MAPA QUARTERLY UPDATE MEETING MINUTES
November 7, 2019  ♦  Location: Founders Lecture Hall
8:30 – 10:00 AM

Slides from this meeting are available at www.ma.org/parents/mapa

I. Welcome - Sara Byrne, MAPA President

Hello everyone, and welcome! Last week was certainly challenging with no power. The power came back on the day before Halloween. MAPA always does a Halloween Treat Day, and we weren’t sure how parents would be able to bake. But as a testament to how amazing this community is, one parent reached out and offered to bake all the treats needed in order to keep the tradition going this year. She baked 10 dozen cookies! So I want to say a huge “thank you” to Mindy Swagel! You’ve just shown that this community knows how to rally, and that we care.

So regular life has resumed, and we have a great lineup for today’s meeting! First of all, our VP of Outreach and Inclusion, Darcy Ellsworth Yow, will start us off with a short icebreaker.

II. Icebreaker Exercise - Darcy Ellsworth Yow

III. Announcements

A. The MA Garden Club meets once a month in the MA garden. It’s drop-in, and no skills are required. Our next date is Tuesday, November 19 at 8:30am for 1.5 hours. (Monika Kainz)

B. Parent Ed - Our next event is on Tuesday, November 12 at 7:00pm with David Isay from Storycorps. Please RSVP. Next after that, we are offering a parent workshop on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion on January 28 at 7:00pm in the BBLC Lecture Hall. We will examine “think, question and create” through a DEI lens. On March 19, we will have Lynne Twist talking about money.

Freshman parents – on Tuesday, November 19, Sanjay and Nicole, our HumDev teachers, will be talking to parents at 7:00pm about the HumDev curriculum and what kids are interested in. Please RSVP so we have enough
C. **Community Action** - we will have a food drive during the week before Thanksgiving. Please read announcements in TW@MA to find out what kind of food each class is responsible for donating. We are also collecting turkeys on Friday, November 22 for donation to Next Generation Scholars. (Stephanie Young)

D. **MAPA Merchant Programs** - please fill out our enrollment form if you haven’t already and would like to participate. We also have a new program to announce with Nugget Markets. All money raised goes directly to MA. Please remember that, after you enroll, you have to go online and register your credit cards. If you have any questions, please email me at nancylong123@gmail.com. (Nancy Long)

IV. **Learning Services and School Counseling** - Rebecca Gustin, Director of Learning Services; Lindsay Eckert, Associate Director of Learning Services; Sarah Janoff-Brinn, School Counselor

Hello. I’m Rebecca Gustin, Director of Learning Services, and this is my 10th year in this job, and my first time speaking to MAPA. We are happy to introduce ourselves, so you know who we are and what we do. I taught chemistry and biology here at MA and then left to get a Master’s degree, and came back to MA in this position.

I’m Lindsay Eckert, Associate Director of Learning Services, and this is my second year at MA.

I’m Sarah Janoff-Brinn. I’m a licensed clinical social worker and the school Counselor. I’m new this year to MA. I’m also an MA alum.

**Lindsay:** Our primary work is to support students with diagnosed learning disabilities. Most students with a learning profile at MA have had a full neuropsychological evaluation as well. The most common diagnoses we see here at MA are ADHD, dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia.

**Rebecca:** We focus on helping students to develop three main skills to prepare for college and life – self-advocacy, metacognition, and autonomy. Self-advocacy is difficult at first, but we support students as they learn this. Metacognition means students gaining an understanding of how they learn, so they can explain it in plain
language to an adult. And for autonomy, this is encouraging parents to recede to the background and let their child handle challenges that arise on their own.

**Sarah:** As the school Counselor, I support students both in their lives at MA and in their lives outside of MA. I work with students with anxiety and depressive symptoms, as well as other mental health challenges. I provide a non-judgmental, safe space where students can open up and talk. Some students are managing significant mental health issues.

**All:** There are commonalities between learning services and counseling. We have relationships with outside professionals (tutors, therapists, psychologists, and others), and we work with families to find outside support when necessary. We then communicate and collaborate with these professionals to best support students at school. We also provide counsel to teachers and advisors on campus as part of a support team to students. We all support parents and students – we are a resource for those who need us. We are available for any student on campus who needs support in academics or mental health. We also provide continuing education for students and faculty. The three of us have already been in to teach a Human Development class for all 9th graders, and we are also involved in other academic programs around campus. We also coordinate and provide professional development opportunities for our faculty and staff.

