces and points. So the teachers that were based on Mastery and Standards was a lot easier for students to catch up because if they could master the skill, then it satisfied that point break, which is an interesting mix of industrialized and the Standards Based while the teachers who were just in this more traditional form it was a lot harder for students to demonstrate that they knew the knowledge and even if they did know the knowledge, because they had not done it on these assignments before. They were still in this F range, so when you had the end of the semester grades, they were not an accurate picture of what the student knew, it was actually a picture of how the student played the game. So that seemed glaringly obvious.

Jean: Okay.

Mary: And when you see that, it is very easy to think, like every day when you look at that, two kids in the same biology class in different sections sitting there studying close to the same base of knowledge, one is going to pass and one is going to fail and it is not based on that they know. And that makes it very easy to make the change I think.

Jean: What support specifically did you receive from your colleagues?

Mary: My colleagues. Well, we have PLTs, professional learning team, so within the PLTs, I know that teachers had emotional conversations about this, so as support from our ends that we had to learn how the teachers were grading, and how to approach them and the approach to a Standards Based Grader and a traditional grader is very different, is very different, so I think we were kind of the support that way to them. I guess to the students, but what happened is that teachers were really holding on tightly to this traditional way of grading and grades has become, at least in my opinion, tied to their own self concept instead of about becoming a more developed teacher. While teachers who have moved to this more Standards Based is about being able to track and accurately measure the amount of content that is mastered by the student and that
Jean: So would you consider that more of a technical support from those colleagues in knowledge and theory and argument for that or was that more of an emotional support you received - or was it both?

Mary: It was probably, I think it in the PLTs what happens is that it is both. Its that, its doable and that the students are still getting it and that what seemed to be proved to more traditionalists, but also the struggle with I'm doing something very different that I have never done before, that is an emotional piece and if you see a peer do that, or even through an intermediate, like a person in resource saying that Ms. Solzi has this supplement and it works in her class, so maybe he could do it here, even that cross, that helps too.

Jean: Okay. Can you describe any other support you may have received, which were beneficial considering your need to understand this approach to grading?

Mary: A continual conversation, it was not a single conversation. In our building it has been going on the whole time I have been here, so six year teaching. The concentration, along with the concentration two years ago, now we are going through this big flux - every one wants to talk about that instead of the grading part. Our administration here was really trying to help us focus on this year rather than become flustered and get away from the instructional practice, so EC, what they are doing is they are setting up these share plannings again where we will continually talk about that. In the beginning in the first three days we had breakout sessions and one of the sessions you could pick to go to was a discussion specifically about grading, so if you had an ongoing conversation inner turmoil, which people are _____do, if you had another place to come and here other people who did. Its not here, its not about slamming down a set pedagogy, we have a covenant, but its more about developing your own, so its is a slow, steady encouragement to talk about it and hoping it will progress.

Jean: So when you think about all those supports you just mentioned, what do you think is really necessary or beneficial if I am one that is going to shift from a traditional grading approach to a Standards Based Grading approach?

Mary: I think it would be very popular, but I think it has to be very practical and you have to approach it from the teacher's side, which is, is it not going to make more work for you, it is going to be more accurate assessment data, its going to mean that you can do more for the students to don't get it and more for the students who do get it. It allows for enrichment and mediation if you know exactly what the skill or the standard is that is not met. I think you have to go with how it is going to make their life easier if you want them to buy in and you have to convince them somehow it is their choice to get them to buy in. I am not sure how you would do that exactly, but.

Jean: Do you have any other information or insight that you would like to share with me now based on what you have told me about the supportive pieces from your colleagues or any of that?

Mary: When you have Standards Based Grading, it means that student that come in even in the middle of the semester, if they can demonstrate the mastery of that standard still...
have a chance. So we are talking about elimination of a lot systematic, racial or class
barriers, even gender barriers that are set up now in the traditional system that if it is
Standards Based, they could demonstrate those standards and that meaning mastery
of those standards and have a chance to catch up with their peers. Which in the
traditional form, that is not how it works, and so for me, that is the part that is the most
exciting. I work with some girls who are who are on homebound that are pregnant and
if it is Standards Based, then we can work on a standard in our own way in that
situation and demonstrate it for the teacher, but if it is more traditional, then we are
going to have to jam in, in that set amount of time all the class work they have done in
that traditional format and then try to pull from that the standard, so it eliminates kind of
some of that, busy work is a negative word, but if it is about mastering, then we can
focus right on that and that is something that their male peers will never have to deal
with.

Jean: Are we focused a lot now on the colleagues and that type of support and a little bit of
leadership, but what kind, have you requested specific support from the other
leadership in this building?

Mary: There is, I’m serving on EC now and one of the things we always hear is that people
want to talk more about grading. I think people need to be reassured that making the
jump from this more traditional model to this progressive model is the way everything is
going, every one is going. That reassurance can’t come from people who are not
established in the district or the building already and aren’t seen as already being
traditionalists, I think that is the part that gets lost, its that they are already in the
building, there is already these factions of teachers that think these teachers are too
easy on their kids and that’s why they like them and that these teachers are fly by and
these teachers are so hard, you need some of those hard traditionalists who are
cemented already in the culture to buy in because if they buy in, even one of them,
then all the other ones that model themselves around this more traditional will follow
suit, but its that first, that lynch pin gatekeeper of the traditionalist. You have to get one
of them to buy in.

Jean: What about the other leadership driving the building?

Mary: Administration wise?

Jean: Ah hum.

Mary: That can be very complicated. We have a new sped head here, so I have not really
gotten a chance to work with him. The last one we had, she would come to our
professional learning teams and bring up new articles she has found or talk to us and
ask our opinion as support staff about what we are seeing across the board. I think it is
a pretty rarity to have a group of people who look at every ones grades all the time and
help kids play the grade game and learn the knowledge at the same time. And they
were smart enough to tap into that and then she took that and translated that out. I am
hoping Tim will do the same thing. But I think that is important to access, for the
administration to access people in the building who have unique knowledge in that
area or unique perspective in that area. I don't think very many people do that and you
would not think of Special?? As a place you go to talk about grading, but if, these are
people who are ________every day.
Jean: Are there any other types of support or any of the things that you would like to have from the leadership or administration in this building?

Mary: (big sigh) (chuckles) being a Standards Based, I am buying into it. I would love to see a mandate to do that, but I know that goes against our culture and I think would be detrimental on the same as it does good. So, maybe a comparison at a faculty meeting or something where on a big group picture from a point of authority, they can draw a comparison between maybe the grade distribution and those two sections and they compare them to standardized test scores, so that we could see that the grades, and while they might be distributed differently in these two sections, they are reporting similarly on standard based tests because I think that would appeal to people who are more concrete in their way of thinking like two biology classes taught very different ways, one has a higher proportion of higher scoring grades because they went Standards Based and when they did the assessment or the core for assessment now would be interested in the core standards, than there was no difference there, but the difference was in the grade and so which one is more important. But unless that comes from a point of authority that people who are traditionalists buy into, I think that is what we are missing. They don't want to do that because they don't want to put a negative connotation what are people are doing in the room, they want them to develop on our own, but I would love to see that because I think it would be hard to argue with that kind of data.

Jean: So you feel the support at any given level helped you?

Mary: Yeah, I think the discussion, I've thought a lot and a lot about in the summertime, I thought a lot about when I pull up grades now, it is part of the conversation in my head. The negative part of that is when schedules come, I know which teachers how they grade which way and so teachers who grade a certain way or a Standards Based are more apt to get funneled by people who can, students who are in need of that kind of assessment and that kind of classroom structure and what happens is that we can get lots of kids in one section and then those teachers burn out or you remove kids from this more traditional section, so that is always the play back and forth. You are going to burn out all of your good teachers or whatever with all your naughty students because they assess knowledge in a different way and that's hard.

Jean: Do you have any final thoughts for me Mary before we wrap this up?

Mary: I would have loved to have a chance when I was in high school to, to be able to focus on Standards rather than the school game and I was convinced being a specialist student by deciding myself and my peers that I was not good at school. But I think if I knew that you could demonstrate your knowledge in different ways or that school was not about checking off boxes perfectly, was about expanding your knowledge base, I maybe would have bought in sooner and then I would have had more choices post secondary and I would have had more choices in life.

Jean: Okay. Well that is all I have for you today. I appreciate it.

Mary: No, I'm glad we could do this.
Interview 2

Jean: Okay Stephanie, good afternoon. I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I will not take much of your time, however, I understand you have been working to transition or you have transitioned towards Standards Based Grading. My goal today is to gain insight from you regarding this transition and your experience within this process. During the course of my doctoral studies, Standards Based Grading has become a focus and I feel that my gaining insight from a practitioner such as yourself, the information will lend itself nicely to my study. At the end of my study, I would be more than happy to share my findings with you, if you are interested. As I stated, your insight will be helpful, therefore, please share with me what you feel is important related to the questions I ask of you today. I do plan to record this interview today in order to review it for themes related to my study. Do you approve of me recording this interview?

Stephanie: Yes.

Jean: Thank you. We will go ahead and get started if you are ready.

Stephanie: Yes.

Jean: So Stephanie, again I appreciate you being here. There are just a few questions I have for you and we will just start with the first one. Kind of tell me about your interest in seeking change from the traditional approach to Standards Based Grading.

Stephanie: I guess it probably mostly has stemmed from my kids, being kind of dissatisfied with not only just their grades, but like what kind of feedback I can given them and kind of, I don't know, sort of feeling like sometimes I was kind of just tricking them, like the questions they did not really know what questions were going to be, kind of they were being held responsible for and so, just some dissatisfaction with from their end, but then made me start to question, okay, well why not kind of be up front with them and kind of be like really, you know, let them know where I'm going to ask them to go. So.

Jean: So then that made you kind of be a proponent of you need to do something different?

Stephanie: Yeah. I feel like I have kind of evolved over the course of my career from very traditional sort of lecture based sort of, I'm going to tell you what you need to know and you are going to tell it back to me um, sort of more asking them to kind of think a little bit more in their responses and less like regurgitation, less growth memorization and I think that kind of all has sort of like, comes down to assessment and sort of grading maybe on a different sort of, I don't know field or plane than traditionally.

Jean: Okay. Tell me about your experience as you were kind of making that pedagogical traditional in Standards Based Grading. What were your thoughts you kind of just touched on it, kind of talk to me about more of the process and what pushed you, really pushed you. Was there evidence or your personal experience or.

Stephanie: it was probably at my other school first. I think just as I started to just think about different ways to just teach period. Then as like the environment that I created in
my class room team changed, then the assessments and the way that I was grading did not quite match, but I did not really know how to do anything different or that there was anything different or what it kind of looked like until I got here and then a lot of our AFL stuff, you know that was still kind of big whenever I got here the first year and just being asked questions, like as a group _______ and then individually as a new teacher, you know, like so why are you asking this question and is this really a fair question and all of those kind of things. So it is kind of more like the switch to a new district and a new building that sort of really pushed me to start to really think about assessment and those things in a different manner. So just trying to wrap my head around sort of the AFL stuff and I think that sort of all plays into kind of the same idea. AFL is assessment for learning.

Jean: Yes.

Stephanie: I figured.

Jean: What type of support did you feel like you needed when you made the decision to transition to Standards Based?

Stephanie: Examples, like so it is really easy come up and I do science and it is math-based science, so it is chemistry and physics and so it is really easy to come up with some like pretty just standard forms sorts of like _______ and stuff. I am one of those people like if I see an example, then "I'm like oh, dude, like I can totally do that" or time to you know, I mean it takes time to like actually go back and kind of revamp things and so you know, kind of initially it was hearing our shared planning time was invaluable, you know like hearing how people were doing things and "oh my gosh, so I can do that" or you know math does it this way and okay then I'm a little math-y, so we can do that or biology does it this way, so I can do a little bit of that, and then time to kind of sit down and form those things and bounce ideas with like my PLT and stuff. But, yeah, examples and time to work on it and kind of some of those guru-y people to kind of hang out with, so shared planning was really important for us and for me.

Jean: So those were your colleagues that

Stephanie: Yeah

Jean: So can you describe what some of that support looked like, was it technical support in how the Standard Based graded, was it emotional support, was it both?

Stephanie: I think it was both. I mean I remember our first, my first couple of years here, you know, shared planning there were specific times when we would focus on you know, conferencing or you know some of these kind of really practical ways to go about doing it, and then not only would they give us some templates or some kind of "here's how we've done it in our room" or whatever, but then it was like here's, because people had done it, here's is what to look out for and here is the hard part. Here are the things and then you get to thinking and you go okay but what happens when you do this? Oh yeah, we did this third block and this is how we handled it or whatever, and so it was, yeah, it was kind of both. I mean the ability to bounce ideas and talk and sort of form that in your own mind and then actually just practical pieces of this is rubric that I used or this is the you know, whatever, so it was really both for me.
Jean: Okay. Can you describe any other support that you may have received, which were beneficial considering your need to understand that certain approach to grading?

Stephanie: (signs)

Jean: Or the materials you read or the outside people you talked to, was there a program or conference you went to.

Stephanie: Well I think, I mean I participated in the physics first program and when Columbia was going to that transition when I was in my other school, so that was also kind of a big push for me and then just continuing that through some training that I have done like the chemistry modeling and then kind of becoming more like a modeler and sort of shifting, I don't know, shifting that.

Jean: So what specifically in that physics first training did you see that you were able to then translate into the Standards Based whatever no matter what you were teaching?

Stephanie: Really asking them to hit themes or topics instead of just equations or you know memorizing Newton's Laws. Not every body knows them, but that application piece or that, you know, applying it or kind of congealing multiple aspects together. And that was always the hard part for me in chemistry, because I just never, I could do in physics because I had gone through it and kind of saw how it worked, but hadn't really ever seen it done in chemistry until I had the opportunity to go last summer and do some chemistry modeling and so now its like, oh, okay so that's what that looks like and so you know, really having the opportunity to go for three weeks last summer really, really helped with the chemistry part of it. So

Jean: What types of support, if you are looking at going and shifting to a Standards Based Grading model verus traditional, what types of support do you feel are necessary or beneficial as you considered that shift?

Stephanie: I think for me it feels like I really need some strong leadership kind of from above. We came in as a chemistry _____ kind of all new. We were brand new, like all five of us and we really stumbled I think a little bit in trying to kind of figure out who we are and who we, you know, how we want to do this and kind of sort of a I mean I don't want it to be a top-down thing, but this is how we do things and this is what we do and so here are some things that you guys can do to practice this. You know, its nice to have autonomy, its nice to have sort like the ability to do that, but if this is something that like skill, like people what us to go then, we kind of need more of a like a guidance, you know, we all. .  for us we have these different philosophies in how to teach, how to grade and all of this and so its kind of a really hit and miss and you know, we knock heads a lot because like we are not all on the same page and so its been sort of hard for me as working in a group of people to kinds of say, no I want to do this, but I feel like kind of as, you know, I think the new national standards, science standards are going to really definitely help kind of get us there. But, sort of a more firm hand sort of from kind of just kind of guidance in that direction, from maybe some higher up people.

Jean: Can you define who those higher up people are?

Stephanie: I was just really thinking just like our science coordinator and he's kind of been through a transition as well and that was kind of, I think that was part of it, and then like
our department chair went through a lot of transition and then we have had a brand new principal, so it has just always been, there has also been just, there has not been a consistent person to sort of kind of guide us into sort of what I feel like is probably how Rock Bridge and probably Columbia Public Schools probably are going to go.

Jean: What type of support related to his transition have you requested from the administration in the building?

Stephanie: We asked for a couple of days last year, it was kind of an ask, we are going to give you to work on some stuff. And they, you know, we have had some professional development days, we have had you know, they, I asked to go to the modeling thing and it was definitely improved and that was good. And I know you have talked about bringing those people in and having you know some bigger sessions and stuff and so mostly just in-service kind of stuff or PD Days where we can actually just sit down and sort of work because during the school year it is so crazy to try to find time and PLT gets kind of hung up with all this other stuff with just living, and so trying to really carve out a day to sit and do some good work. So and they have, I mean this year is going to be tough with the big transition, but I feel like our building does a really good job of protecting that time like when, you know, the PD days are, PLT time or you know department or building, they are really good about protecting that and leaving us some time to actually sit and get work done.

Jean: What type of support are you currently getting no matter what level of leadership we are talking about?

Stephanie: It probably mostly is coming from EC, executive counseling and share planning.

Jean: Okay.

Stephanie: That is probably where most of our sort of ideas and thinking come from.

Jean: You say shared planning, is that PLT?

Stephanie: No. Its some, so we have a shared planning period during the school day and we have our conference time and it is usually on a different day and so the shared planning once every two weeks. Whoever has shared planning at that time meets together, TTB, and it is not content specific. Its like every body in the building and then because we have that time, we do all our PLT time outside of school hours, so I know some people do PLT during the day and they have like common off time so like all of chemistry has the same time off so they can get together. We don't. Like we never hardly ever have the same time off, so our shared planning is more building wide and then our executive counsel is like, I call it the student counsel of the faculty is how I explain it to the kids. So they are kind of our leadership team and we elect them every two years or whatever and they kind of guide those shared plannings. The other group, that I am actually the chair of, is called Teacher Tool Box Committee. It kind of took over for the AFL Committee and so it is just, I know a lot of the grading and that kind of stuff is stuff that we are going to talk about this year because it is just good teaching stuff and that is kind of what TTB is all about and so kind of EC shared planning pieces where a lot of kind of the. . . . I feel like EC is probably going to ask us to do a little bit more formally this year, which I am excited about because it has always kind of been these, well here why don't you try this and lets try this and this worked
here, but I think they are going to maybe hold us to a little bit more of a standard of we
want you to go try this stuff and we are going to ask you to be accountable for it, which
is exciting for me because it will happen.

Jean: What type of support or do you, I guess the better question maybe is do you feel like
the support you have received in this building or in your profession has helped you?

Stephanie: Yeah, I mean, anytime like I have a question, it all has to be, its like, a lot of it has
to have been my-directed and so if you are not one of those people that is kind of
wanting to learn and think and do things different, and then kind of you know, really
think about okay is this what's best for our kids and all that and it is easy to just kind of
sit, but for me, there is always somebody to go ask and there is always shared
planning to start thinking about stuff and somebody will say something and you can hit
them up later or you know, you will go talk to Mark or you will go talk to like our
department chair and be like I'm stuck on this thing, is there somebody in the building I
can talk to and so I mean as far as the building, I feel like it has definitely been what I
need. District wide I don't feel like there is a ton of collaboration between the buildings
when there has been like last summer I got to hang out with the other physics teacher
and the other upper level physics teacher and holy cow, we got so much done and I
just learned so much from them and just trying to figure out a new course and stuff like
that, so there is not a ton of time and it has not always been the most useful of time,
but like building-wise I definitely feel like it has been good.

Jean: Okay. Is there anything else before we wrap it up today that you would like to share
about your shift or the Standards Based Grading approach or the leadership impact or
just kind of final thoughts if you have any?

Stephanie: I don't think so. I'm trying to think. I think I have said about everything.

Jean: I appreciate your time today.

Stephanie: No problem.

Jean: Thanks.
Jean: Okay, well I appreciate you meeting with me today. I would like to thank you for taking the time and I will not take much of your time, however, I understand you have been working to transition or you have transitioned towards Standards Based Grading model. My goal today is to gain insight from you regarding this transition and your experience within this process. During the course of my doctoral studies, Standards Based Grading has become a focus and I feel that my gaining insight from a practitioner such as yourself, the information will lend itself nicely to my study. At the end of my study, I would be more than happy to share my findings with you, if you are interested. As I stated, your insight will be helpful, therefore, please share with me what you feel is important related to the questions I ask of you today. I do plan to record this interview today in order to review it for themes related to my study. I would like to know if you approve of me recording this interview?

