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The development of grading procedures for students with educational disabilities attending regular education classes

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The Development of Grading Procedures for Students with Educational Disabilities Attending Regular Education Classes

by
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ABSTRACT

Kathleen Sharp Sweeder: The Development of Grading Procedures for Students with Educational Disabilitites Attending Regular Education Classes, 1997
Project Advisor: Dr. Stanley Urban
Graduate Program in Learning Disabilities

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act states that children with disabilites must be educated, to the maximum extent possible and appropriate, in the regular education setting with nonhandicapped children. The purpose of this study was to develop grading procedures for students with educational disabilities who attend regular education classes. Current district policies, the teachers' procedures for grading students, and the best practices presented in literature were investigated. Is grading students with educational disabilities in the regular education setting a concern for teachers? Should this school district develop a grading policy for students with educational disabilitites? A teacher questionnaire was developed to focus on these issues. The percentages of the teachers' responses were recorded.

The majority of the teachers surveyed believe that students with educational disabilities should not be graded using the same methods which are used for their nondisabled peers. Various grading procedures were rated by teachers using a likert-type scale. Although teachers wanted to modify their grading procedures for special education students in thier class, there

was not a strong consensus indicating favored techniques. Some methods were clearly not favorable among the teachers surveyed. During this investigation, it was also discovered that there was no strong uniformity in grading regular education students. This discovery makes the use of a modified grading system for special education students even more problematic. Finally, teachers were interviewed in an attempt to discover the preferred method of grading students with educational disabilitites. District wide grading procedures for students with educational disabilities were proposed.

MINI ABSTRACT

Kathleen Sharp Sweeder:

The Development of Grading Procedures for Students with Educational Disabilities Attending Regular Education Classes
Project Advisor: Dr. Stanley Urban
Graduate Program in Learning Disabilities

The purpose of this study was to develop grading procedures for students with educational disabilities who attend regular education classes. Results of a questionnaire indicated that the majority (81%) of the surveyed general education teachers have concerns regarding the grading of classified students within their classes. District wide grading procedures for students with educational disabilities were proposed.

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CHAPTER I

Rationale

Background

Since 1975, when Public Law 94-142 mandated a free and appropriate education for all children, classroom teachers have experienced the integration of students with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 101-476) stated that children with disabilities must be placed, to the maximum extent possible and appropriate, in the regular education setting with non handicapped children. This was referred to as Mainstreaming. In the 1980's, this practice was called the Regular Education Initiative. Currently, the new buzz word for educating disabled students with their nondisabled peers is Inclusion. Regardless of the name, students with disabilities are attending the local public school that they would normally attend if they were not disabled.

Additional pressures and responsibilities unfold, as general educators teach students with disabilities in the regular education setting. Related services and supplementary aides must be provided by every school district to assist the special education students in their least restrictive environment. One type of supplementary aide is the service of special education professionals, such as the Child Study Team, Resource Center Teacher and the Collaborative Special Educator. They are called upon now, more than ever, to support regular education teachers. Previously, special

education professionals worked with special education students. However, P.L. 101-476 has merged the regular education professionals and the special education professionals. As these two philosophies of education collide, the following controversial issues emerge: curriculum, instructional strategies, discipline and grading.

Research Questions

Are regular education teachers concerned about grading students with educational disabilities, when these special education students are included or mainstreamed? How do regular educators currently grade special education students who are included in their classes, and what guidelines do they use? Would regular education teachers prefer to use a district wide policy for grading mainstreamed students? If so, according to the research, what is their preferred method? What works according to the literature review?

Need for the Study

This study will survey teachers for their perspectives on grading classified students in the regular classroom. Current district policies and procedures for grading students will be explored. A review of literature will study issues of grading and alternative grading systems. Finally, a district wide policy regarding the grading systems used for special education students in the regular classroom will be developed.

Grading students with educational disabilities can be a sensitive issue for everyone involved, including regular educators, special education

students, parents, special education teachers, and administrators. Research shows that special education students who are mainstreamed for science, social studies and health typically received a grade of D or lower (Donohoe and Zigmond, 1990). A single letter grade does not always reflect a student's progress or effort. Grading special education students is seldom expressed as an area of concern until there is a problem. However, recent studies have discovered that many regular education teachers have concerns about their grading practices for students with educational disabilities (Pollard, Rojewski, & Pollard, 1993; Bursuck, Polloway, Plante, Epstein, Jayanthi & McConeghy, 1996). Grading seems to be a silent stumbling block to true inclusion.