How do these three collaborate? We know that mental health and academic challenges go hand in hand. We make sure we are supporting the whole student.

**Sarah:** We have a shared philosophy: we see our role here as providing a foundation for students to be successful in their lives after high school, both in terms of mental health needs and learning. Teens want to be heard and understood and have their experience normalized and validated, and we hope to provide that space for them.

**Question:** I just want to announce that this team was responsible for bringing Lynn Lyons to campus last week, and we thank you so much!

**Question:** This is for Sarah – in your first year, do you notice any trends with MA kids in relation to mental health?

**Sarah:** I don’t think this is unique to MA students, but anxiety in adolescents is on the rise about everything. They feel overwhelmed and are trying to develop the skills to manage those feelings. I work with students on developing coping skills and
managing their feelings. Anxiety doesn’t necessarily go away, but I help students learn to manage it.

**Question:** Lynn Lyons presented to the faculty after speaking to the parents last month. Will any of that work be incorporated into the faculty’s work?

**Sarah:** Yes. Yesterday I did a mental health first aid presentation for faculty/staff, helping them learn to understand some of the symptoms of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicide, so they feel they can intervene if they notice a student who is in distress. When students are talked to immediately, it’s much more effective.

**Rebecca:** I’d like to add that when a student is feeling overly anxious about an upcoming assessment, some teachers want to accommodate that immediately. We want to support them, of course, but we also want to empower students to use their coping mechanisms and encourage them to try to overcome it, rather than immediately accommodating the anxiety.

**Question:** Do students know you exist?

**Sarah:** Over the past few months, I’ve been going to Human Development classes, class meetings, the senior retreat, and college counseling sessions, to make my face more familiar to the students.

**Question:** How do students contact you?

**Lindsay:** Sometimes teachers will walk a student to Sarah’s office, but students and teachers can also email Sarah.

**Question:** If your child had a neuropsychological evaluation in middle school, which is good for five years, do they have to be re-tested to make sure they continue to get services in high school, after the test expires?

**Rebecca:** When students arrive at MA, our policy is that testing must be no more than three years old. Their brains change significantly during high school, and we recommend that students should be retested before they go to college. Additionally, most colleges will require the Adult’s Intelligence Scale.

**Question:** Are kids comfortable coming to Sarah?
Lindsay: Yes! I’ve seen so many kids seek out Sarah.

Question: What percentage of the student body do you see?

Sarah: It’s hard to say. I see quite a few students only once because, for example, they are having anxiety about an upcoming test or having a bad day. There are a number of students who come back repeatedly, and I generally refer them out to outside therapists.

Question: Do you do work with the Mental Health Awareness student club?

Sarah: Yes, I’m their advisor, and they’re doing great work!

Question: The kids are more anxious about this grading system. What is your group doing to address this?

Rebecca: We know that KaTrina is coming to speak with you all shortly at this meeting about the grading policy.

Sarah: My experience is that students are feeling anxious about a lot of things, and the new grading system may be a small component of what’s making them anxious and overwhelmed. We talk about what is going to be effective for them, and help them develop strategies to manage these challenges.

V. Remarks by Travis Brownley, Head of School

Hello everyone. Thank you for coming today.

I’m going to resist launching into a discussion about the grading system because KaTrina is here to speak and answer questions about that. I will say that there is a difference between anxiety and clinical anxiety. Our kids do feel anxious at times, and I predict that the anxiety about grading will dissipate over time.

We are through Halloween and the first quarter. It’s been incredible – theater, sports, kids settling in, new things happening, terrific faculty/staff, and three pretty dangerous days around the fires. I can’t fix fires or PG&E, but I can make sure we are making good real-time decisions and communicating effectively about them. I’d like to hear from you how that went from the parent perspective.
The hardest day was on Monday, when we had to decide whether to cancel school for just Tuesday or Tuesday and Wednesday. There was contradictory information, no information, information that changed in 45 minutes. We are connected with the Marin County Office of Education, and we were on the phone with them. We also spoke with people we considered to be representative in Mill Valley, in the East Bay. Fortunately, our tech people live in the East Bay and helped us send messages; but we can’t do that when cell towers come down. It was very dynamic. At the admin level, we did a post-mortem afterwards to discuss how we handled the situation. And this is the third year in a row – so this is now a pattern.