Man: I approve.

Jean: Thank you. So okay, if you are ready, we will go ahead and get started. So there are a few questions here and I'll go sequentially and may ask you for a little bit more information if I want you to expand a little bit if that is okay.

Man: Sure.

Jean: Lets just start off and kind of talk to me about your interest in seeking that change when you considered that transitional approach to grade versus the Standards Based Grading.

Man: Well I have been at Rock Bridge High School for eight years and so for most of those eight years we have been really trying to work towards getting into the Standards Based Grading. I think the most applicable way we see that in our class room is with pretty much everything we grade we use a clear scoring guide for our students and I guess with Standards and objectives in mind, the benefit I've seen in transitioning to more Standards Based Grading is I feel like it is very clear to the students where our expectations are as teachers. I think my biggest gripe I had in high school was that I always felt like I was playing a game versus the teachers and I was just like what do you want me to know, you know, test day would come and I feel like teachers would pride themselves on throwing the curve ball-type questions and its almost refreshing I feel like for the students to say here's where we are going, clear-cut, I want you to learn this and obviously in US studies we don't ask them, you know, I want you to learn the start of the Civil War, we want to ask how this conflict shaped America. Then it frees the teachers to have insightful conversations based off and rooted in the history in the literature yet it enables the kids to work towards that standard, I think in a more meaningful authentic way. So that was kind of a rant, but I think maybe I touched on

Jean: No that is perfect. Tell me about your experience as you made the pedagogical transition, so tell me what your thoughts as you touched up on your experience that maybe how do you deem it more appropriate and how do you think that is going to influence your students?
Man: I guess in terms of more appropriate, I just view it as, I want my classroom to really help these students in a real meaningful way and I guess when I, again when I reflect on my high school career and some teachers have just a passion for certain historical events and some teachers have a passion for this novel and they feel like you are doing an injustice to the education system if a student doesn't know the major themes of *Huck Finn* if they can't tell you when World War II ended. I see it as the reality as students can find that now instantly with our technology and the studies department we are trying to have the student use those facts wisely. You are not playing a game, you are not hiding anything from them. I view it as you're trying to empower the students to work towards a certain standard. That's probably a little more opened ended than just memorize the state or what is this quote from, *The Great Gatsby* or whatever.

Jean: What type of support do you feel like you needed when you were making this transition to the Standards Based approach?

Man: I think the most support that a teacher needs and that I needed was just the other teachers working collaboratively with me and the people, my department chairs to say its okay to almost empower you to think outside the box. Lets try something different. And obviously we have our, you know, in eight years I've been at Rock Bridge we have had, I've been in a PLT every year. So this year I'm in a studies PLT and I'm in the pop culture PLT and it's just invaluable to share lessons and to share in how are you guys working towards a subjective, how are you guys doing this? You know, we tell the students that stealing, I say its kind of collaborating and working smarter and not harder. So I think you need the support of your coworkers. I think you need teachers that are willing to think outside the box and re-evaluate why we do what we do. I have had a lot of that at Rock Bridge.

Jean: Okay. So you kind of touched on it. Do you feel like you need support in other ways like technical or just personally?

Man: I mean, not really. Just because I have always, you know, I have always been good with technology and just as a person am I always willing, I just always ask questions, you know. I've always just said knowing people, family members, and friends, ask my questions and so my inquisitive mind almost ______ worked well with having a standard that we are working towards it and lets investigate it and progress towards it, so, most of my support is just strictly professional.

Jean: Can you describe any other support you may have received along this journey as you are transitioning outside of your colleagues?

Man: What do you mean by outside of my colleagues?

Jean: Well you use your colleagues. .

Man: yeah. .

Jean . . . and people to collaborate with,

Man: Uh, huh
Jean: . . . what other support do you need in the school setting or just your own personal venue of knowledge, knowledge base that can you suggest that maybe you have used.

Man: Yeah, I mean I don't know if, I mean its been valuable that so many teachers here are my age and we are in the same place and so that when we go to Friday happy hours like we are talking about it, you know, we are really talking about how can we make this standard better, how can we help the kids get there and so in many way, and that is just my philosophy of teaching in general, is that I just feel like the best teachers _______ into every aspect of their lives and so I have been fortunate enough to have very good quality teachers here that I can not only look up to, but I can have conversations outside of the class day. What else?

Jean: Did you gain the knowledge about this from your colleagues then or it is, did you look at research or did your administrators come down and say hey, this is . . .

Man: I feel like it is always, I feel like Rock Bridge is always done Standards Based since I've got here. I am interpreting Standards Based learning as the idea of clear objectives for students, working towards those standards in a meaningful way and then scoring them off of a clear scoring guide that they can understand. Am I even interpreting that right?

Jean: Yeah. Because the emphasis . . . the main goal here is really discuss that Standards Based Grading and that is all about the teachers aligning their standards,

Man: Uh, huh

Jean: . . . and that is really the goal here, so you are on top of it, you are doing exactly, you are aligned exactly with what/where I'm going with this. When you think of somebody coming in new let say to your building, what do you think the supports would be that would be necessary to move them if they are in a traditional mindset? And you bring a person in, what all do you think you are going to have to surround them with and who to get them to understand

(Both talking at the same time)

Man: I mean it's hard because you are always balancing something. Ideally you want them to really buy into it. That is really is better. You don’t want to be told, like do this because then it’s very difficult for them to buy into it. So I don't, I think the PLT process helps sway somebody. Its pretty evident in our PLTs if somebody new comes in that man they are in love with the Civil War and they got to teach these five major battles and the kids better know this and its not, its about the knowledge of that and the content as opposed to working towards a bigger idea or standard. So I would just be hopeful, I would hope that you know a new teacher that is, that maybe is of the more traditional teaching, would just see in our PLTs we are discussing any know, if a kid can really meet this standard, then hopefully they can see that that benefits them beyond our class, you know. You know, you hope that in the discussions and in the questions asked and when we do, so we blind grade our assessments, we have four major assessments in a semester with a clear question that we can give the kids early, a day to prepare, a day to write it, we blind grade it so no name on it, we get together with all the US studies teachers and you know, we mix up all the papers, they grade them off the scoring guide and then so you start to see its not about, this is not about the facts they are using in their essay, this is about the ideas they are creating, the way
they are communicating, their analysis and their synthetic ability to write in a way that is all tied together. So you would hope that that process tied together with the PLT process would just help convince somebody or help then transition to you know more Standards Based Grading. You know, I can be a little bull headed in the fact, you know, I'm convinced that this is this smart-wise education. This is authentic education. I'm convince the teachers that love this stuff are doing an injustice to kids because the reality is, like I said earlier, they have instant access to any information they want, so if a kid doesn't know the answer to the end of World War II, its not shame on you, its look it up on the phone, so why should we care. So I'm just convinced that this way is truly the best way to help kids you know we say the 21st century when they get out of here.

Jean: Right. We are going to shift this a little bit. ____________ support _____ and maybe leadership ____ building/administration. What type of support, have you ever requested any support from the leaders of this building? At any level of leadership?

Man: You know the main support that we get is probably the funds to cover our subs the days we leave to blind the score. That is a big support. Honestly, when you don't get a lot talk down support in terms of leadership. I think that is one thing a high school has to do is having an assistant principal that is expert in this stuff and I think we are yearning for leadership in that area. You know, I don't have time to dig up data, more data, and to dive further into Standards. You know, I'm worried about tomorrow, I am worried about I have to do attendance, I got to make sure you know I know this kid is struggling at home, he's not sleeping, I got to connect with him and build that relationship, but I mean I think teachers, I know for sure out here, we got administrators doing discipline out the whazoo, you know, I love Mr. Bones doing student activities and Mast does a great job with athletics. We need another expert like Bones is in activities and Mast is in athletics, its construction that can pop in classrooms, read this article, can you see this, can I do data for you, can I come to your blinds, like that would empower teachers even more because right now we just, you know, when we are getting, when we are running low on energy we are just kind of relying on somebody in our PLT or kind of our department chairs to throw out one more article or remind us to you know, to remind us to stay true to our course. Because I think the tendencies is always to go back to, its my classroom, take these notes, know this stuff, you got to ______ because that is easier frankly than doing Standard's Based, blind grading, scoring guides, you know that is stuff takes longer I think to learn and to master.

Jean: So the majority of the support you would like to see comes from maybe the top down, not as a push on initiative itself . . .

Man: Umhmm .

Jean: just a need to give me more information or to . . .

Man: Umhmm .

Jean: . . . provide you more resources . . .

Man: Umhmm.

Jean: . . . to support the Standards Based Grading model? Is that what you are
Man: Yes.

Jean: . . . to do.

Man: Yes. Yes. And I think, and I have never gotten that from an assistance principal not because I don't think they were capable, I just think there is so much responsibilities that they have, that its number 97 on that list.

Jean: How involved is your principal then, the initiatives for Standards Based?

Man: What do you mean the initiatives for it?

Jean: Well, or the ongoing work in it. some people, you know, you have people that multiple . . .

Man: Yeah, its . . .

Jean: . . . .this whole approach. It is such a pedagogical shift for people that are tradition . . .

Man: Umhmm

Jean: . . . .that are traditional. How much does he get involved in that setting up the ability to do this in your building? Or is he involved at all?

Man: He, you know, he is involved and you know he buys into to do it, but he's not, I wouldn't say he is an active figure head in it, you know what I mean?

Jean: Umhmm.

Man: And we do a pretty good job, like in our language arts and integrated social, we do a pretty good job of somehow delegating certain responsibilities to certain members. Umm, and almost I think I don't know if I can say spoiling Mr. Moss, but we are pretty good, you know and I am not saying that we have it figured out, I'm just saying we, we really want what is best for kids and we are going to move in that direction and um and he, he just trusts us, you know. Which I think is a big part of, I don't know, you really want that in the system principal to just trust your teachers to do right think and hopefully they know if, if a teacher is taking advantage of it. so he is involved and he supports us and we know it, but its not like he's, he's not, he's not on PLTs, he's not coming to our blind scoring days. umm, so its kind of hit and miss I guess.

Jean: Is there another leadership group in this building that might possibly be at, kind of pushing this or helping to steer it in any way?

Man: We have a lot of kind of inner school like committees I guess. So like the executive counsel is an elected group of teachers that kind of leads instructionally and helps kind of build up the school culture. So occasionally they will, they will address grading and authentic assessments and everything that is kind of aligned with Standards Based Grading. But, there is not an assigned committee that is solely responsible for the progress of our Standards Based Grading practices throughout the school.
Jean: So would you say then that executive counseling discusses the, kind of the, maybe the
pseudo mastermind behind the leadership push in helping to keep that ball rolling with
that approach?

Man: Yeah. I mean, I think when push comes to shove, they support Standards Based
Grading, you know, they support, umm, we know they support us. They are the ones
that physically approve our subs. They sign the forms to, for us to go to blind scoring
days or whatever. Umm, so, the answer is yes.

Jean: Is there anything else that we haven’t talked about or something that kind of came to
mind while we are talking, but didn’t fit with one of the questions that you wanted to
share with me today? Just about any last thoughts about,

Man: Uhm

Jean: . . . maybe the leadership component and the supporting the Standards Based Grading

Man: Yeah,

Jean: . . . that you want to hit.

Man: Yeah, I mean I just think I’ve been pretty spoiled, you know. I was thrown into an
environment here I felt was just conducive to my personality and I just think it would be
very hard to be a teacher thrown into a more, you know, if I was in a traditional school,
umm, I would just probably me, not literally, but picking a lot of fights. You know,
asking a lot of questions, you know certain principals there would not love my, like why
are we doing this, do we, like, even asking questions of other teachers, why are you
collecting everything and giving no feedback. You know, it is smart to collect a few
things that are related to the Standards about feedback because it relates to that. So
I've just been blessed being here, really lucky to be in this environment, umm, and its
just, I think we have just been lucky to continually have leaders that are, that are just
stepping up to lead the charge, if that makes sense.

Jean: Yeah, absolutely. Well I absolutely appreciate you being here today and helping me
out with this, so. That concludes our interview
Jean: Okay, thank you for meeting with me today and I would like to kind of take, I won't take a lot of your time, but I have been looking at the Standards Based Grading and I understand that you have been working on that transition or you have transitioned already to Standards Based Grading, so my goal today is to gain insight from you regarding this transition and your experience within this process. During the course of my doctoral studies, Standards Based Grading has become a focus and I feel that my gaining insight from a practitioner such as yourself, the information will lend itself nicely to my study. At the end of my study, I would be more than happy to share my findings with you, if you are interested. So as I stated, your insight will be helpful, therefore, please share with me what you feel is important related to the questions I ask of you today. I do plan to record this interview today in order to review it for themes related to my study. Do you approve of me recording this interview?

###4: Yes.

Jean: Thank you. All right. Well we will get started and like I said, there is just a handful of questions and I will just have your expand if need be

###4: Okay.

Jean: . . If I want to hear a bit more about what you are saying that might be interesting, so.

###4: Okay.

Jean: Lets just start today and kind of tell me about your interest in seeking the change, moving from a traditional to more of a Standards approach in grading.

###4: Umm, you know, I kind of was lucky in a sense because I walked into the school science department that was already sort of one the road to that. You know, they felt it was very important that all of our kids were being tested over the same stuff. That we were, and even to the extreme of all of our kids are getting the same information on the same days, so they don't only have one teacher they can go to, they have lots of teachers they can go to. And so, you know, I didn't have much experience with the traditional, it was always, these are objectives that are tied directly to our standards and this is what we are going to, you know, test you over and every body is going to be test in the same way and even the same exact exams. You know, and we all do the same activities and everything is tied to those standards, you know, and to our objectives. So I don't have much experience the other way other than when I was a student, you know, but in terms of teaching, that is what we have always done and it works and it works really well, so we haven't, we haven't gone back the opposite way, so.

Jean: Okay, great. Tell me about your experience as you made, kind of your personal experience as you were making that pedagogical transition or the change when you started moving in that direction. What were you starting to kind of discern from all that?

###4: Yeah, so, you know I understood why, you know we were doing it that way. It does, its what is truly, you know, best for kids. They know what is expected of them and they
know, you know we are practicing ways that they are going to be tested instead of just, you know, just kind of surprise, as where you know, random things that you are giving them. Umm, and so, for me it wasn't like I said, you know, it wasn't much of a shift, but I did appreciate and understand the reasons as to why you know, we were kind of going in that direction and why we are going in, you know, sort of a differentiated instruction direction you know, and so we were trying out all of these sort of new things, but it was still all tied to, you know, our standards and (overhead page) making sure kids were getting exactly what they needed and we were testing them for exactly, you know, what they needed.

Jean: What type of support you feel you needed when you were making that transition, like you were trying to unveil this concept. I know it was totally new, but . .

#4: Yeah, you know, I think a lot of it started really when I was student teaching. I mean we have done a ton since then, but we were already heading in that direction. But, I forget what type of, oh, for us it was really our PLTs or PLCs, whatever they call them, that all of us got together and we you know, looked at the Standards and we tied them to our objectives and we wrote the test questions based on those and you know, we at that time they had you know, it wasn't the UFC, it was a different type of test, so you know, we were trying to kind of make sure that we were preparing our students for everything they would need to know, you know, later on. Umm, and so really just the help of my colleagues and helping me to decipher some of these, you know, these national-based standards especially now that they are changing them, which is in science it is really exciting because they are making them way more meaningful in terms of trying to go um, you know the route of making it more kind of technical and you know, so, so its kind of exciting to who cares about the nitty gritty stuff, let's look at how can we true this into every day science and you know more realistic for the kids, but yeah, I think just collaborating with the my peers.

Jean: And that kind of takes care of the next question. So can you describe any other supports or maybe tools that you used to guarder a little bit more understanding about that approach?

#4: Yeah, umm, whenever we, whenever I first started I was on all of these different committees and things that we are all dealing with this and so there was lots of you know, various committees all dealing with this different Standards Based Grading and different instruction and trying to kind of meld all of these you know, different viewpoints and so really just being a part of you know those committees that are dealing with you know, a lot of them were dealing with umm, you know, the type of tests we're giving, are we giving you know, like formal and informal testing and you know, when do we test and all that, and so I think just being a part of you know those committees really did kind of help me in terms of understanding why we are doing this and how all of these other ways of teaching kind of interconnect with that.

Jean: What types of support do you feel that are necessary or beneficial as one considers shifting from that traditional to Standards Based, so if you have a new teacher come in and I grew up in the traditional system and you probably grew up in it . .

#4: Yeah
Jean: . . . and they're going to teach traditional, grade traditional. What do you think you need to do to support our what types of support?

#4: Yeah, I think making them realize that you know, I mean, yeah, whenever I was in school, if I did something even homework, I expected to be graded and I was going to get a grade for it, you know, and so, kids are having a hard shift with this, but they come in and I'm just suppose to do this, umm, but I'm not going to get a grade for it, well yes, everything you do here is meaningful, you are doing it because it is going to help you, you know, on the grade that is actually going to count and I am not going to grade practice, and you know, I'm going to grade your kind of formative, you know, assessment and you know as the student teachers feel like if they are creating this assignment or even new teachers, you know they just want to grade everything. I actually sat down with our new teacher today and she said, what am I suppose to collect and what am I suppose to grade. Okay, lets figure out, have they practiced this before, its not fair ever to grade kids on something that it is the first time that they have ever seen it or done it, its just not fair and so kids will quickly learn that oh, I'm doing this because it is going to help me later and I don't want to be graded on it because I am going to suck at it the first time, you know, and given written feedback, she goes, well can I collect it, yes, collect it, look at it, given written feedback, and give it back to them. That is the best, you know, way that kids should not be penalized for umm, for practice, you know, they just shouldn't be. Umm, but I think it is, it is kind of a hard shift, but kids like it, they understand it better, and so just getting them I think to realize that, and looking at the data also, umm, you know, my kids are doing so much better because they are doing all this practice and they do all the practice willingly without me constantly you know, prompting them and I think that is sort of kind of this invigorating thing for them because its not tied to a grade. They can try it and they can practice it and if they screw up, they can just try it and practice it again and it's not something that is going to affect them forever, so.

Jean: Okay.

#4: So I think just seeing that it works is probably the hardest thing, so.

Jean: Absolutely. What types of support related to a transition like this when you are going from a traditional to Standards Based, have you requested any help from leadership and that is any level of leadership in this particular building?

#4: So you know, I sometimes come up with these kind of crazy ideas, which is probably why Mark had you interview me. I am not always certain if every body is going to kind of go with it. You know and so, I mean I have the most supportive administration and staff you can possibly imagine, so you know just, you know, having sort of the freedom to try new things and the people around me being supportive and giving ideas as to how I can change it to make it better, and so that, you know, that has been really helpful and to not be afraid to kind of try, you know, new things and every unit revamping entirely because I realize that half the stuff that we did before, why, what's the point, and you know, how can I make it to where it is just you know, relevant stuff that the kids can take with them and so really I think that just having people around you that are constantly supportive, you know really makes a huge difference and just letting me try all these crazy things that I like to try out.

Jean: Is there a level of support you feel like you still need from leadership in the building?
Umm, I, my colleagues are really good at this, about you know, oh my God, I have this great idea, like right now, I have this great idea and we are going to take all of our honor's biology kids on a camping trip and we are going to learn, you know all these things and somebody to kind of like, help me to pair down my ideas and go okay, so what is this really going to do, is it just that you want to be outside? Well yes, sort of, but you know, like what it is, and so having somebody that they can kind of bounce ideas off of, and usually it is, it's the people around me that not so much administration, but just kind of bounce these ideas around and really help me to focus it and get kind of get the biggest bang out of my buck is what I'm trying to do. Umm, go ahead, I think that is all I was going to say.

