Grading the Future – A Summary
The Illinois State Board of Education’s 2014 Student Advisory Council
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After exploring different grading scales, we found that there were some concerns with our current system. Grades at the simplest form serve as indicators for a students understanding and growth. Currently this indicator does not align with the way we are assessing students on Standardized Tests. Our data suggests there is a gap between grades & standardize test scores; 70% of the 175 high schools we contacted had a variance of 8 percentage points or more between the percentage of their Juniors on the Honor Roll and their percentages of Juniors meeting or exceeding the PSAE. The reason for this is, is because standardized test criteria has evolved over the years, while grading has not, thus explaining the lack of consistencies. Under our current system...grades do not serve as proper indicator; they do not match up with the way we are assessing students.

While carefully researching several grading methods, we found the Standards Based Grading system to serve as the best indicator of academic success. We value our current grading systems (10 point/7 point scales) however feel that they mask academic achievement. In other words, traditional grading scales (10 point/7point scales) incorporate so much more than academic success; they measure participation, behavior, attendance, etc. We do believe there is a place for these other factors to be addressed, however understand that, currently, these factors can mask, or inflate, grades. Standards Based Grading, at the simplest form, answers one of two questions: Do I know it? Can I do it? It measures student’s knowledge on objectives, not a student’s ability to ‘play student’.

Before we even considered recommending that the state adopt a Standards based Grading Scale, we wanted to learn more about the repercussions that come with it. We specifically wanted to know how Higher Education Institution’s would respond to a transcript with Standards Based Grading instead of the traditional ABC report card. After surveying all 12 Illinois public institutions, our group found that 100% of the Illinois public institutions were supportive of a Standards Based Grading Scale. We received responses from 63 Illinois private institutions and found that 82% of the 63 were supportive while 18% were hesitant. We found that the reason the 18% were hesitant was because they were unsure what a Standards Based Scale would look like and felt the need for more information.

Our final area of research was on the uniform grading scales of other states. We discovered that states like Tennessee and Louisiana adopted a statewide scale for many reasons; the one reason they shared in common was the ease of comparing student grades across the state. Currently there are several different scales being utilized throughout the state, this makes student transfers difficult to convert grades. We also found that many college admission offices look at letter grades rather than percentages. Meaning a student who has a 91 in a 7 point grading scale (100-93 = A) is at a disadvantage when it comes to college admissions in comparison to someone with a 91 in 10 point scale (100-90 = A). After researching many states, we’ve concluded that there are a few moving towards uniform grading scales, and Illinois has an opportunity to be a leader in this capacity.

It is also important to understand that nearly everything has changed in education, the way we teach, the way we assess; nearly everything except the way we grade. With these issues in mind we’d like to provide our recommendation: The Illinois State Board of Education’s Student Advisory Council recommends that the state of Illinois should gradually adopt a statewide standards based grading scale. Now we understand there are some areas of concern with this. We know, like with anything else, there might be some growing pains and understand no system...no matter how ideal it may seem on paper...will ever be perfect. However as we’ve mentioned from the very beginning, as students grades are incredibly important to us. They are our only indicators of our growth. Now speaking from experience...as a Student...there is nothing more frustrating than receiving straight As for four years, yet receive an average score on the ACT. If your speedometer reads 45 and in reality you’re only going 20...that’d raise some red flags, and this should too.