

USING STANDARDS-BASED GRADING TO ADDRESS  
STUDENTS' STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

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## Abstract

This action research project report uses standard-based grading to address the problem of traditional grades not adequately assessing student content mastery and students' lack of awareness regarding their strengths and weaknesses. Research was conducted by one elementary and two middle school teachers with 158 students between the dates of September 6<sup>th</sup> and December 16th, 2011. Data was also collected from 95 parents and 14 teachers.

Traditional grades were difficult for students and parents to interpret because they combine a number of factors into one summary grade. Teacher researchers conducted both parent and student surveys in addition to a teacher survey and interview. Through these tools, the teacher researchers found that students and parents alike agreed that they did not always understand why students received certain grades and were not able to identify their students' strengths and weaknesses. Parents were not confident in the teacher's abilities to explain grades.

In an attempt to fix traditional broken grades, teachers sent home bi-weekly progress reports detailing student progress toward individual state learning standards. Teachers then adapted lesson plans and teaching methods to help students improve upon a set of chosen state standards. Teacher implemented a new way of grading that did not allow outside factors to affect grades.

In post documentation, teacher researchers found that 84% (n=114) of students agreed with the fairness of the grades that were assigned to them. This proved to the teacher researchers that when students knew what standards needed to be mastered, they worked diligently to accomplish the goal set before them.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Problem Statement and Context**

#### **General Statement of the Problem**

The three teacher researchers found that traditional grades did not indicate specific strengths and weaknesses for students, parents, and teachers. Areas researched were bilingual kindergarten and first grade combined, sixth-grade language arts, and seventh-grade English. The teacher researchers used a student survey, teacher survey, teacher interview, and parent survey to gather information about the vagueness of traditional grades.

#### **Immediate Context of the Problem**

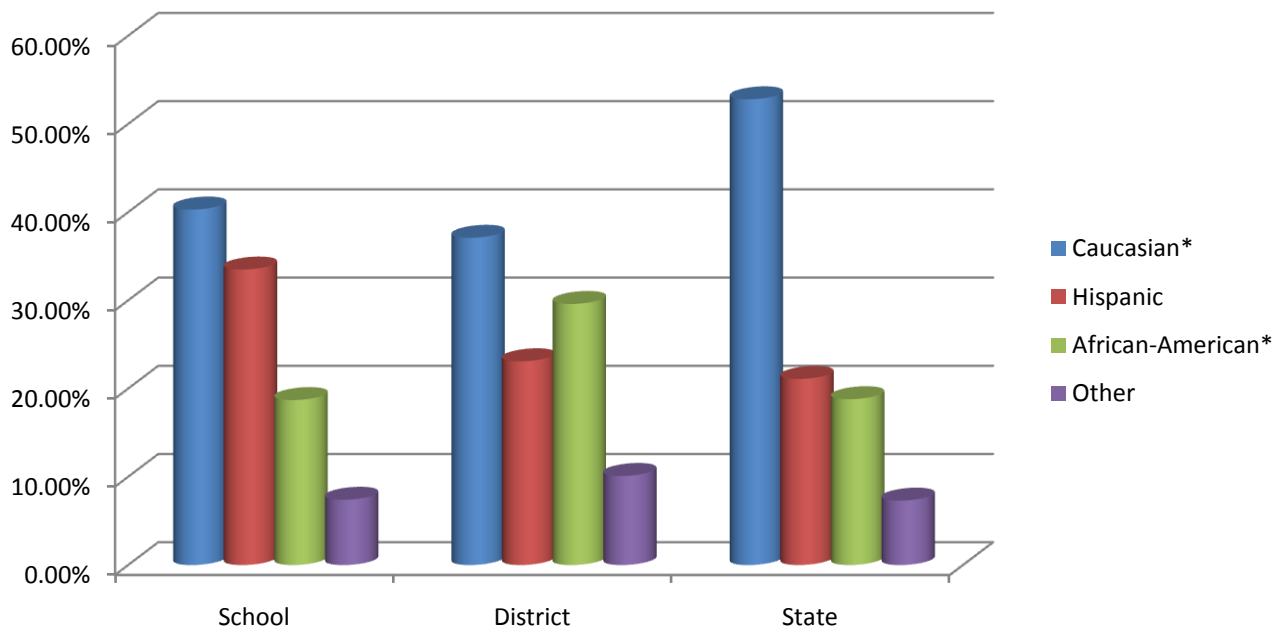
This action research project involved two sites, A and B. Site A was one of six traditional middle schools in a large urban school district, while Site B was one of three elementary schools in a rural school district. The two sites had very different demographics, for this reason the information was presented separately. Unless otherwise stated, the following information about these sites came from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2010a, 2010b).

##### **Site A.**

Site A research was conducted by two teacher researchers at one site that was a public middle school located in an urban community in northern Illinois. The site was located in an affluent neighborhood in a blue collar city, with student attendance based on zones or by language diversity.

Site A had a total enrollment of approximately 1,011 students. Males accounted for 484 (48%) of the student population, and females accounted for 527 (52%) of the student population in the middle school (School secretary, personal communication, December 16, 2010). The district had a total enrollment of 27, 181 students within a state enrollment of 2,064,312 students.

Figure 1 shows the racial/ethnic background of the student population by percentage for the school, district, and state. The majority (40.3%; 37.1%; 52.8%) of the students in the school, district, and state, respectively, were Caucasian. Hispanic students made up the second largest percentage (33.5%; 21.1%) of the student population in the school and state. African-American students made up the second largest percentage (29.6%) of the student population in the district.



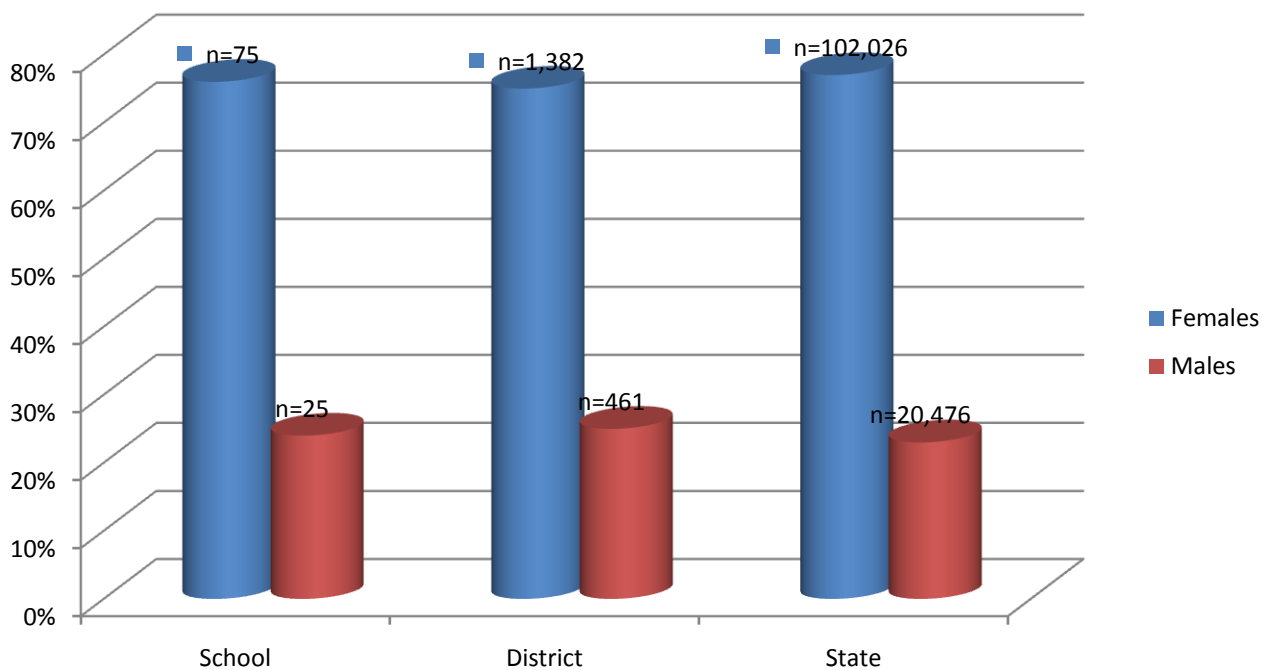
*Figure 1. Racial/Ethnic Background of Student Population by Percentage*

\*School data identifies as non-Hispanic

Site A contained the district English Language Learners program at the middle school level. All of the middle school ELL students were housed at this site. The limited English proficiency rate was 22% in the school, 10% in the district, and 8% in the state. The site had a notably higher population of students with limited English proficiency than that of the district and state. Students who were eligible for Individual Education Plans were consistent at the school, state, and district levels at 12%, 13%, and 13%, respectively. Students who received

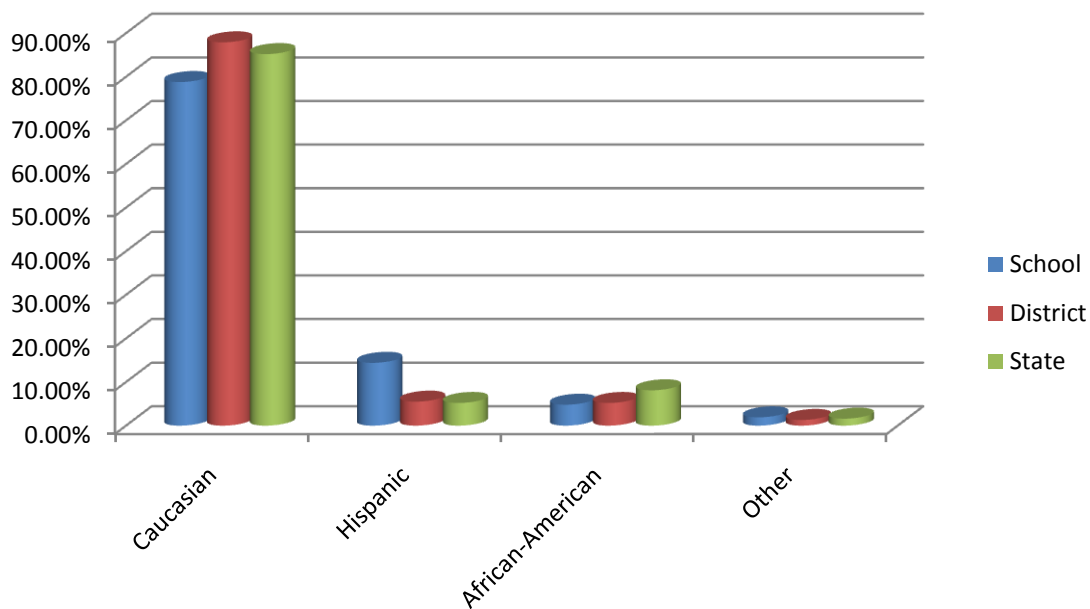
public aid and/or lived in foster care were considered low income and were eligible to receive free and reduced lunch. The free and reduced lunch rate was 64% in the school, 75% in the district, and 45% in the state.

Figure 2 shows the female to male comparison at the school, district, and state levels. Female teachers made up at least three quarters of the faculty with male teachers representing a quarter less of faculty at all levels.



*Figure 2. Gender of Teacher Population by Percentage*

Figure 3 shows the racial/ethnic background of the teacher population by percentage. The majority of the teachers in the school (78.8%), district (87.9%), and state (85.2%) were Caucasian. These numbers were markedly higher than the percentages of Caucasian students in the school (40.3%), district (37.1%), and state (52.8%).



*Figure 3. Racial/Ethnic Background of Teacher Population by Percentage*

At Site A, the average class size was 20 in the school, 21 in the district and 21 in the state. While these numbers reflected the total number of faculty in the building, the typical class size at the site was 30 students with 33 the maximum. Most teachers saw 130-140 students per day.

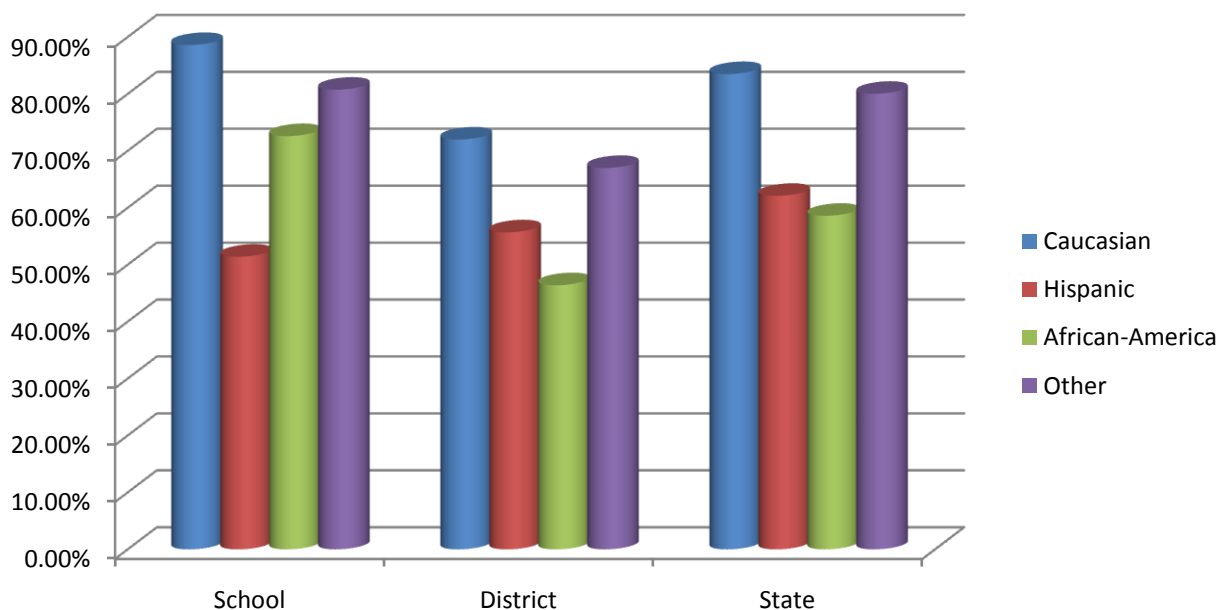
The highest salary at Site A was \$96,853. That was the salary of the Reading Educational Leader who has 31 years of teaching experience and a master's degree. The lowest salary in the building for a full-time employee was \$37,894. That was for a first year bilingual teacher with a baccalaureate degree (Family Taxpayer, 2010). The average teacher salary was \$66,771. The average of teachers with master's degrees was 81% in the school, (8 working on their degrees in 2010), 70% in the district, and 57% in the state.

The site had a 6 period day; each period equaling 51 minutes. The classes taken by students were mathematics, science, social studies, English, language arts and an encore class



such as band, art, physical education or computer. The language arts program had recently lost its tracking system and was now basically a general education class like the other core classes. Students were taught a traditional curriculum by a team of teachers for mathematics, science, social studies, and English. The students were off team for language arts and encore classes. Students had 51 minutes of language arts and 51 minutes of English daily for a total of 102 minutes a day. The district stated that students were taught language arts and English an average of 69 minutes a day, yet all middle schools ran on the same schedule as stated previously. The schools minute average is closer to the states average of 98 minutes daily.