Jean: So what are the leadership components in this building that are really helping to support this initiative or this ongoing approach to grading?

yeah, I mean I think it is just, just, you know we are talking about it constantly whenever when it is our shared plannings and you know we are getting all of these ideas from other departments as to you know different things that they are trying, so that has been really helpful and kind of encouraging to going, okay you almost think things like this are sort of impossible in sort of these black and white areas, you know, its like, I can see how you can do this I like PE or in some of these other classes, but seeing it, you know, math is doing it and seeing all of our, all of the other departments are doing it in very different ways, but we are all kind of meeting the same objective and so that is always encouraging to have you know that collaboration time with people outside to go, okay its not everybody across the board, its kind of doing it and you know feel like you have all of these ideas that are not supported.

Jean: When you think of building administration, do you see building administration being involved in this?

Oh, I mean, absolutely because they are the ones I think from you know at least from my perspective, you know all of us are kind of encouraging one another, but it is the administration that is going yes, this is how we are going to do this and you know we will help you to figure this out and we are kind of as a building, we are trying to make that shift. And they do provide lots and lots of support and help in that regard and they are getting our EC or our executive counsel a lot of the activities and things that they have planned for these shared plannings, so they are in charge of planning the shared plannings. They do you know from the administration, kind of down, they are you know helping us to get better at these things and they are not telling us necessarily to do it, they are just sort of encouraging it and giving us the support along the way, you know, that we need and it really is helpful just having other people tell you that they are doing it and its working. Umm, you know, so.

Jean: What does that support look like that building administration is giving you?

Okay. So you know it really is through for the most part, where I'm seeing it through is the executive counsel and the shared plannings that they are actually giving us time, structured time throughout the school day to work with our colleagues, to practice it, and to bounce ideas off, and share you know all the information that we have and then you know, encouraging PLTs, which we all have to meet, you know with PLTs, but encouraging us to actually do that as well.
Jean: So you feel in kind of totality that the support you received both building administration, executive counsel, shared planning, . . .

#4: Yeah.

Jean . . . . all those things have helped you? Maybe technically, emotionally . . .

#4: Oh, absolutely.

Jean: . . . it just really helped you to . . .

#4: Yeah, I mean you can't, you cannot be a teacher alone, you know, you have to have all the support around you and Rock Bridge, which is why I don't ever want to leave this place because they are amazing at that, I mean better than any place that I have ever been at just supporting one another continuously even when things don't work out, you know, they are still supportive and it does, it kind of trickles down everywhere even our kids feel that way, you know, so.

Jean: What do you think the most important component of building leadership is when you are trying to create or sustain a program like this?

#4: I think part of you know, as you have been asking me about the administration, I really have to kind of think about how they were involved and I think that is sort of the important part of it, is that I don't feel like I have this pressure from up top. I really do feel like its like we really are doing what is best for kids and its not because we are being told that we have to, but we are being given all of these great ideas and giving the opportunity to implement them in the classroom, but I don't have you know, Mark coming into my classroom daily going, doesn't look like you are doing this, you know, he doesn't and you know, yeah, I don't know, so as I was you know, listening, I feel like they're kind of in it with us, but they are not on top just watching over us and directing us, but they are helping you know with all of these plannings and things and trying to help us to go that direction, but not really dragging us along, so.

Jean: Is there anything else that we didn't touch on or that you feel strongly about when it relates to Standards Based Grading and support and leadership and all that that you wanted to add that we didn't cover?

#4: No I don't think so, umm, you know. Honestly I had no idea what this interview was going to be about until we started talking about it. Umm, you know, I really think that just, it is a shift that has to happen and I know it is scary because it is not the way things have been done. And we are nowhere close to having it and I think there is probably even better ways of doing it, but you have got to start somewhere and this seems to be a good place you know, to start with, so.

Jean: Okay, but I really appreciate you taking the time today, you have certainly helped me with some insight and your experience and so that is where we will conclude the interview.

#4: Okay.
Jean: Thanks Lisa for coming in and taking time to meet with me today. I will not take much of your time, however, I understand you have been working on to transition or you have transitioned towards the Standards Based Grading. My goal today is to gain insight from you regarding this transition and your experience within this process. During the course of my doctoral studies, Standards Based Grading has become a focus and I feel that by my gaining insight from a practitioner such as yourself, the information will lend itself nicely to my study. At the end of my study, I would be more than happy to share my findings with you, if you are interested and as I stated, your insight will be helpful, therefore, please share with me what you feel is most important related to the questions I ask of you today and I do plan to record this interview today in order to review it for themes related to my study. Do you approve of me recording this interview?

Lisa: That's fine.

Jean: Great. Well thanks. We will go ahead and get started, so Lisa, I'm just going to start off and if you can kind of tell me about you interest. What was your interest when you originally looked at the traditional way of approach to grading to the Standards Based way of grading, what was your interest in seeking that kind of a change?

Lisa: Umm, hardly any. I think our conversations through assessment for learning, AFL, that we began talking about here a couple of years before the district said you much talk about it. We had a group of people that had looked at it and thought there was some good value in there and so we as a group kind of decided, we think we want to look at this, we think there is value in it. So we started exploring and through our bi-weekly shared planning meetings, co-curricular, we started exploring some of the you know, foundations of AFL and that is when it just really hit me, its not like I'd been seeking out some different, its like, boy I could and should be doing this in a different way, so, kind of it came to me and I thought this is really good and then just took it and ran with it.

Jean: Okay. Tell me about your experience as you made the pedagogical shift, like what were you thinking about when you, what really propelled you towards the Standards Based model? I know you kind of talked about some of that AFL concepts that you were studying, but in your own mind, what really gave you that last push to say this is the right thing to do for kids?

Lisa: We had conversations about what a grade really means and a kid that makes a C does that mean they can do half of it and not half of it, or they do all of it at kind of the 70% level and what does that mean. We talked about the, the girl who works really, really hard and gets lots and lots of help and gets perfect scores on all of her homework, but then can't take a test at all and fails every test versus the boy who doesn't do anything and its always the girl that does everything and the body who does nothing in my mind, the body who doesn't do anything and then he makes an A on every test and both of those kids end up with a C grade in the class and when you actually talk about what does this kid know versus the second kid, its an entirely different thing. So somehow trying to figure out how do I make the grade reflect what they truly know about my particular course was the thing that was just constantly in the back of my mind. And as
I was trying to formulate how to put it together and how to make it work, that was my ultimate goal was for the grade to reflect what they could actually do.

Jean: Okay. What type of support did you feel like you were needing during that time when you were making that transition to that Standards Based approach?

Lisa: Uhh, I needed a lot. It kept me awake at night, um, thinking about it, wrestling with it. It went on for oh, probably a year and a half kind of time. Umm, just as far as support, I really just needed somebody to talk to. Somebody to think through with me, somebody who was kind of in a similar spot and wanting to think about the same things I was thinking about and just brainstorming ideas about how can we do this, what is a good way to do this, and then trying to figure out how to make that work in my classroom with a particular course that I was teaching. I would say that was the biggest support, just an opportunity to talk to other people and try to figure some things out.

Jean: So that was more collegial, like it was more of your colleagues supporting you at that point?

Lisa: Yes.

Jean: Can you describe any other supports or tools that you used to help you gain that perspective on if you were doing the right thing or not, or was it grounded in any one thing/

Lisa: I think we just have to go back to some of the research stuff, you know, whether it is the AFL foundations or some articles, Patty Avery was really good about finding an article and passing it on to you about lets see the, what was it, the Power of Zero?

Jean: The Case Against the Zero?

Lisa: The Case Against the Zero, there you go, just that article in particular, things like that that you could read that just make you go, oh wow, I never really thought about that before and so we had some of those things that would come along in shared planning, here read this article. Patty would do that. I would go into Kathy Ritter's office pretty frequently and I would just sit down and say help me. Help me because here's kind of where I am struggling, I can't figure out how to get from here to here. So yeah, there was some, a lot of collegiality with it, but also some umm, just needing to read some research or read an alternate point of view that kind of made you rethink maybe what your current situation was.

Jean: Okay. So what do you think, if you see somebody new going in towards this approach and they don't really know anything about it and they are just coming in fresh and they have been convinced by seeing others that really don't have a knowledge base, what do you see a necessary supports? What are they going to need in order to make that transition?

Lisa: Umm, I think I will just say time. Umm and it kind of depends where they are at in their professional career also. If they are a first year teacher, they don't know. They don't know how to do it anyway, they are still formulating their notions and their philosophies and they are very amiable and you get them involved in some of those conversations and they are going, oh well yeah, that's how everybody should it. If it is somebody who
has been teaching 15 years and they come in and they are pretty set in their ways, umm, then that is a whole different kind of ballgame and I will also say our professional learning teams, we've used a lot as a support piece and our teams are designed around a common course that the teachers teach, so for example, we have a pre-calculus professional learning team and there is no mandate that says you all have to do everything exactly the same, but there is a mandate that says the big things, you really need to talk about and come to some consensus about. Are you going to accept late homework, or how much of the homework is going to be worth, are you going to let them retest, all of those kind of things because if you do allow it and I don't allow it, that makes like miserable for me. And so I think by kind of forcing our teams to work together and talk together, even if you've got somebody that comes in that is fairly set in their ways, they are joining in with a handful of other people who are already thinking about it a different way and we just really don't give them an option to do it totally different. They kind of need to, now the way I teach this lesson and the amount of homework I assign and all of that kind of stuff, you've got full range to do it how you want, but some of those big things, switch then falls into I think the kind of topics that you're talking about as an example.

Jean: What type of support did you ever request from your leadership and that can be any level of leadership in this building. Did you ever request support from maybe the higher powers that be?

Lisa: Well, I think I just have to go back to conversation and research. My going into Kathy Ritter and saying help me think through this. Umm, she would come up with articles that she would pass along my way as well. Umm, you know we did our Stack Grant from math, there was a lot of thinking to place then. We spent three weeks you know, every summer for three years and I remember some of my most conflicted times were really then because that was when I was telling myself, I get to make the changes now because once August gets here, then its too late. I always feel like when I start in August I still have to be doing in you now, in January, which of course that is not true, but so it was summer when I would really wrestle with some of those things the very most and Stack was just a convenient way to uhh, have conversations with colleagues, to be able to talk to people that are at Hickman or at Jeff Junior, it was pretty research-based as well. We had articles that we had to think and reflect on and then, you know, we would talk about it and do different things, so that as far as something beyond just you know, right here within our own four walls was probably the biggest thing just professional development kinds of things, about assessment and grading and the standards and such.

Jean: The leadership in this building that is currently in place, what kind of ongoing support to they provide for that initiative or your ongoing practice in Standards Based Grading?

Lisa: Our executive counsel, do I need to define that at all or can I just . . .

Jean: Sure

Lisa: An elected group of six teachers along with the principal, so its seven people, the teachers serve two-year terms and they are staggered three go off every year and three new ones come on. They are the governing body for school improvement and so they under their purview the two biggest things for leading to what you are talking about and the biggest things overall is guiding the professional learning teams and
providing forms to fill out, conversations to have, feedback back to the PLT as you are
writing a goal, this goal is not a very good goal, so provide feedback and ask for
revisions and they will resubmit. So having some due dates and some things, when I
say forms to fill out, you know its, what is, how are you dealing with the kids that aren't
understanding you know a particular standard in your class and they have to talk about
it and then fill out and answer that question and sent in and so there is some
accountability there that those conversations are taking place. Also set the agenda I
guess for our shared planning sessions, so our co-curricular professional development
the executive counsel determines what things need to be talked about throughout the
course of the year and either appoint a group of people to, we want you to create a
session on X and you guys figure out how to do it or the executive counsel may create
it themselves either one. So I guess those are the two big ways that you kind of get
whatever discussions you feel like need to happen going on within all of the teachers
within the building, because every teacher is on a professional learning team and every
teacher is in a shared planning group.

Jean: Who, what is the shared planning group made up of, like what types of teachers, all
they all the same content?

Lisa: It is a group of teachers that are all have a common period off.

Jean: Gotcha.

Lisa: We've got four period day, we teach five of those eight, so one day you are teaching
three, the other day you are teaching two and your three class day the fourth class is
your conference period. On your two class day, one of the hours is supervision and
then the fourth hour is shared planning, which it is a conference hour except every
other week, you get together and meet for half of the block, so 45 minutes every other
week, so its just made up of the 10-15 people that are all have shared planning are all
off in that one hour.

Jean: You mentioned something about sessions, they create sessions the executive counsel
or the shared planning groups. Are those meant to be produced or presented to the
greater faculty?

Lisa: That will include all of the faculty. All of the faculty are assigned a shared planning
group. One of the eight blocks.

Jean: So when you said sessions you were referring to shared planning sessions?

Lisa: Yes.

Jean: Okay. I just wanted to clarify that. At this point in time where you are in your
experience and active participation in that Standards Based Grading model do you feel
like you still need any guidance from leadership or want more guidance from
leadership in the building?

Lisa: Umm, where I am at right now, this is my latest struggle, is we spent so much class
time with formative assessments that we are not getting our content covered. There is
great value in this formative assessments, the kids love them. I wasn't sure you would
be able to get a kid to do something that wasn't going to be worth any points, but by
and large, you can get them to buy into, we've got to practice, practice, practice, because it is worth something. You're learning whether you, you know, whether you know it yet or not. And so I found great value in that. The kids love it. They don't want those formative assessments to be worth a lot of points. They like having that opportunity to mess it up and then figure it out and then by testing day to be able to do it. But, what I have noticed in the last few years, I haven't gotten as far. There is a whole unit that I'm not even touching that I really feel like I need to do. And so how do I take the principles of AFL and offer kids opportunities and have all the these, its kind of our struggle to get all of these targets and there's too many targets and is there some way to take these five targets and roll it into one target, so that you are assessing this one thing rather than the five little bitty pieces. Those are kind of the conversations that are going on in my head now and as a result, I'm forcing other people to think about that too because I'm just asking them questions. Part of what we are trying in algebra 2 this year, which came up from these very issues, is the quizzes are going to be take home quizzes and we are going to give a quiz at the middle of the unit and at the end of the units and they take them home and do them and then they bring them back and turn them in and they are not going to be worth much for points, 5 points maybe, but it will be a opportunity for them to do something and an opportunity for us to learn where they are at and the provide them feedback, but we're not going to spend 45 minutes of class time to gather that information. They will just do it outside of class. We haven't had our first one yet, it is going to be coming next week. Will the kids do it or will it just come back blank, will they understand that it is a formative opportunity and you really do need to take this and do something with is and come back to class with it done because if you don't, the 5 points you lost isn't that big of deal, it's the 100 points on the test that you didn't get an opportunity to get some feedback on. I don't know whether we can get kids to buy in to that or not, we'll have to see, but that's, when you ask about the leadership part of it, I guess and I've kind of said all the way through this, I don't know what I don't know. So the thing that moves me to the next chunk is when somebody says something that makes me go uhhh and then I start wrestling with it and so our mantra this year at Rock Bridge is kind of keep moving forward. We started off the very first day, Monday the 13th and watched little video of the Robinson's keep moving forward and that's kind of our goal for the year, is don't get complacent, don't get settled where you're at, but keep thinking, keep wrestling, and keep trying things, and keep trying things and they are not all going to work and that is okay, but just kind of keep yourself moving and so its those little things that people say or sees that someone plants, discussions that pop up that I personally need most in the leadership to keep my mind thinking rather than letting me get to the place where I start thinking, well I've pretty well got it all figured out and I can just coast through these last two years and not have to, you know, think about it anymore, I'm set.

Jean: Okay:  do you feel, so overall you felt that the support you received since you started this initiative has helped you, all the levels of support?

Lisa: Oh yes.

Jean: Okay. Is there anything else Lisa that you wanted to share or that you in your mind would maybe want to touch on or express that you haven't already shared with me?

Lisa: I don't really think of anything.
Jean: Okay. Well I appreciate you taking the time today to talk to me and give me some frank answers. I appreciate your time.

Lisa: Yeah.
Jean: Good morning Bob. I would like to thank you for taking time to meet with me today. I will not take much of your time, however, I understand you have been working to transition or you have transitioned towards the Standards Based Grading. My goal today is to gain insight from you regarding this transition and your experience within this process. During the course of my doctoral studies, Standards Based Grading has become a focus and I feel that by my gaining insight from a practitioner such as yourself, the information will lend itself nicely to my study. At the end of my study, I would be more than happy to share my findings with you, if you are interested, and as I stated, your insight will be helpful, therefore, please share with me today what you feel is most important related to the questions I ask of you. I do plan to record this interview today in order to review it for themes related to my study. So therefore, do you approve of me recording this interview?

Bob: Yes.

Jean: I appreciate that. So if you are ready, we will get started and we will just roll into the first questions. If you can just kind of tell me, I know you are a mentor teacher now, however, relating to your class room experience and maybe how you are coaching others, tell me you interest in seeking change from like that traditional type of assessment for kids to Standards Based Grading.

Bob: Okay. For me it call comes down to motivation. Student motivation to learn. And you know, I did watch Ken O'Connor a couple of years ago and that was prior to coming to Rock Bridge and he said some things that I've always believed that kids should be allowed to make mistakes when they are learning and no two students are going to learn at the same pace although we teach them all at the same pace. If you are this age, then you have to be in this classroom and we are going to teach you all the same way and you are all going to learn the same way and I don't think that that happens. So students need the opportunity to make mistakes along the way, learn it. I think back to the things I've done in the past when trying to learn something new, and its very shaky at first and I want feedback along the way. I certainly would not want my early failures to affect the end, the outcome or what people, umm, how successful I am with that, you know. There have been some times when I really messed up at the beginning, but then I come out to be pretty darn good at the end and if my grade was just averaged like that, it would not make sense, it wouldn't be an accurate reflection and I don't think it is an accurate reflection on what students know and can do when the grades from the entire beginning of the unit to the end of the unit are averaged together and some teachers try to do things that kind of hide a little bit where they are going to weight the homework a little bit lower and the quizzes a little bit lower and the tests really high, and so that is kind of their getting comfortable with it and that, its sort of a movement along the continuum when they do that, umm, to not give that homework as much grade. But I think it is still clouding the overall picture of what the kid, what the student is capable of doing. And I think we need to be careful about that in grade and score, if you are going to look at it to assess, is this really an accurate reflection of what the students know. It could be inflated because if you are giving effort points for homework or if the student is getting a lot of help with their homework, going through a tutor or having an older brother or sister or a parent, umm, they may get good homework scores and then the quizzes and tests are low, but if you look at
the final grade, you don't have that really accurate depiction of what's going on with the
student. Umm, does that answer your question?

Jean: It did and it really leads into and lends itself to the second question, which was about
your experience as you were going to that pedagogical shift and like when you were,
before you hit that Standards Based Grading approach . . . .

Bob: Ummhmm, yeah

Jean: . . . you decided, what were you concerns I guess with that experience when you
were traditionally grading when you thought man, I just, there is something going on here . .

Bob: Well it, just because I didn't think the grade was reflecting accurately
(knocking) . . . . motivation-wise, I don't think students would be motivated,
you know if they get that early zero or that early bad grade in the unit, they are not
necessarily motivated to put a lot of effort into what is the effort, what's the use of
putting in more effort if I've already got this D on that first quiz, how much harder am I
going to have to work actually to get this grade up and so they, they would just shut
down early on in the learning process and that just didn't, didn't seem right. They
became, and students were just, they are after points. Point grabbers.

Jean: Ummhmm.