Today I want to talk about this idea of how we help our kids to learn what it means to live a life well-lived. This concept is developmentally off for high school students because they’re not really thinking that way. They tend to think a year, six months ahead of time. As our world gets more complicated and we get more communication about it all the time, I am struck by how much information they have to process and how much is really difficult information, even if we try to shut things off for them.

I’m going way back in time to when I was in high school. I’ve told the story about having two phones in my house and really no privacy. I remember watching the news during the Vietnam War. The news came on at 6:00pm. There were reports, maybe some body counts, nothing very accurate, and no opposing views. There was not a lot of detail. High level pictures of some fighting. My father was in the Navy, and I was slightly rebellious. I had a POW bracelet. Did any of you have a POW bracelet? I was really engaged with that. I watched my own family move, and my father was going to send my brother to Canada if he got drafted. We now know the news was highly filtered and consciously inaccurate. That’s happening right now, too.

I think we have to deal with this conundrum. The kids are not going to shut off the flow of information. They are going to be exposed. How do we talk with them early enough and in a significant enough way so that they can move through it? Sometimes we tell them “this is not for you to worry about.” I tell my 4th graders that. They ask about things. We brought them to the Jared Huffman symposium with Lawrence Meyer about the impeachment process. They wanted to talk about Watergate. You can help your kids decide what they need to focus on.

What should high school students be focused on? We can’t just say “do your homework or whatever your teachers tell you.” They need to feel more agency. They
have a flood of information that is not developmentally appropriate. What a freshman can handle is very different from a senior. What habits do you want them to have?

What is the habit of homework? It’s about how you prepare yourself to do the things you need to do. Even today, we all do homework – we don’t call it that, but we do. Our kids have to understand what it means to get out into the world and exercise and see different things. That’s why we have the mind body brain program. When I was a kid, I was very athletic. I played outside with the neighbors. Kids don’t do that anymore, and I wouldn’t dream of sending my kids outside to play. How do we still give them those opportunities and not hover over them? How do we manage our own anxiety about our kids so that they don’t feel our anxiety?

How do you teach kids the act of play? Do you play enough? I don’t think I play enough. We model reading in our house, but that’s not enough. I’m not worried about your kids academically. They are getting a fantastic education. The Transdisciplinary Learning Program is fantastic. I can talk to you about what I see happening within three years with that program – it is out of this world! Very successful!

We need to keep collaborating about how a kid learns to live a life well-lived. There’s a lot that gets in the way of that. If I could wave a magic wand, your kids would not apply to college until August after graduation, and they would do national service of some kind for a year. Then they would go to college. But that will not happen anytime soon.

What can happen is that we can stop seeing college as the end result of a high school education. At MA, we don’t just prepare them for the next chapter, we prepare them for life.

Now I’d like to take your questions.

Question: I have a few kids in elementary school, and the foregone conclusion is that they will get a generator for when PGE turns the power off next time. With the solar panels here, are you thinking about how to keep school operating during power outages?

Travis: We do have battery backup at MA that lasts about 6-8 hours. After that, our solar panels send electricity to the power plant. We have discussed this. We can’t
run school without safety systems, elevators running, food services. As an administration, we talked about this for six hours. But what if there’s power in San Rafael, but it’s out in Mill Valley, the East Bay, and Fairfax? We are geographically diverse, but we have to attend to safety for people in many places. We have to exercise caution and put safety first. What if there are no stoplights running? That’s dangerous. It’s complicated.

So we decided that we would have school if we felt that over 50% of students could get here. Some teachers wouldn’t be able to get here. We have to attend to the complexity of our situation. Not like Redwood or Tam where all the students live in one area. That’s a lot less complicated.

I did suggest that we get a generator at McCluskey House (Travis’ home very near school) so there is a second command center. Keeping the school running during an outage is too expensive, but we do need to continue with some functions, most importantly, communications.

Question: I have one kid who took a gap year. Another didn’t want to do that. Is college counseling discussing and encouraging that?

