

GRADING FOR EQUITY: SHIFTING POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND MINDSETS IN SANGER

WEDNESDAY, MAY 1 AND THURSDAY, MAY 2

SANGER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

TEACHER GRADING EXHIBITION

MAY 1, 7:45 AM

SANGER HIGH SCHOOL

1045 NORTH BETHEL AVENUE

SANGER, CALIFORNIA

COLLABORATIVE MEETING

MAY 1 AND 2

SANGER WEST HIGH SCHOOL

1850 SOUTH FOWLER AVENUE

FRESNO, CALIFORNIA

MEETING AGENDA

DAY 1: WEDNESDAY, MAY 1

7:45 am **Breakfast.** Light breakfast will be available at the grading exhibition at Sanger High School.

PROLOGUE

Teacher-Driven Efforts to Rethink Grading

Sanger Unified School District (USD) is in the second year of a targeted focus on advancing student learning and prioritizing equity through attention to grading practices at the secondary level. Professional learning communities of teachers have provided a vehicle for collaboration around these issues to better understand the shortcomings of traditional practices and to pilot new approaches. We will launch the meeting by attending an annual district-wide grading exhibition that provides an opportunity for teachers to share their emerging practices and engage in dialogue with one another about strategies, lessons learned, and next steps.

Session Purposes: To demonstrate an approach to teacher empowerment and collaboration around approaches to grading and explore strategies designed to combat problems embedded in traditional practices.

8:00 am **Grading Exhibition.** Participants will experience a showcase of teacher teams in Grades 7-12 who will share emerging strategies to rethink the assessment of student learning and practices for acknowledging content mastery.

8:45 am **Travel to Meeting Site.** Participants will carpool from the grading exhibition at Sanger High School to the meeting location at Sanger West High School.

- 9:15 am **Reflections on the Grading Exhibition.** Participants will meet in pairs or trios to share their reactions to the exhibition experience and identify any questions they would like to explore as the meeting continues.

- 9:55 am **Convene Meeting.** Joel Knudson will convene the meeting with opening remarks, introductions, and an overview of the agenda. Dennis Wiechmann will welcome the group to Sanger USD.

SESSION I

Confronting Evidence of Disparities in Grading Practices

A growing body of research illustrates the inequities baked into traditional practice and the long-term harm it can create for historically underserved students. Evidence also comes from district practice itself. A-G completion rates reveal disparities among student groups. Higher education partners report that despite indications from students’ grades that they’ve met the expectations to begin college-level coursework, students are not always prepared to succeed. Course syllabi also offer documentation of current approaches and an opportunity to identify patterns across classrooms, departments, and schools. In Sanger, teachers themselves have impressed upon district leaders the need for change; their professional opinions add additional important perspectives. Having begun the meeting with an exploration of teacher practices intended to promote more equitable teacher behaviors, this session offers an opportunity to more deeply understand the root causes and harmful impacts that these emerging teaching behaviors seek to overcome.

Session Purpose: To foster shared understanding of the harm created through traditional grading practices.

- 10:15 am **Sanger USD Context and Background.** Sanger USD district leaders will provide contextual information about the district and background on the motivation for embracing grading practices as part of a broader effort to ensure quality and consistency in instruction and student learning.

- 11:00 am **Evidence of Inequitable Practices.** Participants will examine data from multiple district contexts to develop a shared understanding of why traditional grading practices can be ineffective, inaccurate, and inequitable.

- 12:00 pm **Lunch.**

- 1:00 pm **Update from Oakland Unified School District.** Chief Academic Officer Sondra Aguilera will share an update on developments in her district since the Collaborative met there in February 2024 to explore approaches to improve early literacy and language development.

SESSION II

Supporting Educators to Shift Mindsets and Practices

Dedicated efforts from educators across the system are critical for motivating and sustaining improvement. Any effort to promote change must address the central role that teachers play in assessing and documenting student learning progress. Indeed, Sanger has deliberately designed its approach to meet teachers where they are, leveraging the district’s PLC structure to empower teachers to examine data, view

grading through the lens of teaching and learning, and craft solutions for a path forward. The grading exhibition earlier in the morning illustrates the current progress with that approach. Efforts to support teacher roles may be just as important. Principals provide critical guidance in setting expectations at the school level and creating the conditions for teachers to recognize and address the problems embedded in traditional grading approaches. In Sanger, curriculum support providers (CSPs) also offer essential supports as coaches and resources to foster improvement. This session will build on participants' experiences with the exhibition to further explore ways in which educators in multiple roles foster shifts in both will and skill.