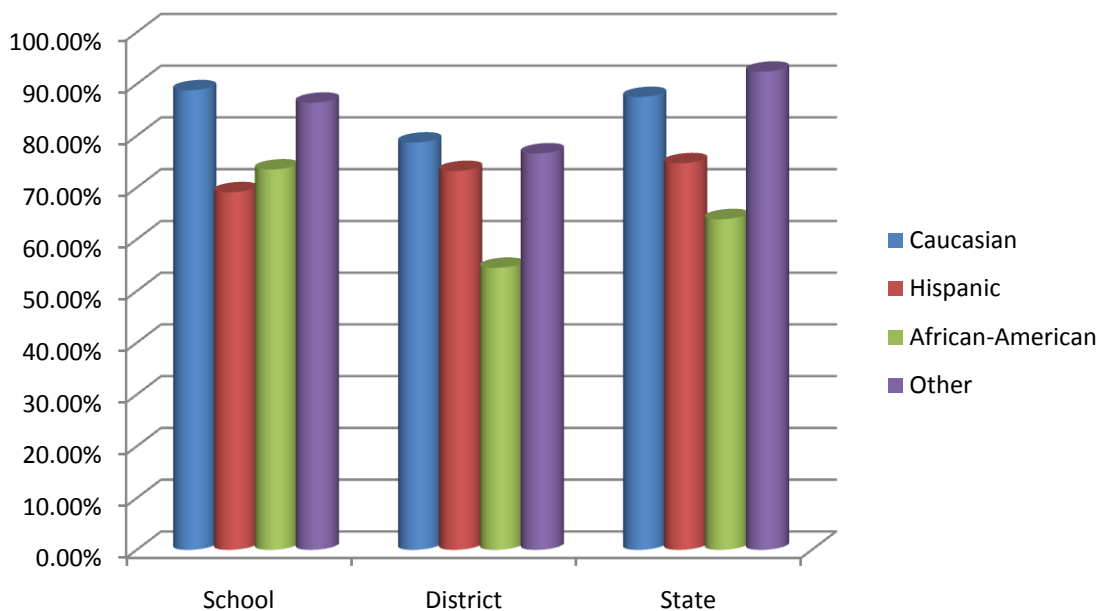
Students at this site took the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT). This state mandated test included reading and math sections. The school made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in math, but did not in reading during the 2009-2010 school year. Figure 4 shows that at all grade levels, Caucasian students, as the largest ethnic subgroup, made AYP with an average of 88.6% meeting or exceeding standards in reading. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students were notably lower in reading than the AYP benchmark of 77.5% with an average of 33.1% as the second largest ethnic subgroup at the site. This low score was attributed to students who were recent arrivals from other countries that did not speak/read any English, but were given the same test as native English speakers/readers.



*Figure 4.* Ethnic/Racial Reading ISAT Meets or Exceeds Score by Percentage

The above averages follow the same pattern as the comparisons of reading to both the district and the state. LEP students were also given the ACCESS for English Language Learners. During registration, if a parent/guardian marked that a student spoke more than one language; their students must take the ACCESS test. According to the Illinois Interactive Report Card “About the Tests” website tab, “The ACCESS assesses social and instructional English as well as the language associated with language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, across the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading and writing)” (2010b).

Figure 5 shows that in math, Caucasian students meet or exceeded 88.8%, 78.7%, and 87.5% at the school, district, and state levels respectively. Hispanic students at the school level (69.1%) were lower than at the district and state levels. African-American student scores at the school level (73.5%) were markedly higher than at the other levels.



*Figure 5. Ethnic/Racial Mathematics ISAT Meets or Exceeds Scores by Percentage*

The site had one principal and three assistant principals. There were three counselors, one student support specialist for the ELL students and parents, one truant officer, one nurse, and one social worker. The site had an IEP team consisting of a psychiatrist, diagnostic technician, nurse, social worker, counselors, and classroom teachers provided input for a student eligible for an IEP and a 504 plan (Teacher Researcher, Site B).

The site was known for being the middle school of choice before the district changed to zones. It was known as the middle school *on the golden hill*. The school was known for athletic superiority, the district middle school ELL program, popular band program, and an excellent and devoted teaching staff. The staff often called themselves family. It was known for having high test scores and preparing the students for high school and beyond.

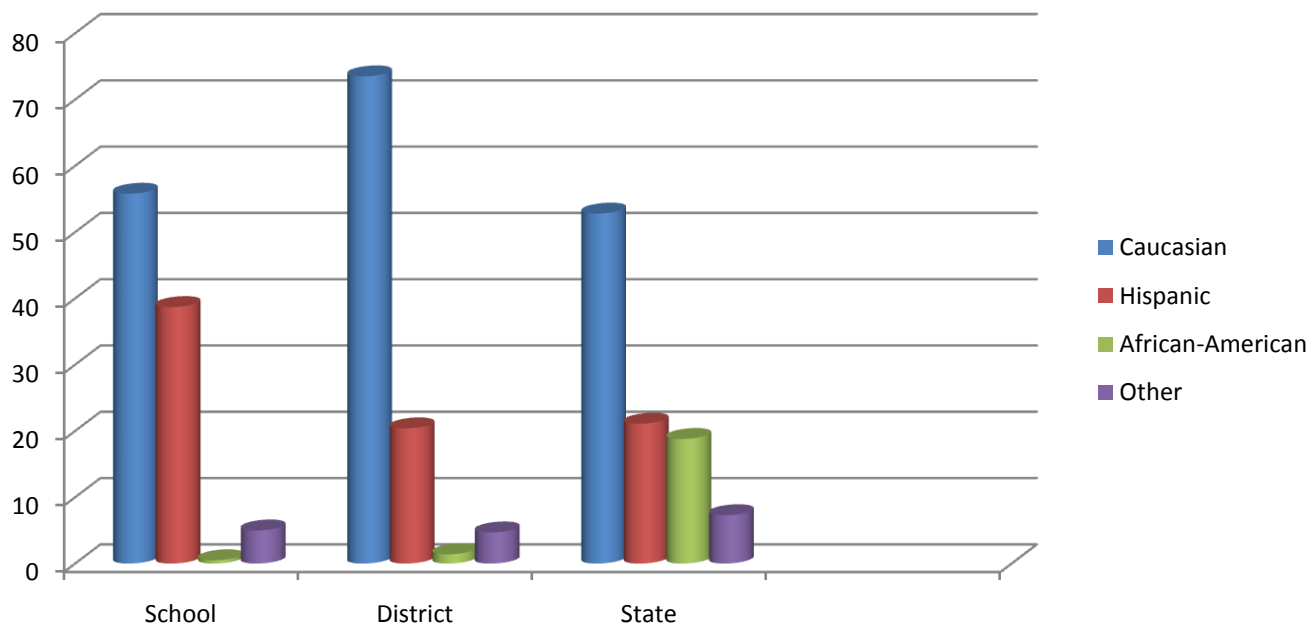
The middle school building had two levels. It had a main office where the nurse was also stationed. Across the hall was the counseling and ELL office. On the main level were the

cafeteria, faculty lounge, updated auditorium, pool, computer lab where class was held containing 32 computers, athletic locker rooms, and a few language arts classrooms. On the second level was the library which contained the schools only community computer laboratory, that contained 35 of computers, gymnasium, special education classrooms, and the rest were regular education classrooms (n=52). Each teacher was given a laptop from the district. Most math teachers were given smart boards and document cameras. Some teachers had access to a desktop computer, TV/VCR/DVD player and overhead projector (Teacher Researcher, Site B).

### **Site B.**

Site B research was conducted by one teacher researcher that was a public elementary school which incorporated students from two small rural towns in northern Illinois. It was surrounded by cornfields but within 20 miles of a major interstate and about 75 miles from Chicago.

In 2010 the school had a total enrollment of 199. The students were predominately Caucasian (55.8% n=111) with higher representation than the average state percentage (52.8%).

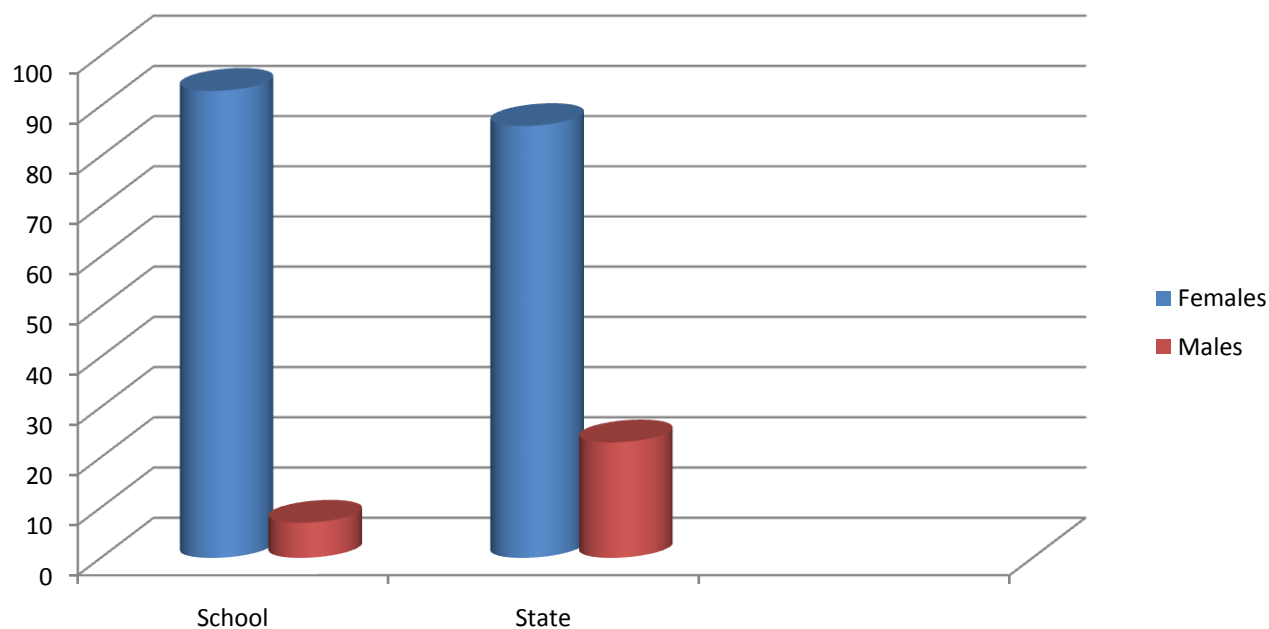


*Figure 6. Racial/Ethnic Background of Students Population by Percentage*

At the school, the percentage of students with limited English proficiency was 31.7% (n=63), which was considerably higher than that of the state which was 7.6% and lower than that of the district percentage which was 9.6%. The percentage of students coming from families that received public aid or were eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches was similar to that of the district and was 38.2% (n=76). This percentage was lower than the state percentage of 45.4%. The school had a truancy rate of 0.0% compared to the 3.6% for the state, and the attendance rate at the school was 95.6% while the state attendance rate was 93.9%. The school had a mobility rate of 21.3%, while the state had a lower mobility rate of 13%. At the school, 39.7% of students had an IEP, while only 13% of students in the state had an IEP.

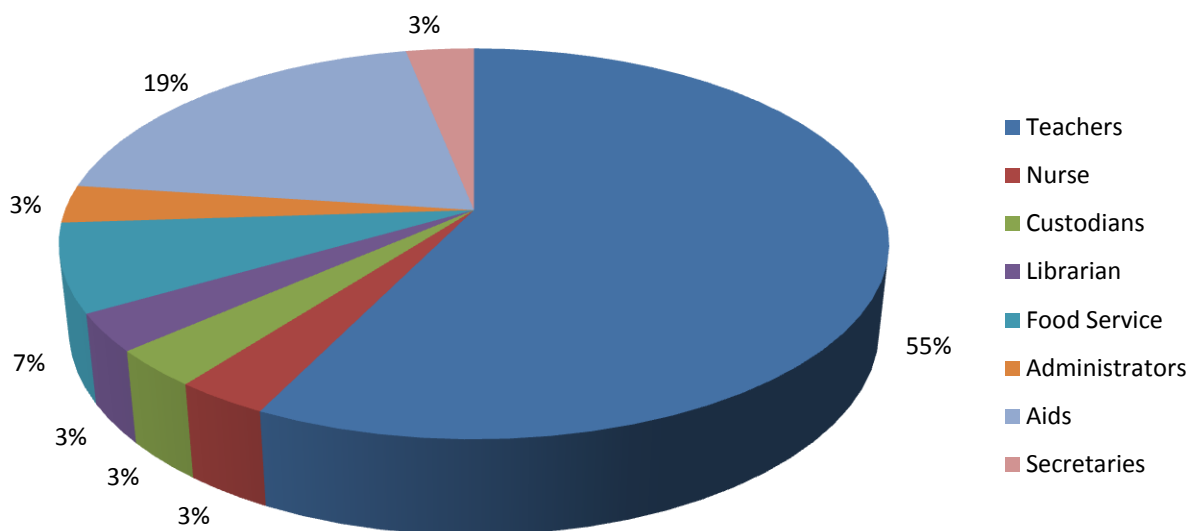
In 2010, the school had a total of 15 teachers, 1 male (7%) and 14 female (93%). The teaching staff was 100% Caucasian. On average, teachers in the district of Site B earned a salary of \$52,012 and had 11 years of experience, whereas teachers throughout the state earned an average salary of \$63,296 and had 12.7 years of experience. Within the district, 56.5% (n=65) of

teachers had their bachelor's degrees and 43.5% (n=51) had earned master's degrees. The maximum number of students in a classroom with one teacher was 30 and the student-to-teacher ratio was 15.4.



*Figure 7. Gender of Teacher Population by Percentage*

In terms of standardized test scores, the school has varied over the years. In 2010, 92% of students had a composite score of “meets” or better on the ISAT, while in 2009 only 78% had a meeting score and 75% had a score of “meets” in 2008. In 2010, 89% of students met or exceeded standards in reading, 96% met or exceeded in mathematics, and 75% met or exceeded standards in writing on the ISAT. However, only third and fourth grades were tested for the ISAT even though the school represented students from kindergarten through fourth grade. The administration of Site A included one male principal. Teachers made up just over half of staff (56%, n=15). The staff of the school is broken down by category and shown in Figure 3.



*Figure 8. Staff at School by Percentage*

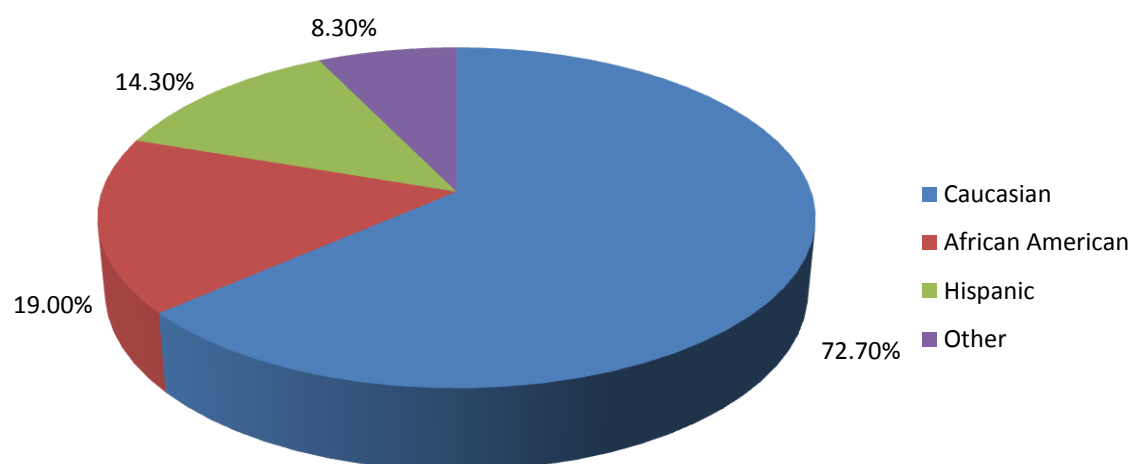
The school was located in a small town just a block from the downtown area. Just outside of the downtown area were miles of cornfields.

### **Local Context of the Problem**

#### **Site A.**

Site A was a middle school located in an urban area of northern Illinois. Students lived in a city of 150,881 people. From 2000 to 2009, the population of the city increased by 5%. The average household size was 2.5, the median household income was \$25,681, and the median family income was \$48,651. The per capita income of these families was \$21,882. Of all individuals, 22% were below the poverty level, which was extensively higher than the United States average of 13%. Of all families, 17% were below poverty level, following the previous trend. The median age in the community was 35.0 years with 11,102 people (7.4%) under the age of five. A total of 112,989 people (74.9%) were 18 years to 65 years of age, and 20,537 people (13.6%) were over the age of 65 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008).