Teachers have many variables to consider when evaluating all students. Portfolio or outcome based assessment is gaining popularity. Therefore, the traditional report card grades may not match the instructional practices of the current classroom (Kohn, 1994; Willis, 1993) At the same time, teachers are expected to answer issues of accountability through student performance on standardized tests. In addition to this, regular education teachers are now frequently responsible for grading the special education students who are included in regular education classes. Also, there is the added pressure that eventually almost all disabled students will have to pass minimum proficiency tests like their nondisabled peers.

Special education teachers and professionals must assist the regular education teachers and professionals to determine effective grading techniques for students with disabilities. As special education students are included in the mainstream, their skills and abilities may differ from their

peers. Although mainstreaming is not a new concept, inclusion has recently been revived. Unfortunately, students with disabilities are entering the regular classroom prior to appropriate teacher training. Regular educators are not always prepared to teach students of different ability levels. Special educators also require training in order to collaborate with their regular education colleagues. Support from special education professionals can be lacking also.

Limitations

As grading special education students is explored, the issues surrounding the grading of regular education students will be revealed. If a uniform procedure is not being used in the grading of regular education students, then it may be difficult to create a grading procedure for special education students.

If the majority of the district's teachers do not respond to the given survey, then the resulting grading policy may not necessarily meet the needs of the district nor will the teachers have a feeling of ownership.

According to Capozzoli (1984), teachers reported having insufficient training in testing and grading special education students. If the teachers' perspectives are in conflict with effective grading procedures as interpreted through the review of literature, then the teaching staff may feel that the policy is being imposed upon them. The school district would have to embark on the training of teachers to adapt their regular education classes for the included special education students.

Finally, it may be discovered that a uniform grading policy for students with disabilities in the mainstream is not an effective way to deal with the issue of grading. Other alternatives may be suggested.

The resulting grading policy will be based on the needs of a specific school district. It would be inaccurate to generalize the resulting policy to other districts which are not similar in population.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

What Are Grades?

There are many aspects of education. Report card grades are just one such aspect. Grades are frequently taken for granted, yet they are valued by many people to make important decisions (Wendel & Anderson, 1994). Report card grades help determine who is to be promoted and who is to be retained. Vasa (1981) noted that report card grades also effect extra curricula eligibility, honor roll placement and scholarships awards. Business feels that a student with good grades will be a good worker. Colleges use grades to determine who will, or will not, succeed in higher education. It is a fallacy to believe that grades are a proven predictor of future achievement, because they are not (Chandler, 1983; Rogers, 1989).

So, what are grades? A general consensus in the literature suggests that grades are a form of communication (Calhoun, 1986; Carpenter, 1985; Carpenter, Grantham & Hardister, 1983; Cohen, 1982; Kiraly & Bedell, 1984). But what do they communicate, and to whom? A military commercial has recently been aired on television. During this commercial, the narrator expresses a thought that he is thankful for a teacher, "who never let me settle for a C". This supports the theory that society views grades as a form of communication. A television commercial tries to convey a message to an audience. "Never settling for a C", communicates to the audience that

receiving good grades in school, an A or B, was part of the reason that this person found success in the military.

Grades are intended to communicate messages. If the message intended is not the message received, accurate communication fails (Carpenter, 1985). Do report card grades express effort, ability, achievement or something else? To whom do they communicate? The student has to interpret the given grade. Do they know what it represents? The student's parents interpret the given grade. Do they understand it? What about the student's peer group? They will also interpret the given grade. Will they compare it to their own grade? Does the grade given to one student mean the same as a grade given to a classmate? Other teachers need to understand the message being communicated. When a teacher needs to research the past learning behaviors of a student, they look at the previous report card grades. When a student transfers to a new school, there is no way to tell initially if a student is gifted, disabled or on a modified program, by viewing the report card alone. These scenarios illustrate that the grading of a student is not simple. Every person viewing a grade can perceive it as something different. "To be meaningful, grades must be interpreted by all members of a school community in the same way" (Kenney & Perry, 1994, p. 25).

Assigning a report card grade becomes compounded when the regular education teacher is now held responsible for grading special education students in the mainstream. Every teacher grading a special education student can perceive grades differently. If the regular education teachers do not have a policy to follow, questions will arise. Sometimes the questions are posed by the student himself or by the parent, peer, advocate, another

teacher, school or potential employer. Questions asked after the grade has been assigned are too late. The procedure for grading should be clearly communicated. The special education teachers and administrators have to work with the regular education teachers and support them. The regular teacher must explain the grading procedure to the mainstreamed student at the beginning of the course. Students can not improve their school work if they do not understand why they received a certain grade (Gustafon, 1994; Gersten, Vaughn, & Brengelman, 1996). The regular teacher should also inform the parent of grading procedures because that teacher is held accountable to explain the special education student's grade.

Why Grade Special Education Students?