Bob: And they became how much is this worth. I will do this if its worth this many points,
umm, and I wanted them to be learning for the learning sake, and I can tell you from
the perspective of middle school to high school, I didn't have a problem getting middle
schools to work even the reluctant ones I convince to do some work in class and then I
got to high school level and I would ask the students to work and to work on a project
together or okay at the end of 30 minutes I want you to report out and the first question
was, is this worth points. So they become point grabbers that has nothing to do with
are they learning and then in my own children doing homework, umm, they would just
do homework to get done. They just wanted to get it done and I helped, I tried to
explain the process or the what is going on behind the problem or how they'll debate
about something and they will tell me, all I need to do is get this done.

Jean: Right.

Bob: And that is all it was, its, it just seemed like it was busy work and the learning that could
be brought out is lost because they are just doing it to get it done.

Jean: Ummhmm.

Bob: We are not doing it to have a further discussion or whatever, so it, I guess those were
the concerns for me is that they became point grabbers, they were not after the
learning, they were giving up early in the tasks or within the unit.

Jean: When you were going through that transition and you were looking at this new
approach, what type of support did you feel like you needed to go ahead and make that
transition?
Bob: Ummm, its being here at this building, we, Ken O'Connor was here, I think just the location was here. Umm, I knew that I was, I don't know, I knew I was supported of above, but at the principal level, that they would have my back on this. Its sometime there are some teachers that are here for quite a while that are very traditional and, and I have to respect what they bring to the table because they have been teaching high school a lot longer than I've been teaching. They were, uhh, it was nice that they, they allowed me to do this and they didn't share their, if they had bad opinions about it, they didn't really argue with me about it, so they kind of allowed me to try some things. The important thing also is that you have, that you can be able to explain to parents what this is looking like and what it's going to be and why you are doing it.

Jean: Ummhmm.

Bob: I think that is an important piece too, so you can be, you can get the support from up above, but if your parents are fighting you, then the, then the kids are coming in with their parents perspective and it becomes a difficult battle, so you are going to need to have some understanding or at least a way to explain to parents that is going to make sense using the correct words, the right tone so that they, and really backing it up well for them to understand the new approach. Luckily I didn't have, I didn't have any kickback from parents. Occasionally I would have an email and then I would be able to explain myself and they appreciated what I was doing, so.

Jean: Did you have any support from colleagues and if so, what type of support was that.

Bob: I think it was more of there were few colleagues that, that's cool, but that is a lot of work. (laughs) So and they also questioned how do you get them to do homework, how do you get them to take the quizzes in a formative assessments, uhh, seriously and not blow them off if they can just get their points at anytime during the semester. Uhh, they question a little bit of the fairness issue if the student is allowed to make up points on a test they had done in the semester. How is that fair, that they all had that opportunity to do it, that was my explanation. They didn't have to learn it in the first two months. If it took them a little longer during the semester to learn it, they could always come back to me and work on it and then test and my ultimate goal is not to try to you know, catch em, so I can, oh, you didn't get it during these three months, too bad we're moving on, my goal is to, you didn't get it during these three months, lets keep working on it and you can retest anytime between now and the end of the semester when I have to turn in the grades.

Jean: Okay.

Bob: So it was, there was some coolness, but there was also some skepticism about how do you keep the kids motivated to work with this?

Jean: Can you describe any other support you may have received that were beneficial in considering this shift? Did you do any for example, research or talking to other colleagues . . .

Bob: You know, it was really the Ken O'Connor presentation and AFL, you know, at the time we were doing it AFL. We still are doing AFL, but we are not calling it that. But, yeah, my participation I guess in the assessment for learning, things that I was learning as a coach with the leadership academy also, uhh, reading some motivation, you know,
how they motivate students and then also the Ken O'Connor thing and just knowing that, I don't know, I felt, I've always felt like I could try things in the district, try new things. I guess I've been at schools where that was, they either respected me enough to do that or it was open enough to let kids, or let teachers try things, is what, as long as they had a good reason to try it, you know, if it failed and flopped, then you adjust, which I adjusted you know. I think every year we adjust a little bit.

Jean: So if you have somebody come into this and they are a traditional teacher/educator and they were, you've kind of hooked them with an interest to switch to Standards Based Grading, what supports do you feel are absolutely necessary for those individuals to make this shift successful?

Bob: I think that and I may be saying this over and over, but you're asking these questions for a reason to kind of drill down into this, umm, I really think you know, the professional readings, seeing either watching a video of some people who are presenting, having a panel, there have been some teacher panels in the district that have got together people who have done some things to sit and talk about the benefits, the pros and cons of it, I think it is important that they know that its not easy to make the shift. I think they need to see for sure what the value is, what the benefit is to the student and so that could come out in a panel, that could come out in research, it could come out in discussions with students, you know, have a panel of students who have been some classes that were, the grading was a little different and they could speak on that. That would be something that I would see definitely at Rock Bridge that there would be some students who would be very willing to sit on a panel and give their opinions pro and con. You know I can tell you students that were in my class eventually learned to like the system and they really felt like it favored them. And it reduced the pressure in the class and for some people they think reducing the pressure means that they are reducing their, their commitment to the learning, but it actually really kind of gave them more freedom to relax and learn. Instead of them doing it because I have to do it and there is so much pressure because I have to learn within this time frame. With that pressure off, they kind of actually worked well, better I think with less stress in the classroom. But, that was my, I just ______, but I think you would need teachers who have been there and done that and students who have been a part of it to kind of talk about it as well as looking at those videos or having some one come in and speak or doing a study, a book study or something like that.

Jean: Okay. Lets look at the leadership component a little bit.

Bob: All right.

Jean: As you had mentioned, you felt supported by administration. What type of support did you request from leadership. Did you ever need anything that was, something else that would help to propel you or

Bob: I didn't.

Jean: Okay.

Bob: I didn't. That is interesting that you asked that. I think it really depends on the structure of the building. I think I had this discussion last night. There are buildings where you kind of wait to be told what to do or wait to be told what direction we're going
to go in or wait to be told where to think. You know, here's where I want you to put your thinking this year. Umm and that kind of comes from above. And then there are buildings where you, you know, people will just come out, like here when we have our shared planning, there are teachers who are just fired up about something and you just listen to them and you're like wow, if you've been in part of that, you know, you are being told what to think or when to think it, you could be swayed, like oh, I guess I'm suppose to think this way, but then there are buildings where teachers are just, you know, you think as a professional where you want to be going. So I guess what I'm trying to say is that I did not ask for help in thinking this particular way. I didn't feel like, I think my past was kind of like, all right if you are going to do something, you're going to do it yourself. They'll support you, but you're just going to kind of do it yourself and I know that there are people that just go right up and say, hey I need this, I need this, I need this, and that is probably kind of helpful to the leader in the building, but it is not always perceived by the faculty that that's something you can do. Like you have to, you have to know that this is the correct way to be thinking before you can ask for it. Umm, because you have to be safe, right, so there is some environments where you are safe to try a bunch of things and you can ask for support and others where the perception is necessarily or they, or their past history doesn't allow them to just say, you know what, I'm going to try something new, I'm going to the principal and ask for help. So I think that was my upbringing was that I'm not necessarily going to, especially when I tried it, it was my first year here, so you kind of, in your first year you just jumped in and say hey look at me I'm doing this and I kind of did it knowing that I had the support at the upper level, but I'm just kind of doing it myself and not make a big scene about it. Now after a few years, I might be more, but I think it is important for you as a leader to understand you know, there are some teachers who are very comfortable about just jumping out there and trying new things and others that don't think that's allowed.

Jean: Right

Bob: or that's going to be safe to do that or they are not going to want to make waves early on and I don't know whatever waves, what are waves, I mean some buildings definitely someone makes waves and then there are some environments where there is a teacher over here making waves, but doesn't bother anybody else or people like to catch that wave.

Jean: Can you think of anything in particular that the current leadership is doing to support that style?

Bob: Yeah, well, yeah within our building our principal has said, we want, I want the teachers to make mistakes every day, I want you to fail every day. Umm, we're asking our students to make, to take risks and fail. To learn from those failures and grow. So as a faculty, we need to be modeling that as well and we need to be trying new things and the students need to be seeing us as trying new things and trying to grow, umm, and I want, Mark came out and said it, I want teachers to make mistakes and fail every day. But, you know, you got to, if that, if that is was just taken by itself, it would be a problem but it's followed up with, and learn from those mistakes and keep trying and model for your students that we are lifelong learners. Umm, and getting that message from up above, is really, is really kind of neat. ______is always asking and bring in new people, we have a lot of young people who are brand new to the building are on some of his big committees, but he asked people to share during faculty meetings and during
shared planning, you have so many different people to share out what they are doing. So he recognizes innovation and I think that has always been the culture here, I mean he was picked because, I think they thought he would follow up with that, but you know, Kathy Ritter set the precedence and before her, you know we can go back to you know, past principals who have really been part of that encouraging teachers to just get out there and try new things.

Jean: so that type of ongoing support is

Bob: ________(interrupts)

Jean . . . you feel like you still need from leadership to

Bob: Yeah, yeah.

Jean: so

Bob: definitely so. And I think, yeah, leadership up above and then also your peers within you, within your PLTs and that was, that is the harder thing to do is to get everyone in your PLT to do the same thing. I didn't get that to happen, umm, it was my first year, so I was on a PLT. We talked the same things, we had the same standards, we graded differently and the grading thing is so difficult to get everyone on board with. So I graded differently than they did. They knew what I was doing, umm, and the concern was parents are going to think that one class is graded easier than another class and so we had to be careful about that aspect of it. Again, what is best for kids. We make sure that the parents are not upset about this. Well, you know realistically you can get parents coming in and I demand my kid get transferred over to this teachers class and the next year no one wants to be in this teacher's class, they all want to be in this one and then, so to kind of keep that at a small war, we try to be consistent as we can, but

Jean: Is there anything else we didn’t touch on that you felt strongly about, about Standards Based Grading and maybe that leadership component that you wanted to kind of summarize with or you may put it all out there on the line already.

Bob: you know, I don't know. I think that if the leadership really believes in that, I think the biggest concern that I see here at this level, is keeping the students going because they are point grabbers and its just going to take a lot to beat it out of their system, beat it out (laughs), but to rid the system of some of the old past ways of you are getting your grade on this homework and you are getting your grade on this quiz and we are going to average everything together and that is going to be difficult for teachers to grasp something new. I think recognizing what its going to take and recognizing the change that might take, you know, we did a little bit this summer where we had to, we suffered a loss whenever we change and do something new there is a loss and people don't deal with loss very well when there is a change, and so to recognize that, that it might hurt a little bit, umm, and I think the biggest challenge for me has been how to keep the students motivated in between, in between your final assessment, your summative of assessment to keep them motivated for the formatives, keep them motivated to keep doing the homework, many kids are, but then when you've got your, kind of your lower group that is really unmotivated and at the high school level, man they are done with math. They’ve I could convince them in middle school to like math
for a couple more years. At the high school level, they are done. So what kind of support do you need to give them to, along the way, and I think that would be just something to look into, I guess its more of, looking into it could be a teacher panel again, it could be more research about how to long the way. I think middle school is a great place to try this and then maybe when they get into the high school, they won't be such point grabbers and they will kind of have the system down where they need to work along the way is important and the feedback that you give them along the way is important and I think that is probably the key is to get regular constant feedback along the way for the students and hold them accountable for doing the work so they just don't wait until the test to study because the test is the only thing that is going to count, the summative is really the only grade, at least for me that is kind of the way the Standards Based Grading is, is you know, your summative, but your formative along the way shouldn't really be factored into that final grade, but the feedback along the way and the formative is really important, so that, when you get to the summative they have, they are almost 100% sure how hey are going to do on that final test because they've had plenty of opportunities along the way to stumble and learn from it. But then the opportunities for them afterwards kind of come back and rework some things. I didn't answer the question about leadership did I?

Jean: You did. You did very well. I thought a couple of question ago you actually hit it very nicely so I appreciate it.

Bob: Sorry, yeah, the support is really just understanding the process

Jean: Ummhmm

Bob: and giving the teachers, I mean letting the teachers know that you are behind this and you've encouraged it and show them, somehow show them that it can, it can impact the motivation to your students in the class, it can uhh, I don't know, yeah.

Jean: Yeah, I well, I

Bob: ____they are supportive along the way.

Jean: I certainly appreciate you taking the time today to meet with me and kind of discuss some of these things and I appreciate your insight and it will help, lend itself nicely to the things that I am looking at in my study, so, I appreciate your time.

Bob: Cool.

Jean: Thanks.
Jean: Good morning David. I would like to take the chance to thank you for meeting with me today and I won't take much of your time, however, I understand you have been working to transition or you have transitioned towards the Standards Based Grading. My goal today is to gain some insight from you regarding this transition and your experience within this process. During the course of my doctoral studies, Standards Based Grading has become a focus and I feel that by my gaining insight from a practitioner such as yourself, the information will lend itself nicely to my study. At the end of my study, I would be more than happy to share my findings with you, if you are interested, so as I stated, your insight will be helpful, therefore, please share with me what you feel is most important related to the questions I ask of you today and I do plan to record this interview today to review it for themes related to my study if you will approve of that recording.

David: Absolutely.

Jean: Okay. I appreciate that. Thank you. We will just go ahead and get started then David and if you can kind of tell me a little bit about your interest when you were seeking change from more of a traditional model of assessing student learning to the Standards Based Grading.

David: Umm, my Standards Based, tell me what, what your thoughts are, what are you referring to when you say Standards Based?

Jean: There are many different approaches. This is about how you are assessing students based on standards rather than maybe giving them points for effort or giving them points for attendance or those things that aren't academically . . .

David: So switch away from kind of the behavioral-type of stuff and more on, by standards, I mean, are you talking about the curricular stuff. .

Jean: Yes.

David: . . . common core and essential core and all that?

Jean: Yes, yes, yes.

David: I don't know if I'm going to be real good because I don't, quite honestly I don't feel that the common cores are moving in the right direction based on everything that I have been reading and, and the things that I'm finding out as far as the national guys, the Trace ____, and the McLouds and those guys. I, so by standards when you say standards you're talking about the curriculum from the common core and all that

Jean: And really its just about how you are assessing students right now, so its not really about the common core, I mean, I know that is coming down the road, but how are you assessing students maybe right now that is maybe not quite traditional, but its more

David: Sure, absolutely. I will be even, the common core to me doesn't, the common core to me is a misdirection, so I'm not, we, we're moving away from assessing even the
common core, and I know that's that is not a district directive and I'm sure I can be fired
for saying that, but the reality of it is, is that, we started the movement. Catherine
??Sapp, my teaching partner and I started, actually well, well I started looking at this a
long time ago, so, if I go too long just tell me to shut up and we can move to different
questions. But the idea behind Sir Ken Robinson is really kind of where we are
adopting. Its what we are thinking about and trying to stretch and we are not just
talking about AP kids, we are talking about all kids and if we feel that the model of
education that we have now is not appropriate, which I don't feel that it is because its
training kids to work in factories, its an industrial model, you know, it's the idea that you
know have bells and we have whistles and that is what they are suppose to learn so
that they do better in factories and that and so anyway, we feel that there are skills that
they should have when they leave high school going into the workforce or going to
college and those are the skills that we are going to start to put in the grade book. We
are going to start put leadership and/or initiative or we are going to put, we are going to
put something along the lines of collaboration, creativity, media literacy, which means
technology, ad some other things and we are not going to put in the grade book, code
of Hammurabi and verb tents as individual lessons. We are going to go beyond that
and so I think that a common core comes well short of being able to do that. It does
not free teachers to teach kids the way that they are learning in an age of information
when they can get on their phone or their iPad and they can find whatever I'm teaching.
They can find it immediately and so, I don't think that drill and kill, I don't think that a
teacher lecturing, I don't think that a teacher doing those things is really an appropriate
use of our time and I think it is almost an insult to kid's ability to manipulate technology.
Now we have to teach them how to do some stuff, but those are skill stuff, so that
means that the common core is, even though it is a movement in the right direction, it
doesn't go far enough, so we started looking at all of this stuff a couple of years ago, I
did, and then, and then particularly got really interested in it last year when I realized
that if a kid can turn in an essay and it is an awesome essay and its two days late and
its better than any kid that turned it in a day early, how in the world is that in any way,
shape or form reflective of what that kid knows and can do and what I've taught. It
makes no sense. It makes no sense to think that this kid is going to get penalized
20%, 10% a day or 5% a day or even a half a percent a day and he has a better essay
than the kid that turned it in on time, so I am rewarding the behavior, which is what the
industrial model teaches us. We want those workers to be non-thinking, non, and they
have a set time that they have to get things done by and if they don't get them done by
that time, then they are going to get penalized for that, just as they would in a factory.
They are going to get docked pay or whatever it may be and so the whole real world
argument of you got to learn how, well that is not the real world they are going to be
going into, they are not going to work in that type of a setting even, even the people
that work in skilled labor jobs lets say an auto mechanic or something like that, the
timeframe is not the world anymore, I mean people work all night long in the United
States on line, so I'm not getting them ready for that and I think that is punitive and I
think that teachers use that punitively and I think they use that punitively because they
feel that they are doing the kid some service somewhere along the line by punishing
them for turning in this intellectual insight work and what is the result on that on kids?
What do kids think then? What is a kid going to do? He is going to say are you crazy
and he is going to shut down and that is what we see over and over and over again
and we realized also that classroom homework points, we realize that after doing a
series on grading that Kathy Ritter, our previous principal kind of got us down the road
on, you know, what should grades be about? It should be about what they know and
can do and there is these kids that walk in our classroom that can do everything we
are going to ask them to from the beginning either skilled based or curricular based
and they are going to be bored and we are going to have kids that need the practice to
get to that, but at the end of the day, it's the par, the old parachute analogy that I'm
sure you've heard and are well aware of, but I mean if, if a kid can make a great
parachute and he can do it right away, and the other kid can't do it, but he is going to
get all the points along the way and at the end he is going to fail his test because he
covered his bases, he was on time, he turned everything in, but the kid that can make
a better parachute was late and he has essentially a C in parachute making because of
behavioral issues - we've got an issue there because I want the kid that can make a
parachute right. I don't really care so much about the kid that can meet the industrial
model of education along the way, so we kind of looked at that and we kind of thought,
man, you know, we're, what happened was that the kids that needed those, the kids
that we said, okay, this, we are so mad because they are not turning things in on time
and we are going to punish them, we're going to make sure they turn it in on time and
make it all worth points. Well, guess who got hurt - the kids who needed those points
the most and we're not teaching then anything and it became a struggle and a battle
and we are putting kids in positions to get, to make an antagonistic relationship with
teachers. We don't like that, we are in the business of, we are people people, that's
what teachers are and so antagonizing kids is not fun and for the people that it is fun, I
suggest they are in the wrong, they are in the wrong profession. So it, it became a
thing where we really tried to divorce ourselves from the notion that points were about
behavior or about homework, the only thing that really mattered is how much we had
taught them during the course of the semester, so we, if we can create the right
assessments and we can ask the right questions, then they should be able to get there
and if they don't, then, we find a new way to do it, but we are all in it together, so that
was kind of the movement, I mean that is a lot of different stuff in there, but it, it all kind
of, it is rattling around in my head because there is so many things that I've been
reading about and so its kind of where it started and, and its kind of, its evolving and its
not a finished product by any means and it definitely, I just, I just have ideas, I don't,
and we try to do some of them in the class from time to time, but it sucks because you
feel trapped by the district curriculum, by the common core, even though they say the
are more skill based, and there are traditional teachers who think that its, its, it is an
abomination that a history teacher would not want to teach the Babylonian or the code
of Hammurabi or I don't think the kids need that. I don't think they need it anymore. I
think they can survive just fine without it.