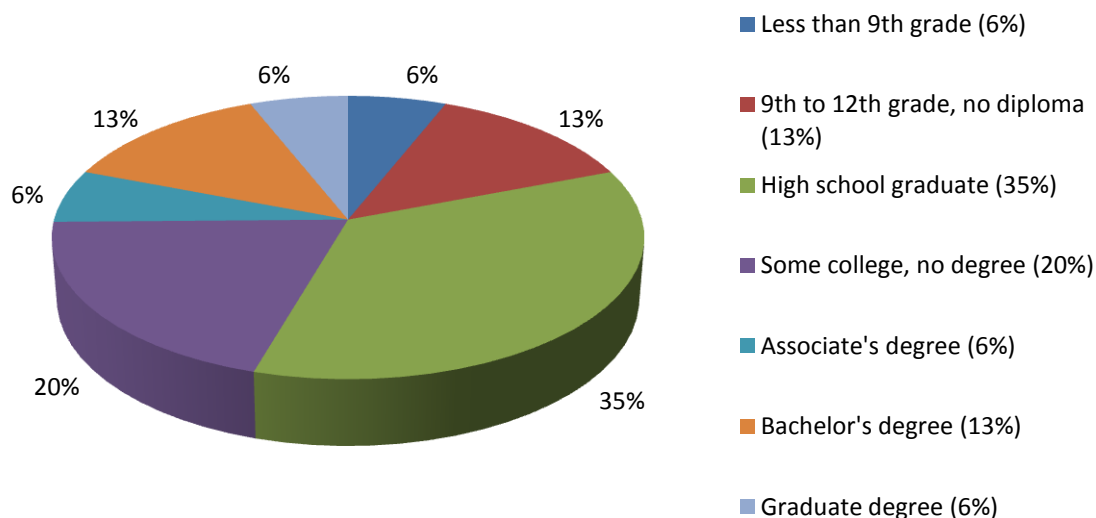
Figure 9 shows the diversity of the city. Although the majority of the residents (72.7%) were Caucasian, the largest minority (19.0%) were African American, of any race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008).



*Figure 9. Racial/Ethnic Background of City by Percentage*

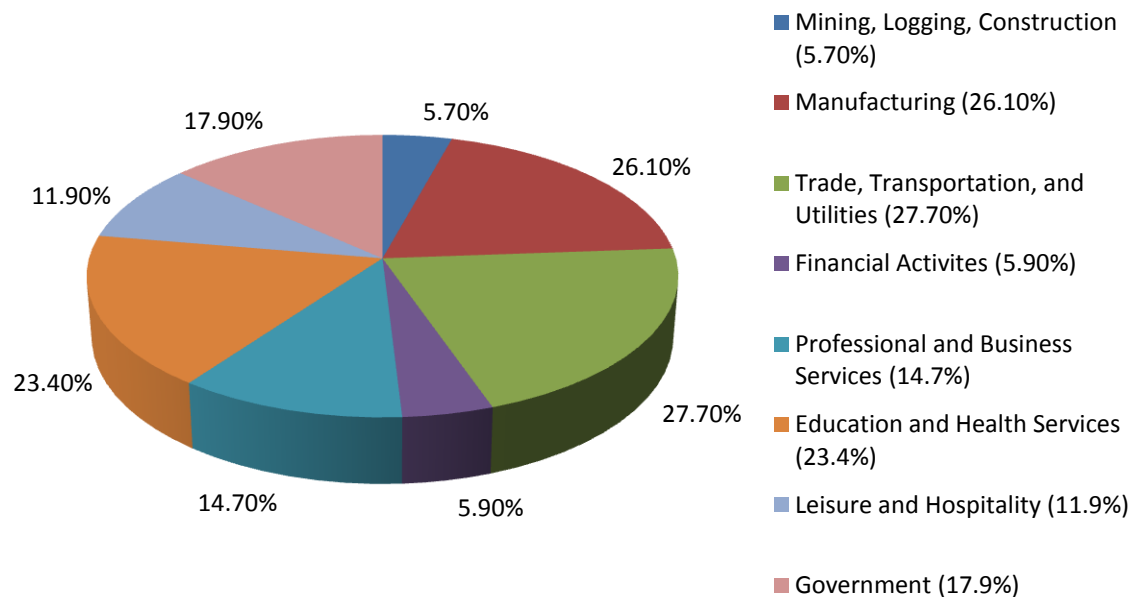
Figure 10 shows 19% of the population of the city did not earn a high school diploma. A high school diploma was earned by 55% of the population. An associates, bachelors, or graduate degree was earned by 25% of the population (Simplyhired, 2010).





*Figure 10.* Educational Attainment in the City by Percentage

Figure 11 shows that over three-fourths of employment was in the trades, transportation, and utilities field (27.7%), the manufacturing field (26.1%) and education and health services (23.4%). The unemployment rate in the city was 15% compared to the United States unemployment rate of 10% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). The blue collar work force was affected tremendously by the economic downturn. This, in turn, may have affected a high crime rate; though murders and aggravated assaults were down (269 to 262), robbery, burglary, and theft were up (1,684 to 2,096) (The Site's City, 2008-2009).



*Figure 11.* Types of Occupations in the City by Percentage

The city in which the site is located was founded in 1834 on the banks of a large river. Trade along the river, the creation of dams, and the arrival of the railroad caused economic growth and industrialization. The city had always been known as a melting pot of ethnicities and a hub for manufacturing. From this manufacturing background, the sock monkey was produced. The sock monkey had been a staple in the toy industry since 1870 (The Site's City, 2010). The city was known for its various attractions while the local performing arts theater was "listed on the national register of historic places" (Coronado Performing Arts Center, 2010). There was a museum full of hands-on experiments for children, combined with a historical museum that boasted the skeleton of a tyrannosaurus rex. There were multiple sports venues, such as baseball, ice hockey, and soccer, for spectators and participants. The city also boasted the second largest outdoor water park. Every fall there was a music festival along the riverfront and every winter there was a snow sculpting competition.

Local property taxes accounted for 51% of the districts revenue which translated into \$169,147,096. These revenues support a district that included 36 elementary schools, six middle schools, eight high schools, one special education school, and one gifted academy for a total of 52 school buildings. The site where the research was conducted was a public middle school within a district that was zoned by neighborhood schools at the elementary level. Elementary school students were then sent to the middle school based on what zone their elementary school was in. Middle schools fed directly into zoned high schools. The school where the research was conducted was headed by one principal and three assistant principals in charge of discipline. Additionally, the school has a mathematics educational leader (MEL) and a reading educational leader (REL). All the aforementioned administrators worked for one superintendent and her cabinet. The cabinet consisted of a chief student support, an executive director of school, chief financial officer, chief operations officer, an executive director or curriculum of instruction, an executive coordinator to the superintendent, and a special assistant to the superintendent (City Public Schools, 2010).

The mission of the site is to excel 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in the transition to high school.

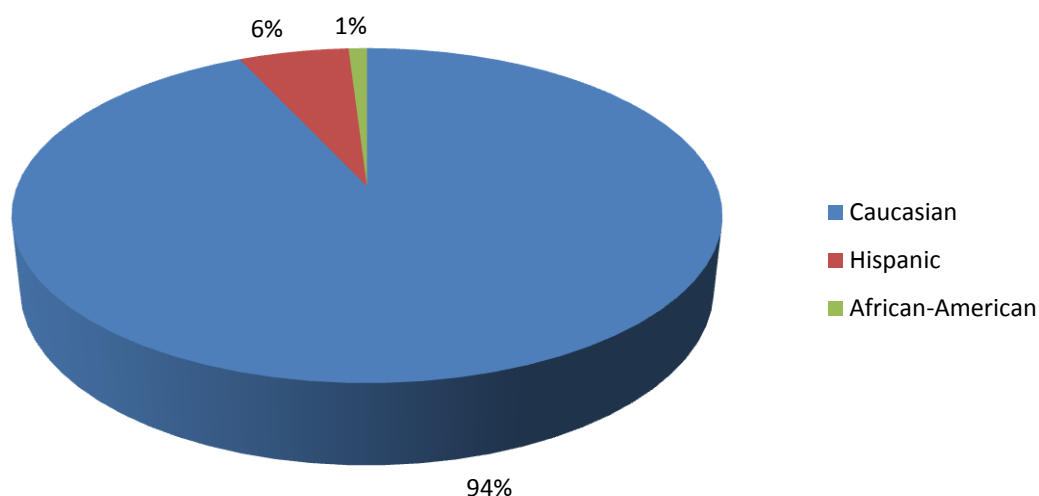
By leading a child centered partnership within its community to maximize the potential of each student for academics, emotional, and social growth (Site A School website).

There was an obvious lack of technology at the site, as 1,011 students had access to 35 computers, when the library computer laboratory was available to be reserved. The one desktop computer per classroom was difficult for 30 students to access.

**Site B.**

Area B was the northern half of a rural county and encompassed a few small towns, the main focus of this section will be the town in which the school is located. This area was within Northern Illinois 15 miles of a major interstate and about 75 miles from Chicago.

As for the population, at the time of the 2000 census the total of the two towns in this area was 2,329 people (American Towns 2008, U.S. Census Bureau 2006-2008). One of these towns was listed in the top 30% of the 101 cities with the largest population increase from 2000 to 2006 (City Data 2010). In 2000, the median household income was \$56,375; however it was estimated to be \$76,420 in 2008. The median age of people in this area at the time of the last census was 32.5 years old, while the United States average was 35.5 years old. In 2000, this gender make up of the area was made up of about half males (n=1,224) and half females (n=1,105). The ethnicity of the area consisted of 94% Caucasian, 6% Hispanic and less than 1% African American. In this area, 49% of people had a high school degree and only 6% had a bachelor's degree or higher (City Data, 2010).



*Figure 12. Racial/Ethnic Background of the Area Population by Percentage*

The average number of people in a household in this area was 3.33 (City Data, 2010). Members a household lived in a home, on average listing price of \$183,314 (City Data, 2010). At the time of the last survey, the unemployment rate was 2.8% compared to the national average of 5.8% (City Data, 2010). Popular types of employment for men in this area included agriculture and farming, construction, transportation equipment and machinery. For those working, popular types of employment for women included health care and professional services (Simplyhired, 2010). The crime rate was lower than the national average. The total crime index of the area was 22.33 and the crime index for property crimes was 74.45, in comparison to the average crime index of 100. There were 2,378 property crimes per 100,000 people in this area compared to the national average was 3,213 (Home Facts 2010).

The community was growing and had been developing new neighborhoods where cornfields once stood. A gated community with a lake had been forming and nearly doubled the population of the town. This small community was well known for a large apple orchard where

many families came from all over to take a hay ride out to pick their own apples, ride ponies, and do other fall activities. There was also a state park nearby with activities year round such as hiking, canoeing, cross country skiing and camping.

Local property taxes accounted for 51% of the district's revenue which translated into \$8,381,895. The school district was a kindergarten through twelfth grade unit district ran by one superintendant and a principal in each building. The district included three lower elementary schools, one upper elementary, and one middle school which all fed into one high school. The district was "committed to bringing the growing community together to provide a superior education that challenges all students to pursue their potential in a safe environment for today's society and tomorrow's world", as stated in their mission statement (Teacher Researcher, Site B). The school believed in integrating the newest technology when possible. Each classroom had one teacher computer and a five had between two and seven extra student computers. The classroom in this study had six student laptops and one teacher computer. There were also five teachers in the building with Smart Boards.

### **National Context of the Problem**

According to O'Connor (2007), "Grading still remains an aspect of school that is clothed in myth, mystery, and magic" (p. xiii). He also stated that inaccurate grades led to poor instructional decisions and many teachers combined a large amount of evidence into a single summary grade. Guskey (2001) stated that most teachers used norm-reference standards which focused on comparing students rather than individual progress. Simply calculating percentages on tests was no longer enough; students needed to be assessed on progress of curriculum standards (Colby, 1999).

**Reflection**

Based on the literature that we reviewed, parents, students, and teachers were familiar with and have been scored using the traditional grading system. Tests, quizzes, projects, assignments, and homework have been represented by one summary score within each subject area. This summary score does not portray student strengths, weaknesses, and progress within the subject area for the parents, students, and teachers. If students and parents can identify their areas of weakness, they can look for ways to improve.

## Chapter 2

### Problem of Documentation

#### Evidence of the Problem

The purpose of this action research project was to better address students' strengths and weakness according to state standards, teacher researchers implemented standards-based grading practices. The evidence was documented through parent and student surveys and a teacher survey and interview. One hundred thirty-eight students at the sixth and seventh grade levels at Site A and 20 kindergarteners at Site B, for a total of 158 students, participated by responding to a student survey about their familiarity with standards-based grading. Ninety-one parents at Site A and 12 parents at Site B completed the survey for a total of 102 participants. Additionally, 10 teachers at Site A and five teachers at Site B, for a total of 15 faculty members, responded to a questionnaire about standards-based grading. The teacher researchers collected data based on the aforementioned tools from 274 research participants from September 12, 2011 to September 13, 2011.

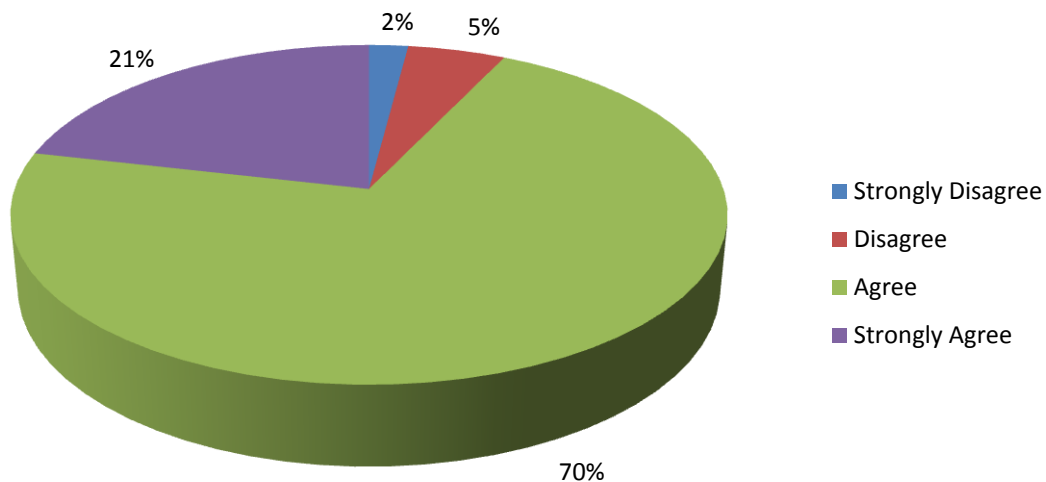
#### Parent Survey.

The purpose of the parent survey was to gain parent knowledge of standards and their opinion of traditional grades, to inform parents of what students are learning and how grades are determined. The survey was sent home in the students' backpacks (n=20) on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011. After being filled out by the parents of the students it was returned the next day when the students anonymously put them in a collection bin. Overall, the teacher researchers had a 59% (n=98) return rate from the parents. This survey had five statements that were responded to on a Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *agree*, and *strongly agree* with *strongly*



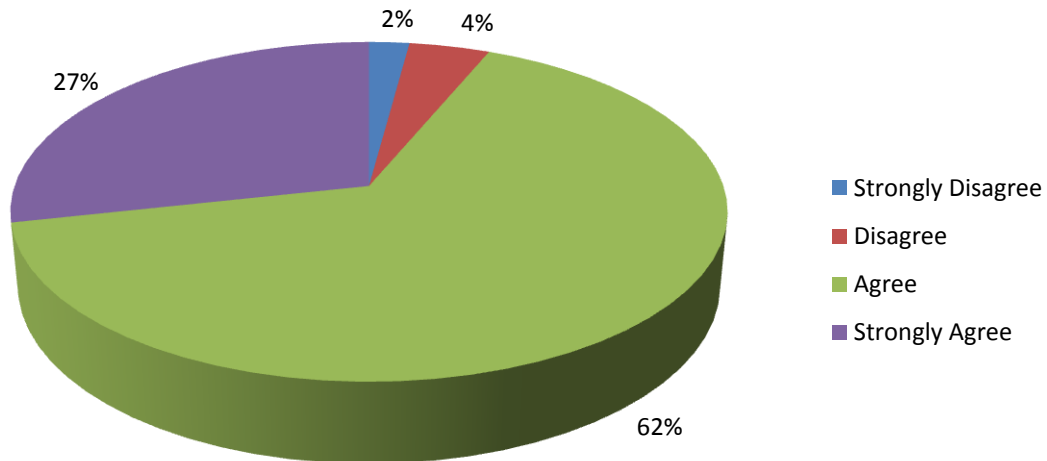
*disagree* being number one and strongly agree being number four. Refer to Appendices A and B to see the parent survey for Site A and Site B, respectively.

According to Figure 13, 7% (n=7) feel that their student's teacher is unable to explain their child's grade to them in a way that they can understand.



*Figure 13.* My student's teacher can explain to my satisfaction why he or she received certain grades (n=98).

A total of 6% (n=6) surveyed do not understand why their child received certain grades last year.



*Figure 14.* I understand the reasons why student received the grades he/she did last year (n=95).

Figure 15 below shows that 16% (n=16) of parents do not know their child's academic strengths and weaknesses.