Research studies have been conducted to determine the perspectives of regular education teachers and disabled students on grading in the mainstream. Grading was not such a threat to regular educators when special students received their report card grades solely from the resource teacher. Although studies did show that mainstreamed students were receiving D's or lower in classes such as health, science, and social studies. In addition, this study found that students were receiving passing grades just for showing up and having an interest in the class. It was more an issue of social integration than learning (Donahoe & Zigmond, 1990). However, grades for math and reading were still assigned by the same teacher who instructed them, the resource teacher.

One question which arose was: why grade special education students in the regular education setting? Administrators, teachers, and parents want

to be able to track the progress of students with disabilities and to evaluate learning. "The major reason for giving grades to learning disabled students is that they should not be exempted or excluded from the educational system and/or educational subsystems such as grades" (Lieberman, 1982, p. 381). Therefore, it is not only a student's right to receive a report card grade like their non-disabled peers, it is usually desired by everyone involved.

According to the research mentioned earlier grades, as a means of communication for special education students in the mainstream, do not convey a clear message. Some disabled students may try very hard to accomplish the regular curriculum goals. However, due to their disability, they find it impossible to meet the teacher's expectations for the class. Failing to meet the teacher's academic expectations could result in the disabled student receiving a failing grade on a report card. However, the same student could receive a better grade from a different teacher who considers effort, attendance, ability, etc. This example shows that some students with disabilities will not successfully learn nor will they be able to demonstrate their learning when they are taught with their regular education peers.

Not all regular education teachers perceive this dilemma of sometimes requiring special education students to be taught, tested and graded differently. According to Schuman & Vaughn (1991), they are willing to provide support or encouragement, but less willing to make classroom modifications. Some regular educators feel that students who need alternate methods should not be educated in the regular classroom. They continue to believe that the special education student in the regular class should be

treated as all other students (Chandler, 1983). Alternative grading procedures are needed for mainstreamed or included special education students to demonstrate learning.

Alternative Grading Systems

The literature suggests various methods for effective teaching strategies and testing modifications. This would suggest that the process of grading students with disabilities in the regular class may also need to be modified. Some high school teachers would rather adapt the grading policies so that the mainstreamed student could earn a passing grade, than alter their daily teaching or revise their testing (Zigmond, Levin & Laurie, 1985). Although no single grading procedure is best for all students (Anderson & Wendel, 1988), teachers can consider alternative grading systems for special education students in regular education setting. The following systems were common suggestions among the literature (Kinnison, Hayes & Acord, 1981; Malehorn, 1984; Michael & Trippi, 1987; Partin, 1979; Salend, 1995; Vasa, 1981; Willis, 1993):

1. ***Individually Written Report*** : Student will receive a narrative report, written by the classroom and resource room teachers.

2. ***Individual Education Plan (IEP)*** : The student's report card is based on the IEP goals and objectives.

3. ***Percentage Grading*** : Student's grade is based on percentages of correct responses on every assignment completed.

4. ***Multiple Grade System*** : Student receives three grades for every subject, representing ability, effort and achievement.

5. ***Variation Multiple Grading System*** : Letter grades are accompanied with a subscript number that represents the students level of functioning.

6. ***Shared Grading System*** : The resource center teacher and the classroom teacher cooperatively agree upon the grade.

7. ***Point Grading System*** : The student's grade consists of point distribution. For example: 40% tests, 20% oral reports, 10% attendance, 10% homework completion, 20% classroom participation.

8. ***Criterion Mastery System*** : Specific goals are set. The student receives grades based on a pre-test - post-test procedures.

9. ***Pass-Fail System*** : The student receives a P or an F as a grade.

10. ***Contract System*** : The teacher and the student agrees on a contract which specifies requirements for an A, B, or C grade.

11. ***Daily- Weekly Guide*** : Class participation and interaction are graded. The student's daily/weekly activity is also graded. These grades are averaged for the report card.

12. ***Regular Classroom Teacher Controlled System*** : The special education student is graded using the same system used for regular education students.

13. ***Student Self Comparison*** : The student's progress is measured by the gains he/she makes towards achieving the goals of the curriculum content. The student is not compared to the other students in the class.

One consideration in using an alternative grading system for special education students in the regular education setting, is to have a system for

grading regular students already in use. Uniformity in a grading system must already be in place for regular education students (Thomas, 1986), before it can be analyzed and altered for special education students.

Summary

To grade or not to grade. This has been an ongoing question in regular education for years (Guskey, 1994). Society has decided that everyone must be held accountable. Unfortunately, grading has been used to sort individuals, such as deciding who goes to college, and has even been used in an attempt to motivate students (Ornstein, 1994; Vasa,1981). Grades are part of the criteria which is used to evaluate an individual's future prospects or current worth. The true purpose of grading is to communicate a student's strengths and the areas needing improvement. As special education students are being instructed with their nondisabled peers, the dilemma of grading continues. Virtually all students must face testing and grading.