Jean: So tell me about your experience then when you were making this pedagogical
transition to looking more at the skills and the standards that you have to intertwine into
your education for kids, what were the things that you were seeing as you were shifting
towards this and maybe for you, its what shift did you see in the kids?

David: Oh, absolutely. Umm, you know again, it's been a better relationship with the kids.
You know, I've always had a good relationship with the kids that has never been an
issue for me. Its been, its been freeing for me because I realize that, that they respond
better and they remember, they remember that learning can be fun and it should be fun
and it shouldn't be a, a battle to get them to learn and we're trying to put this practice
with our fourth, with our fourth block, which is non-AP, non-honors, just a regular old
world studies class and what we are finding is that its more important to be a human to
those people than it is to be a teacher and I think that is really kind of the core of this
whole thing is that, I mean I'm no expert on anything, I enjoy the subject that I teach,
but I enjoy the kids more and I think that its helped them to see that you know learning
can be fun again and somewhere along the line they got that beat out of them and I
think they got it beat out of them because they didn't get the points or someone told
them that they couldn't do it at some level, and if this, if the Ken Robinson video is right
on you know, what the, the shifts that we are going through in education, 98% of kids
are leveled genius or creative when they are 0-3 years old and then it just
progressively goes down and so happens? Well, according to him, education happens
and I think that is probably, probably the truth. I mean in a natural world kids probably
stay creative their whole lives and somewhere along the line someone told them that
they couldn't and you know, we are not all going to get to the NBA and we are not all
Einsteins and we know that, but certainly we can find the things that those kids are
interested in maybe more earlier, the Montessori model or something like that.

Jean: What kind of support did you feel like you were needing David as you went through this
shift and you made that decision to kind of evolve your curriculum in your approach to
teaching?

David: Well it's funny because the thing that we went through with RPBC, the whole north,
south, east, west and the early adopters and the, you know, the second generation
after the early adopters and the, or the visionaries, I'm not a visionary. I'm an early
adopter. Umm, but I do feel like it's hard to convince the people that make the policy
that this is legit and I think that _______, I mean as we learned and I believe
beforehand you have to have the people that drag their heels on stuff. Just as you
have to have the early adopters and the visionaries, but I, the pace of things is slower
than I would like it to be, umm, but at Rock Bridge I've never felt that I haven't had
support. I've always had a principal that said, hey man, go for it, do it. But then, but
then you, but then they can always hide, the administration can always hide behind,
well, but that is not what is stated with the district, so you can only go so far with it.
They would never say that to you, but, but that becomes the subtext of conversations
that you have with the administration is, well you know, you can do that, that is
awesome, great, but keep an eye on this or remember that we've got this that or the
other, and I don't want to remember, those things to me are constructs of the old
model. I think that, they give me plenty of latitude and the way Mark does it is
phenomenal about saying, hey try anything you want, but then Nick will come in with
something about common core or district, I mean honestly the, our department chairs
are more reticent to want to do, I think because they are first year department chairs
and, umm, they are more nervous about really changing the system than probably the
principal is at this point, but

Jean: Okay.

David: So I feel like I've got support here, but I also feel like I am constantly fighting against
the old guard or the, not fighting, I'm constantly trying to convince the old guard that its
okay to do that and I don't always have the patience for that, but you know, I mean, I
respect the position and I understand why because change is different, its weird, it is
really going to work, can it really work for those kids, I'm so tired, that's why this year
I've taught AP and honors for the last five years, so, I haven't taught a regular class
room and umm, I go so tired of sitting in meets with people going, I, well, my regular
kids can't do that and they can't do this, and they can't do that and they can't do this,
you know, why, why, why not? Why? Why do you say that and that is frustrating to me.
Just as its frustrating to hear the administration say well, that is all good in theory or to
be cynical about it, or to say well, you know, oh that is a great idea, but that is never
going to happen or its, you know, its just another one of those things in education, well, may be, but I believe in it and that power of belief can be I mean a pretty transforming thing if you let it be, so, that to be has been frustrating and as far as support goes, I've never felt unsupported and even Nick Cramer has said, you know, do what you gotta do. Umm and he's been supportive of it, but its, I think he understands the logic behind it, I think every one understands the logic behind it, but every one is a little bit nervous to go that far and I understand that and I respect that.

Jean: What kind of collegial support are you getting, if any?

David: Umm, great, they are great. I mean, it, there are a lot of interesting, they are a lot of good conversations, a lot of sometimes contentious conversations that I'm never afraid of, and I enjoy, I enjoy listening to the opposing viewpoint, umm, because it helps me refine what I think and sometimes I move back you know, towards, towards the same ole way, but at the same time, they are willing to try, they are willing to try even the ones that I would consider to be umm, you know, the, the hangers on to the old way and in particular one of my student teachers I can think of specifically and he is more than open to try it, but it, he, he doesn't always agree with it, so I think that is probably about where we are.

Jean: Can you think of any other support that you may have received that was beneficial when you were making this transition. You've kind of mentioned the administration and you've mentioned a little bit about colleagues, you also mentioned about doing some reading and looking at Ken Robinson I believe was the name

David: Yeah.

Jean: are those the main factors or the main players in the support that you felt like you were able to move forward?

David: It just, I mean it all, it all started just by reading the articles in that you get from the ASCD news brief everyday because I signed up for that and then I started thinking you know, I started thinking more globally about systems rather than about my individual class room because I got to the point in my career, I'm at 15 years, its my 15th year, where I still love what I do, but I also wonder if there is, you know, more change that can be made outside of the class room and so I will, I think about that a lot and I think about you know, changing systems and so Ken Robinson is one of them. The grading articles that Kathy Ritter brought in I can't remember who the author of those were, but then there is articles all the time and then, and then, you know, I have Twitter and so I signed up for these national guys that are on Twitter and I read articles that they send or you know, comments that they make about common core or about set standards or about any of that stuff and about the 21st century skills and the importance of teaching kids how to be flexible and adaptable and things like that, so I pretty much will read anything I can find and particularly I have a file now of, that is now three pages long about the articles that I have read that have changed my thinking and I keep the articles and I forward them out. Another thing that really, really, really changed my thinking before Ken Robinson even though Ken Robinson says essentially the same things was a presentation that was done in Iowa. I think it was, it was Trace Pickering or someone else like that, I can't remember exactly what his name was, but they talked about the need to change the model because of what they found was the PLTs and the PLCs and the collat____ and bruc____got stuck trying to answer two basic questions
out of the four that should be asked, but ignored, ignored the fundamental change in
schools that still were asking the same questions we’ve been asking under the
industrial model and so we get stuck in that cycle rather than looking then, looking at
the problem. The problem is not the test scores or, the problem is not the test scores
or the achievement gap or anything of those, those are symptoms of the fact that we
are in the wrong, we are asking the wrong questions because we are assuming that
the old model worked and is working and it did work for that time, but it doesn’t work
now and so, I read all of those things and I think about those things and I try to find
ways that I can do that in my class and push my colleagues to think about it. I think
and I’ve talked to Dr. Belcher and Mark and I keep pushing for, I think that the, I think
that there is a real disconnect because I think that administration keeps us here and
asking those two questions focusing on data rather than focusing on the system and
how to change the system we’re focused on one piece of it and we should be changing
the whole thing and so my concern is that what, as long as we have administrator
systems in the building that support me and say, okay you can do whatever you want,
you can do whatever you want, but there is no one in this, in the main office or in the
central office, there is in the central office, but not in the school office, there is no one in
the school office whose focus is on academic reform. No one. Its all discipline, its all
about discipline, we have three assistant principals and their main job and God love
them, they need to have that job, is to, is to enforce discipline. So you are telling the
teachers all the way up to that point, reform, reform, reform, but we are going to keep
the same old model, we are going to keep the same model as administration here. I’ve
said to Mark and I’ve said to Dr. Belcher many, many times, you have got to put, you
don’t have to call them an administrator, but you’ve got to put a, essentially a chief
academy officer or a quality control or whatever you want to call it in that office and
Jim Mast is of the same notion several years ago that, that, (chuckles) we’re not, I can
change up to a point, but if you keep the same thing going there, there’s a disconnect.
It’s tell me, okay I can change, but you’re not going to spend your time on any of the
things that I’m talking about, in fact, I may be speaking Greek to you when it comes to
some of these things that are coming down the pike and I want to make it very clear, I
respect that, I understand that, umm, but, but we can’t say oh, but we’ve got to deal
with those kids for whatever reason, call it the achievement gap, call it whatever, well,
it, if you are saying the kids are acting out in my class room because I don’t have a
good lesson plan or I didn’t start right or its not interesting to me or its not beneficial to
me, guess when it causes you problems, what are you doing about it? Well you are
hammering, you’re expelling them, you’re giving them ISS, you’re doing all that, but tell
me then academically what you are doing for them to help them not be that way in my
class room. We need to have a common, we need a common language and a
common understanding from the first year teacher all the way to the 20th year
administrator and its stop once it hits the office doors, that education or reform stops
there because we are so focused on the behavioral issues and if the behavioral issues
are issues that administrators tell us are because of things we can control, then they
have to be a part of that educational conversation that will alleviate those behavioral
contains as well. And so, and you know man, and that to me has fallen on deaf ears
to this point, but I think, but (huffs) I think they understand the need for it. I think that
they understand the concept and the philosophy behind it, but again, then that
becomes me going (chuckles) you understand it, you know, you know the necessity for
it, then why are we keeping it this way? Why, why, why.

Jean: (agreeing)
David: Well, because we have to take care of those kids, it's the dangers of the school, its 5% of the population, its 5% (getting a little loud) 5%, maybe 10, maybe and if you made a better educational system where they felt that they were valued and not a discipline problem, then let's talk about that because you're forcing us to talk about as teachers, but we are not talking about the whole structure of the building, so I think it's a point if you take small steps, I think a chief academic officer would be a great step towards that, but Mark is reluctant to want to take away the discipline piece from some of the assistant principals, then don't pay them an administrative salary, pay them somewhere between teacher and administrator and say you're job is to coordinate with the district, find out what the district offices are and then coordinate with the teachers in the building, say how can I support you, so the teachers know can look at the office as, okay they are in charge of discipline and we're in charge of this because the teachers are being in charge of discipline too. That's crazy talk, I know. To an administrator I don't expect you to believe that, but

Jean: We can talk a little bit afterwards.

David: Absolutely.

Jean: So if you see somebody shifting towards the model,

David: Right.

Jean: The model that you talk about today

David: Right.

Jean: What supports are absolutely and necessary and beneficial to someone wanting to move in that direction?

David: It's just, its just what we talked about. It has to be, the administration has to be open to the notion that, that it all, its all up for review, and it all has to be up for consideration, all of it and if, you, just doing what Mark does and just doing what Jen does, everybody, I mean they are all great and Nick and even Dr. Belcher said, yeah, that would be great, we need to throw this, try this, da-da-da, its, its starts with the support, its starts with try it, try it, try it, and that's been awesome. I can't ask for anybody to give us more support than we get out here as far as being innovative, being creative, you know being, showing initiative, being in a leader. All the skills that we want our kids to have, they empower us to have and I think that is awesome. It starts with that. It really starts with a, I think an administration that either the principal and I mean, you or Mark or any, you guys don't have time to do the educational stuff, which is why I think, you guys are PR guys, you're CEOs, CFO's, whatever you want to call it, but, are, but you are dealing with parents and administration and teachers that are bitching and complaining and you don't have time to create this whole focus, but if you had someone who could say, hey, what do you want me to do with this school? Bring you ideas, say where do you want us to go, so its, so it starts with the principals, it starts with the district saying, you know, saying these are going to be the measurable objectives, how are we going to get there and every one has the opportunity to be creative, be visionary, be thoughtful, keep the kids first in mind, umm and don't, go do, you know, I think that's the #1 thing, that's getting out of the way of ourselves and thinking that there are common things that have to be taught or we have, obviously
common assessments would be fine, but they can be skilled based assessments that
don't deal with curriculum, so teachers could teach whatever they wanted as long as
they got to that point. Some good assessments, good creation of the assessments,
good thought, good common, unity of vision, which is what I feel we kind of lack and it
frustrates me at the central office when they say, we’re use data, data, data, data, data,
and we are going to make smart goal, smart goal smart goal that has to be you know,
what is it, statistically measurable, timely measurable all those things and what are the
district goals. Okay, how smart are they. They are not real smart. We want to
increase the learning of every kid in the district, SO DO I, I did it last year, I guarantee
they learned something in my classroom. We win. They are not smart, but I have to
make a smart goal. So to increase that unity of vision I think that is the best support
you can have. Picking two or three things you believe in as far as the reform of
education and then getting out of the way of ourselves teachers too, teachers too.
Umm, that is tough, I mean that’s a whole paradigm system shift that would be chaotic,
parent would go crazy and I understand that, which is what you would have to deal with
them, and I so. I think the best support is to just saying go try it, see where you are, just
keep the kids first and foremost in mind. Don’t, you know, what is the Hippocratic
oath, first do no harm, right? So that kind of thing. Professional development is all well
and good, but you have to let the empower of the teachers define their own
professional development. For me its been reading the SC responders. I don’t need to
go to a conference. I buy it and I try to help other people see it, but I don’t know.

Jean: Yeah so you’ve

David: I don’t know if that answered your question or not.

Jean: Yeah, you did, it did. And you’ve kind of touched on these last couple of questions that
I want to throw your way, but cause you’ve kind of mentioned a couple of things about
administration, but what specifically and you touched on it, have you requested from
leadership as you’ve gone through this?

David: I’m a north-east person. (laughs) I go and I got the big picture, but details, oh, maybe,
that’s why I need west people to help me with. So specific things that I could ask the
administration for to me is the western detailed side of the people I don’t get real well
and I wish I did. I wish I was that well-rounded person because I think Jen Mast is the
perfectly well rounded person. What would I request from them? Honestly I, here’s
what I would request: I would request a year sabbatical from, we have ingrained PLTs
so much into our building and we have focused so much on data from test scores and
how its going to change instruction and language on assessments, which is the wrong
conversation. I’m convinced. It’s the wrong conversation. But its hard because when
you have a turnover rate of 50 or higher percent every year of teachers in that, in our
department, you almost have to say that is the only comfort zone that you have and so
I would request from the administrators a complete overhaul of let, we are going to
suspend it for a year, we’re not going to get rid of it, but we are going to suspend it for a
year, go out and find something that you like that you can grab on to and try it. Just try
it and at the end of that year, come back to your PLT and say here’s what we did,
here’s how we tried to meet the standards or here’s what we tried. Even suspend the
standards and say I know this is crazy, I know this is going to be radical, I know that I
could get, I could catch some heat for it, but if, if you will take that heat for me, we can
innovate, we can do things and, and we can you know, change some of the things that
we don’t like about it, but we’ve got to break, its become so ingrained out here that I
think that we need to shake it up that's why I'm hopeful that the RPBC can allow us to
do that and to create a five year plan where we are more interdisciplinary, more
integrated as a building, the old way of doing school, which is ironic for me to say was
that the kids they didn't go from history to language arts to science to math. They, it
was a much more integrated system and I'd like, I'm mean talking back with the Greeks
and I would like to see more of that, more problems-based learning, but you have to let
teachers go out there, so the thing I say is lets not abandon this, we don't want to
abandon it, that would be a bad idea because PLC and PLT's I firmly believe are the
way to go, but we need to shake it up enough so that the new people coming in are not
afraid to try new things and we're getting out of the way that we've done things so that
we can really be innovative. So that to me would be the #1 thing you could do, the
other thing would be for the administration to bring in articles for us to consider as a
class to bring in things, its that unity of vision thing and to bring in stuff, just two or
three things, we really believe this about grading or we really believe this about
integrated in this class, we really believe this about 21st century skills, what do you
think and then we talk about it and we have the shared planning thing, which allows
different disciplines to come together once a week and I love that. So we can't
abandon what we have, but we can certainly reshape it to go forward a little bit more I
think. So its not a great answer, but that, it's not specific detailed.

Jean: Yeah, actually you just answered my last three questions. I really appreciate that.

David: Sure.

Jean: Do you have any final thoughts that you want to share that you didn't touch on, you've
really been comprehensive and I appreciate that (he laughs), so but are there any
other issues related to anything you wanted to bring up?

David: No. I mean not really. I can go on and on and on, but I

Jean: I appreciate your time. I really (David interrupts: no, no, no) talking to me today.

David: I love talking about this stuff.

Jean: Yeah.

David: I love talking about it. I think its, it's a dynamic time in education and I think we have
an opportunity here and I'm really worried particularly at the high school. If we have an
opportunity to reframe and reconstruct the whole thing, the 9th grade allows us to do
that and I'm really worried that we won't take advantage of that

Jean: Yeah.

David: and I think, that would be sad, but you know, I'm going to continue to go to my class
room, I will continue love being with kids, I'll just be bummed for the larger structure of
Columbia Public Schools, which I grew up in, I mean I grew up here, so I'm very proud
of that, so.

Jean: Well, thanks again for your time.

David: Yeah, no worries, no worries.
Interview 8

Jean: Okay, you go by Jim?

Jim: I do.

Jean: Jim, I appreciate you taking some time to meet with me today and talk about topic of my study. I will not take much of your time, however, I understand you have been working to transition or you have transitioned towards the Standards Based Grading. My goal today is to gain insight from you regarding this transition and your experience within this process. During the course of my doctoral studies, Standards Based Grading has become a focus, so feel that by gaining insight from a practitioner such as yourself, the information will lend itself nicely to my study. At the end of my study, I would be more than happy to share my findings with you, if you are interested, and as I stated, your insight will be helpful, therefore, share with me what you feel is most important related to the questions I ask you and I do plan to record this interview today in order to review it for themes related to my study at a later time. Do you will approve of that recording this?

Jim: I do.

Jean: I really appreciate that. So Jim we will get started and just kind of start off if you can tell me a little bit about your interest as you sought change from that more traditional approach to more of a Standards Based Grading approach?

Jim: Yeah, I think the genesis of my focus on it comes from the fact as a language teacher, I am often inheriting students from other teachers and I'm also passing students on to other teachers who depend on my being able to reflect for them levels of mastery or lack thereof that my students achieved, so I need to know when I inherit them where in fact they are in their language learning and I really need to pass that on accurately as possible to their next teacher and the logical way to do that, is to have their grade reflect their learning as opposed to things like pure effort, participation, etc.

Jean: So can you tell me about your experience kind of as you made that pedagogical transition like what propelled you towards this direction?

Jim: I, in part I was propelled because to me Standards Based Grading is the only accurate reflection of a student's experience in my class grades-wise. Now they may have affect of experiences or they may have experiences in which they gain wisdom about things perhaps outside of the Standards, but when it comes to my curriculum, umm, if they can't show me not necessarily initially, but eventually that they have mastered the standards, then I don't think that I can then show via a grade that they've succeeded in my class. Umm, I guess the bottom line is that learning in a way that is learning in a way that is in some way a quantifiable is really my emphasis and tradition has been that we reflect other things in addition to learning with grade and although I value those things, I don't know that that's the role that grade should play in reflecting student experience. If that makes sense.

Jean: What were your grades reflective of prior to Standards Based Grading?
Jim: Well, umm, I did have a participatory pieces in my grade. I've always been largely Standards Based. I'm not completely Standards Based and the reason that I got rid of the participatory piece was, I felt that although my grades were a good reflection of student learning, they weren't as good as they could be and I want, I wanted it to be better, but at the same time, I didn't want to remove the kind of input that participation grades can give to students and parents and so the struggle then was to give that input without assigning a grade to it and although I do that, I do still sometimes worry that students see grades like currency and that is that if there is not a kind of point monetary value assigned to the work, they may think that it is inherently not valuable, un-valuable and that is the furthest thing from the truth. Its just that the value of that work, umm, up to the level of like formative assessment, uhh is one that isn't necessarily reflected in, in the grade for that work instead it is reflected in the mastery that should come from that work that comes assumptive assessment.