Session Purposes: To explore strategies for empowering teachers and administrators to cultivate new grading approaches, examine the barriers that stand in the way, and consider resources and supports necessary to guide this shift.

- 1:10 pm **Educator Panel.** A group of principals, curriculum support providers, and teachers will share their experiences with grading practices and the roles they play in the change process.

- 2:05 pm **Small Group Discussion.** Following the panel discussion, participants will break into small groups to explore the kinds of supports needed for each role to effectively deliver on a move toward more equitable grading practices.

- 3:15 pm **Break.**

- 3:30 pm **Consultancies.** Participants will meet in small groups to address key challenges associated with supporting teachers and administrators in making shifts in grading practices.

- 4:45 pm **Summary and Reflection on the Day's Discussion.**

- 5:00 pm **Adjourn for the Day.**

- 6:00 pm **Reception Followed by Dinner** at The Lime Light.

DAY 2: THURSDAY, MAY 2

8:30 am **Breakfast.** Light breakfast will be available in the Shark Tank.

SESSION III

Establishing District Policy to Articulate Expectations

Efforts to improve grading practice that empower teachers to identify solutions can both leverage teacher expertise to identify best practices for moving forward and encourage teacher buy-in for a shift that they help to author. Achieving goals for consistency that ensures equity across a system, however, may require translating the local efforts among teacher teams into expectations across a district. This can take the form of official guidance and board policy; in Sanger, district leaders have made progress in establishing “pillars” that should guide grading practices. Connecting policy and practice through attention to top-down and bottom-up commitments is nevertheless a key area for attention and striking the right balance between “tight” and “loose” expectations will shape prospects for implementation success. This session will explore approaches for establishing and ensuring consistency in district approaches.

Session Purposes: To examine district approaches for transitioning from voluntary and exploratory efforts to improve grading practices within teacher teams to clear system-wide expectations for grading.

9:00 am **Consultancies.** Meeting participants will use small group consultancies to explore considerations for achieving consistency in district-wide practice when exploring unknown solutions to problems.

9:55 am **Break.**

10:10 am **Report Out and Full Group Discussion.** Small groups will share key takeaways from their discussions, followed by dialogue among members of the full group.

SESSION IV

Leveraging Student Voice to Monitor Progress and Navigate the Consequences of Change

Evidence at Sanger West High School indicates that early efforts to rethink grading are successfully removing barriers to A-G completion by decreasing the number of D’s and F’s that students receive. This same evidence also finds a decrease in A’s, however. Even as new practices open doors for historically underserved students, they also reshape the pathway to success for students who have been successful at accumulating *points* in their classes—even if those points are not aligned with content mastery. District leaders are grappling with the full range of consequences for moving in a more equitable direction. Student voice becomes critical in understanding the student learning experience and ways in which changing approaches to instruction and grading shape that experience.

Session Purpose: To examine implications of district practice for student experiences in school.

10:25 am **Student Empathy Interviews.** Modeling an approach that district administrators have used to inform their work, Sanger students will share their experiences in school and ways in which grading practices have shaped their learning journeys.

11:45 am **Lunch.**

SESSION V

Preparing for District-Wide Change

Developments at the secondary level have helped teachers to cultivate a deeper understanding of challenges associated with traditional grading practice and to embrace needed shifts. One key lesson from the work so far is that approaches to grading are fundamentally tied to instructional quality; a shift toward capturing mastery in course grades also requires a shift toward prioritizing mastery in the instructional environment. To help align expectations for teachers and students and promote consistency across students' K-12 educational experience, Sanger USD is beginning to expand its efforts to include Grades K-8.

Session Purpose: Identify considerations for expanding a focus on grading practices to include all grade levels.

12:30 pm **Widening and Deepening Implementation.** Sanger USD secondary teachers are in their second year of implementing new grading practices, but elementary teachers have not yet engaged in this work. Participants will consider the appropriate next steps to implement and spread new grading practices more broadly.

1:45 pm **Summary and Reflection on the Day's Discussion.**

2:00 pm **Adjourn Meeting.**