The research suggests that the teaching, testing and grading of special education students in the regular education setting must be modified to meet the needs of the learners (Beattie, Grise, & Algozzine, 1983). Common test modifications include: untimed tests, oral tests, alter the method of recording the student's answer, grade the test based on the number of items correct rather that the number completed, allow the student to take the test somewhere else without test pressure or anxiety (Kinnison, Hayes & Acord,1981). Teachers can also adapt their tests to meet the needs of their special education students. They should keep in mind the construction of the

test; such as readability, content, format, reliability, validity, presentation of items, and directions (Salend, 1995).

A review of literature suggests that special education students are experiencing difficulty in the mainstream. Sometimes they fail, when they should not fail, based on their disability. Some may pass the class but they are never given a valid opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned. If a Pass/Fail system is used, then they do not have the same opportunity as others for honor role placement or an accurate class rank. Some teachers perceive learning disabled students in the classroom as a problem which will require extra effort on their part. However, when surveyed, these teachers revealed that they hardly did anything different for these students (Zigmond, Levin & Laurie, 1985). This means that students' grades do not accurately communicate anything. This opens the door for subjectivity and ambiguity.

Grading policies which allow for students to be compared to themselves, rather than others, are recommended. Students must be made aware and understand the grading requirements in advance. Remember, the mainstream need only be modified when a student's disability interferes with his/her performance. Communication is what grades are all about. When possible, supplement the grading symbol with an oral or written narrative. Other grading alternatives are available and they should be considered in order to meet the needs of individual mainstreamed students.

Another common issue in the literature is that preservice teachers are not being trained sufficiently on grading procedures. They do not know how to alter and to modify their class to meet the individual needs of all learners. General education teachers who are in the field have also not been

adequately trained on grading students with educational disabilities. These veteran teachers are also experiencing the added pressure of grading special education students in the regular education setting. Bursuck et al., 1996, conducted a national survey of elementary and secondary general education teachers and investigated their adaptations for grading students with disabilities in general education classes. This survey discovered that general education teachers had questions and concerns about grading practices for students with educational disabilities.

CHAPTER III

Design Of The Study

Instrument

A teacher questionnaire was developed for two purposes. The first was to identify current grading procedures used by teachers for special education students. This provoked questions concerning grading procedures for regular education students. The second purpose was to identify the opinions and the concerns of the teachers in regards to grading special education students in their classes. This information will be used to help determine whether a special education grading policy would benefit this particular district.

This questionnaire consisted of ten questions regarding the teachers' grading procedures for special education and regular education students. Some questions required a yes or no answer. Other questions involved a narrative response. It asked teachers to indicate if they had strong feelings about this topic and if they would like to be interviewed. Finally, this questionnaire listed thirteen various methods for grading special education students in the regular education setting and it asked the teachers to rate each method using a likert-type scale from 1 through 5. The response of 1 represented the methods the teachers would prefer to use in their classroom with special education students. The response of 5 represented the least desirable method.

Subjects

In order to explore current district policies and procedures for grading students, the superintendent, director of special services, and the two building principals were informally interviewed. The district's handbook was also consulted. A copy of this questionnaire was submitted for the administration's approval prior to distribution to the teachers, the subjects of this study.

The subjects were thirty-six regular education teachers from two schools. The two schools make up the entire school district. The first school is for grades kindergarten through fourth and it consists of nineteen regular education teachers. There are four teachers who work in both buildings. The second school is for grades fifth through eighth and consists of thirteen regular education teachers. Seventh and eighth grade classes are departmentalized according to academic subjects. All of the teachers who participated in this study have been teaching in this district for at least five years. Thirty-three of the teachers hold a bachelor's degree, while three possess masters degrees.

The subjects have had a variety of mildly disabled students in their classes. Some of the students have been classified as: perceptually impaired, neurologically impaired, emotionally disturbed, communication handicapped, visually impaired and orthopedically handicapped. Most of the subjects have had similar experiences with special education students in this district. The special education students received replacement instruction for reading, language arts, spelling and mathematics. However, this has recently been changed. The students now leave their classroom for

instruction in their weakest area only. As result, the students are now spending more time in their regular class. Regular educators now have more responsibilities in grading. There are also three students who are receiving in-class support. A collaborative grading system has not yet been developed for these three students and their teachers.