Jean: Okay. When you made this transition,

Jim: uhhuh

Jean: Thinking back, what type of support did you feel like you were needing or maybe looking for as you shifted?

Jim: I didn't want to be the lone wolf. I didn't want to feel like I was an innovator in a negative sense of the word and that is not to say that I don't, I'm not comfortable with experimentation, but I also feel like I'm doing students a disservice if I am, if I am valuing work via grades in a unique way because if I work at a school where my students, six different teachers have six utterly different grading philosophies, then boy am I giving them all sorts of mixed messages, so then I also don't think though that means that we have to be lock step. I feel like we have to come to certain agreements so that a student will not have a unique grading experience with us, but one of a small fold of experiences and so that came only through collaboration and discussion with my peers in my department, but outside of my department as well because I didn't want this to be a world languages things. I wanted this to be a smart teaching thing. I wanted to maybe, maybe be on a forefront, but not be the lone wolf, straying out there doing his own thing.

Jean: Right.

Jim: Because I don't think that serves students.

Jean: So did you receive support from colleagues?

Jim: Yes.

Jean: So what kind of support were you receiving?

Jim: Well, uhh, received support in that you know, my movement to total Standards Based Grading was evolved out of discussions that I had in our normal shared planning and department meetings with my colleagues. Grading is something that we talk about. Not because we have to, but because we want to, right? Because we see it as a way to improve the student experience, umm, and so the genesis of it was kind of like an oh duh experience that came working with other teachers, trying to figure out how we
could, how we could grade our students in ways that I think stand up you know. The grades should not be a momentary reflection, they should be a kind of, they are a fulfillment of contract between the student and the teacher about what is, what is, what has to come out of the class, not everything that comes out, but what has to come out it and I was listening and talking to math teachers when we had this discussion. I was listening and talking to people in our studies department and we had this discussion. I mean, and I wanted to be with that. They were doing what I though as smart things and I wanted to be a smart, a smart teacher in that respect. It was exciting in that respect. I mean I felt like I wasn't doing something because I was being ordered to do so and I wasn't doing something merely because I felt like it would be a good thing. I felt like I was part of a movement and a movement that was happening not, in concert with our administration, you know, part of the great reality of the leadership structure at Rock Bridge is that we are, we are teacher led and/or administrator led, there really is no difference because we are constantly in conversation with each other. I wanted to be a part of that. You know.

Jean: Right. Can you describe any other supports you may have gotten after, through this transition? Like what else did you pull in to help you know that this may be the direction you need to go?

Jim: Sure. If involved checking in with the people that I've mentioned to you, not just in the genesis of the situation, but as we go on and I'm in the midst of it right now. You know in some ways I kind of feel like I'm in a second year of an experiment. Uhh, and attempting to tweak from there. My wife is an academic advisor in the College of Arts and Science at MU. As such, she sees a lot of students straight out of schools like Rock Bridge. Their level of preparation and the extent to which the grades they have received do or do not reflect the typical success they are having in their first and second semesters, that she sees that. Because she meets back up with them when they are thinking about different degree programs and such and I so I felt like kind of on both ends, umm, I was receiving input about the validity of this move. Like whether it was more than just feeling good to me, but actually giving my students something that would serve them. Umm, I will say because I feel like maybe this is implicit of your question, I wasn't necessarily relying on any sort of outside documented research. In that respect, this was all fairly anecdotal to me. That said, it wasn't umm, it wasn't random anecdote, it felt more like a movement that I was kind of being reaffirmed by different outside sources on.

Jean: Okay, makes total sense.

Jim: Yeah.

Jean: So when you see a colleague come in and they are pretty traditional, but they are like, hey, you've got a good thing going here

Jim: yeah

Jean: and I would like to know about it. What kind of supports do you feel are absolutely necessary for a person wanting to make that shift?

Jim: Well part of it comes down to, to numbers. You've got to think, you've got to think at, about what this is going to look like in your grade book and then you have to plan back
from there. How is what is going to be reflected in my grade going to be formed on a
day to day basis, right? The skilled development, the formative assessment,
summative assessment, uhh, but it, if you don't get the numbers worked out in your
head, uhh beforehand, I don't think, and I've sat down with some other teachers who
are going through their grade book at the beginning of the semester and saying, well I
usually count this for this much and this for this much and I say to them, okay, now I
want you to do the math and add up those different efforts as percentages or total
points and then think about that final product. You know, what is the mosaic that
you've created there in that grade and is it a reflection of what you believe is true
learning. Umm, and what I find is that

(Phone call interrupts)

Jean: Okay, so you were at the point where we were talking about the supports for somebody
transitioning

Jim: Yep.

Jean: And so, I think, did you answer that to your satisfaction?

Jim: Yeah, I think so, basically it means thinking through the whole process, its not just
about Standards Based Grading, it come down to everything you do in teaching.

Jean: Right. Okay. I'm going to kind of shift it a little bit and you have mentioned it, you
mentioned it previously, what type of support did you, did you request any support from
the actual building leadership at all or administration?

Jim: I didn't and in part that is because as a Latin teacher who is the only Latin teacher in
the school and one of only two in the district, I'm kind of used to uhh, having to rely on
myself. Umm, that said, I wanted to make sure that I was working in concert with the
overall philosophy of the school, but no, I would say very little support in that respect.

Jean: Okay.

Jim: But that was okay.

Jean: Did you feel like the leadership would be in support of . . .

Jim: Absolutely.

Jean: . . . your choice to go in that direction?

Jim: Absolutely

Jean: And how did you know that?

Jim: Personal conversations.

Jean: Okay.
Jim: Yeah, I mean, yeah, this is something that I feel and have to talked comfortably with both my assistant principal and my principal about umm, and it was part of conversations when Kathy Ritter was here, its been part of conversations you know from when I first Mark Moss, so yeah, I feel like they were in touch with it.

Jean: Okay. So is there any leadership going on currently that is helping to continue the movement towards this?

Jim: Well not in an observable way that I've seen so far this year and I think that's impart because some of our kind of curricular in grading movements are hit and pause a little bit because of the transition, I mean that has become in our district the dominant issue and so I think sadly that is going to cost us a little bit on our kind of, our development in teaching outside of issues that are directly impacted by the transition.

Jean: Okay. Is there anything else about this transition to Standards Based and/or leadership or anything about that whole component and process that you wanted to mention or speak to that maybe we didn't hit on?

Jim: Well, I would say that part of the reason why I'm doing this and why its seems so easy is because although this is my 11th year as teacher, I still feel like a new teacher and a I very much want to keep that philosophy. Umm, I not the kind of person, I hope not to be the kind of person that falls into old patterns for the sake of them and so every year is a new opportunity to improve the product that I give and that includes certainly not just my content area and not just my student interactions, but every little bit of what I do. I think that teachers who are open to all sorts of changes in the ways that that uhh, in the ways that the school works for them, umm, are naturally going to be more adaptable to this kind of change. That said, I hope that doesn't leave anyone behind who could benefit from thinking like this.

Jean: Ummhmm, but overall you feel like the leadership has been enough of a support to continue.

Jim: Absolutely.

Jean: Okay. Are there any specifics before we close out here that you can think of that they have done overall to help continue moving those that are doing it or initiate the interest maybe of those are that are not?

Jim: You know, I'm going to argue that this happens at Rock Bridge because of school culture.

Jean: Okay.

Jim: This is how we teach.

Jean: Okay. Great.

Jim: Yeah.
Jean: Well Jim, I really appreciate you taking the time to meet with me today and discuss some of these questions and you certainly have garnered some good rich insight and I appreciate your time.

Jim: I enjoyed it.
Jean: I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I will not take much of your time, however, I understand that you may have been helping or discussing or possibly working to transition or considering maybe Standards Based Grading in the district as a district leader, I don’t know how much you’ve touched on this, but that is kind of the crux of our conversation today and discussing maybe traditional versus Standards Based Grading. My goal today is to gain insight from you regarding this transition and your experience within this process possibly. During the course of my doctoral studies, Standards Based Grading has become a focus for me and I feel that by gaining insight from possibly a district leader that possibly is part of this process. The information will lend itself nicely to my study. At the end of my study, I would be more than happy to share my findings with you, if you are interested, and so as I stated, your insight will be very helpful for whatever you have to offer, so please share with me what you feel is important related to the questions I ask of you today. I do plan to record this interview today in order to review it for themes related to my study, so I would need your approval for recording this interview.

Dana: Sure.

Jean: Well thanks. All right, if you are ready, we will just get started. The first just to kind of kick this off, can you kind of tell me a little bit about your understanding in the context of traditional versus the Standards Based approach to grading?

Dana: Okay. I think that traditional grading has usually been often left up to the autonomy of the teacher, so when you had some teachers who may have only put in their grade book assessments or chapter tests. You may have had some teachers who would also put chapter tests along with homework along with projects, maybe even extra credit of, that would have been a part of the grade. And I think traditionally that is where most mindset comes from grading because that is probably how it was done to them in their educational experience. I think Standards Based Grading helps you focus much more on what does the student know and what do you want them to know. So, you have certain objectives or standards that you want students to be able to master, whether that is to move on to the next grade level or to the next course in a series of courses and you've identified those, they are clearly communicated to the students and other stake holders and at that point the teacher then decides how best to assess those and they may have, they meet, they maybe assessed for them differently, in other words the teacher just wants to know do I know this to be able to move on and no grade is taken at all or they may be then assessed in more of a summative manner so we finish this and so now we need to know what, what do they know and then generally because in our system of grading of letter grades then we assigned some sort of numeric value that in order to assign a grade.

Jean: Okay. Can you tell me as a district leader, do you have knowledge of teachers within your department that you lead utilizing Standards Based Grading to any certain degree?
Dana: I believe over the last couple of years we've really tried because I think the catalyst was probably the PLC work and thinking about professional learning communities, but thinking about what is it we want students to know mathematically. Umm and that was a huge shift in many cases because of, umm, I think again because of their experience as most teachers think of a mathematics course of being based on this text book and not a lot of conversation regarding to the fact that this text book is written to please 50 states with a bazillion different objections not just 50 different state objections, but maybe different districts objectives and so on and so forth and so we cram everything into this book to please every body to sell it, uhh, that doesn't mean that you need to be teaching all of those things, but because that is the way we've experienced it, uhh probably all the way through college, that is what our expectation is, so we're given this test and that is a guideline for what we need to know, so a couple of years ago we really started focusing on because I think PLC is what brought it forward is, well what is essential. You know, we have 350 objectives here, really what is essential and really drilling down and thinking about that, uhh brought up some really good conversations and I think that we are, I think all of math teachers really are thinking about okay, what is that we want students to know, but again, then I think that piece to completely Standards Based Grading is not there because more than likely most of them also put other things into their grade besides do students know this. Umm, and so you know, I think we had an example just this last year where a student actually failed the course, but in looking at, this is an eighth grade student, but in looking at MAP scores, was advanced, so if we are aligned, currently should have been aligned with Missouri state objectives and that student was advanced, then that student should not be failing that course. And while that brings up ah-ha's, again some teachers become defensive about this is my course and this is, I value this and if I value that they need to do homework or they need to do, come to class on time or bring a pencil or whatever it might be, the student needs to value that too and then we can go into I'm teaching them life skills and they needed to be responsible and you know, we can just talk on a big tangent, but I do think that we've really, we have made progress in the fact that the last two years I don't think we would have even been able to identify central objectives in what we want them to know.

Jean: Okay. What is your perception, your personal perception concerning assessing student learning with Standards Based Grading?

Dana: What is my personal?.

Jean: What is your perception of the, of the approach of Standards Based Grading?

Dana: Okay, uhh,

Jean: Personally speaking. 

Dana: Well, I think that good, I mean, do I think it's a good thing?

Jean: Yeah, like where do you stand you think about, because you've given a pretty good definition of what Standards Based Grading is and what/how students are assessed, personally speaking, how do you feel about that approach?
Dana: Umm, I think, I mean I think its critical and very valuable. I think if I put myself in a classroom teacher's shoes, it's not always easy to do. Umm, and again, speaking through the lens of math, we tend to think often of that if we identify essentials. We look at essentials and then we see a checklist and it becomes a checklist of skills. While the skill is very important, I think we also have to think about can I write more performance event-type question that may encompass five or six essentials and along with identifying those essentials, its also going to be assessing as the common core now says the eight mathematical practices, which can they communicate the thinking, umm, is there precision with their answer, uhh, do they have to make selective decisions about what tools they are going to use when solving this. Because those things are just as important as the skills, but are not as easy to assess. So while I can make a check list and I know if Johnny knows x, y, and z, if I don't apply those mathematical practices to that, Johnny may know x, y and z today, but in a month Johnny is not going to know x, y and z if we have not assessed that in a manner that is all encompassing, so can I apply that to a real world situation. Can I decide what mathematics I need to use if I'm going to encompass this or am I going to forget some little procedure that the teacher checked me off on three months ago, so, I think it, its easier said than done I guess, umm, but if I talk with them and I have a conversation about them, wow, they know a lot or vice versa is true, wow, you know, they don't know, they can whooo, check, check, check, why do you check them off on all this skills, but if I have a conversation with them, they don't know how to apply using any of those. So, it becomes pretty complicated sometimes when you think about it in individual student terms of how you actually need to assess where every student is on what they need to know.

Jean: Okay. Do you see any relevance between our curricular standards currently and the use of this assessment and grading level?

Dana: Yes. There is a lot of relevance between that, I think that with common core and smarter balance, it is going to become even more relevant. Because at least with samples that we've looked at, you know, what they are going to is that students are going to have to be able to do the math, they are also going to have to make decisions about when to use it and how to use it and how to apply it, uhh, so I think, I'm hoping that is going to help us come together even more on that.

Jean: Okay. So how do you propose that we would lead teachers to the understanding in this shift to Standards Based Grading?

Dana: Well I think one of the things that really opened my eyes I think was about 10 years ago and when you asked me to do this, I was thinking about, and I could go look this up, but I didn't since I was gone all weekend, umm, but it was a workshop that we brought here to town, we did it out at Rock Bridge High School and it was something about zeros. .

Jean: Ken O'Connor?

Dana: Yeah, Ken O'Connor and the, I don't know, what, the title of it was something about zeros and I know, you know as a math teachers, should have always been thinking about that value of the zero, but I really hadn't. That was a huge eye opening
experience as far as WOW, you know, golly, a zero and a 59%, there is a huge difference there - Jeez, I never really thought about that before and I think we have had some teachers who have really thought about that as far as even when they are putting numeric values to grades, umm, I know that there are teachers who have stopped the zero business and umm, and put it more an easier continuum as far as equal distribution of how to its going to work, so umm, I think that was really a huge eye opener for me and I think that it is almost a, I don't know, a born again Christian, (chuckles), you know, you got to, you got to live it, you got to kind of feel it in a way individually again, if its something done to you, you can at least initiate teachers into reading about it or having conversations about it I think that are eye opening and, and because no teacher wants to do the wrong thing to a child. Everybody wants them to do the right thing, but again, because of the, I think most of use tend to model what we see modeled and there haven't been a lot of examples of Standards Based Grading models in any of use have probably experienced and so that again makes it harder to completely do something new in your practice if you haven't practiced it or seen it happen before.

Jean: What types of support, if any, have you provided with those who practice Standards Based Grading within the department that you lead?

Dana: Umm, well I think initially leading the idea that we need to identify essential curriculum and make sure that we have that identified for every grade level is one thing that I did. Umm, and then also initiating and continuing to encourage the conversations about the value of zero and how do we grade, umm, more in thoughtful manners, trying to post questions back to teachers rather than the big stick of can't do that or you shouldn't do that, or whoa, that is really wrong, which is what I'm often thinking, so then you have to think about okay, so how can I maybe just pose a question to them, have you ever thought about, or sometimes its just asking the question so that I see that Sam earned a B, what does that mean? Can you tell me what Sam knows? Umm, will often just be enough to get them to really think about the fact that, well, I don't really know, he got a B, but I don't know what he really knows. Uhh, and sometimes in just that manner helps.

Jean: Okay. Do you feel like you'll have a contribution to this model of grading and assessment if we, we look at a shift like this, maybe what would your contribution do you think be?

Dana: Well I think my contribution could really be important because as I see all mathematics teachers, umm, 6-12 or even on the elementary level, that's the time to collaborate amongst common uhh, teaching, so well, so what does that mean and initiating, putting groups of people together across the district not with just, I think within buildings is really important and that's easier to do on a regular basis, but the across district picture, so someone is really doing some cool things over at Smithton and how can we get that to our other buildings as well and I think that would be where I could really be helpful and especially when we have district days around those conversations would be important.

Jean: So describe the support, if any, that you feel teachers would need while making a transition to Standards Based Grading.
Dana: I think you have to make sure that they feel comfortable asking questions and communicating with you, umm, kind of that open door and it isn't wrong, nothing is wrong to say, so I have a question, I have an issue, and then also helping them to communicate with parents, umm, what is going on, of, because then I have seen, while it sounds fabulous, Standards Based Grading and they know this, I have seen a reverse reaction with parents sometimes because if I say, umm, I teacher math A course and Sam doesn't know any of these objectives, so Sam is really failing my class, but and you should definitely be able to support with the parent why they do that, but when a parent comes in and says, well, but they've done this homework and they've done X and they've done Y, those should be points, well I don't give, I'm not giving, that's very valuable for the student to be able to meet this objective, but the student still can't meet this objective and so therefore, they are still at wherever they are, I mean I think teachers need help sometimes communicating with parents about what, what it means and what it looks like, so I think that is an important piece that I can help and really just, or I can maybe since I can have, try to have the district lens, I can guide them to someone else, you know, there is a teacher at Hickman that teaches your same course and is doing a great job, so lets get you guys together, they will be more of an expert, so helping them make connections with other people that are being successful or and maybe even other districts if I know, if its happening in a different district somewhere, uhh, I can help make that connection for them.

Jean: Okay. You've given me a lot of insight and your personal connection, I mean your personal kind of approach to your understanding of this Standards Based Grading, do you have any other information or insight or just your personal opinions on this approach versus the traditional approach that we haven't maybe discussed yet?

Dana: No, I think just my biggest insight is that this is huge can of worms. Its not a bad one to open up, but it, its big and its going to be, you know, just in dealing with teachers in general you know that there are some that are very receptive, there are some that are willing to try absolutely anything you do, and then there are some that are going to nod their head and close their door and do as exactly what they want to do all along, so umm, you know, peoples grade books often are kind of sacred umm and what really goes in there, so I just think continuing to have that conversation is huge in initiating that ongoing, and again, I think that PLC piece is huge. That makes it and I don't want to make this sound ugly, but it makes it more difficult for somebody to shut their door and do what they want. And even if they continue to do that, if they are part of the PLC, they will hear conversations that will at least start them thinking. Umm, even if it is in the privacy of their car driving back and forth to work, I mean, there, because they all do want to do what is best for students and so, they will start thinking about it even if it is really hard to manage that change and what it looks like, umm, but I think its not something that can be done overnight, but it is also not something that should be just left to do whatever you want, I mean, I think there needs to be gentle pushing to get us in the right direction and hopefully offering supports and things along the way to help people make those changes.

Jean: So you feel in totality to kind of sum this up, do you feel like this has to be a grassroots effort or who do you see as a part of this shift in really getting this to move forward?