Travis: There is the ability to take a gap year, and the inclination, and the need – these are all different situations. College counselors don’t proactively put that forward, but they do talk to some families about it. Some kids really need it. What are they going to do during their gap year? We don’t want them just sitting at home. Work, travel, or intern. Different people have different access, which is too bad.

Our college counseling office has its hands full with three counselors, just managing the college process thoughtfully. We have seen an increase in students taking a gap year in the past few years. Just having a real job is a great experience. It’s important to learn how to work. To learn that when you work these hours, you get this money. If you don’t work, you don’t get paid. Our kids don’t do that stuff enough. There is a lot of reliance on internships that their parents get for them. It’s good for them to get yelled at by someone and not be able to yell back, or to realize who will tip you and who won’t and still give good service to everyone. These are great lessons, and the things I learned by waiting tables are still useful to me today.

Question: My question is about information input. My daughter was trying to understand a current event and went through different networks and couldn’t
make sense of it. We can’t rely on the media. I told her she must develop her own source material, and not rely on news networks. How much of that is emphasized at MA?

**Travis:** We spend a lot of time teaching kids to evaluate source materials. We are way beyond the high school experience that you and I had. For us, there were only three kinds of historians, each narrowly categorized. Things are different now.

What’s the difference between truth and reality? So much media is motivated by a political base trying to win an argument. We don’t ever really know what has happened, but at least we understand that. The kids are learning to make data driven arguments and data driven decisions. We remind them that not everything we see counts. There’s a lot of information coming at them – how do you teach them to not engage?

How many of you have recently read the Constitution? I have a copy on my desk. I think you should all read the Constitution and discuss it with your kids. It’s critical, and you should do that. They do that in American History, and they discuss it. We also have a Constitutional Law class.

**Question:** This is more of a comment. I’m a senior parent, and I’m getting very sentimental thinking about how much I love MA and how much I will miss it. These meetings have been so great. I have a kid at another school; the head of school there does not get up and do what you do. So I want to thank you for your transparency and doing what you do.

**Travis:** Thank you so much for that! You know you are always welcome here at MA, even after you leave!

**Question:** This is a more depressing topic. I have an 8th grader shadowing, a sophomore, and one in college. Our dinner conversations have gone longer and deeper. The two younger kids feel one person can’t make a difference in the world. We recently watched True Cost, a documentary about the fashion industry. It was very depressing. My kids feel powerless. How do you make students feel more empowered? We need a village to instill optimism.

**Travis:** There is some good news. You are having dinner together as a family, and conversations are getting deeper. Your kids are talking to you. Those are the
positives. I haven’t seen that documentary and can’t comment on that.

I don’t know how to change climate change. I worry that we talk too much about these things as problems instead of opportunities for change.

Developmentally, this is what students feel at this age – “I’m not in charge.” They don’t make the rules. They don’t get to choose everything about their lives. They want to be more in charge of themselves. We address this in curriculum and with clubs and with the Transdisciplinary Learning Program, which teaches them to develop agency.

In student government, senior students Sarah and Max started this year in an extraordinary way, one that I haven’t seen in decades. So, there is agency. Kids have to decide they want to take the time to do it. They have a full academic course load and activities after school, so they don’t have time to do much more. You can’t do everything you want to do, and you have to make some choices. And we have to intervene at times.

With this feeling of a lack of agency, we can point out facts. What percentage of Americans who can vote do vote? Twenty something percentage. This is a very depressing statistic.

KaTrina: One thing we are working on is providing authentic audiences for students and helping them to find it. We want them to present beyond just in class. When you present to an organization that has an impact, it feels very different. In my Ethics class, we are looking at dilemmas and creating a response for them. One group is looking at whether there should be an ethical algorithm for dating apps. Tinder uses one that only finds people like you. So, they are asking, “does that create a problem for society?”

Another group is looking at how organizations use money ethically. They didn’t find a lot of information about how to ethically donate. Questions like, “should you put your name on it?”, “should you require directing of your donation?” They want to create a toolkit to give to our Advancement Department here.

Travis: Unfortunately, we are out of time. Thank you again for coming.
VI. KaTrina Wentzel, Academic Dean - MA’s New Grading Policies

*Please read these comments alongside KaTrina’s slides, included in the MAPA November Quarterly Update Meeting slides on the MA website, here: www.ma.org/parents/mapa*

From a brain point of view, when I put you into alert mode, you move a little out of cognitive function to the level of a teenager; when I put you into alarm mode, you’re at a preschool level. I realize I put some parents in alert and alarm over this new approach to grading, so I am happy to be here to talk with you about it and give you information, knowledge, and an understanding of what we’re doing.