Setting

This small school district is located in southern New Jersey. It can be described as a rural district with urban overtones. Fifty percent of all residences in this small town are rental properties. Therefore the school population is very transient. Many urban problems such as unemployment, overcrowding in housing, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse affect this community. There are approximately six hundred students living in this district. Most of the students walk to school. The percentage of the student population's ethnicity is as follows: 44.3% White, 23.6% African-American, 31.4% Hispanic, and 0.7% Asian. Fourteen percent of the school population is classified as special education students.

The district offers a full continuum of services for it's special education students. About twenty percent of the classified population attend out-of-district placements because the small school district can not meet their IEP goals and objectives within the district's facilities. The school district offers three self-contained special education classes and two resource centers. Some resource center students receive replacement instruction out of the class and some receive in-class support. The Child Study Team consists of a Director, Social Worker and School Psychologist

who are part-time. The remainder of the Team consists of full-time positions of a Speech Therapist, a Guidance Counselor and a Learning Disabilities Teacher-Consultant. Other services for special education students are contracted out to agencies. These include an Occupational Therapist, a Physical Therapist, and Personal Nurses.

Chapter IV

Analysis Of Results

To determine if teachers were interested in a district wide grading policy for students with disabilities in the mainstream, a teacher questionnaire was distributed. It was important to first determine what the teachers' grading procedures were for their regular education students in order to understand how grading systems were modified for special education students. The teachers were surveyed for their interest in a grading policy. Several methods for grading special education students were presented for the teachers to rate using a likert-type scale. The district's grading policies were investigated.

District Grading Systems

Many teachers subscribe to what they believe is the grading policy of the school district. The district's handbook was consulted to review it's grading policy. According to the handbook, a marking system shall be developed so each grade level is using a uniform system (see Board of Education Policy #5121).

Teachers from grades fifth through eighth use the same report card format. This report card displays the following marking system: A = 100-92 (Excellent), B = 91-83 (Good), C = 82-75 (Average), D = 74-70 (Passing), and F = Below 70 (Failing). Although these teachers use this uniform system of

percentages for report cards, they all use different methods to attain the students' grades.

Teachers from grades first through fourth also use a standard report card. It categorizes the academic grades as the following: A = outstanding, B = good, C = satisfactory, D = needs improvement, and F = failure. Non-academic grades are used for music, art and physical education. They are defined as O = Outstanding, S = Satisfactory, N = Needs Improvement and U = Unsatisfactory. In addition to the academic and non-academic grades, students receive an effort grade of: 1 = excellent, 2 = good, and 3 = poor for reading, mathematics, and language arts. The student's instructional level is also reported under their reading grade. A clear criteria for the academic grades was not presented on the report card.

The first grade teachers along with the principal made a decision to use the non-academic marking system for all subjects. However, a uniform criteria for assigning the grades of O, S, N, and U is not evident. The first grade teachers all use a slightly different system to arrive at the students' grades.

Kindergarten teachers have an explanation of their own marking system printed on their report card. The Kindergarten marking system is as follows: S = satisfactory progress, I = improvement shown but not yet satisfactory, N = need for improvement, and NR = not ready. Kindergarten students are graded according to the criteria or skills stated on the report card. Therefore, kindergarten students receive grades based on their own

Survey Results

Out of the 36 teacher questionnaires distributed 32 (89 %) were returned. 94 % of the teachers have had a special education student in their class. The majority surveyed (81 %) reported that the process of grading special education students has been an area of concern. Most of the teachers (88 %) follow a grading procedure for their regular education students. Few teachers (3 %) use the same system for grading students with disabilities. The majority of teachers (66 %) have modified their grading procedures. Others (18 %) use a combined approached. They grade some special education students using the same system devised for regular education students and a modified system for other students. Most teachers (44 %) reported that students do not always receive the letter grades that exactly correlate to their percentages.

Eighty-four percent of the teachers recognize that subjective factors such as effort, attitude and ability also effect the students' grades. Many of the teachers surveyed will allow good work habits to raise a grade that borders between two grades.

When the second, third, and fourth grade teachers were surveyed to determine the percentages or criteria used to assign grades for regular education students, a different percentage system was again noted between some of the teachers. Every fourth grade teacher reported the uniform marking system which is presented on the fifth through eighth grade report card. However, when second, and third grade teachers reported that they followed the district's policy on grading, it is not clear as to what they are referring.

There was consistency in the marking system reported by teachers from grades fifth through eighth. They use the criteria printed on their report cards. These teachers do use individual grading procedures to arrive at the percentages which correlate to the assigned letter grade. These teachers are in agreement with their colleagues who indicated that subjective factors effect grades, especially when a student's final average is between two grades.