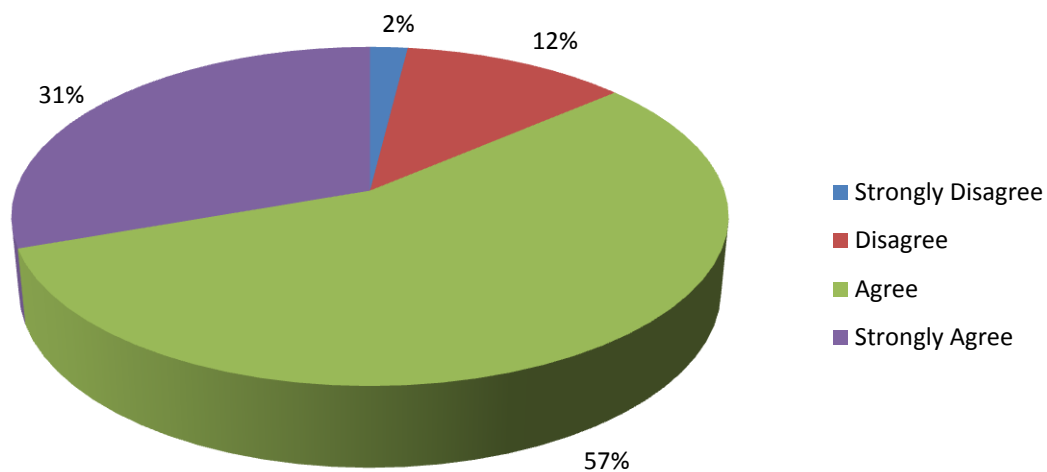
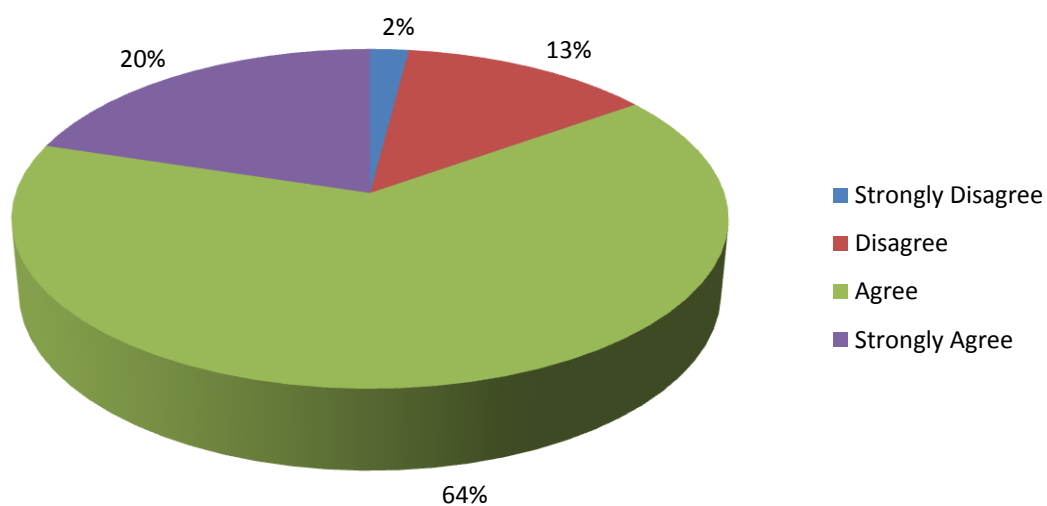


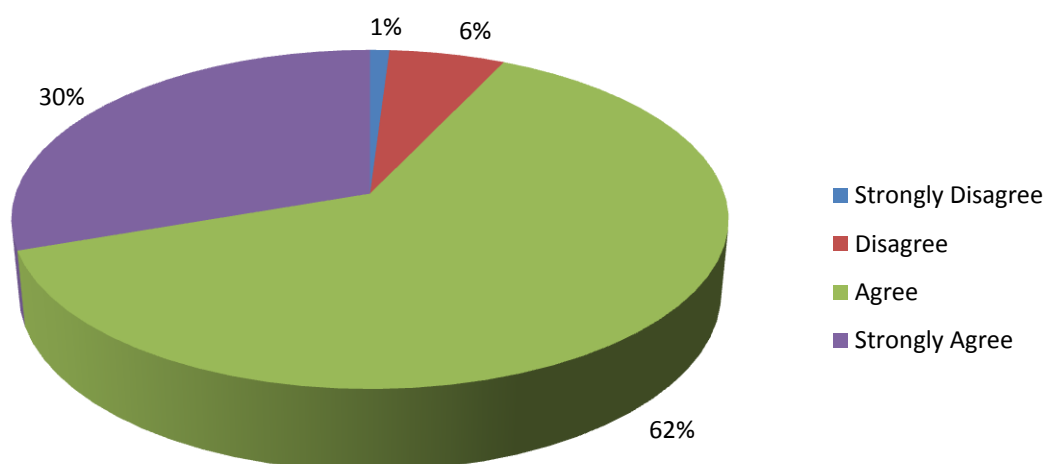
Figure 15. I know my student's strengths and weaknesses in the classroom (n=102).

Figure 16 below shows that 15% (n=15) of parents do not know the grade level standards for their child.



*Figure 16.* I am aware of the standards for this class that my student should meet by the end of the year (n=99).

In Figure 17 illustrates that 7% (n=7) of parents do not feel comfortable helping their child with their homework.



*Figure 17.* I feel comfortable enough to help my student with his/her homework (n=99).

### **Teacher Survey.**

The purpose of the teacher survey was to gain information about teachers' current grading practices. The survey was placed in the teacher's mailbox on September 12, 2011 to be completed at school in each teacher's classroom with request for return the next day on September 13, 2011. Fifteen teachers received a survey. Fourteen surveys (93%) were completed and returned. The teacher survey contained 5 questions using a Likert scale regarding their current grading practices. The response choices included *strongly disagree*, *disagree*,

*agree*, and *strongly agree*. The teachers were given a chance to add additional comments. Refer to Appendix C for the teacher survey.

Figure 18 showed that one teacher felt that they could not explain to parents what standards their child was not meeting.

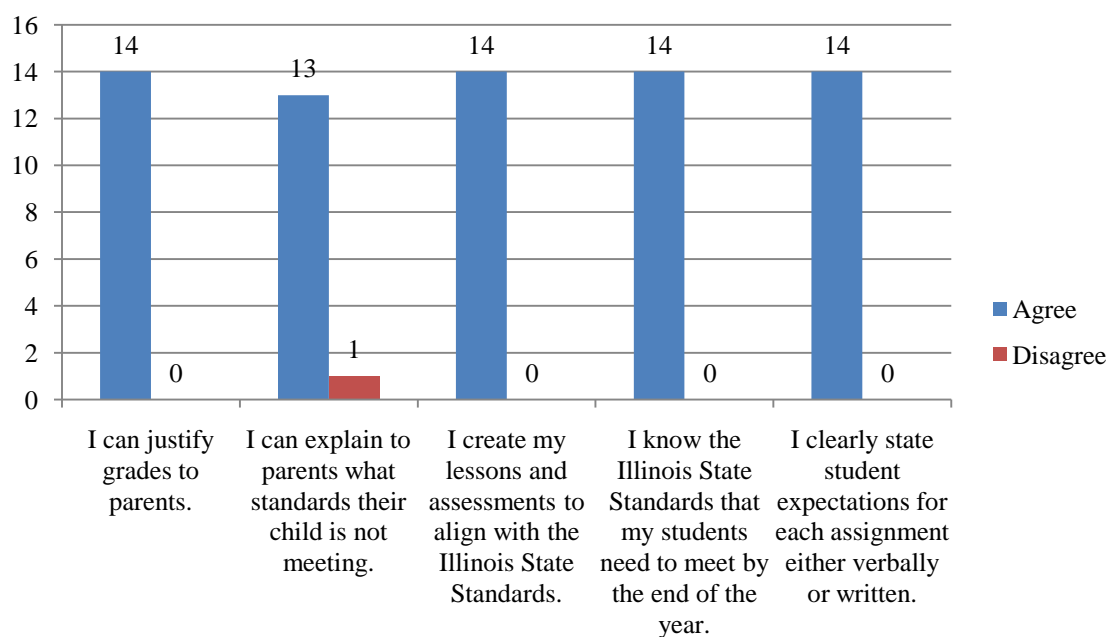


Figure 18. Teacher Survey (n=70)

### Teacher Interview.

The purpose of the teacher interviews was to gain information about teachers' current grading practices and their understanding of the state standards. The interviews took place on September 12, 2011 in the teachers' classroom. Three teachers were interviewed. The teacher interview had seven open-ended questions regarding their current grading practices and knowledge of state standards. Refer to Appendix D for the teacher interview questions. The interview posed seven open-ended questions. The teacher researcher analyzed the responses for question one, "If a parent were to call you and ask why their student received a "D", how would you explain it to them?" One respondent stated, "I would hold a conference before report

cards were sent out. I would provide copies of student work. Lastly, I would show data comparing the student to the rest of the students.” Another respondent declared, “I would describe the lessons the student missed, explain the procedure that was in place for missing assignments, and describe the interventions I took with the student concerning their grade.” The third respondent replied, “I would pull out the student portfolio and analyze why the student was getting a “D” and explain what the student could do to bring up his/her grade.”

When teacher researchers analyzed the responses for question “Do you feel the assessments you use are based on state standards?” two teachers (66%) felt that the assessments they used were based on the state/common core standards. One faculty member stated, “No, assessments are mandated by the district.”

When the teacher researchers analyzed the responses for question three, three (100%) answered yes that they knew all the standards for the courses they taught.

When the teacher researcher analyzed the responses for question four, three (100%) answered yes that they were confident they could teach and assess on the standards.

Question five asked teachers how they made sure each standard was addressed. One respondent stated, “I would look at the standards in lesson plans and use the curriculum that was provided to teach the standards. If I get through the curriculum, I would hit all the standards.” Another respondent acknowledged, “I use the standards to prepare my daily and weekly lesson plans. I have a list of the standards and can check them off as I complete them.” Another respondent confirmed, “I have the standard posted for the lesson so everyone in the room knows what is expected. I pre-assess, teach the lesson, and end with an exit card. I am able to analyze the data quickly and see if my students are meeting the standard.”

Question six asked teachers how concerned they thought parents were about their children's grades, one teacher responded, "Sometimes but it depends on the parents." Another teacher stated, "I believe that most parents are concerned about their child's grades. I also believe that many parents either do not know how or do not give their child the attention they need to complete homework. The most contacts I have are from few parents, but their contacts are many." Another teacher declared, "Most parents care. Perhaps a lot of parents do not know how to assist their child. Therefore they do not make themselves"

Question seven asked if they thought the grades that their students received in class correlated with their ability to learn material. One teacher answered, "Yes, but not including attendance issues and bad behavior." Another teacher avowed, "With their ability to learn –no, but with the amount of work they do-yes." Another teacher responded, "Yes, but not including attendance issues. If a student tries, he/she will learn in my classroom."

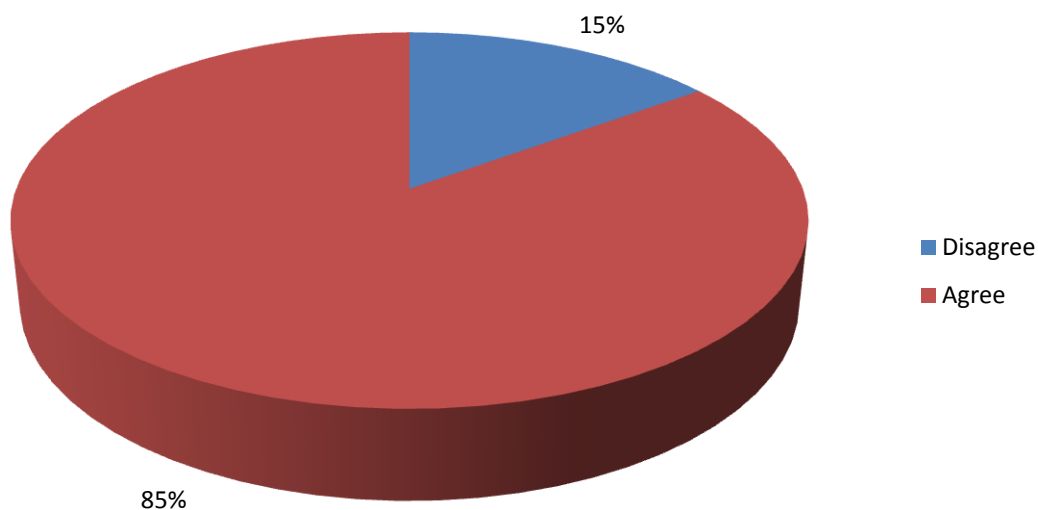
After analyzing the open-ended responses from the teacher interview, the teacher researchers found that three (100%) of the respondents knew and were confident they teach and assess the standards for their grade level and courses.

### **Student Survey.**

The purpose of the student survey was to gain knowledge of student understanding of teacher expectations, student understanding of what constitutes student grades, and student perception of traditional grading practices. These surveys were conducted on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and had a return rate of 100%. Site A and Site B were separated due to the large discrepancy of grade levels. One hundred thirty eight students at Site A were given a survey to complete in class with five statements requiring a Likert scale response of *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *agree*, and *strongly agree* with *strongly disagree* being number one and *strongly agree*

being number four. Refer to Appendix E to see the student survey for Site A. Site B had a survey of five yes or no questions which the teacher verbally asked the students in small groups. The 20 students responded anonymously by putting a green chip in a box if their answer was yes and a red chip in the box if their answer was no. Refer to Appendix F to see the student survey for Site B.

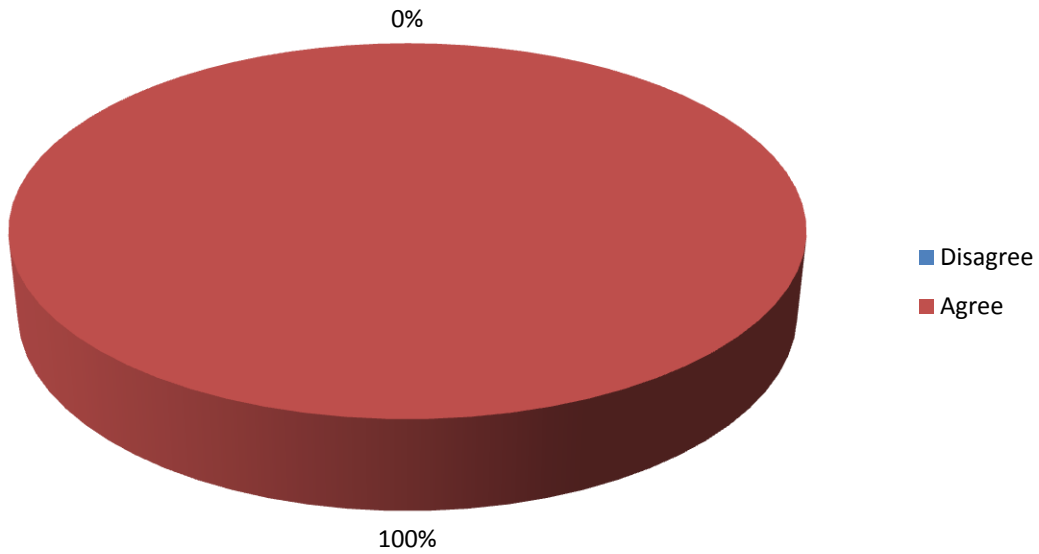
Figure 19 below represents that one out of every nine students (15%) surveyed felt that the grades they received were unfair.



*Figure 19.* Grades that I receive are fair (n=138) Site A.