I’m passing out an exercise for you to complete now. These are anonymous students, and I want you to give them grades based on the information provided. [pause while parents completed the exercise]

This exercise illustrates that grading is much more than numbers. Each of you brings in a bias as to what you consider important – if we were only measuring understanding or completion, we would come up with different results.

Teachers bring in their own biases, and grading is messy. We know from research that traditional grading systems are problematic. There are factors that push some students over the line from a B+ to an A-, for example, in grading, and much of that can come from bias, and they can create issues of inequity. We, as a faculty, have done work on reviewing our forms of assessment and grading, and we’ve been working to integrate what we’ve learned.

Turning to our slides now, I want to start with this quote from Thomas Guskey, one of the most well-known researchers on grading and assessment in the US and North America. Guskey believes there is no perfect grading system, but we can do better.

Over the past three years, as a faculty we’ve been working on the following. We had professional development as a full faculty with Denise Pope from Stanford’s Challenge Success and Joe Feldman, who wrote *Grading for Equity*. In addition, individual faculty or groups by teams or department have pursued additional professional development. We’ve been sharing our learnings with one another and paying attention to research in the field.
We are also a founding member of the Mastery Transcript Consortium, an organization that is looking for a different way to show learning on transcripts. We are looking for a better way to explain the quality and evolution of the student’s experience. This is a long-term conversation that we want to be a part of. By being a member of this consortium, we get access to all of the research and data in this field. We have also done pilots of teachers and teacher teams and received feedback from students for the past three years. I have not communicated a lot of this out to parents because we have been in a learning and development stage.

This year... there is no uniform grading policy. Much has stayed the same and is being done the same way that is always has. After my recent letter to parents went out, a few people reached out to ask questions. The reality is that there haven’t been big, system-wide changes. I decided to communicate more this year because the learning and groundswell has now resulted in many teachers making changes in the way they grade. When we know something is important and meaningful, it is educational malpractice not to move in that direction. We’ve hit a point where every department at MA has begun to move toward these new practices. But it is not yet implemented across the board.

The next slides show the things that we value as a school, down the left-hand side. On the right, we’ve indicated the practical steps we are taking.

We value bias resistance. So one of the things we are doing is eliminating zeros. If you think about it, an A covers the top 10% of the grading scale, a B is the second 10%, and so on, until you get to an F, which covers 60% of the scale. So now, instead of an F representing a score of 0, it is a score of 50. Now, an F doesn’t put students in a spot that is impossible to recover from. Some teachers have instituted this.

We also provide scaffolding, meaning that we don’t just jump into an assessment without first providing steps for students to follow for achieving success. We also believe that participation grades can be problematic – are we being fair in what we are measuring, or does this simply indicate a student’s comfort level to speak?

In terms of accuracy, we are actively reviewing and refining our assessments.

On the next slide, we value learning and growth. When I think about what the purpose of a school is, it’s learning, growing, belonging and reaching potential. Historically, school has been used for sorting. We need to provide specific feedback,
and not give penalties for students who need multiple attempts to master material. We have to allow trial and error.

Here’s an example – I assign three essays in my Ethics class. In the past, each would have been worth 1/3 of a student’s final “essay” grade. Doing so would have prioritized students who could do the work from the start. But what I actually care about is that, by the end of the class, students can write a strong essay. So in my class, the first two essays aren’t graded, and I give a lot of feedback. Students are now reading the feedback and learning from it when writing their next essay. When they turn in an essay, students mark where they think they are on the rubric – they are being more honest about what they need to work on. Before, too much was tied up in grades.

It is high stakes to be graded on just one essay, but I also have a revision policy. This has been one area of my own growth. Last year, I had a blanket revision policy, allowing students to revise any assignment multiple times. For some students, this policy worked well. But, perfectionistic students would just keep revising. Also some students see the revision policy as a way to not be as motivated the first time around.