The majority of teachers (72 %) reported that they would prefer a district wide grading policy for students with disabilities who are mainstreamed into regular classes. Two of these teacher stated that they were interested in a flexible policy or just guidelines. Some teachers (22 %) do not want a district wide policy and a few (6 %) did not answer. Thirteen methods for grading students with educational disabilities were derived from a review of literature and then presented. The most favorable grading procedures were the methods in which 45 % or more of the teachers rated them as a 1 or 2 indicating a strong preference. These methods are as follows:

1. The Individual Education Plan (65 %): The student's report card grade is based on the IEP goals and objectives.

2. Student Self Comparison (53 %): The student's progress is measured by the gains he/she makes towards achieving the goals of the curriculum content. The student is not compared to the other students in the class.

3. Variation Multiple Grading System (50 %): Letter grades are accompanied with a subscript number that represents the students level of functioning.

4. Criterion Mastery System (50 %): Specific goals are set. The student receives grades based on a pretest - posttest procedure.

The least favorable methods were determined when 45 % or more of the teachers either rated the method as a 4 or 5 on the likert-type scale. They are as follows:

1. Regular Classroom Teacher Controlled System (72 %): The special education student is graded using the same system used for regular education students.

2. The Contract System (47 %): Teacher and student agrees on a contract which specifies requirements for an A, B, or C grade.

3. Pass-Fail System (47 %): Student receives a P for passing or an F for failing as a grade.

4. Point Grading System (47 %): The student's grade consists of a point distribution. For example: 40% tests, 20% oral reports, 10% attendance, 10% homework completion, and 20% classroom participation.

Although the majority of the teachers were interested in a district wide policy, many stated concerns that the methods reviewed in this questionnaire would be too time consuming for the regular classroom teacher. Yet the above results indicate that overwhelmingly (72%) the teachers did not think the special education student should be graded using the same system used for regular education students. The teachers demonstrated a strong dislike for using a regular education grading system but they did not overwhelmingly demonstrate a uniform preference for any of the various methods presented. Additional comments indicated that

kindergarten and first grade teachers were more tentative about a district wide grading policy for special education students, because their grading procedures are already flexible due to the developmental nature of young learners.

Many teachers have been using modifications in their system of grading special education students, developed through their own teaching experience. Other educators would prefer to alter their testing procedures rather than the report card grades. Some of the teachers interviewed were not sure that their methods of grading special education students were ideal. They reported concern with how and whether to make grading modifications for students with educational disabilities. Guidelines for grading special education students are desirable to teachers because they would provide a support system for these regular educators who are responsible for grading students with disabilities in the mainstream. Cumulative responses to each individual question in the questionnaire are contained in the Appendix.

Chapter V

Conclusions And Recommendations

Summary

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act states that children with disabilities must be educated, to the maximum extent possible and appropriate, in the regular education setting with non handicapped children. The purpose of this study was to develop grading procedures for students with educational disabilities who attend regular education classes. Current district policies, the teachers' procedures for grading students, and the best practices presented in literature were investigated. Is grading students with educational disabilities in the regular education setting a concern for teachers? Should this school district develop a grading policy for students with educational disabilities? A teacher questionnaire was developed to focus on these issues. The percentages of the teachers' responses were recorded.

The majority of the teachers surveyed believe that students with educational disabilities should not be graded using the same methods which are used for their nondisabled peers. Various grading procedures were rated by teachers using a likert-type scale. Although teachers wanted to modify their grading procedures for special education students in their classes, there was not a strong consensus to indicate favored techniques. Some methods were clearly not favorable among the teachers surveyed. During this

investigation, it was also discovered that there was a lack of uniformity in grading procedures for regular education students. This discovery makes the use of a modified grading system for special education students even more problematic. Finally, teachers were interviewed in an attempt to discover the preferred method of grading students with educational disabilities. District wide grading procedures for students with educational disabilities were proposed.

Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from this research are based upon the specific research questions posed in Chapter I.

1. Grading students with educational disabilities has been a concern for 81% of the regular education teachers. The teachers are concerned with how and whether to make grading modifications for students with educational disabilities.

2. When regular educators have to grade students with disabilities, 66 % modify their grading procedures. A combined approach was reported by 18 % of the teachers who use a modified system for some students and the regular system used for others. Few teachers, 3 % use the same system for grading students with educational disabilities as nondisabled students.

Eighty-four percent of the teachers consider subjective factors such as effort, attitude, and ability when grading some students. These factors influence the letter grades that students receive. Teachers noted taking this into consideration with students who were classified as having a learning disability. If the student had demonstrated effort and a good attitude, but

was not achieving average grades due to a learning disability, then the teacher tended to take into account these subjective factors and reward the student by raising their report card grade . Other teachers interviewed preferred to make accommodations while teaching and testing, instead of modifying grades.

