

CENTER GROVE HIGH SCHOOL

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July 23, 2010

Dear Parents of Center Grove High School Student(s),

Greetings! Earlier this spring a committee was formed at Center Grove High School to examine the grading scale. In this letter I will share the following: a) background information on how the process occurred, b) parent perspectives, c) teacher perspectives, d) the committee's decision and its rationale, and e) next steps.

Background Information

This past spring a committee of parents, teachers, students, and administrators was formed to study whether Center Grove High School should change its current grading scale to make our scale more consistent with surrounding schools and eliminate a disadvantage for students seeking college admission and scholarships. Other central Indiana school districts have made similar grading scale changes due to the realities of the college admissions process. During the research phase, teachers were surveyed with 89% supporting a change to the grading scale. After numerous meetings in which research was reviewed and implications discussed, the committee recommended that the grading scale be changed to a 90-80-70-60 scale effective in the 2010-11 school year. The committee also decided the grading scale change would not be retroactive; however, some parents expressed concern on that point. As a result, I convened a public forum June 2 to hear these concerns and, with other committee members in attendance, gathered input to relay to the committee. The committee met again in early July to review parent and teacher input as well as its previous decision.

Parent Perspectives

Many views were expressed on this topic in e-mails and voice mails to the administration and school board as well as at the public forum. The predominant opinions expressed included:

- The committee's decision reflected concern for only the top ranked students of a class.
- Parents are worried about their children being denied the opportunity to be accepted at the college of their choice.
- Financial concerns were a major theme (e.g., scholarships, car insurance, and affordability of college).
- Parents believed the numerical representation of grades in Skyward would permit an easy mathematical and technological fix if the scale was applied retroactively.
- Parents at the forum stated they were not concerned about the impact of a grading scale change on honors and awards received in previous years.
- Parents perceived that other schools have changed their grading scales and made it retroactive.
- Parents believed the retroactive change would help many kids—and that should be our focus.

Teacher Perspectives

Following the June 2 forum, I sent an online survey to my staff of 130 teachers regarding making the scale change retroactive. I received responses from 77 or 59% of the staff, and many wrote lengthy comments to the questions. Of those responding, the following results emerged:

- 55% of our teachers made a change to their grading practices as a result of the 2008-09 grading scale change.
- 72% stated they could not support, for a variety of reasons, a retroactive grade change for the 08-09 and 09-10 school years.

A summary of teacher comments and viewpoints includes the following:

- Many teachers made adjustments to their grading practice when the school-wide scale was adopted in 2008. In their opinion, grades would not be accurate, and in fact inflated, if the new grading scale was applied retroactively. Adjustments were made to buffer the impact of the more rigorous grading scale instituted two years ago.
- Many teachers adjusted their grading practices using various methods such as: offering extra credit, curving grades, dropping the lowest grade(s), using daily participation grades to reflect effort, grading homework for completion rather than assigning a letter grade, permitting the retaking of a low assignment or test score, and assigning a letter grade based on the quality of work and then converting the letter to the higher numerical scale. Teachers offered many opportunities for students to improve their grades and help them succeed.
- Report card grades are a compilation of many grades in a grading period. It would be impractical to adjust all of those individual grades for each student the past two years.
- Students knew teachers' expectations and grading standards; it is not appropriate to change the grades after the fact.
- Via Skyward, parents are able to see the numerical value assigned to student work. This gives the impression that grades are simply based on numeric values. However, teacher professional judgment is used when implementing grading procedures and assigning grades. Both are then considered when converting to the grading scale. A retroactive change to previously assigned grades would not accurately represent the teachers' assessment of student work.

Decision and Rationale

After weighing parent, teacher, and student input as well as the precedents of other schools, the grading scale committee affirmed its previous decision to not make the grading scale change retroactive.

A summary of the committee's rationale is as follows:

- In the teacher survey, many teachers indicated they had already made adjustments in their grading practices to help students improve their grades. To quote one teacher, *"If a blanket adjustment is made, students that received the grades they deserved will receive higher grades than deserved since I already made the adjustment for the higher scale."*
- In reviewing the feasibility of possibly making the scale change retroactive, the committee realized that to truly be fair to every student, that every single assignment, test, homework, etc. grade for every student would need to be reviewed to determine if an adjustment had already been made. This is simply not practical to do. As a teacher explained in the survey, *"Earning a grade is not a simple numbers game. When teachers curve tests, grade compositions and projects or take participation grades, they are taking more into account than just the numbers. There is no fair way that an administrator can go back a year later and change the grade that a teacher assigned to a student."*
- I contacted several central Indiana schools after hearing from parents that a school(s) had retroactively changed their grading scale. From these contacts, I discovered that no district applied a scale change retroactively to previous school years. Note: Hamilton Southeastern Schools did make a grading scale change in October 2009, and it was only retroactive to the beginning of the 09-10 school year.
- A retroactive grading scale change would have many ramifications. Possible ramifications include class rank changes; students who have retaken a failed class, but may have passed it the first time if the scale is changed; honors and awards might need to be rescinded, while awarded to others; Core 40, Academic Honors diploma, dual credit grades and graduation exam waivers could all be impacted. Other situations might have legal consequences. Unanticipated ramifications would likely emerge once retroactive changes were made.

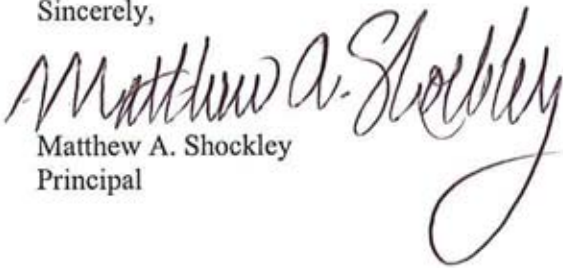
Next Steps

I have shared with Dr. Lippe, our interim superintendent, and the Board of School Trustees the above information and the committee's decision not to make the grading scale change retroactive. Thus, we will begin the 2010-11 school year with a new 90-80-70-60 grading scale.

I will be drafting a letter to be enclosed with all transcripts explaining our history of grading scale changes so that colleges and universities will be duly informed when reviewing student transcripts. Perhaps my explanation will help admission officers interpret the grading practices and policies at Center Grove High School to benefit our students when acceptance decisions are made.

The open dialogue with parents continues to show the keen interest our parents have in their student's education and future success. I appreciate all of those who participated in this dialogue via e-mail, phone conversations, or the public forum. I also am grateful for the insights and suggestions from the grading scale committee and my staff as they provided direction and guidance on this complex and sensitive issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew A. Shockley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping flourish at the end of the name.

Matthew A. Shockley
Principal