So this year it’s not about revising all the essays. Instead, on the third assigned essay, the grade counts; and if you want to improve your grade, you can revise any of the three essays from the class. I want to see a student’s best work by the end of class, but I’m not prioritizing students who came in already skilled at the thing I’m supposed to be teaching and students are supposed to be learning. I don’t want to penalize learning, which, to some degree, is what the previous system did: If you came in being able to write a strong essay at the start of class, you were set. But if you didn’t—but then learned how to—you were penalized by my averaging that initial grade into your essay grade. We want to reflect learning and growth. Some other teachers are doing similar things.

We talked earlier about the importance of students feeling a sense of agency. We need to teach support and structure, get students to set goals, self-monitor, self-assess, and be involved in grading decisions. In my class, students create evidence and use persuasive communication about what they feel their grade should be.

Our next step in adopting this new grading policy is to establish consistency. In the future, we will adopt school-wide grading practices and criteria for mastering the five
competencies. This year we are creating performance indicators for skill and level which are grounded in research, student-facing (written from the student perspective with language such as “I can,” and “I will”), observable, developmental, and research-based.

Lots of additional resources are listed in this slide deck, and I also have a handout for grading practices. [Handout is included at the end of this transcript.]

Let’s turn to some questions now.

**Question:** You’ve been really thoughtful in your class, KaTrina. My daughter is in a foreign language class, where there are possibly some unintended consequences when you favor one thing over another in grading, such as participation.

**KaTrina:** In some classes that’s true; participation by everyone is necessary in some classes. In world language, we are looking at what we actually want to grade: students’ verbal proficiency has been moved to an assessment category. And assessments are not necessarily always tests. There can be verbal practice, oral assessments, and a revision policy.

**Question:** Thank you for presenting today. Have you shared this information with the students? And do you notice any gender bias in the self-grading piece because research shows that females grade themselves much harder than males.

**KaTrina:** I did meet with the junior class, as a whole, because I sensed high alarm in that group over these new grading practices. I told them, “You have learned to play the game and we just changed the rules. I get it.” We are seeing the highest level of concern in world language and math. In fact, our math policies have not changed this year, and yet this is the first year that students and parents are expressing concerns. Some math classes have retakes but not all.

Juniors saw a similar presentation to the one I’ve done with you today. I reminded them to communicate with their teachers. And I am watching the grades carefully. We just completed the Quarter 1 grade report process, and I compared this year’s grades to those from the past three years – they look almost identical.

I haven’t talked with entire grades except the juniors. But some select students have come to speak with me.
Yes, girls are harder on themselves. Self-grading is a moment of metacognition but not the ultimate grade. This shows where student and teacher agree/disagree and discuss. Self-grading opens up the conversation in a way that wasn’t visible before.

Question: I want to ask about the revision policy.

KaTrina: This policy may change from year to year, but right now there is no school-wide policy. One overarching policy is that teams have to be in agreement, so all sections of the same class have to be aligned. Teachers are required to publicize their grading policy – such as how they handle late work, redemption, revision.

Question: How can we follow up with you individually with questions?

KaTrina: Please email me.

Question: I’m surprised that there isn’t a school-wide grading policy. I’m concerned about consequences to current students while you work through what may be an amazing end result. My child’s grades in every class have dropped an entire grade level. Research can be questionable when used in this context, and our kids are competing against kids in public schools which are not implementing this.

KaTrina: I am paying close attention to the grades. And while individual students will have various experiences, the overall distribution has not changed. We are communicating a lot with the environment outside MA. I reached out to 50+ college admissions offices; I heard back from almost all. We received zero negative response. Some said this would make MA kids more desirable. Our job as a school is to make sure we communicate that through the college application process.

We look at research and survey responses from businesses describing what they want in job applicants – it’s all in the five competencies. They want flexible, quick learners who are able to work with others, and are culturally competent. It’s difficult to measure those things just with numbers.

Question: Isn’t the primary purpose of education to determine which students have the most potential? By allowing retakes of assessments and rewriting of papers, aren’t you flattening out those results?

KaTrina: We are in conversation with college admissions offices at colleges, which are looking for ways to understand and differentiate transcripts. Does that include
the UC schools? Yes and no. There are some standard bands that colleges look at, such as GPA, test scores, etc. But they also want to understand the stories behind those metrics. Some colleges appreciate persistence, work, and effort to end up competent by the end of a class. And very few classes at MA are allowing unlimited revisions. There is a philosophical question to this.