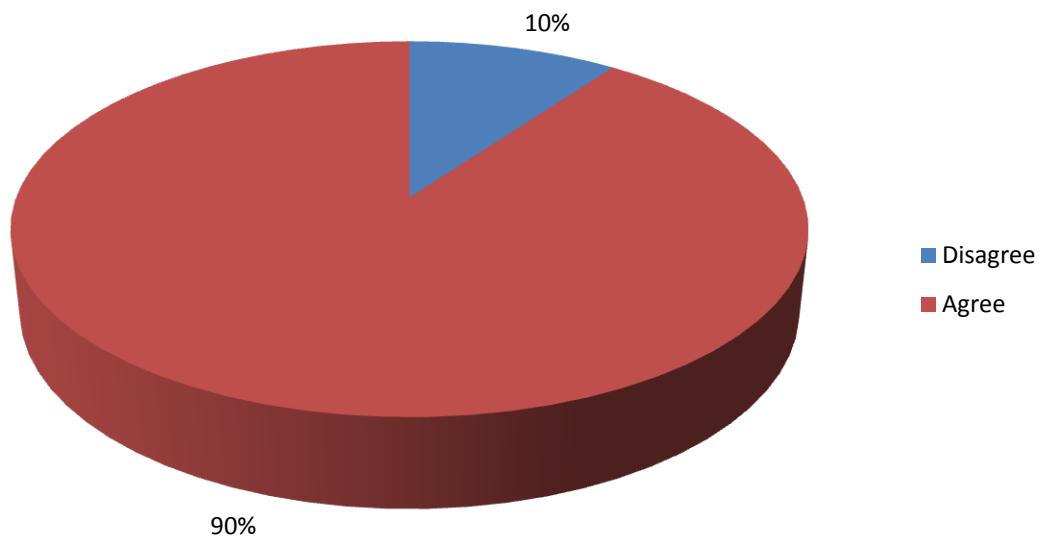
Since Site B was a kindergarten classroom, this question was altered for student understanding. Based on Figure 21, 100% (n=20) know what to do to get good grades in the classroom.





*Figure 20.* I know what to do to get a good grade (n=20) Site B.

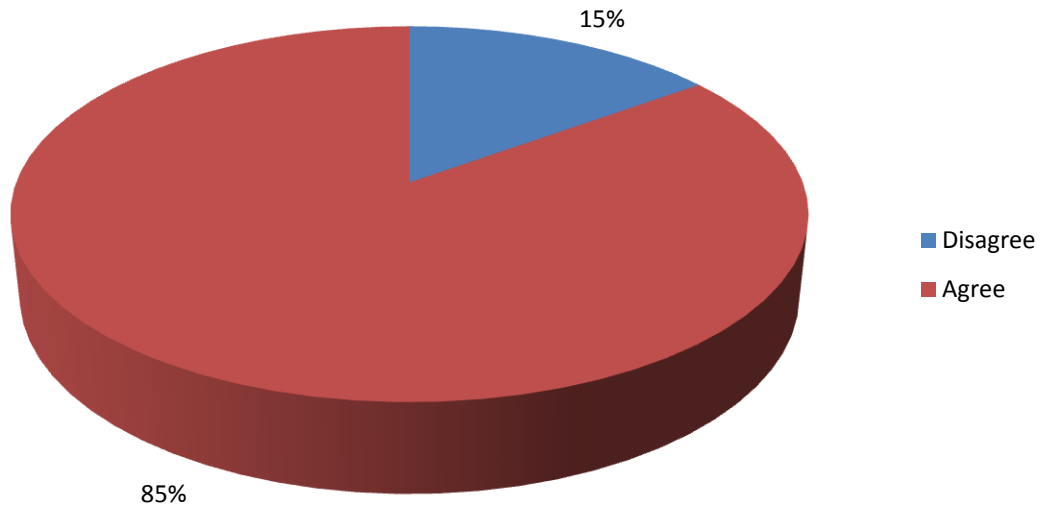
According to Figure 21, 10% (n=14) of students at Site A disagree that they know what their teacher expects from them on every assignment.



*Figure 21.* I know what my teacher expects from me on every assignment that is given (n=137)

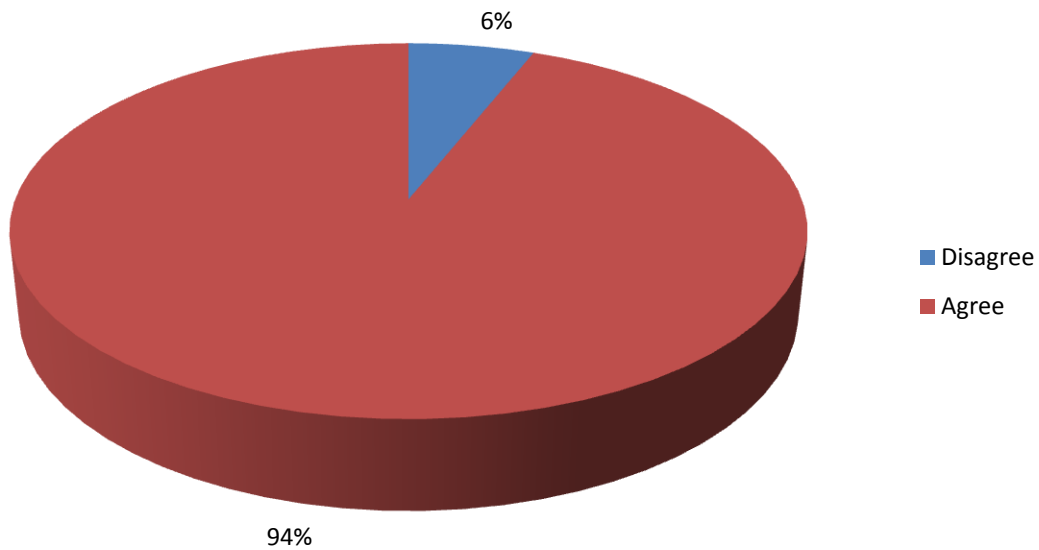
Site A.

Figure 22 below represents that 15% (n=3) of Site B students do not understand directions.



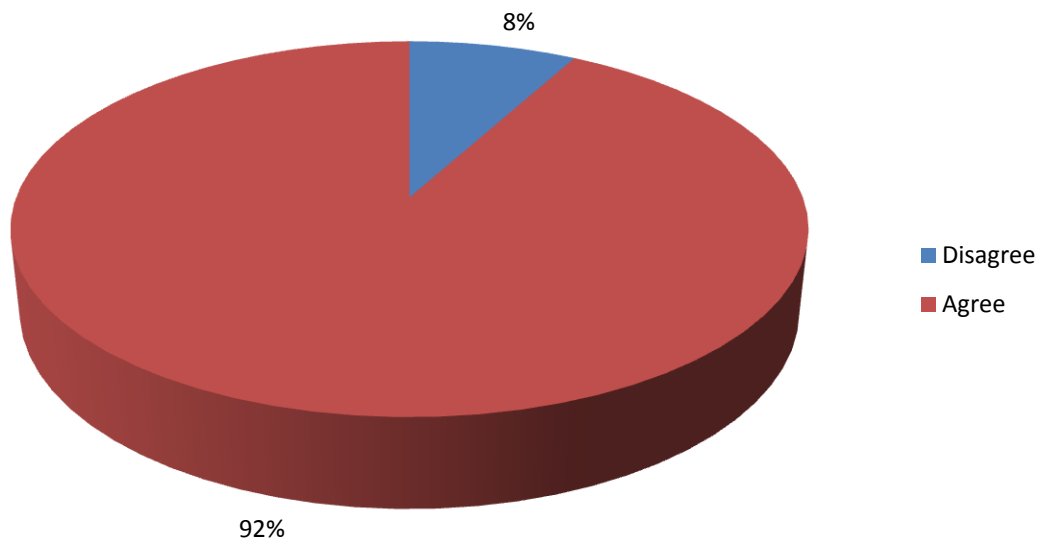
*Figure 22.* I understand directions (n=20) Site B.

Figure 23 shows that the teacher researchers found that 10 students (n=6%) of 162 at both Sites A and B do not know their classroom strengths and weaknesses where 152 students (n=94%) are aware.



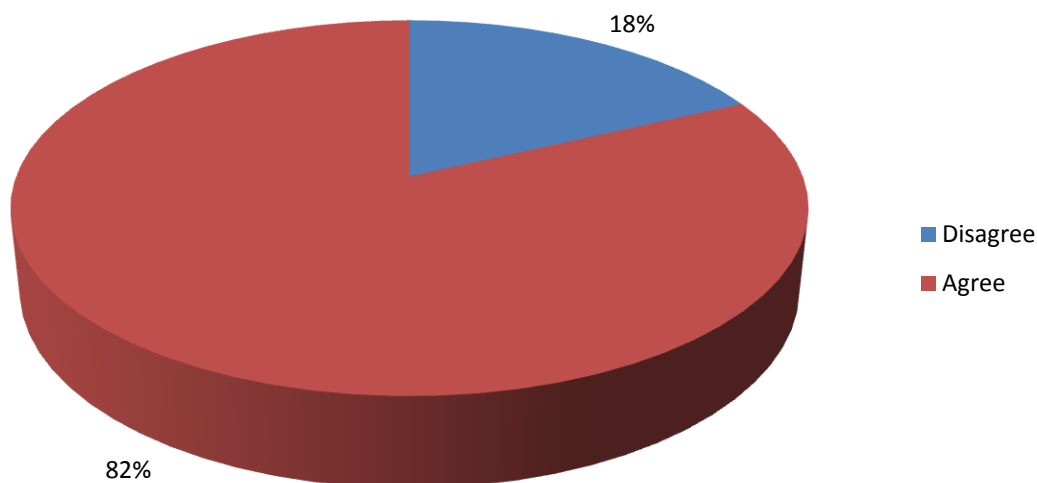
*Figure 23.* I know what I am good at and what I need help with in this class (n=162) Sites A and B.

Figure 24 represents the percentage of students at both sites who do not think that their teachers help clarify unknown information. Eight percent (n=13) feel that they are not receiving the extra help they need to be successful in the classroom.



*Figure 24.* My teacher helps me when I do not understand something (n=157) Sites A and B.

According to Figure 25, about 20% of students surveyed admitted that they do not ask a teacher for help when they do not understand something. That means that 32 students (n=158) are spending part of their school day unclear of the material that they are being taught.



*Figure 25.* I ask for help when I do not understand something (n=158).

### **Summary**

Based on the parent survey, the teacher researchers found that the terminology of standards-based grading is misunderstood by parents. The teacher researchers found that 15% (n=15) are not aware of the standards their student should be meeting by the end of the school year.

After analyzing the teacher survey and interviews, the teacher researchers discovered that the majority of teachers felt confident about knowing the standards, teaching to the standards, and justifying grades to parents. One teacher did not feel confident about talking to parents about a student's grade and its justification. All three interviewees agreed that they only use evidence of learning in their final summary grade; therefore, they do not include attendance, behavior, or missing work.

The student survey revealed that 16% of students (n=11) do not ask a teacher for help when they do not understand what is being taught. When a student does not ask for help, they fall further and further behind.

### **Reflection**

The teacher researchers feel that due to the high stakes testing, the stress of state and national standards is tremendous and it is possible that this is new information to the parents and they may not be familiar with the terminology. Question 4 of the parent survey states, "I am aware of the standards for this class that my student should meet by the end of the year." Figure 17 shows that 84% (n=83) parents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with this statement, yet they are unaware of what the state standards due to the transition to middle school or to school in general. Figure 16 illustrates that 9 out of 10 parents responded that they knew their students strengths and weaknesses in the classroom, yet when their student is struggling, these same parents call or email asking why their student has a low grade.

Upon analyzing the teacher surveys and interviews, the teacher researchers feel that the teachers are current on educational trends. Teachers use standards on a daily basis in their planning, teaching, student accountability, and assessments.

As for the students, the teacher researchers feel that the students answered questions according to how they thought the teachers wanted them to answer and were seeking to please them. There will always be some students who will not take responsibility for the grades they earned and will place blame on teachers no matter what.

### **Probable Causes**

The purpose for probable causes with traditional grading will provide insight about why traditional grading is flawed. Environmental factors are combined within the summary symbol

of A, B, C, D, or F. Students are not aware of their strengths and weaknesses within a subject area. Students are compared to one another not assessed as individuals. Teachers do not have adequate training on how to grade individual students. Therefore, grades become inconsistent and ineffective.

### **Standardized Testing and Test Scores.**

Standards-based reporting is not likely to be an effective way to summarize high-stakes testing results (Kane, 2004). There is no clear data yet that standards based reform translates to meaningful learning and a rise in test scores (Certo, Cauley, Moxley, & Chafin, 2008). So educators need to instruct in a way which will result in the highest possible student performance on standardized tests, as educators have a stronger accountability for results (Inman, Marlow, & Barron, 2004). Assessment questions pose a challenge because they must accurately assess learning outcomes that are consistent with the standards (Tognolini & Stanley, 2007). Test scores do not prove that students are being engaged in their learning (Certo, et al. 2008).

### **Problems with Traditional Grading.**

Traditional grades do not reflect true mastery of a concept because of the inadequacies of current grading methods (Marzano, 2000 as cited in Guskey, 2001) because they are not communicating accurate achievement (O'Connor, 2007). While traditional grades give a comprehensive summary symbol, they do not provide detail of specific strengths and weaknesses (Scott, 2005). Many teachers combine a large amount of evidence into a single summary grade, therefore, leading to poor instructional decisions, (O'Connor, 2007).

According to Ken O'Connor's book, *A Repair Kit for Grading 15 Fixes for Broken Grades*, fix number two states that grades are broken when students are penalized for submitting late work. Some teachers believe they need to knock an assignment down a grade so that grades



are “fair.” This distorts grades because the penalty does not reflect student achievement (2007). His fix number three states that grades are broken when points are awarded to students who do not demonstrate achievement of specific standards. Extra credit reflects something other than expected learning, hence distorting student achievement (2007). Fix six states that grades are broken when scores from cooperative learning groups are added to individual achievement scores (O’Connor, 2007). There is always a student who does more work and a student who does less, yet they receive the same grade. Due to all of these distortions, parents and teachers cannot pinpoint areas in which their students need reinforcement.

In *A Repair Kit for Grading 15 Fixes for Broken Grades* by Ken O’Connor further states that grades are broken when evidence is blended into one summary symbol. One symbol does not show students’ strengths and weaknesses. Student proficiency and mastery are not communicated in detail (O’Connor, 2007). Fix eight states that grades are broken when they are defined as traditional grades are defined (O’Connor, 2007). This summary symbol, or letter grade, is very difficult to interpret by students, parents and administrators, and definitions of each letter can vary from teacher to teacher (Scott, 2005).

Most teachers use norm-reference standards which focus on comparing students’ progress rather than individual progress (Guskey, 2001; Tognolini & Stanley, 2007). With a norm referenced grading system, weaker students never have the chance to feel successful in any classroom aspect or standard (O’Connor, 2007; Tognolini & Stanley, 2007). Norm referencing has no reference to the standard of performance (Tognolini & Stanley, 2007). Criterion-referenced standards compare student performance to a learning standard. This makes students focus on their individual success and not the success of others. Students spend too much time

looking for “the right answer” and focusing on things like grades, class ranking, and gold stars rather than the progress of their learning (Black & Wiliam, 2010; O’Connor 2007).

Fix 11 states grades are broken when scores are averaged together to create a summary symbol. Finding the average of a student’s scores include outlying grades. Usually these outliers bring a student’s grade down because they are low outliers (O’Connor, 2007). Fix 12 states grades are broken when zeroes are entered into a student’s academic record. Zeroes distort achievement (O’Connor, 2007). Another challenge of fix 12 is that if zeroes are entered into a student’s academic record, that student’s grade may never recover. If a student feels hopeless due to the effect of zeroes, they may become discouraged; take the zero to escape accountability, which may result in a discipline problem. (O’Connor, 2007). Fix 13 states that grades are broken when all assignments are recorded in a student’s academic record which refers back to fix 11 that includes averaging outlying grades (O’Connor, 2007). Fix 14 states that grades are broken when developmental improvement is averaged with beginning scores. Averaging does not show a student’s level of proficiency (O’Connor, 2007). When beginning a new skill, student grades will be lower until that skill has time to develop. When averaged, these grades lower a student’s overall percentage score. Simply calculating percentages on assignment and tests is no longer enough, students need to be assessed on progress of curriculum standards (Colby, 1999). Fix 15 states that grades are broken when students do not understand the expectations of how grades are determined (O’Connor, 2007).

### **Behavior.**

Grades need to be pure. They cannot include student behaviors, only student achievement (O’Connor, 2007). Inaccurate grades occur because teachers do not separate grades and behaviors (O’Connor, 2007). When grades are based on factors related to attitude, such as

effort and self-esteem, they provide parents and students with misleading information about a student's performance in class and do not give a clear depiction of their academic achievement (Scott, 2005). Unfortunately, many students have poor attitudes and are not self-motivated (Certo, et al., 2008). Teachers use grades as extrinsic motivators to control student behavior. At the middle school and high school levels, there is no system to communicate outstanding or poor academic and/or social behaviors (O'Connor, 2007). "Extrinsic motivators increase students' focus on the reward or punishment rather than on the desired behavior. They give a rise to the need to continuously increase the amount of the reward or punishment to elicit the desired behavior," (O'Connor, 2007, p. 11). Grades motivate successful students, but they penalize average students who are working to their potential (O'Connor, 2007).