3. The majority of teachers, 72 % reported that they would prefer a district wide grading policy for students with educational disabilities who attend regular classes. Some teachers, 22 % did not want a district wide policy. Two teachers wrote in that they were interested in a flexible policy or guidelines. During informal interviews, many teachers agreed that procedures or flexible policies would be preferred.

4. Thirteen alternative grading methods for special education students were derived from literature. According to the questionnaire, the teachers did not have an overwhelming favorite method. The methods which had the highest ratings were: The Individual Education Plan, The Student Self Comparison, The Variation Multiple Grading System, and The Criterion Mastery System.

5. According to a review of literature, alternative grading procedures which allow students with educational disabilities to demonstrate their learning may be needed for some students. Grading policies which allow the students to be compared to themselves rather than others are recommended.

Discussion

Before a modified grading policy is established for classified students, a uniform grading policy should exist for all regular education students. A uniform grading policy should be adopted for this school district from grades second through eighth. Some of the teachers recognize that their grading procedures can be subjective. However, they have not considered that the lack of uniformity between themselves and their colleagues, in regards to grading systems or modifications, can be problematic. In fact, it is a problem especially in seventh and eighth grade were the subjects are departmentalized. Parents want to know why their child has an average grade in one class but is failing in another class.

Students who are classified as having a learning disability should be given an opportunity to demonstrate what they know. Therefore, some teachers' perspectives concerning grading will have to change. With special education students, teachers will have to look for what the student knows, not what the child does not know. Some students receive grades based on good work habits in the classroom. Although this is important, a student's report card must communicate what the student knows. Giving more emphasis on the student's effort could lead to a deceiving grade, which does not communicate what the student can really do. Using a marking system of O, U, N, and U was considered more flexible by the teachers interviewed. It was agreed that this marking system would not adversely impact upon a student's ability to be placed on the honor role or to be eligible for extra curricular activities. Since this is an elementary district, consideration of class rank is not an issue.

A skill based report card, along with a narrative would be ideal. These processes would lead the teacher to clearly think about and explain what the student knows. However, that would require a major shift in how grades are communicated for regular education students. Therefore, the regular education system of grading has to be molded to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities. A teacher in-service regarding common modifications and the various grading procedures, which are considered to be best practices for students with learning disabilities who attend regular classes, is recommended. Training should also be made available regarding how to read and interpret IEPs.

Recommendations

In order for this district's system of grading to begin to meet the needs of students with disabilities, the following three point policy was proposed. There is also a recommendation to redesign the district's report cards.

Marking systems shall be used uniformly by each grade level (see BOE Policy #5121). Unfortunately, these uniform marking systems have the potential to discriminate against classified students based upon their disability. Students with educational disabilities who attend regular education classes shall be graded according to the following flexible policy:

A. Based on a student's learning disability, the child may not be able to demonstrate learning using traditional tests or methods of grading. No single grading system is considered best for all students, therefore:

1. An individualized grading procedure must be selected and modified by the Child Study Team, including the parent and the classroom teacher during the student's annual conference.

2. This grading procedure will be described in the Individual Education Program (IEP). The suggested grading methods are:

a. Individual Education Plan (IEP) Objectives

b. The O, S, N, and U Marking System

c. Point Grading System (using a variety of assignments)

d. Ability Grading (adjusting grades and grading weights according to ability)

e. Other_____

3. At the beginning of every school year, the student's case manager will be responsible for distributing Modifications For The Regular Education Program which appears in the IEP. This page from the IEP will not provide any confidential information. It will provide a list of modifications for instruction, testing, and grading.

4. Special education personnel, such as the resource center teacher and the case manager will work with the parents and the classroom teacher to monitor the student's progress. The chief school administer will ensure that the IEP is being implemented as prescribed.

5. An asterisk shall be added to the student's report card indicating that the student has an individualized learning or grading plan.

B. A student with an educational disability shall not fail based on their disability and learning characteristics. The regular educators shall:

1. Read the student's reports and understand the possible effects on the student's learning ability.

2. Follow the prescribed special education grading procedures according to the student's IEP.

3. Seek assistance when there are indications that the student is not succeeding in the class. Contact the student's case manager to coordinate the development of new strategies or procedures.

4. Communicate with the student, parents, and special education personnel. This must be documented before a child receives a failing grade.