Thank you so much for coming today and bringing your questions. Please feel free to email me if you have any more.

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**Next MAPA Quarterly Update Meeting**

*March 5, 2020*  
*8:30 – 10:00am*  
*Founders Lecture Hall*
Grading Practices

Our understanding of grading—the inaccuracies and biases that exist within it as well as the issues of the practice overall—are evolving. As such, the following grading practices and strategies have been put into effect in some classrooms. Note that not all classrooms use any or all of these, but rather this list is meant to give a snapshot of different practices along with the (condensed) reasoning.

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<th>No homework grades</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This can be the scariest policy for students (and parents) because, for many, these grades have provided a type of grade safety net. It can be incorrectly seen as creating a high-stakes testing environment or create the misperception that there is no room for learning/error. It’s actually the contrary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● The most important pillars of grading are accuracy and bias-resistance</td>
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<td>● Grading homework and participation has been shown to decrease internal motivation and authentic engagement.</td>
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<td>● It may seem counterintuitive, but students complete more homework when it’s not graded.</td>
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<td>● The most important reason for homework is practice. We know mistakes are crucial to learning, so when we penalize students for errors during the learning process, we are sending the wrong message.</td>
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<td>● The second most important reason for homework is formative assessment: a way for teachers to check what skills/knowledge students have learned and what they still are working on. This can happen without grading.</td>
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<td>● Graded homework can have two effects on the extremes: for students who already have the skills needed, they complete the work but just go through the motions. As such, it’s busy work for them, and unnecessary. For students who are lacking the skills, homework is a good place to practice. If graded, however, they are often punished for learning (that is, if homework is practice, then they should be allowed to struggle and not be penalized for it).</td>
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<td>● When homework receives points for just being turned in, it can actually create grades that are based on inaccurate and invalid information.</td>
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Challenge Success surveyed over 16,000 students at high performing high schools: 79% said they’ve cheated on homework in the last month. This is the most common when there are points for completion for trying the homework vs. fully graded homework.

Many of our courses did not change their policies around no/low homework grades (such as math courses); they were already operating with these systems for some time. Their results—as well as the results of other courses who have piloted alternative systems of homework grading over the past two years—have provided an important lived-reality that, when paired with research, supports that these practices can truly create learning-centered classrooms.

Our commitment is to ensure a robust learning environment where students are properly assessed and graded. When homework isn’t graded, note the following:

- “Assessment” doesn’t just refer to tests. In many classes, students will have assessment opportunities that include projects, drafts, outlines, speaking, etc.
- There are still lots of points available through assessment—we’re avoiding a high stakes environment, and in most cases no single traditional test will “weigh more” than in the past.
- We are committed to giving feedback so that students feel confident in what they know/can do before any assessment.
- In some classes, students are curating ‘evidence’ for meeting a course competency or goal. In these cases, they can use their homework, participation, etc. as evidence, they’re just not graded per se.
- We realize this is different. We’re keeping a close eye on assessment scores and our gradebooks to see if there are surprising changes. We will be reactive to this.
- No grades on homework and participation are typically paired with redemption/revision policies (see below).

Learning should not be penalized. In other words, not being able to do something at the start of the semester but being able to by the end shows that a student did exactly what was expected of them: they learned.

The goal of our courses is growth in/mastery of specific skills and material. While teachers have a timeline in mind (and have created
units and such based on this), they recognize that each student has their own experiences, learning curves, and unexpected needs.

- While staying on the course timeline is helpful (deadlines have been created to create a balance in work and to build upon existing knowledge), there will be times when some students need another opportunity to show what they know.
- These policies were designed to support a growth mindset, show our understanding that “failure” can lead to learning, and to ultimately value *that* a student learns, not *when* a student learns.

### No Zeros or a 1–5/0–4 scale

- Mathematically, the zero disproportionately punishes when used in a 0–100 scale
  - 10% between all other grades - 60% in Fs
  - ⅔ of the grades scale are degrees of failure

### Weighting More Recent Achievement

- These policies are designed to avoid the trap of penalizing learning ... if a student can’t complete a task at the beginning of the class but can by the end, then they’ve learned/mastered the skill we wanted. We don’t want to penalize early mistakes and learning.