Dana: I think it needs to be a combination of both. I mean I think you, if you have open it, like you got to a brand new building and you have no idea what those teachers think, if you would throw out just a conversation, you are going to have some teachers
immediately that are with you and so I think it needs to be leadership, but I think it needs to have some grassroots teacher effort in there helping you as well because they are the ones that are leading the PLCs for the most part, so if you have those, some of those people scattered about that are leading PLCs, that is going to help bring teachers along, but often is it just planting the seed, so as I mentioned earlier that Ken O'Connor things, wow, just an eye opener, I mean it just, wow I never thought about that before and I think that is what a lot of it is, is just to get teachers to think about it. You know when you think about what does that mean, well you know, if somebody had asked me 15 years ago or when I started teaching what does that grade mean, I would said well it's a grade, its 80%, that is what makes 80% and that is usually pretty acceptable to parents too because we haven't had to identify what does that mean they know when you ask that question, well I don't know, that's chapter two. Well what is in chapter two? Well I have to get my book, you know, I mean, so I think its just kind of a completely different way of thinking, but definitely a good way of thinking when we think about what we need to know, but we have to make sure that we are identifying it properly what they need to know and then how do you assess that.

Jean: Okay, well Dana, thank you for taking the time to sit down with me today and I certainly again, as I said in prior before we began this interview that I would be more than happy to share the findings with you at the conclusion of this study, so thank you again.
Jean: Good morning Nick and I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I won't take much of your time, however, I understand that you know as a district leader, you may be working with this transition as we look at more assessment through standards as we transition with our district wide assessment as well. My goal today is to gain insight from you regarding this transition and your experience within this process. During the course of my doctoral studies, Standards Based Grading has become a focus and I feel that by gaining insight from a leader such as yourself, the information will lend itself nicely to my study. At the end of this study, if you are interested, I'd be more than happy to share my findings with you and as I stated, your insight is going to be very helpful, therefore please share with me today what you feel is most important related to the questions I ask of you. I do plan to record this interview today in order to review it for themes related to my study, so if you approve of me recording, we will get started.

Nick: Sounds great.

Jean: Thanks Nick. All right. So, can we just start and tell me a little bit about your understanding in the context of traditional versus Standards Based Grading.

Nick: Sure. So the way I kind of put it in my head, I think at least, is a traditional grading systems is one that really tries to maybe even judge more than evaluate, it really ranks kids based on how you perform and that is about it and so because of that, I think what a grade means varies very differently from individual to individual from you know, locale to locale, umm, conversely a Standards Based Grading approach really looks at what does a kid know and it really evaluates whether or not a student is proficient in what we want them to be proficient in and so you know, to take it full circle again, if you were to put a kid in a traditional grading based system, while they may get an A or maybe they get a C, it doesn't really tell you what they know, it just tells you the teacher's judgment of that student usually in perspective compared to everyone else in a class whereas if you had that same kid in a Standards Based Grading system, you would get very clear information on what does the student know and what do they not know.

Jean: Okay. So as a district leader, you have the knowledge, kind of a good grasp on the teachers in your department and what is your knowledge about just overall teachers using Standards Based Grading. Are you aware of any that type of approach?

Nick: Right. It gets kind of scattered throughout the district. There are pockets and I think there are certain buildings that it's a stronger presence than others. Umm, I don't know that I would say there is someone in every building that is doing it, but I do think there are also very isolated cases of it too where you just have one teacher and maybe is the only teacher in the entire department in a building that is doing it because they think its right. Umm, I do think that something has impeded its progress previously is the curriculum itself and so certainly in language arts, we, and I use myself as a teaching, you know, as an example here, umm, I never really got to Standards Based Grading when I was in the classroom. I sort of did, like I had gotten to the point where I was at least kind of categorizing things by broad modalities like writing and reading and at least kind of using that as a way to see how people were doing, umm, (interruption).
lost my train of thought, so in my own experience, but what was holding me up from kind of going full-fledged into it is that I didn't have a clear indication of what students really wanted to learn. You know, we have hundred and thirty some-odd things that we said they could be learning and couldn't do it all and so umm, it, just didn't have the means by which to really tie it to a standard and make it still be practical and fluid and so the shift to common core and in particular or district's, you know, laser-type shift to it and really a shift to saying that these are 34 standards that we really think are important I think is going to make it infinitely more possible to do that and I think just by doing, I don't know that a lot of teachers would say that they made this switch this year, but I think almost incidentally some of them have started to shift how they do it because the standards themselves was so much more focused and so much more concise than they were and the same thing in social studies, and social studies isn't quite there yet I think where I would like them to be at the district level, but you've had you know curriculum that is a mile wide and an inch deep, you know, you've had hundreds of contents standards and so it has the system itself I don't think has lent itself as well to a Standards Based Grading as it could and as it should, so.

Jean: Okay. Do you see any relevance between our curricular standards and the use of this assessment in grading model?

Nick: Yeah, absolutely. And again I think as we, as I was just talking about, as we move to a curriculum that is very specific about the standards that we want and that those standards themselves really build and are vertically aligned and kids are going to grow throughout this system, then absolutely you want an assessment system that is very tied to those very explicit standards and it gives you very useful and very quick data on is a kid mastering it or not. If they're not, then you need to get them in intervention, umm, so that they can and if they are, then you want to get them in enrichment so that they are not just, you know, doing, driving their wheels and so I think it makes perfect sense and that has been part of my goal like with the shift of language arts is really developing an assessments system that is very tightly aligned and that gives you standards based data and yet, we are still stuck in that, you know, in between and there is a number of factors that I'm sure you've heard about and researched about and so I kind of intentionally left it so that you could do both with it so you could still give it a grade umm, that you know, you could use to judge kids and stack them up against each other, but at the same time, you're getting standards based data that you can use in informative ways a teacher for the purposes that we've talked about.

Jean: So how do you propose maybe as a district leader to help lead teachers to the understanding and this shift to standards based?

Nick: I think first of all, I had mentioned it earlier, I think it starts with having the system in place and again I think that has been a huge piece that has been missing in the past, not just in our district, but I think across the country and so I think it really is a backwards design model, you have to have standards themselves that are clearly identified that are reasonable that are, you know, you truly can cover in a year and once you have those identified, you need to have assessments that are aligned of those standards like we were just talking about and then once the assessments are aligned, you need to have some intervention systems in place to help kids that aren't there and I think once those systems are in place, I think teachers naturally are going to start to use it and gravitate to it and I mean, I think you do need to do a certain amount of education on the why and really, you know, get them to understand the
potential benefits of it. Umm, I think that more than anything really will get them up and moving umm, and for those that aren't, I mean I don't know that again they have to be mutually exclusive, this idea that if you are either standards based grading or you're you know for lack of a traditional grading, I think you can kind of do both. You can grade a system that allows you to do both is what I'm saying and so I think when you pause it that way, there is absolutely no reason why I wouldn't. If you make it efficient for teachers then there is no reason why they wouldn't want the added benefit of a standards based system.

Jean: Sure. Okay. What types of support have you maybe currently or had you thought about providing for those that are wanting to utilize or utilizing this approach to grading?

Nick: Umm, hmm, so on the language arts, you know, I'm schizophrenic here because I have multiple personalities (laughing). On the language arts side, I mean I really think that driven as much as anything what we've done and so, umm, so just to give you some very specific examples, in developing an assessment system itself, we went so far as to very deliberately sequence the order of questions that are aligned to certain standards so that when a teacher looks at, and eventually we would like to get it to be completely done on a computer so that the data analysis is instant, but until we get to that point, umm, I, on a reading assessment we've got three different passages and I know you are not going to see this as you heard it again, but we've got three different passages in every assessment and so we ask questions that are aligned to the same reading standards in the same order for each passage and so and then on the answer sheet, we have those questions in a row, so question 1, question 11 and question 21 are all visually together so that when you score it, you can very quickly see this kid is 3 out of 3 on standards 1 and 2 and maybe 0 out of 3 in standard 3, so it just saves you so much time as a teacher in terms of really being able to do that analysis piece, so its little thinks like that that I think you know takes some forethought to put in, to develop the system that way, but once its there, its it just makes it grease, it just makes it work so much more efficiently and so that's what I tried to do. Now social studies like I said is a totally different beast because we just aren't there yet. We don't have a curriculum that has been hammered down for reasons (laughs) somewhat within the district and somewhat outside of the district and somewhat just time because of everything we've been doing on language arts. Umm, and so I do struggle more with those teachers because, you know, and again there are pockets that really want to do it and really are ready to jump and we don't have those systems in place and so its working with them individually as much as you can to kind of make some decisions as an, because, in absence of a district defined curriculum I think that is what you kind of have to do and so working with the PLT or working with an individual to really pair their curriculum down to what is essential and to help them develop their own assessments that can give them that sort of data and I think more than anything just backing them up when there is a question from an administrator or from a parent or why, you know, why are you doing this, this looks so different than anything I've experienced before, being there to help kind of field those questions and in bringing, you know, sometimes I think teachers who haven't had the time to really study it, you know, do it because they know its right and kind of trust their gut, but they kind of wilt sometimes under pressure and so being able to come in and be that authoritative voice to back them up I think really helps too.
Jean: Do you feel like you will be able to make a contribution or a contribution when we make this shift and can you speak to those contributions that you think you will be a part of?

Nick: Well I'm hoping you know, some #1, I'm hoping what we've been doing in language arts really starts to become a model for other content areas for other grade levels but certainly for a model for elementary and I think we've already started to see that and you know, that is just nice because then you have a system from K-12 that actually works together and again, I mean the standards themselves are the key piece to making that happen, umm, but, I guess that is what I, and I think I've seen the same thing with teachers, I think its at sort of a lead by example thing. Once you've had someone that is brave enough or smart enough or whatever to try it, and survive you, you just start to have those conversations and you know, that is how I first learned about it is a colleague of mind at Oakland was doing it and you know, its like huh, interesting and you know once you saw it work and so I know, what were some of the complications, but what where the huge pay-offs, that made you interested an that is when I started doing more research you know myself on it and so I think that just gets magnified to enfold when you are doing it at a district level and so you can see a content area or grade level has been able to do it and do it successfully and this is what they are able to do because of that, that just is huge and so you know, I say this all the time anymore, we are at such a perfect storm right now in our district and country, whatever that you, your standards are hitting at the same time you're getting your assessments at the same time that you are getting PLT, I mean its just the perfect time for all of these things to, and you're changing, like you're, and I think that is such a huge piece to this, you have so many people that are changing what they do and even where they do it and who they are doing it with all at the same time that its just such a perfect opportunity to capitalize on it and so that, that's what I've been really mindful of and that is what is frustrating to me on the social studies side of things is that I don't think I'm going to have as many systems in place when that storm hits as I'd like to because its such a golden opportunity to make the most of it and so the more we can get these things in and teachers used to it when they make this big jump I think more likely they are to shift radically what they are doing.

Jean: So then what type, considering all that?

Nick, Uhhuh

Jean: the big idea, the big picture, what types of support do you feel are necessary and/or beneficial as teachers consider a shift from the traditional to the standards based grading?

Nick: Yeah, I think its again very kind of literal pragmatic level. I think certainly a lot of, and so lets say that you're doing it systemically, lets see you're doing it as an entire building, I think again a huge education piece for parents and students understanding what this is because a lot of them probably haven't been exposed to it before, I think along those lines, even just at the report card level, I think we have to kind of you know, what I would love to see and its still I think the logistics of it is somewhat complicated, but I would love to see a system where you're reporting out to parents and teachers themselves, these are the skills that we think are essential for your success and here is where you are on this, umm, and I think the more digital we go, the more easier that becomes uhh, because everything can be tied together and can instantly update each other and you're not worried about paper, paper, paper, and so I
think all of that is a process as well that is going to help with it, but I think, I think, yeah, I think fundamentally you need to have some education for parents so that you understand, you need to have administrative backing so that when you do get some resistance from the community and there will be some, you know, that you've got some support, umm, I think you also need in the same say that the curriculum I was talking about from the teaching side systems had to change report cards and everything on the, on the reporting I think that side needs to change a little bit too to match it.

Jean: Do you have any other information Nick now that we've kind of discussed some of these things and or some insight that you would like to share with me that maybe we haven't covered in this conversation that?

Nick: I don't, nothing is coming to mind. Do you have any other followup questions in particular or?

Jean: Well I guess my final question would be if you, I mean I've been kind of pretty comprehensive in your responses, as you see this initiative being a possibility in our district and as you mentioned the perfect storm, what approach do you see as the best way to maybe encompass this and maybe get the shift a start?

Nick: Whew, good question. (Laughs) I think, AHH, again, I will take it back to the English example because I think we are the most at. I think just getting those tools in teachers hands is going to make it happen and then you are still going to have some resistance to that, but I think you're going, teachers themselves are going to find that there is less resistance when they are doing it and when they're, and so that I what I mean, you know, not even, to not even make it a fight, like I said, these new assessments we've made them so that they can do both, alright, so that they are giving you the standard based data, which we know is essential, but that you can still tie a grade to it you know, I left it very much say individual teacher, you decide what way you want this to be in your grade book, umm, I'm more concerned with you getting the data, you know, and another great example that was one of the push____ I had from some teachers in developing the assessments. We had this big question over should these assessments evaluate all standards each time or should we really slice and dice and look at just a few standards here and a few standards here and ultimately what we decided was we do want it to look at everything every time, but if you're worried, you know that you didn't cover it sufficiently, then don't hold the kid accountable for it and that is a great, you know perfect example of where I think a little bit of flexibility on our part in not make this you know, just completely paradigm shift umm, I think is going to ease them into that process because again my hope is that they will realize, oh wow, this really is useful information and it really doesn't matter, you know the kid, so that's what I mean, I think just, I think it almost has to be a pragmatic change of thought before it, for some, especially for your fundamentalist teachers before its going to be a paradigm shift for them, as they got to kind of live it first and the only way they are going to live it is if you have a system in place that allows them to do it and that systems needs to be somewhat flexible in those transition years, but I think you're going to get to the point where I'm hoping, like I said even though you can attach a grade to this now, its like why, that's just an extra layer, so.

Jean: Well Nick, I certainly appreciate gathering your insight today and your perspective, so taking time out of your day has been more appreciated and again like I said, at the end of this study there will be a report but together about kind of an approach to how to
move and how to shift to something like this based on the perception of those I've talked to and I again will be more than happy to share that with you if that would be an interest of yours.

Nick: Okay. Thank you.
Jean: All right, well good afternoon Craig. I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I won't take much of your time, however, I understand that since you are in a leadership position in the district and we may be considering this shift in how we assess our student grade, I want to get your perspective on a few questions that I have for you today. So my goal is to kind of gain some insight from you regarding this transition or possible transition and your experience with this process, if any. During the course of my doctorial studies, Standards Based Grading has become a focus and I feel that by gaining insight from a practitioner such as yourself, the information will lend itself nicely to my study. At the end of this study, I would be than happy to share my findings with you, if you are interested and as I stated, your insight is going to be very helpful, therefore please share with me what you feel is most important today related to the questions I ask of you. I do plan to record this interview today in order to review it for themes related to my study, do you approve of this recording.

Craig: I do.

Jean: Well thank you. Alright, well we will get started, so, Craig can you just tell me a little bit about your understanding in the context of a traditional versus standards based grading, what is your understanding of that?

Craig: Umm, my understanding of standards based grading is that its, its actually something that I would like to see my department move towards formally, uhh, I think standards based grading is once I've, for instance if I'm a student, once I've mastered a certain standard, then I get credit for that mastering that standard and I move on to the next standard, which is basically how, how it is in industry and so I'm a practical arts, I'm the practical arts coordinator, so that seems to make, make the most sense for my department. Getting an arbitrary grade for a project doesn't make much sense to me because when I go into industry, they don't ask me how many A's did I get, how many B's did I get, they ask me what I can do, what can I do and uhh, that is what is most important and that's what's going to get our kids employed and so being in practical arts that kind of, kind of the shift that I would like to see, at least my department take.

Jean: Okay. What is your take on that versus the, I mean the traditional you stated, the kind of is that, can you kind of explain what/how you feel about traditional? Let's just get there.

Craig: Okay, umm, well for instance if I get, if I'm at Oakland Junior High School and I get a B, is that a B at Jeff Junior High School? Is that a B at West Junior High School? Umm, it seems to me that there is a different way that, there is so many different ways that people grade and there is so many different things that people put into, into those grades, a standard is a standard. If I can do it, I can do it. If I can, if a kid can master the use of a certain tool, well they can master it anywhere, wherever they go, that's a master, but if I grade on you know, a certain percentage of homework and what is your attitude as a class, then I have a teacher that you know that is a little bit more lack than other teachers, well then a B isn't a B, you know, its not a B, its not a B, so it just seems like standards based grading would be, it would mean something, it would mean instead of it being, it seems like in practical arts everybody is, everybody should get A's everybody should get an A. If you've mastered all the subjects, all the criteria in
Jean: Absolutely. So as a district leader, do you have knowledge of teachers within your department's kind of utilizing this standards based grading method?

Craig: I think a lot of, a lot of my teachers do. I think it more, it happens more as you move up the ladder, umm, I think well, maybe not, maybe, you know what? I don't know if it is more so at the high school than it is at the middle school. I think if you talk for instance in your building, umm, we have a set of criteria that kids are suppose to master, our measurable learn objectives we are suppose to master and we have our essentials, but I think some, some teachers have added it, added some other components into that that we probably should, for instance like working well with others, well that to me that is a standard, that is a standard, so we should make that a standard and then we can actually you, we can we can show that they mastered that this personal work really well within groups, small groups, this person works well within large groups, this person, but we're so caught up in the daily grade, you know, grade, having to have to give the parent a grade, how is my kid doing, well they have a B, well what is a B mean, you know, I think we all are working towards that, its just that we are kind of saddled with this whole system that we've always, we've always had, but if you, if you go to the high school, for instance lets say my fabric, fabric construction class or fabric design class, umm, they have certain criteria that they have to master to be able to move through that, that curriculum, but then they also have to give a grade on how well the piece is put together, but if that teacher at Hickman and that teacher at Rock Bridge aren't always on the same page, well then that doesn't always, that doesn't mean the same thing, so I think we're trying, I guess my rambling, I think we're trying to get to that point, its just that we are kind of shackled with an antiquated system that we can't move towards something that really means, means something in the world of work I guess.

Jean: So what is your perception concerning assessing student learning with standards based grading, your personal perception. If you had to be asked Craig how do you feel about it? What is your personal take on this approach?

Craig: I would love, I would love it and I know that 90% of my staff would love it too because it, I guess it means something, it means I can do this. It takes the, it takes the uhh, randomness out of grading, it does, well so many times you've heard a kid, I mean I know you've heard this, that teacher doesn't like me, you know, well, to be fair sometimes that does meet, that does enter into it. If I don't, if I'm a teacher and I don't always particularly care for the way a student behaves or the way their attitude or whatever, my grading. I can be, I can be skewed towards, you know, I'm going to stick to this kid on this grade and you know I hope that doesn't happen, but the reality of it is it does happen, but standards based grading, if that is a standard that you, like for instance, you work well with others, you play nice with others, that's a standard. Well you can quantify that, you can say you know on this day, this day, this day you didn't do this. You haven't mastered this, this, you know, this part of our curriculum. I personally think it would be, it would be beneficial for our district to move towards that, so if you ask my opinion, I'm all for it. I've been waiting for this.

Jean: So then you see the relevance between our curricular standards or the common core coming up and the use of this assessment in grading model?
Craig: Sure. I think, it's just taking the, it's just taking that system, that old antiquated system and it's actually moving it towards something that actually, its actual data that you can use. I mean, I go back to this, I keep going back to this, but a B doesn't mean nothing, an A means nothing. My uncle told me when I was in high school, he said A's, B's, C's it doesn't make any difference, take the hardest course you can, he said and you get a C, you get a D, it doesn't matter, it's the stretching your brain that matters, it's the work that you are doing in that class that matters. He said your grade point average is going to, you know that doesn't mean anything because he as an engineer, he said if I'm looking for somebody and I'm looking for somebody that is going to come to work for me, I could care less what your grade point average was in high school, I'm looking for what can you do and he said that is, and so I've kind of I just use that as kind of my motto or my mantra from that point forward is that I don't really care about it, I really don't care about a grade, I've always cared about what can I you know, what can my students accomplish, what can they do and so when I do, when I have graded, I've always used that as kind of my meter stick, so.