#### **A Need for Individualization of Student Learners.**

Students with special needs, 504 plans or IEPs, should not be graded in according to the norm-references because they do not fit the mold of a general education students. Teachers struggle to assign accurate and fair grades to students who have special needs and who are meeting the standards to best of their ability (Jung & Guskey, 2009). There is little guidance in how to grade students with special needs and disabilities (Guskey& Jung, 2006). Few teachers have found grading practices that satisfy the diverse needs of students, parents, administrators, other teachers, and community members (Guskey, 2001). Most teachers apply informal, individual grading adaptations for such students which communicate little about the students' actual performance or level of achievement. Teachers seem to think of fairness as uniformity, but since all students are different, uniformity might actually be unfair (O'Connor, 2007). Fair is not always equal and equal is not always fair. Grading for special education students in general education classes is difficult and policies are unclear for the general education teacher (Jung &

Guskey, 2009). Any educational approach that does not invite teachers to teach individuals and meet their diverse needs is deeply flawed. (Tomlinson, 2000; Turner, 1995, as cited in Inman, et al., 2004). There is an issue with equality and students' equal opportunity to learn in standards based education reform (Noble & LeMahieu, 1997). Not all students perform well on tests, but this does not mean they are not bright students. They should be assessed in a variety of ways to meet their diverse needs. Standards are meaningless unless tested, but students need to be graded on more than just tests (Goodwin, 2003).

### **Professional Development and Teacher Interpretation.**

Little formal assessment training occurs on standards-based grading, while teachers need to be well versed in assessment techniques in order to apply them to the classroom and the assessments being made (Tognolini & Stanley, 2007). In addition to the lack of training, in regards to assessment, teachers do not have enough professional development to be able to incorporate technology and more hands-on learning activities (Hinder, 2006). Administrators at the district level need to be clear on what standards need to be taught at each grade level and should offer professional development for teachers so they can learn different ways to teach the standards (Hammond, 1997). Standards based education professional development needs to be effective for all teachers and needs to give teachers a clear description of what it is really about (Noble & LeMahieu, 1997).

There should not be a problem with consistency depending on which teacher a student has for class. In many schools, grading is done by independent teachers, which make grades messy and inconsistent. Some teachers assess through tests and others just through homework and projects, this causes an inconsistency among teachers (Marzano, 1996). Teachers must accurately interpret the standards in order to judge if a student has applied them consistently.

The misinterpretation of standards is a challenge (Tognolini & Stanley, 2007). A passing score has to be set across grade and subject level and is not to be left up to individual teacher interpretation. It cannot be different depending on the professional making the judgment. Another challenge is making sure that all teachers are applying common scoring rubrics when grading (Tognolini & Stanley, 2007).

### **Teacher Reservations.**

Many teachers have reservations about standards-based grading. Problems have occurred across the United States and in school districts due to fuzzy or varying definitions of standards and variance of what is meant by “standard”. In some cases, there are too many standards so that teachers, students, and parents get overloaded. In many cases, a standardized state test is the means with which districts test for proficiency. Schools and teachers feel the loss of autonomy and structure when making decisions about what is best for their students (Clark, D. & Clark, S., 2000). With the implementation of No Child Left Behind, students have lost their individuality. Education now has a one size fits all mentality. Teachers are concerned as to where the standards will come from, whether it is national, state, or district policy and who will decide which standards are to be used and met (Marzano, 1996).

Many teachers have a lack of understanding of standards (Noble & LeMahieu, 1997). Teachers who know their subject matter see standards as an intrusion in their classroom (Baines & Stanley, 2006). Some teachers are uncertain about confronting the establishment of grading and that reporting criterion is written ambiguously which causes lack of support (Reckase, 2004; Tognolini & Stanley, 2007). Going from a letter grade report card to a standard based report card is challenging, because teachers are concerned about how to evaluate, record, and communicate students’ progress in a standards-based system (Colby, 1999; Guskey & Jung,

2006). Standards-based assessments involve time consuming planning. Assessments must be designed for specific outcomes and standards. “Educators face the daunting task of how best to grade and report student learning in terms of those standards” (Guskey, 2001 p. 2). Much effort must be spent making the transition from norm referencing to standards referencing. Many problems occur in the introductory stages of transition (Tognolini & Stanley, 2007).

### **Government Accountability and the Public Perception.**

In recent years, governments have been more and more vigorous about making changes to raise the standards of learning (Black & Wiliam, 2010). The No Child Left Behind Act requires each state to identify and adopt standards for student achievement and to test for them annually (Bull, 2006). There is a gap between local and state standards when it comes to aligning the curriculum with the standards (Noble & LeMahieu, 1997). The public and government have different views on how schools need to be reformed (Goodwin, 2003). Parents, students, and teachers are feeling left out on decision making when it comes to standard based reform (Goodwin, 2003). Parents feel in order to become active in their child’s education; they need specific information about their child’s strengths and weaknesses, a level of detail that traditional report cards do not provide (Jung & Guskey, 2009).

### **Summary**

Many of the authors cited agree that high stakes testing does not reflect student achievement. A problem of traditional grading is that there are a number of outside influences that do not reflect student achievement, such as attendance and behavior. Students are compared to one another according to the traditional norm referenced system of grading, rather than comparing their work to the appropriate standard. A summary symbol given at the end of a semester or quarter does not detail a student’s strengths and weaknesses. Outlying grades tend to

skew a student's grade when averaged into the final summary score. Students with special needs should not be held to the same norm reference as other students. There is a need for set terminology, common rubrics, and assessments for teachers. Traditional grades leave room for teacher interpretation.

## Chapter 3

### The Solution Strategy

#### Review of the Literature

Standards-based grading sets high standards for students, which in turn creates higher achievement rates, and holds schools accountable for meeting standards and raising test scores (Certo, Cauley, Moxley & Chafin, 2008; Inman, Marlow & Barron, 2004). These educational standards come from national and state documents (Marzano, 1996). District policies, assessments, curriculum, and instruction are clearly aligned with the standards at each grade level in all schools (Hammond, 1997; Marzano, 2010; Voltz, Sims & Nelson; Doherty & Hilberg, 2008).

Subject area and grade level standards are used as the core of the curriculum (Marzano, 1996). Standards help to identify and provide clarity and focus for what teachers want students to learn (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999; Scott, 2005). Standards referencing brings to the forefront a student's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers, parents, and students can focus on the details of what a student needs to be successful. Standards-based learning is not about seat time, but what students know, understand, and can do (O'Connor, 2007). This type of education incorporates the use of multiple intelligences, cooperative learning, tiered lessons, and learning centers (Guskey, 2001; Jung & Guskey, 2009; Tomlinson, 2000; Voltz, Sims, & Nelson, 2010). School learning reconnects with real world situations in standards-based grading. These approaches to education make students rethink school culture and create a rich learning environment. By the time students graduate from high school they will have a solid base understanding of critical learning skills (Winger, 2009; Doherty & Hilber, 2008). Therefore, standard based grading can



be measured over time since the performance standards stay consistent by subject and over the years (Tognolini & Stanley, 2007).

### **Teacher Collaboration.**

Teachers need to work together to create common terminology, rubrics, and assessments in order to be consistent in grade levels, subject areas, school buildings, and districts across the country. Districts/teachers need to develop a criterion rich description for a limited number of levels of achievement. Levels must be defined so that meeting the expectation of the standard is clearly identified in the appropriate language. These levels should be defined through teacher collaboration (O'Connor, 2007). Levels of success need to be clearly defined before applying standards-based grading (Kane, 2004) such as: exceeds the standards, meets the standard, approaching the standard, below the standard, and warning of failing the standard.

Standard-based education promotes collaboration between educators to promote student progress and achievement (Voltz, Sims, & Nelson). Subject area teachers form committees to create lessons to teach to the standards (Marzano, 1996) in this way, standards-based grading will have teachers on the same page when it comes to grading and evaluating their students (Marzano, 2010). When teachers know and understand what standards need to be met, they can collaborate to form a concrete curriculum that is aligned with the specific standards that the students need to know for that grade level (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999). Teachers may need help from an IEP team to develop standards and goals (Jung & Guskey, 2009) for students with special needs, because it is important to develop a strong standard based curriculum for inclusive classrooms (Voltz, Sims, & Nelson). Standards-based education continues to promote collaboration not only between teachers and students, but with parents as well (Voltz, Sims, & Nelson) by giving parents the tools to help their students at home.

### **Teacher Accountability.**

Schmoker and Marzano (1999) state that standards-based education makes sure teachers know the standards, how to teach lessons that align with the standards, and how to collaborate with other teachers. Teachers must create a culture of success, backed by a belief that all students can achieve (Black & Wiliam, 2010; Voltz et al., 2010). Teachers who used an array of teaching strategies produced more student engagement; thus creating independent more self-regulating thinkers and learners (Certo, Cauley, Moxley, & Chafin, 2008). By teaching a real world technique, students learn how to do something right and succeed (Scriffiny, 2008). This will motivate students to work hard toward understanding the standard. By using a standards-based system, educators focus on teaching critical knowledge and skills (Doherty & Hilberg, 2008; Voltz et al. 2010).

Classroom teachers need a clear cut curriculum from their district that shows what standards need to be met and how can they can teach to proficiency. Teachers need to create an environment where students understand the importance of learning a specific standard, therefore students know what is expected of them (O'Connor, 2007). Increasing intrinsic motivation and decreasing extrinsic motivation are best classroom practices (O'Connor, 2007).

To use a standards-based grading system correctly, Colby (1999) suggests that teachers ask themselves these questions:

- Do the standards reflect the knowledge and skills we want the students to possess?
- Are they measurable?
- Are teachers consistently using standards to guide classroom instruction?

- Are assessments purposefully aligned with standards and instruction?  
(Colby, 1999).

Colby (1999) continues by recommending a four step process to design a grade book.

1. Develop a workable format, possibly one page grid for each student.
2. Develop codes for the type of assessment, level of performance, and time period when the assessment occurred by possibly using colors and letters.
3. Create an easy-access grade book for all of the students' progress in a three-ring binder.
4. Monitor the implementation of the system and make adjustments where necessary.

A well kept standard-based grade book shows teachers exactly where a student is and what standard the student may need help with (Scriffiny, 2008).

Teachers have no control over certain factors within the school and with students. In standard-based grading, teachers do have control over how to assess student understanding of a standard (Scriffiny, 2008). Teachers are able to assess student progress or difficulties and adapt work to meet student needs (Black & Wiliam, 2010). "When high quality standards drive assessment and instruction decisions, teachers report on how well each student progresses according to each standard, then the standards-based grading system will become essential" (Colby, 1999, p.11).

### **Student Accountability.**

Students need to be held accountable for all standards that are set for their grade level (Marzano, 1996). This is made easy for them when standards-based education lets students

know which standards are important to learn (Hammond, 1997). The students know what the standards are and they know what they need to do in order to meet or master that specific standard (Hammond, 1997). Standard-based education measures students learning of a standard and is not influenced by student behavior (Hammond, 1997). The key to having competent and proficient students is to evaluate their achievement using similar criteria that is consistently applied at all levels (O'Connor, 2007). Students will improve their knowledge and understanding when they are lead to talk about their understanding in their own ways in class discussions (Black & Wiliam, 2010). In the standards-based reform, students who are knowledgeable about a standard can recall the information that was taught and students who understand the information can denote higher level thinking skills (Winger, 2009). "Pupils should be trained in self-assessment so that they can understand the main purposes of their learning and thereby grasp what they need to do to achieve" (Black & Wiliam, 2010, p.5).

Students should be shown how to monitor their progress so they can understand their own strengths and weaknesses and set goals for themselves. With this understanding, students can lead parent-teacher conferences (O'Connor, 2007). When students are engaged, they have the opportunity to be autonomous and make decisions about their learning (Certo, Cauley, Moxley, & Chafin, 2008). Students are more engaged when instruction includes authentic learning experiences and challenging activities (Certo, Cauley, Moxley, & Chafin, 2008). Students were motivated by teachers who showed care and concern and correlated teacher caring with the way they presented and taught lessons (Certo, Cauley, Moxley, & Chafin, 2008). Caring teachers were seen as teachers who asked for and valued students' ideas (Certo, Cauley, Moxley, & Chafin, 2008). Students must drive teacher assessment to improve attitudes and achievement. Students must be involved to make communication clear (O'Connor, 2007). Teachers should

challenge students to be successful (Doherty & Hilberg, 2008). Low achievers can concentrate on specific problems and teachers can give them a clear picture of what is wrong and how to work on it (Black & Wiliam, 2010). The reward for learning should be the feeling of success (O'Connor, 2007). Overall, student progress and attitude relies heavily on teacher attitudes.

### **Assessment.**

Assessments accomplish their purpose when students know what they are supposed to be learning, receive regular feedback, and know what is expected in order to meet each standard. Standards-based grading with formative assessments lets students know where they stand with the standards and where they need to improve (Marzano, 2010). This system makes it easy to address those not meeting expectations (Colby, 1999). In standards-based grading, formative assessment is a process. Colby (1999) and Marzano (2010) agree that students that take the time to learn the standard and prove to their teacher they understand the standard should not be penalized for their earliest work. Formative assessments make teachers aware of what standards the students are not meeting and how can they re-teach those standards (Marzano, 2010).

Teachers know what is expected in order to help students reach proficiency of the standards. For this reason, assessments, assignments, and tests are aligned to the standards and benchmarks (Hammond, 1997). A standards-based program provides flexibility for a wide range of learners and great assessment tools to meet standards (Inman, Marlow, & Barron, 2004). When assessing students on a specific standard, teachers can use traditional tests, portfolios, informal observations, and performance tasks so that they have tangible evidence and the students are more engaged (Certo et al., 2008; Marzano, 1996; Scott, 2005). Teachers can create assessments that overlap standards so that if a student is missing an assignment, it will be

assessed eventually to obtain sufficient evidence to determine the proficiency of the standard (O'Connor, 2007). In 2008, Doherty and Hilberg suggested that teachers assess through dialogue with students. If a student can verbalize they know and understand a specific standard, then teachers can assign that student a grade (Doherty & Hilberg, 2008). Teachers can measure progress through observation, discussion in the classroom, and reading student work (Black & Wiliam, 2010). O'Connor (2007) says that grades need to support learning, which means that formative assessments are designed to help students improve, while summative assessments are designed to measure student achievement. As students continue to improve on a standard, teachers must be willing to let new evidence replace old evidence when deciding on a summary symbol.

### **Rubrics.**

Standards-based grading needs to be attached to some kind of criterion-referenced scale such as a rubric (Kane, 2004; Marzano, 1996). A rubric that is designed well can be followed by each student at each grade level to make sure the students are mastering a standard. Teachers and students can then make assessments and assignments that will fit with the rubrics (Marzano, 2010). Rubrics help define quality and can improve student performance, as well as monitor it, by making teacher expectations clear and how students can meet these expectations (Goodrich Andrade, 1997). Students can evaluate themselves with rubrics to better understand the standards-based grading system (Colby, 1999).

### **Grading Fixes.**

Grades must be consistent, accurate, meaningful, honest, fair, and must support learning (Guskey, 2001; O'Connor, 2007). To say that grades need to be consistent means that

performance standards need to be the same from teacher to teacher. Therefore, grades must be determined in a similar way and must be applied in the same way. This requires teachers to decide together what “proficient” means (Guskey, 2001; O’Connor, 2007). To say that grades need to be meaningful means that they must communicate useful information to students and parents. They must directly reflect specific standards, which in turn, require teachers to set up their grade books by standards so they can see which standards students meet or are approaching (O’Connor, 2007; Winger, 2009). Standards-based record keeping will show the growth or decline of standards amongst the students. Students need to prove through assignments, projects, and tests that they understand the standard (Scriffiny, 2008). Hence, teachers can keep track on what standards are being met and which standards are not being met. Standards-based grades are not fixed. It is natural to start off with lower scores with an increase as the student continues to learn more about the standard. The scores change, but the standard never changes (Tognolini & Stanley, 2007). Teachers can also pull out students who are not meeting and re-teach to make sure they will meet the standard that is being taught (Colby, 1999; Guskey, 2001; Marzano, 2010; O’Connor, 2007; Winger, 2009). Grades should be determined, not figured, by using professional judgment and a student’s scoring tendencies (O’Connor, 2007). Standards-based grading gets rid of meaningless paperwork and meaningless homework. With this new reform every paper that comes from a student will have meaning and demonstrated they understood the standard (Scriffiny, 2008). Therefore, standards-based grades can be interpreted much easier than a single letter grade (Scott, 2005).

