

Title of Study: *Mastery Grading: An Action Research Plan for Student Engagement*

Dates of Study: 2018-2019

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Purpose of the Action Research: *The purpose of the study is to analyze the relative impact of mastery grading principles on student classroom engagement and student success.*

Research Question/Hypothesis: *My research question is: Will the application of mastery grading principles increase the classroom engagement of high school students?*

The Existing Need: *To effectively engage students there needs to be a strategic use of daily and weekly classroom data to motivate pedagogical choices. On my campus, there is a concern that students 'need' grades to be tied to homework, or perhaps participation, to ensure that there are consequences and rewards for student work. If Mastery Grading becomes a part of the regular expectation of my school's instructional program, there needs to be a great deal of teacher education about Mastery Grading.*

Research Connection: *Students who experience mastery learning have multiple opportunities to demonstrate understanding and growth over the courses' specific learning goals and objectives (Fredricks, 2004). Teachers are expected to plan for mastery through identification of key learning standards, and to prepare for multiple formative assessments (in-process evaluations of student learning) along the way. From these measurements of learning, students are given various correctives, or enrichments to improve their demonstration of learning objectives.*

Participants: *The study will include four teachers; one English teacher, one Geometry teacher, and myself, a social studies teacher. There will be one honors US History class with 37 juniors (23 Male and 14 Female), two sophomore AP World classes (33 Male and 28 Female) and three honors Geometry courses (49 Male and 36 Female). Altogether, there will be 105 males, and 78 female students, 183 students.*

Grade: 10-11

Intervention: *The planned intervention will take place over four weeks in February and March. The initial intervention will be a one hour training on the use of the Mastery Grading with the Schoology learning management system. After one week of implementation in which they introduce and discuss the Mastery Grading tool to their classes. I will meet with each teacher for thirty minutes to discuss their progress with Mastery Grading and to interview them about their observations about student engagement and student voice in the classroom that week. Teachers will be expected to discuss class progress towards mastery of standards once a week for ten minutes. This conversation will be focused first around presentation of Mastery Grading data, then conducting a classroom discussion*

Results: *The results from my research were inconclusive.. My data does not indicate that students increased their 'voice' over the course of the study. However, written reflections collected from students over the course of the study did reveal that many students were able to write about their goals with precision. Anecdotally, students in the AP World History class put their 'student voice' to use to advocate for changes in the way curriculum is presented in terms of behavioral engagement, my data is not consistent with the research I read. However, Students I observed who already engaged in 'teacher pleasing' behaviors already had high grades. Survey results after the study show that students did not dramatically change their engagement in the course, but they did show small increases in relevance.*

Conclusions: *Even though mastery grading was implemented over several weeks, it was not implemented with fidelity. I think implementing mastery grading mid-school year was overly ambitious. Teachers engaged in this study are capable campus leaders. Their implementation of mastery grading had to compete with other leadership responsibilities and cross-curricular projects. Piloting mastery grading across an entire department, or within a magnet is a more realistic goal. Mastery of grading takes time to adopt, and it requires a lot of teacher planning to implement. Working with a grade team, or a department would provide more support than working ad hoc across a school. In replicating this study, I would plan additional time for developing the units that will involve mastery grading. Expanding the scope and time of the study may yield more accurate outcomes.*

Recommendations: *Future research could examine how mastery grading impacts engagement in additional subject areas is needed. Perhaps areas such as art, music and dance will have a different impact on engagement when mastery grading principles are applied. I also expect that career technical education courses would indicate high levels of student engagement when teachers use Mastery Grading practices.*