Jean: Okay. So how would you propose then that we lead teachers to the understandings in this shift through to this model?

Craig: Wow

Jean: To what some say traditional? How do you see that shift taking place?

Craig: You know what, I think you start with practical arts. I think you start with us because I think we are the most likely, the most likely, the area that is going to make the easiest transition its going to I think core, when you move towards core, that brings on a whole different realm of issues with it, but practical arts I think it, that makes sense that we are based on standards. It's a practical area. Can you do this, can you do this? I would think that you would start with some of the electives and practical arts seem like the most likely choice that you could do that. Umm, you are not going to get as much blow back from the community, you're not going to get as much, I think it would make sense to the community. If you are talking about a standards based grading if you are talking about practical arts, well that just, that just seems like a natural fit and I think we could argue that with anybody that, this is, just an A or B like I said, it doesn't make any sense. Standards are what we are looking for. This is what we are looking for. If we have those standards you know, laid out and choreographed, you know vertically and horizontally aligned, then that would make, that might be the easiest transition that would be, I think it would be easily done really, so I'd say from my people I don't think, I think you would have some people that are still would be set, would be stuck on you know even though you went to standards based grading, I think they would still be stuck on that old that old system because that is what they always, that's what they are used to, but a lot of my new teachers, I think they would listen and run with it, so umm, I don't know. I think it would be interesting. We are in the middle of rewrite right now, so get us permission and we will do it. (Laughs)

Jean: Exactly. We could start today! What types of support, if any, have you provided for those that are practicing maybe in your department that you've seen or you are aware of, what kind of support do you provide them or have they come to you for support?
Craig: Not so much in that area. I think we've talked about departmentally facts, business, tech, having some, some of those soft skills, you know have a _____ some of our standards, you know, do you, you know, again go back to do you play well with others, do you, are you on time, are you friendly, and, we talk about those because those you can tie directly to industry and we've done that through the REDY, the Regional Economic Development Study, you can look directly at that and say what do employers want. Well this is what they want, can you do these? Those are standards that make sense to kids. Those are standards that make sense to every one because if you are going to be successful, if you can do these things no matter what area you go into to, so we've talked a lot about aligning our standards around those areas. Now we're in the middle, we're in the midst of doing that this year, so umm, talk to me in May and we will, I will have it hopefully better lied out for you, but that's kind of how we are all moving towards.

Jean: It makes sense in your area.

Craig: Yeah it does, it makes perfect sense.

Jean: So do you feel like you will have any contribution to the model of this, I mean if and when we shift towards this and maybe what is that contribution going to look like for you?

Craig: We've thought, my department has thought that for core, for standards based grading, we are the model, we are the model. I mean you talk about how to implement core competencies in your classroom, we're it. You talk about how to implement standards based grading into your education system, we're it. So we think that we are leading the charge on this because you know, its, we had a meeting at the beginning of school about this and I said talking about core competencies and everybody says, well everybody in my group kind of said, well they should be asking us how to do this, not telling us how to do this, they should be asking us, how do we do this because we do this, we do this every day, we show you how to apply these things. We show you why you need to play nice with others, we show you why you have to be on time. We do these things, so I really feel like we could be at the forefront of this, so.

Jean: So what types of support then you feel are necessary or beneficial as teachers consider a shift from traditional grading to standards based grading? Thinking of everybody, not just with your department, everybody.

Craig: Sure. Umm, we are going to need, we're going to need some uhh, I guess official grace period from the powers that be to make some mistakes because we are going to make some mistakes and its going to be messy and sometimes change is messy, but we're going to need that time to, if we are going to do this, we really need to jump in with both feet and get messy with this because its, its not going to be an easy (snaps fingers) transition there. Its going to be some, some push back from the public, there is going to be some push back from some of our teachers, but it's the right thing to do, I think, for kids, its, I've always felt like this. We got a kid that has a 4.0, I got a kid at Douglas High School that has a 1.6, their life experiences are totally different. The reason that kid has a 1.6 and the reason that kid has his 4.0, completely different. Is that kid any better off, shouldn't be what this kid can do? I had a meeting with Yung ??Casey just the other day, they were talking about this 3.0, is there, you have to have a 3.0 to take these dual credit classes, which is ridiculous to me because this little girl that wants to
Jean: Right.

Craig: Standards based grading, can she do it, yeah, but, you're there, you are and it takes that gate keeping out of the whole process and it puts everybody on an equal playing field. I can do the work (snap) let me go. You know, I can do this. Let me move forward and it just, I don't know, I think we need to give everybody the official okay that its alright to make mistakes and its alright to make this look a little ugly and its going to be, its going to take just likely any good curriculum, it takes 3-5 years before you really get it down. Give us that 3-5 years and then talk to us about it, but don't look at it and say oh in a year we're going to change things and go back to the way we had done it and it, you know, if nothing else, let us do it. (Laughs) give us the okay to do it.

Jean: So then you, when you look at this approach then, when we make this shift, we say, hey this is a greatest thing ever, this is where we need to go, its what's right for kids, it equals the playing field, what approach or who is the approach to, to try to make this or drive this initiative. Where/who starts this snowball affect?

Craig: Its likely anything, I think teachers start it. I think the teachers start it. If the teachers start any you know, bond issue that is passed, any tax levy, anything, anything big in the district that has ever happened, happens with the teachers and you have to get teachers behind it and you have to get you know, yeah somebody has to be the guinea pig and you know, I really do, I mean I wholeheartedly believe this. You could start with a core group of teachers and say we are going to let this group pilot this and this group is going to be our guinea pig and we're going to see how this works with the hopes that all of us get on board and we move towards that, that standards based grading, umm, I think its going to take, its going to take concerted effort by everybody in this district to get it done. Umm, start with your electives, start with your coordinators you know, and start pushing that and letting some different courses (snaps finger) move towards that and, what I'm not sure of is what, what happens after that? What happens after we make the move towards that? What happens at the next level? The collegiate level when they, when a UMKC comes along and says, well we need to know what the grade point average is of this person before they can get into my University or into my department or whatever, what happens at that point because something needs to happen, something needs to happen at that level that, that gets those people on the same, I mean in the same time period that the rest of us are in. I just, I'm kind of frustrated with that, that area, but I, to answer your question, I think you get the teachers behind it and if the teachers are behind it, it will take care of itself.

Jean: Do you have any other insight or information or just commentary on what we've talked about today? Do you have any other thoughts that I didn't hit on or you wanted to share before we close this out?

Craig: I don't know, I don't now if I gave you the information you wanted, but I think that we're, that the district or districts in, you know in the larger sense, we're so worried about
public opinion and we are so worried about oh, what are people going to think and how
is this going to work instead of just worrying about what is right. When you break it
down to in the simplest form what is right, that I go back to that little girl at Douglas
High School with a 1.2 and a 3-year-old at home trying to get into college and she can't
because she's got that 1.2 and that's our meter stick right there, and then I've got a 3.0
kid at another high school that has no more business in college than a man in the
moon, now that doesn't make any sense to me, so at some point we have to do what is
right for kids and we keep talking, we talk about that, this is, this to me is what is right
for kids. I can do this, this is what I can do, this is how I can do it and that's what, look
at any data that anybody gives us, I mean its not like its, its not like its, uhh, this is
pulled out of thin air, this is what industry tells you. This is what we want. This is
what's going to help our kid and this is what's going to get our country back on track.
You know, we keep talking about stem and science and math and, but it boils down to
just that, its what can we do and what, show me what you can do and this is what, and
for you to be successful in my industry, this is what you need to be able to do, not go
out and get a 4.0, and then come see me about this. So, I don't know. I get . . .

Jean: Oh, no, I appreciate your thoughts.

Craig: I appreciate you talking to me about this. I think this is, I mean I get excited about it
because I really think this is especially in my area, this is something I'd really like to see
us get the stamp for approval to move forward because it makes sense with us.

Jean: Well, thanks for taking the time today to sit and share your thoughts and I appreciate
your input and as I said earlier, at the end of this process, if you are interested, I would
be more than happy to share the results of this dissertation, so

Craig: I would love to see you get this.

Jean: All right. Thanks Craig.

Craig: Thank you very much.
Interview 12

Jean: Good afternoon Mike. I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I will not take much of your time, however, I understand you are in a leadership position in the district and may or may not have been working with standards based grading based on your department and the people within. My goal today is to gain insight from you regarding this transition or your experience with this process possibly. During the course of my doctoral studies, Standards Based Grading has become a focus and I feel that by gaining insight from a practitioner such as yourself, the information will lend itself nicely to my study. At the end of this study, I would be more than happy to share my findings with you, if you are interested so and as I stated, your insight is going to be very helpful, therefore please share with me what you feel is most important related to the questions I ask of you today. I do plan to record this interview today in order to review it for themes related to my study, do you approve of this recording.

Mike: Sure.

Jean: I appreciate that. So with that said, we'll just start Mike. Can you just tell me a little bit about your understanding in the context of traditional versus standards based grading?

Mike: Sure, I say traditional would be what we all grew up with where everything counts the majority of things count for points whether it is homework, tests, extra credit and it all goes into a pot and you earn a percentage based on that and a kind of over simplified version, but standards based grading my view on it would be we actually track the scores on certain key standards and then there is variations of how we treat that whether it's the grade you get on the standard by the end of the year or if its an average of grade of the standard, but its, on a test for example, we know exactly what standards are being graded and we would have a grade for each individual standard on that test.

Jean: So as a district leader, do you have knowledge of teachers maybe within your department that are currently trying the standards based grading model?

Mike: I don’t think by the true definition of standards based, no. I think we are realistically in the science department we are working on making sure we're teaching in a standards way, but the grading is still traditional.

Jean: So do you have any feelings one way or the other about the whole traditional versus standards based? What is your . . .

Mike: I love standards based. I think it is the right way to go. I think we can come up with example after example on how a grade does not, a traditional grade does not necessarily reflect a student's learning and it also can be punitive, uhh, that they dig themselves such a hole maybe they even know it or I think the homework piece is a big on that sometimes a kid might be able to pass anything, but yet because of what is perceived as effort brings them and shows that they are a B, but then they take a state test and they are no where close to proficient, so I am a huge, I know there is a lot of controversial parts of it and you got to work through them, a huge proponent of at least working towards at least some parts of the standards based grading.
Jean: So your perception of standards based grading then is a positive one?

Mike: It is.

Jean: And so saying that, and you just kind of went there mentioned some of those pieces, but what do you think is the, your perspective, what do you think standards based can do for kids that traditional does not?

Mike: I think it identifies exactly what is, what they master and what they do not master. It also helps parents, which then helps kids understand where they need to work on. If under the traditional system if I'm in I think math is a great example, if I'm in algebra and I get a B that doesn't tell me as a parent or me as a student where I need to go. Did I get a B on everything or did I fail something and get A's on other things to average the B and I think standards based, if we follow through with the standards based report card or progress reports, lets us know that we have mastered these topics, we still need to work on these topics whether its for remediation in school, home, but it really tells us where we are not just one over our _____ letter grade for the course.

Jean: Okay.

Mike: For science, example, science is another good example I think. Science unlike math, math can build, science is three to six discrete completely different topics, so it means virtually nothing if you mastered or aced this astronomy and doesn't mean you mastered geology and they have nothing to do with each other. So to give one letter grade there does not tell us what they did and didn't do.

Jean: Okay. So do you see any relevance then between our curricular standards or the new common core standards and the use of this assessment grading level?

Mike: It has a huge relevance. I think we could have use it on the past standards too, we just didn't. But now they have really narrowed down the number of standards at least in science and I believe that is to be true in the other areas too, but I know in science we have really narrowed it down to big ideas to where we could, we would be able to implement standards based grading far easier with our new upcoming standards next year than we could now.

Jean: So how do you propose that we would lead teachers through this kind of evolution or shift from traditional to standards based? How do you see that coming together?

Mike: I think, at least what worked for me in the past with my department, who in my past district was very against the whole idea. What actually sold some of them was just to discuss, we looked at different grades and how the grade is related to the big assessments that meant something, whether it ACT in high school or the state test and they were shocked to find out that kids that, ahh, I don't want to over, I don't want to over exaggerate this, but some of the kids that were getting C's and D's were ending up proficient or advanced, some of the kids that were getting high A's were falling at the like the second level, and it just led us to believe that this grade doesn't really mean anything and then the other big one was a grade in, I'll pick our schools, but a grade in Hickman biology was a B was not necessarily a B in Rock Bridge biology and
standards based actually, we found its easier to control that a little bit, so I won some
over just by going over what is wrong with the current system and not everybody, but
that is what helped win us over a little bit. But then you got to a lot of controversy in the
homework piece and the giving zeros piece and then unfortunately that is what ended
up bogging down and it was all about that and not about the bigger picture.

Jean: Okay. So what types of support, if any, have you provided currently for those who are
practicing standards based and you said,

Mike: Yeah, if I apologize if I just don't know it, I am not aware of any that are really doing
what I would consider a standards based grading in science and there may be one out
there that just hasn't talked to me about it, but I would provide them particularly with our
new standards coming, we can provide them with a lot of support. I would like to see
the tests. I have experience, we started building the new tests in the last district where
when we made the teachers guide to the tests, the answer key, we would know then
the question, we would mix them up, but questions 1, 5, 7, 9, 10, we would make sure
that there was 5 on a standard minimum, were this standard and so in the end when
we plugged that in to what was their master manager, it would give us a score of each
one and it was really interesting because again, on a test they might get an 86, but this
total told us they were getting 100's on some and failing on other sections. So that is
how I think I would help them is to help them build a test system that is easier for them
to do standards based.

Jean: Okay. Which is a great segway into the next question, do you feel you would have any
contribution to his model of grading and assessment?

Mike: Yeah.

Jean: So there in lies the crux of the common core standards . . .

Mike: Exactly.

Jean: . . . can you see yourself surfacing in any other way either directly or indirectly as far as
the support for your science teachers?

Mike: (big sigh) umm, I would support them in any way anybody would want me to support
them, but specifically in the assessment building and the other part that I am really big
on, a big monitor this year that I talked on August 14th is analyzing what you are
teaching and if you cannot answer and I kind of find this standards based, if you cannot
answer why this is important to kids, then we need to analyze why we are teaching
that. Whether it is important now or next year, none of this, its important later in life just
because like, answer, really answer why this is important in the next year and if you
can't answer that, then its probably not a worthwhile standard that we are addressing
and we need to cycle that out in the, and concentrate more on the standards that we
feel are important, so I think identifying relevance in the bigger part would be
something that would interest me in addition to the assessments.

Jean: So then specifically, just kind of knowing what this animal is about since you have kind
of had some prior experience with this, what support do you see teachers needing
specifically if we would transition to the standards based model?
Mike: The support is how to manage a grading system like that. Uhh, there was a lot of bogg
down on how much time this would take teachers to give a test, which a test will often
at least in my area will often address several standards at the same time, on how to
without taking weeks to quickly figure out how to give a grade on different standards
and so I think that's, that's in whether, and whether it could go different ways, maybe
we give too long of assessments and maybe we should just do an assessment at a
time for the little tests, so I think just the building of assessments is big and then what
to do with that and I, that is the, that one I don't even have a gray answer. Now that
you've got these scores, you know that these five kids, how when you have 125
students do you, do you address that. Umm, and I've seen some good things. I've
seen some of the junior highs and maybe even you guys have done it sometime, but
I've seen some Oakland and Jeff Junior what they've done its not standards based, but
they are doing what I thin would work well is they are giving a kind of assessment and
then for the next couple of days, they actually split their kids up and divide them up and
say, okay even your Suploski's?? kids for the next three days you are going to Mrs.
Eckerns class, you are going to Gable and they divide them up by what parts of the
tests they did well and what they didn't and I think standards based would lend itself all
to that.

Jean: So kind of an RTI model then?

Mike: Yeah, yeah, it would

Jean: _____had mentioned?

Mike: Yeah.

Jean: And so on the other side of that, it would be the enrichment side, so then another
positive

Mike: Exactly.

Jean: Okay. So do you have a strong feeling on like what approach or who do you think
should be leading this transition as we seek a possible shift in our district?

Mike: They tend to, I think they tend to listen to coordinators a little bit, as they are safe, you
know, I think you got to get the right people because principals like you I think could
win over some, but then if you have other people in the district that come in and more
of mandate, then there is always pushback, and so I think we just got to get really
positive realistic people in there and I don't think it matters much what the position is,
uhh, just practical real life and willing to listen to their concerns and, and I think what I
saw tank so much in the last district is too much of a blowing off of the teacher's
concerns. Some of them are whinny and needed to be blown off, but I think it was
blown off too quickly and so they just shut down and but, yeah, when I see how your
leadership style, you know there are other principals that aren't that way. I think we
just need to be practical. I think it could be any number of positions. I think the
coordinators will be good to help the teachers develop the assessments, but it would
be anybody leading it just with that positive focus I guess.
Jean: Okay. So knowing that you've had a little background in this and knowing that we're as
a district you know considering it and the way common core is aligning seems like the
perfect storm so to speak to see a shift.

Mike: Yeah.

Jean: Do you have any other insight or information you want to share or kind of put out there
that says hey, this is my big thought, my big ideas.

Mike: Yeah, the one big idea is just what we burned by is figure out a statement with a group
of good administrators and teachers on how to address the nosy rose thing. If indeed
that is the direction its going to go and most standards based I found that is a big
component, it was shocking how that bogg a system. There was 100 people involved
and that shut it down and shut it down for two years that little bitty thing in my opinion,
little bitty. Uhh, so coming up with how that is going to be a addressed, I don't know if I
know a great answer to that, but other than that, I think just talking about the merits of
how its more meaningful to kids and how a current grade does not mean much to
students right now.

Jean: Okay. Well Mike I really appreciate your time. that I all I have for you, so again, as I
said earlier, I'm more than happy to share my findings with you if you are ever
interested at the end of the study.

Mike: Great.

Jean: Thank you for spending some time with me today.

Mike: Thank you.
Jean Selby has resided in Boone County, Missouri her entire life. Born in Columbia, Mo., Jean began her education in Columbia Public Schools, and finished in the Southern Boone County School District. Attending William Woods College from 1983 – 1988, Jean completed her undergraduate in education with a Bachelor of Science degree.

Jean began her teaching career, teaching 6th grade in the Southern Boone School District, in 1988, and taught for the next 11 years. Selected as a mentor teacher by the University of Missouri Fellowship Initiative, Jean mentored new teachers through the end of the 1998-1999 school year, including various other responsibilities for the University. Jean acquired her masters and specialists degrees during this time, in administration.

Jean acquired an administrative assistant position in the Columbia Public Schools for the start of the 2000 school year. She was titled assistant principal beginning the school the school year 2004 and worked in this capacity through the 2009 school year. During this time, Jean entered in the Ed.D. program and successfully completed coursework. Being chosen as a participant in the Wallace Foundation Grant, Jean became acting principal at her school for the 2009-2010 school year.

Jean was chosen as principal and remains in her current school, Smithton Middle School, in the Columbia Public School District for the 2010-2011 school year. In her third year as principal, Jean has finished her doctorate degree graduated on December 15, 2012. 

Jean continues to lead a highly talented faculty at her current school and looks forward to finishing her career in this capacity.