“Fairness is much more about equity of opportunity than it is about uniformity.”

(O’Connor, 2007, p.iii). If schools report behavior separate from achievement, this report shows the behaviors that the school values. Teachers can communicate appropriate behaviors such as

effort, persistence, accuracy, and timeliness. This descriptive feedback should elicit desired student behavior (O'Connor, 2007). Standard-based grading should strictly grade students on where they met or mastered the standard. They should not be graded on the nonacademic factors (Winger, 2009). Therefore, if a student cheats on an assignment, do not give them a double penalty of both a failing grade and a punitive punishment. This failing grade distorts student achievement. The students can complete another assessment in order to establish accurate achievement of the standard (O'Connor, 2007). In addition, if an assignment is incomplete, it may be entered in the grade book until the assignment is completed or until there is enough other evidence for a teacher to get a clear picture of that student's achievement (O'Connor, 2007). In real life, deadlines are negotiable. As long as the student discusses the deadline with the teacher, and is not a repeat offender, teachers should be flexible (O'Connor, 2007). Another aspect of standards-based grading is teachers should have enough evidence that they do not need extra credit. If a student's grade is on the borderline, have the student complete extra evidence. If the evidence is better than earlier evidence, proficient understanding has been achieved (O'Connor, 2007).

### **Summary**

Standards-based grading sets high standards for students and puts them in charge of their own learning by letting them set goals based on specific learning standards. With standards-based grading teachers can have common rubrics and assessments and use common language in grading. Teachers can better communicate expectations and grades to both students and parents when they can cite specific standards the student should be meeting.



## **Project Objective and Processing Statements**

As a result of implementing standards-based grading during the period of September 6, 2011 through December 16, 2011, the students and parents of the students of the three teacher researchers were made aware of which Illinois State Standards they met or were proficient in and which they were approaching being proficient. Parents and students also knew where students' strengths and weaknesses were by the evidence collected by the teacher researcher and the standards report given to them.

The teacher researchers had to do the following tasks in implementing the research project:

- Teacher researchers familiarized themselves with the Illinois State Standards for the content area in which they taught.
- Teacher researchers taught to the Illinois State Standards.
- Teacher researchers created rubrics to assess students.

## **Project Action Plan**

The following project action plan provided a weekly timeline to guide the teacher researchers in implementing standards-based grading.

### **Pre-week: August 29-September 2, 2011**

- Make copies of parent letter and consent form
- Make copies of parent survey
- Make copies of student survey
- Make copies of teacher survey
- Make copies of teacher interview questions
- Set up a standards-based grading grade book

### **Week 1: September 6-9, 2011**

- Send home parent letter and consent form and student assent letter (if applicable) with student on September 6<sup>th</sup>

- Collect parent consent form by September 9<sup>th</sup>
- Discuss with students the Illinois State Standards for current grade level/subject area
- Discuss grading descriptors: Exceeds, meets, approaching, below standards
- Students will set goals for themselves

### **Week 2: September 12- 16, 2011**

- Teacher researcher at Site A will have a small group discussion where students will put chips in boxes
- Teacher researchers at Site B will distribute student survey to the students
- Analyze student survey
- Send out parent survey September 12<sup>th</sup>
- Parent survey returned by September 13<sup>th</sup>
- Analyze parent survey
- Each teacher researcher will distribute 5 teacher surveys
- Analyze teacher survey
- Interview a teacher
- Analyze interview answer

### **Week 3-13: September 19- December 2, 2011**

- Teacher researchers will create lesson plans, assessment, and rubrics that are clearly aligned with the Illinois State Standards.
- Teacher researchers will create a rich learning environment by providing a clear focus on what standards the students need to meet with rubrics and assessments.
- Teacher researchers will track the progress of their students with their assessments and standards-based grade book at grade level/subject area.
- Student progress reports will be sent home bi-weekly to address their strengths and weaknesses.

### **Week 14: December 5-9, 2011**

- Make copies of student survey
- Make copies of parent survey
- Make copies of teacher survey
- Teacher researcher at Site A will have a small group discussion where students will put colorful chips in boxes
- Teacher researchers at Site B will distribute student survey to the students
- Send out parent survey
- Parent survey returned by December 9<sup>th</sup>
- Analyze parent survey
- Each teacher researcher will distribute 5 teacher surveys
- Analyze teacher survey

### **Week 15: Post Documentation December 12-16, 2011**

- Complete student survey analysis
- Complete parent survey analysis
- Complete teacher survey analysis

#### **Methods of Assessment**

The first method of pre-assessment was a parent survey designed to gain parent knowledge of standards and opinion of traditional grades because parents should be informed of what students are learning and how grades are determined. This was sent home with 300 students, on September 12, 2011 and parents completed and returned anonymously on September 13, 2011. This same survey was conducted again in the same manner from December 5, 2011 through December 9, 2011 for post documentation and results were compared to the previous survey.

Next, there was a teacher survey to gain information about teachers' current grading practices from five teachers for each teacher researcher (n=15). The survey was distributed September 12, 2011 and was returned anonymously on September 13, 2011 during pre-documentation and was again used for post documentation December 5, 2011 through December 9, 2011. The data was compared to note any changes.

A student survey was conducted on September 12, 2011 during pre documentation to gain knowledge of student understanding of what constitutes their grades and teacher expectations to understand their perceptions of grading. In middle school, students completed an anonymous paper survey. In the elementary school, the teacher conducted small group surveys in which students put different colors of chips into a box depending on their feelings in response to questions given by the teacher. These surveys were again conducted in the same manner for

post documentation during the week of December 5, 2011 through December 9, 2011 and results were compared and analyzed.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Project Results**

The purpose of this action research project was to better address students' strengths and weakness according to state standards. Traditional grades gave a summary score without going into specific detail. Often, student behavior and outside factors influenced the summary score. Standard-based grading practices reflected the students' pure mastery of a concept. Teacher researchers implemented standards-based grading practices over the course of this study. This included sending home bi-weekly progress reports detailing progress that students made toward individual state learning standards and adapting lesson plans and teaching methods to help students improve upon a set of chosen state standards. Participants included 138 students at the sixth and seventh grade levels at Site A and 20 kindergarteners at Site B, for a total of 158 students with 95 parents completing surveys. The research study was conducted from September 6<sup>th</sup> through December 9<sup>th</sup> of 2011.

#### **Historical Description of the Intervention**

##### **Site A.**

September 6<sup>th</sup> through September 9<sup>th</sup> of 2011 marked our first week of pre-documentation. During this week, we distributed parent and student consent forms (n=242). We collected 74% (n=104) of parent consent forms. We were disappointed that more parental consent forms were not returned, but yet we were not surprised since we have taught middle school for many years. We discussed with our students the basis of our action research project which was to implement standard-based grading practices in the classroom. At first, the students were a bit confused in Teacher Researcher A1 classes because standards did not seem stressed at the elementary level the way they were at the middle school level. On the other hand, Teacher

Researcher A2 found that students were familiar with learning standards because teachers were required to have them posted and referred to them at the beginning of each class on a daily basis at the middle school level. The students were excited to see what standards were going to be covered. They liked the preview of the entire quarter in a quick snapshot. This week also marked the first open house of the year. Our teammates allowed us to be the teacher representative to talk to the parents about the standards-based grading system. Upon completion of our speeches and the collection of parental consent forms, we were surprised by the lack of questions. We both wondered if we had done a spectacular job, or if the concept was so new that it was not quite understood in this early stage of implementation.

The second week of pre-documentation, September 12<sup>th</sup> to September 16<sup>th</sup>, we continued distributing and collecting student and teacher surveys, and conducted a teacher interview. While analyzing the parent surveys, most parents seemed to strongly agree with the questions asked. We inferred that these were the parents of our students who came into the classroom with a strong educational foundation because their parents were positive forces in their lives. One thing we found interesting was that 64 parents (n= 62%) strongly agreed or agreed that they knew what standards their child should meet by the end of the year. At this pre-documentation stage, we thought that our numbers would have been lower and grown during the post-documentation stage. We asked ourselves if the question was misleading or if parents truly understood what was asked. Most parents said they agreed with the question that they knew their child's strengths and weaknesses, yet we received phone calls from parents who did not know why their child was failing. We hoped that this project pinpointed what standard the child struggled with. By looking at the standards, both teachers and parents figured out an intervention at school and at home. We found it interesting that all of the teachers surveyed

strongly agreed that their lessons and assessments aligned to state standards. This initiative had been pushed for that past several years in our middle school building, so this did not come as a surprise to us. We were pleased with the support that our fellow teachers were giving us about our research and implementation of standards-based grading. Our students overwhelmingly agreed with the statements on their survey. Even though we did everything possible to guarantee anonymity, we wondered if they answered the way they thought we wanted them to answer. My, Teacher Researcher A1, students said they were comfortable asking me for help. For me, this was a great starting point because now students knew the specific standards they needed help with. I, Teacher Researcher A2, was surprised the most while analyzing student surveys that 11 students strongly disagreed or disagreed about asking for help. Only one commented that she/he did not ask for help due to personal shyness. I was forced to reflect upon my teaching style and if I was making concepts, expectations, and direction clear. I had to ask myself if I was making myself available to my students so that they could become proficient in the standard being taught.

The first week of intervention was the week of September 19<sup>th</sup>. During this week we sent home a parent letter stating the standards to be mastered during first quarter. See Appendix G for the letter. We prepared for this week by pulling out the standards that the district wanted taught by analyzing the curriculum guide. We planned our lessons, assessments, and grading rubrics based on the Illinois State standards, but we also took each standard and created a “Target Grade Sheet” for our students. This sheet had 8 to 10 standards that were to be taught during the first quarter of the school year. These were the same standards that went home in the parent letter. We planned to use these sheets as our student grade books as well as letting each student keep their own individual grade sheet for their own reference. Each standard was written

out with an area underneath it to record individual student achievement over the grading period. Each section had a pre-assessment and post-assessment line so that students could see their growth from start to finish. See Appendix H. As we graded and returned papers to students, they filled out their target grade sheet based on what standard their work showed evidence. Students then began using a file folder portfolio to collect evidence of their achievement of the various standards. My students, Teacher Researcher A1, were eager to place their first pronoun assignment grade into their portfolio. When they realized most of them did not meet the standard, they were unhappy. I explained how I would work with them to make sure each student was proficient at the standard. I re-taught the lesson, and the students asked many questions and were involved. The next day they completed another pronoun assignment and the majority of students exceeded the standard. Some students who did not meet this standard stayed in for lunch for extra help. This was a great feeling because my students realized they did not understand a concept, and they were motivated to prove to me that they could and would master the standard. Portfolios were kept in our classrooms, but were accessible to students at any time. The preparation for this took quite a bit of time since we had to look through the entire quarter as opposed to just one unit of study. This was time consuming because in the past, we had just verbally mentioned the standard, but now we had to physically attach a standard to every worksheet or classroom presentation. We felt like we were putting a lot of effort and work into something that we had not seen the benefits, and we started to have some doubts if all of the front loading work was going to pay off.

In the second week of interventions beginning on Monday September 26<sup>th</sup>, we continued to create plans, assessments, and grading rubrics based on the Illinois State standards. Students continued to maintain their individual target sheets and evidence portfolio. We continued to



work one on one with students who were not proficient in a specific standard. I, Teacher Researcher A1, had two parents stop in to see the portfolio. They questioned the purpose of having one. I was able to pinpoint where their child needed to improve and provide activities that they could work on at home. The parents now understood what a standard was and how they could help their child at home. Honestly it was scary explaining this project and why I was doing it but in the end I knew I could tell a parent exactly where their child needed to improve and what I was going to do in order to get their child to at least meet if not exceed the standard. As multiple pieces of evidence were compiled for each standard, I, Teacher Researcher A2, told my students that they would be allowed to drop one grade for each standard as long as I had enough evidence to clearly see if they were proficient at a specific standard. I showed them an example of a fictional student whom was not proficiency at the beginning of the standard practice, but by the end the student was proficient or exceeding. I asked which grade should be dropped, and of course they chose an early grade that was below standard. My students were thrilled that I had given them this option. They understood how when you begin something, you are not always proficient until you have enough practice to truly be proficient. I made it perfectly clear that if a student did not have enough evidence, one dropped grade could not be justified. This common sense approach is one of Ken O'Conner's grading fixes mentioned earlier in the review of the literature. I found it interesting that this suggestion, as simple and practical as it is, made such a huge impact on my kids without them even applying it to their own grades yet. One student shared with the class that he was relieved to hear this because he always felt penalized if he made one mistake. We sent home copies of current student grades this week. Parents signed and returned them. The only negative aspect of this week was the paperwork. We felt that we had to be right on top of my grading to that our students had immediate

feedback. We had no problem correcting exit cards, but when it came to editing essays, we felt bogged down. We wanted to keep my students as up to date with their grades as possible, but we were starting to get behind.

During week three of intervention beginning October 3<sup>rd</sup>, the students continued to chart their scores. We continued to create plans, assessments, and grading rubrics based on the Illinois State standards. This week was invigorating compared to last week's overwhelming mound of paperwork. Our principal asked to see what we were doing to implement the concept of standards-based grading in our classrooms. While we were a bit nervous, we knew what we were doing was solid and that our students were benefiting from our hard work and effort. We presented our individual student portfolios and grade books. We told him how we were holding students accountable for producing evidence of proficiency in each of the standard on the target sheet. We informed him that we were allowing students to come in for lunch to prove proficiency on alternative assessments if first attempts were not proficient. He commented that we were really going above and beyond what was expected of a teacher in the district. He had a lot of positive feedback for us. He also mentioned that the district office was spearheading a focus group of middle school teacher to discuss transitioning the middle schools to standards-based grading and report cards. He asked if we wanted to be two of teachers to represent our school. We accepted to say the least. Many of our students struggled with filling out their target sheets. We decided that we would take time this week to individually assist them with their charting. During this time, we were able to talk with individual students about the areas they needed to improve and gave them a high five on the standards they meet proficiency on or exceeded on. We were beginning to realize this way of teaching and grading was making us

better teachers. Students were able to verbalize where they needed help. This gave them confidence and motivation to set a goal and achieve it.

Weeks four and five of the intervention covered October 10<sup>th</sup> through October 21<sup>st</sup>. During these weeks, we continued to create plans, assessments, and grading rubrics based on the Illinois State standards. Our students were falling into a routine by now. They were using the terms exceeds, proficient, approaching, below, and warning. We often heard under breathe comments and some sighs of relief when papers were returned. Our students commented on their target sheets as their score finally showed a pattern of success. Students who normally struggled started to meet the standards. Confidence abounded in our classrooms. We sent home progress reports for parents to see the improvements their child had made. The comments that came back were very exciting. One comment was thankful for assisting a child and about the open lines of communication between school and home. Unfortunately, I, Teacher Reseacher A1, had students who were not meeting the 6<sup>th</sup> grade standards due to a language barrier or because of an IEP. This frustrated me because I could not lower the standards. I decided to adjust their portfolio and made them do different activities that showed me they understood the standard. The only thing that happened out of the ordinary was that the district opened its parent portal online. The parent portal was a way for parents to check their student's current grades online. We were very excited this happened because parents could quickly see their child's grade. Parents were able to monitor the assignments, quizzes, and tests. They were able to see where their child was struggling. We were shocked that no parents called or emailed this week. We were expecting some sort of communication concerning the parent portal. Because of this, we did not have to send home printed grade sheets for parents to see on a bi-weekly basis for the remained of the action research.

Week six of the intervention, October 24<sup>th</sup> to October 28<sup>th</sup>, was the end of the first quarter. During this week we allowed the students with enough evidence for each standard to drop the lowest grade per standard on their target sheet. We saw them reap the benefit of all of their hard work, organization, and responsibility of the first quarter. Even though students had been recording their grades on their target sheets all quarter, the grade drop was a significant milestone. It was if they finally saw what one score could do to skew a grade. If a student did not have all of their evidence, we told them that we would not drop their lowest grade. We wondered if students would stay on top of assignments better during second quarter due to this requirement. We knew we had quite a bit of work ahead of us before final grades were due. We had to go through each individual portfolio, check which grade the student chose to drop, record that in our grade books, and in our grade book online. Again, it was a lot of work, but to see students' scores truly reflect what they were learning in class was unexplainable. Among all of our students, only two failed first quarter. This was due to chronic truancy and a lack of evidence to support proficiency of a standard. This number was incredibly low compared to years past. We were pleased to see this outcome due to standards-based grading.