C. This does not guarantee that a classified student can not fail. If this policy has been followed, the student can fail if he /she :

1. Refuses to do the prescribed work.

2. Has non-excusable chronic absenteeism, which effects academic achievement.

3. Displays problems with discipline which are not related to the student's disability.

Pursuant to BOE policy #5121, the chief school administrator, in consultation with the teaching staff, shall develop a marking system to be used uniformly in the same grade level throughout the schools. Therefore, the district's report cards should be redesigned for all students not just special education students. For grades second through fourth, the report card must be reprinted to accommodate three changes. The teachers like the fact that an effort grade is given. The word *effort* should be enlarged to represent that students are receiving multiple grades, one for the letter grade they earned and one for their effort. Another space should be provided for teachers to indicate on which level the student is working. An asterisk indicating that the student has an individualized learning or grading plan should be added. The uniform percentage system which correlates to the letter grades should be printed on the report card. The first grade teachers should meet again with the principal to define the criteria for their marking system. They should also consider designing a unique report card for first grade students only. The report card for grades fifth through eighth should include an explanation of the O, S, N, and U marking system which could be prescribed for special education students and is currently being used with students who have limited English proficiency.

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Appendix

Results of Responses to Individual Items Contained on the Teacher Questionnaire

Grade Levels/Subject Areas Taught by Respondents:

K	(n = 3)	4	(n = 3)	BSI	(n = 2)
1	(n = 4)	5	(n = 3)	gym	(n = 1)
2	(n = 3)	6	(n = 2)	art	(n = 1)
3	(n = 3)	7/8	(n = 5)	music	(n = 1)
4	(n = 3)			Spanish	(n = 1)

1. Have you ever had a special education student in your class?

YES	NO
94%	**6%**

2. Has the grading of special education students been an area of concern for you?

YES	NO
81%	**18%**

3. How have you graded these students in the past?

A.	same as "regular" students	3%	D.	A & B	16%
B.	with modifications	66%		NA	6%
C.	other method	9			

4. Do you follow a grading procedure for regular education students?

YES	NO
88%	12%

5. Do all of your students always receive the letter grade that exactly correlates to it's percentage ?

YES	NO	SOMETIMES	NA
19%	44%	28%	9%

6. Do other factors such as effort, attitude, ability, etc. , influence your grades for some students?

YES	NO	SOMETIMES	NA
84%	0%	13%	3%

7. Are you satisfied with continuing your past grading practices for special education students?

YES	NO	SOMEWHAT	NA
34%	13%	44%	9%

8. Would you prefer a district wide grading policy for special education students who are in your class?

YES	NO	NA
72%	**22%**	**6%**

* Would you like to be interviewed to discuss this issue in more detail?

YES	NO	NA
50%	**31%**	**19%**

A review of literature offers various methods for grading special education students in regular education settings. Several methods are listed below. Rate each method on a 1 to 5 scale. 1 represents the method you would most prefer to use in your classroom with special education students and 5 would be the least desirable method.

Percentages of responses are listed in bold print.

1.	Individually Written Report: Student will receive a narrative report, written by the classroom and resource room teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
		5	**6**	**9**	**5**	**4**

2. Individual Education Plan(IEP): The student's report card is based on the IEP goals and objectives.	1	2	3	4	5
	3	**18**	**7**	**1**	**2**
3. Percentage Grading: Student's grade is based on percentages of correct responses on every assignment completed.	1	2	3	4	5
	2	**5**	**8**	**7**	**7**
4. Multiple Grade System: Student receives three grades for every subject, representing ability, effort and achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
	6	**8**	**9**	**2**	**7**
5. Variation Multiple Grading System: Letter grades are accompanied with a subscript number that represents the students level of functioning.	1	2	3	4	5
	7	**9**	**9**	**2**	**4**
6. Shared Grading System: The resource center teacher and the classroom teacher cooperatively agree upon the grade.	1	2	3	4	5
	6	**10**	**11**	**5**	**3**
7. Point Grading System: The student's grade consists of point distribution. For example: 40% tests, 20% oral reports, 10% attendance, 10% homework completion, 20% classroom participation.	1	2	3	4	5
	3	**8**	**5**	**6**	**9**

8. Criterion Mastery System: Specific goals are set. The student receives grades based on a pretest - posttest procedure.	1	2	3	4	5
	5	**11**	**6**	**5**	**3**
9. Pass-Fail System: Student receives a P or an F as a grade.	1	2	3	4	5
	4	**5**	**7**	**3**	**12**
10. Contract System: Teacher and student agrees on a contract which specifies requirements for an A, B, or C grade.	1	2	3	4	5
	3	**5**	**7**	**11**	**4**
11. Daily-Weekly Guide: Class participation and interaction are graded. The student's daily/weekly activity is also graded. These grades are averaged for the report card.	1	2	3	4	5
	4	**3**	**11**	**7**	**2**
12. Regular Classroom Teacher Controlled System: The special education student is graded using the same system used for regular education students.	1	2	3	4	5
	2	**2**	**5**	**6**	**17**

		1	2	3	4	5
13.	Student Self Comparison: The student's progress is measured by the gains he/she makes towards achieving the goals of the curriculum content. The student is not compared to the other students in the class.	6	11	10	4	0