October 31<sup>st</sup> to November 4<sup>th</sup> was the seventh week of intervention. Second quarter was starting and we had to look through the district curriculum guide again for what Illinois State standards we would be teaching. The problem was that the district did not have a guide to distribute. Instead, we had the students get ready for parent-teacher conferences. We individually conference with students and went through their portfolio analyzing where they met or exceeded the standards and where they needed to improve. The students made a plan for where they needed to improve that they were to discuss with their parents.

The eighth week of the intervention, November 7<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup>, had us back on track. We continued to create plans, assessments, and grading rubrics based on the Illinois State standards. We distributed second quarter parent letters, see Appendix I. Students began filling out target sheets as evidence of standards was returned. The students knew what to do. They were eager to see their grades this week. Students were really accountable for their grades. To see their smiles was priceless, but on the other hand, when they asked for help, we felt validated. Parents were calling and emailing with questions, and we were able to pinpoint student strengths and weaknesses. We were pleased when parents asked for guidance on how to help at home.

We had parent-teacher conferences during the ninth week of intervention, November 14<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup>. We let our students lead conferences with their parents, so we told them to explain their portfolio and target sheet to their parents. We were stunned at how eloquently our students could explain the process of standards-based grading. We were pleased to hear our students use the terminology that they had been hearing from us for the entire first quarter. It was exciting to see parents already aware on how their child was doing in the classroom. We were able to pull out portfolios and answer any parental questions. Parents were receptive to dropping the lowest score for each standard and thought that it was a fair practice. One parent did comment that she appreciated that students were given more than one chance to prove they knew a standard. Parents of students who did not have all of their evidence did not seem upset when their student could not drop a grade. We only saw half of our parents during conferences which was disappointing. As middle school teachers, we can only do so much in our classrooms to promote academic success. Academic success was a combination of home and school. Students needed that reinforcement. Even if a parent had no intention of helping their child, we did send home review sheets so the students would work on the standard they were not meeting. Overall,

conferences were successful, and we were validated that standard-based grading was the way to go.

We finished our tenth and eleventh intervention weeks of November 21<sup>st</sup> to December 2<sup>nd</sup> continuing to create plans, assessments, and grading rubrics based on the Illinois State standards. Instead of becoming complacent, we challenged ourselves to come up with some different types of activities to attain evidence of proficiency of state standards. For one activity, we let groups of students create their own rubrics. They did a good job since they had seen so many of our different rubrics up to this point. We were amused to hear the terminology that they were using that sounded so much like our own. We were working hard, and our students were successful.

During the final weeks of standards-based implementations, November 28<sup>th</sup> through December 9<sup>th</sup>, we distributed student and parent surveys. We analyzed our results and found that our interventions did work. Parents and students were now aware of the standards and what needed to be done to meet those standards. I, Teacher Researcher A1, was happy to see that my students still wanted to place their scores on their target sheet. I had made an impact of them that made them accountable for their achievement. I, Teacher Researcher A2, did receive more written feedback from parents. One parent commented that there needed to be a more detailed progress reports to help her child with his weaknesses. Since I cannot report online or on a report card the way I do in my grade book, there was a lack of continuity. I understood her frustration. Another parent thanked me for my hard work because it brought to light the lack of communication between herself and her child about grades. One student made the remark that she/he finally felt that it was alright to screw up an assignment at first because fixing it was an option. Another one stated that the more practices on a standard, the smarter she/he felt.

**Site B.**

September 6<sup>th</sup> through September 9<sup>th</sup> of 2011 marked our first week of pre-documentation. In this week I distributed and collected parent consent forms (n=20). I received consent from 80% (n=18) of the parents, which I was pleased with. I also discussed the issue of standards with my kindergarten students and tried my best to explain to them what standards and grade descriptors were in a language they could understand. With this being their first time in a school setting, it was a struggle to get them to understand the concept of standards and that it is a set of skills they should have by the time they leave kindergarten. I gave examples such as being able to recite the alphabet, and that helped them understand some but my negative point for this week was that I still felt they weren't quite grasping the concept of standards. For this reason I decided to wait until intervention weeks before having the students set goals for themselves.

During the second week of pre-documentation from September 12<sup>th</sup> through September 16<sup>th</sup>, I distributed and analyzed parent, teacher, and student surveys in addition to conducting a teacher interview. For the parent survey, I was interested to see that parents claim to know a lot about state standards, but I had to question if that was really the case or if they just wanted it to look that way. I was disappointed to see that not all of my teacher surveys were returned. My student survey was difficult to conduct because my students are beginning kindergarteners and cannot read. I worked with them in small groups and they responded to each of my questions with a green chip if they were in agreement with the statement or red if they were not. I felt like the students may have been just answering the questions however they thought I wanted them to answer, although I told them many times it was anonymous. My positive point for this week was that the teacher I interviewed already had very similar grading practices to what I was planning to implement, which means she could be someone I could learn from or go to with questions.

The first week of interventions was the week of September 19<sup>th</sup>. During this week I prepared a plan in which I went through the common core standards for math and language arts and categorized which standards I thought would be most important for students to learn in first, second, third, or fourth quarter. I then created lesson plans for the next two weeks using the standards I had classified for early first quarter and began teaching with a goal in mind. As a first year kindergarten teacher, I found that this made it very easy and manageable to decide what to teach and when. I felt confident that my lessons were teaching the students topics that were the most important and developmentally appropriate for them.

In the second week of interventions beginning on Monday September 26<sup>th</sup>, I analyzed the students' progress on a specific set of standards. This included working with each student individually to see how high they can count, what numbers and letters they can identify and if they know their alphabet. I was glad to this because it gave me a great idea of their starting point so I can monitor progress throughout the semester. I sent it home as the first bi-weekly progress report and received comments that parents appreciated being informed of how their students are doing. I felt that it also gave them an idea of what is important to learn as a kindergartener.

During week three of interventions beginning October 3<sup>rd</sup>, students set goals for themselves using state standards. I felt that it helped to assess them first last week so they already have an idea of which areas could use more practice. I gave them a list of seven goals to choose from as something they would continue to work on throughout the year. Some students put a lot of thought into choosing their goal and were very motivated to work towards it. However, as a whole the process was a little chaotic. Many students could not settle on just one goal and wanted to circle all of them because they want to get better at a lot of things and did not understand the concept of a main goal. Some students wanted to set unrealistic goals such as



being able to count to “90 billion”. Also, many students tried to choose a goal they have already met because then they could be proud and say they met their goal, which was not the idea.

Something I noted as interesting was that when I met with parents shortly after at conferences, they did not seem interested to hear what goal their child had set for themselves.

Week four of interventions, October 10<sup>th</sup> through the 14<sup>th</sup> was my time to send home my second bi-weekly progress report to parents. The negative side of this was that it seemed like I had just done it and assessing kindergarteners is very time consuming because they need to be assessed one on one for the most part. On the positive side of things, I heard from a number of parents that with these reports they now know what to practice at home with their children and do so more often. I have already noticed an improvement and can tell they are working at home.

Week five of interventions, October 17<sup>th</sup> through 21<sup>st</sup> happened to be the week of report card testing for my school. I felt that I did not have nearly the stress that some of my colleagues had in scrambling to test 25 students on 20 standards because I had already been assessing them all year and had an idea of where they were. I also already had a collection of evidence to back up their grades and show progress. It also helped that students were already used to progress monitoring. On the other hand, I did have to convert all of my grades in my grade book for report cards because the school’s grading descriptors are different than mine and include meets, progressing, and needs improvement.

During week six from October 24<sup>th</sup> through October 28<sup>th</sup>, I submitted report card grades. I felt like it was easier because I already had a standards based grade book with everything I needed for the report cards; however it seemed redundant to be sending home grades and entering them into the computer when they have already been receiving bi-weekly reports but in

a different format. I found it interesting that our school report cards were already broken down into skills, yet not all of those skills were in line with the state standards.

October 31<sup>st</sup> through November 4<sup>th</sup> was our seventh week of implementation and also the week of parent teacher conferences at my school. I liked that parents had no surprises at conferences because they were already informed of how their students were doing. It was also nice that they already were aware of the curriculum and what students were learning in kindergarten. I was glad to hear many parents were helping work with their students at home because they knew what their deficiencies are. However, I find it interesting that some particular parents said they had been practicing with their child, yet I have not noticed an improvement and they are still really struggling. A negative aspect of conferences was that I found out that some parents cannot read and therefore had not gained anything from any of the progress reports that were being sent home.

Weeks eight November 7<sup>th</sup> through week ten November 22<sup>nd</sup> of implementation were pretty by the book for me with nothing out of the ordinary to report. I continued teaching and assessing based on the state standards and sending home bi-weekly reports. I continue to be amazed at how much my students are learning and how many of them have already met their goals of being able to read a certain amount of sight words, count to a certain number and so on.

In week eleven of interventions, November 28<sup>th</sup>, I had a parent request to come meet with me. She said that she wanted to know how her daughter is doing in school and what she can do help her. I was frustrated by this because I just sent home progress report outlining her progress in meeting each of the standards, accompanied by a packet of flashcards for letters, sight words, and numbers and a list of reading strategies and ways to help at home. If this is not enough, I do

not know what more I can do! I discussed this issue with other teachers in the building and no one seemed to have suggestions to appease this particular parent.

During the twelfth and final week of standard-based implementations from December 5<sup>th</sup> through the 9<sup>th</sup>, I conducted and analyzed student and parent surveys. Most parents showed they knew more about their child's progress this year than last year (if their child was in pre-k), which shows that our interventions were working. However, I still had one parent who gave all negative answers to the survey even though I tried my best to educate all parents in the best way possible. It is interesting that I feel my students still do not really understand the concept of a survey and are putting in the answers they feel I want to see, even though it is anonymous.

### **Description of Interventions.**

The first intervention the teacher researchers implemented was the use of rubrics and assessments. Teachers adjusted their grade books so that they would reflect the rubrics and assessments of the standards. A rubric was used so it can be followed by each student at each grade level to make sure the students were mastering a standard. Teachers and students made assignments and assessments that fit with the rubrics (Marzano, 2010). Students evaluated themselves using rubrics to better understand the standards they needed to master. On the other hand, assessments accomplished their purpose when students knew what they needed to be learning, receive regular feedback, and know what was expected in order to meet each standard (Marzano, 2010). Many types of assessments were used in order to see if the students meet or did not meet a specific standard. Teachers monitored progress through formative assessments such as observations, exit cards, short quizzes, projects, papers, assignments, and discussions. This helped teachers see what standards their students were meeting and which ones they were not meeting. Teachers re-taught those specific standards. With formative assessments, teachers

saw the growth of each individual student. Summative assessments were designed to measure the student's achievement for each standard that was covered.

The second intervention strategy involved the teacher researchers attempting to hold students accountable for all standards that are set for their grade level (Marzano, 1996). The teacher researchers provided a goal/target sheet that provided the specific standards that the students need to know in order to meet or master (Hammond, 1997). The students filled in their weekly target sheet with assignments and assessments. The students were able to monitor their progress and were aware of what standards they may need help with. They identified their strengths and weaknesses and set goals for themselves. If a student showed an area of weakness, they came in for assistance before school, at lunch, or after school for an alternative assignment. During this time, the teacher helped the student become proficient with that specific standard. Therefore, students who were knowledgeable about a standard could recall information that was previously taught and those students who understood the information can denote higher level thinking skills (Winger, 2009). Implementing a goal/target sheet made students understand what they needed to learn and increased their self esteem. See Appendix H for goal/target sheet.

The third intervention strategy involved the teacher researchers informing parents and guardians through a letter stating what standards their child was expected to master within this quarter. Standard-based grading brought to the forefront a student's strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, parents could focus on the details of what their student needs to be successful (O'Connor, 2007). This provided communication between the teacher and the parent. Parents were aware of how they can help their child at home. Teachers sent additional work home for students and parents to work on to strengthen their understanding of a specific standard. When the teachers sent home a progress report the parents/guardians were aware of the standards and

were able to see the strengths and weaknesses of their child. During parent teacher conference, parents know exactly where their child needs help. Time is not wasted in trying to figure out where their student has a weakness. Teachers were able to pinpoint the weakness and provide assistance on what the students needs to do to become proficient. Everyone was on the same page and together helped the student become successful. See Appendix G for parent letter.

### **Reflection.**

#### **Teacher Researcher A1.**

As a result of implementing these interventions in my classroom, I, Teacher Researcher A1, have learned the importance of standard-based grading. I saw how it benefitted my students, their parents, and me. I know my students were very interested and eager every week when we charted their grades to see if they improved or declined. If they saw they went down in a specific standard, they would take the initiative to come ask for help. It amazed me to see how the students were motivated to do the assignment right the first time. They wanted to prove to me they understood the standard. They took pride in their work. Parents complemented me on how standard-based grading and portfolios helped them understand where their child needs help. Parents asked for advice on how they could help their child at home. I am a better teacher because of this research project. I am now capable of seeing which standards students struggle with. This gives me a chance to assess and re-teach that specific standard. Knowing what standards I need to address within my curriculum has given me the opportunity to produce daily activities and assessments that drive my instruction. Overall, I had a great experience and really benefited from this research project. I am a happier teacher because of it.

**Teacher Researcher A2.**

Standards-based grading has had a profound effect on me as a teacher. Grading was a institution in education that had been ingrained in me as a college undergraduate. After being in education for 16 years, I found it ironic that I decided to research a topic that had not changed during my professional career. I was surprised how one facet of teaching affected the rest of my view of education. I had a new found appreciation for my students as individuals. In a society where students were data, standards-based grading made me look at the strengths and weaknesses of my students individually. I learned that my students enjoyed having expectations placed upon them. When given proper direction and guidance, they wanted to meet my expectations and achieve proficiency. I felt like this group of students was the most accountable class that I have had throughout my career. My students knew their strengths and weaknesses and felt comfortable asking for extra help at school and at home. Simple things like giving students multiple opportunities to prove their knowledge of a standard were important for me to experience in a district that expected me to teach a mile wide and an inch deep. I was pleased to see that parents were able to step up and help their student when a specific standard was not met. Being direct and clearly stating a student's weakness helped both students, parents and myself since all three parties involved were working together. This action research project was quite the undertaking for me as a mother of three elementary aged children and the wife of a traveling professional. I have exceeded my personal expectations, yet as a professional, I had a taste of researching and implementing a very effective grading strategy that has made me a better teacher. I felt like I needed to ask myself what else was out there and what else I could bring into my classroom to make me a better teacher for my students. There were conversations at school that I avoided before, after this project I joined them and added to them meaningfully.

### **Teacher Researcher B.**

As a result of implementing these interventions in my classroom, I, Teacher Researcher B, have learned how beneficial standards-based grading can be for students, parents, and the teacher. I learned how helpful it can be to use state standards to map your curriculum and guide your lesson plans and assessments. I was new to teaching kindergarten and would not have known where to start without using standards as a tool. In addition, I grew as a teacher because I learned so much from the other teacher researchers in my group as we were able to share our experiences, both good and bad. I also learned that parents really appreciate being informed on how their children are doing. Many teachers think that parents are not willing to work with their child at home, but really they just need in guidance as to what they should be working on and then are happy to do it. I too, feel that I benefitted as a teacher and grew to be a better teacher through constant progress monitoring and always knowing where my students needed more help or re-teaching and in what areas they could be further challenged. Overall, I feel that this research project was a great experience that helped guide me through my first year of teaching kindergarten and helped me to grow as a professional.

### **Presentation and Analysis of Results**

The purpose of this action research project was to better address students' strengths and weakness according to state standards, teacher researchers implemented standards-based grading practices. The three teacher researchers found that traditional grades did not indicate specific strengths and weaknesses for students, parents, and teachers. Areas researched were bilingual kindergarten and first grade combined, sixth-grade language arts, and seventh-grade English. The teacher researchers used a student survey and parent survey to gather information about the vagueness of traditional grades. One hundred thirty-eight students at the sixth and seventh grade

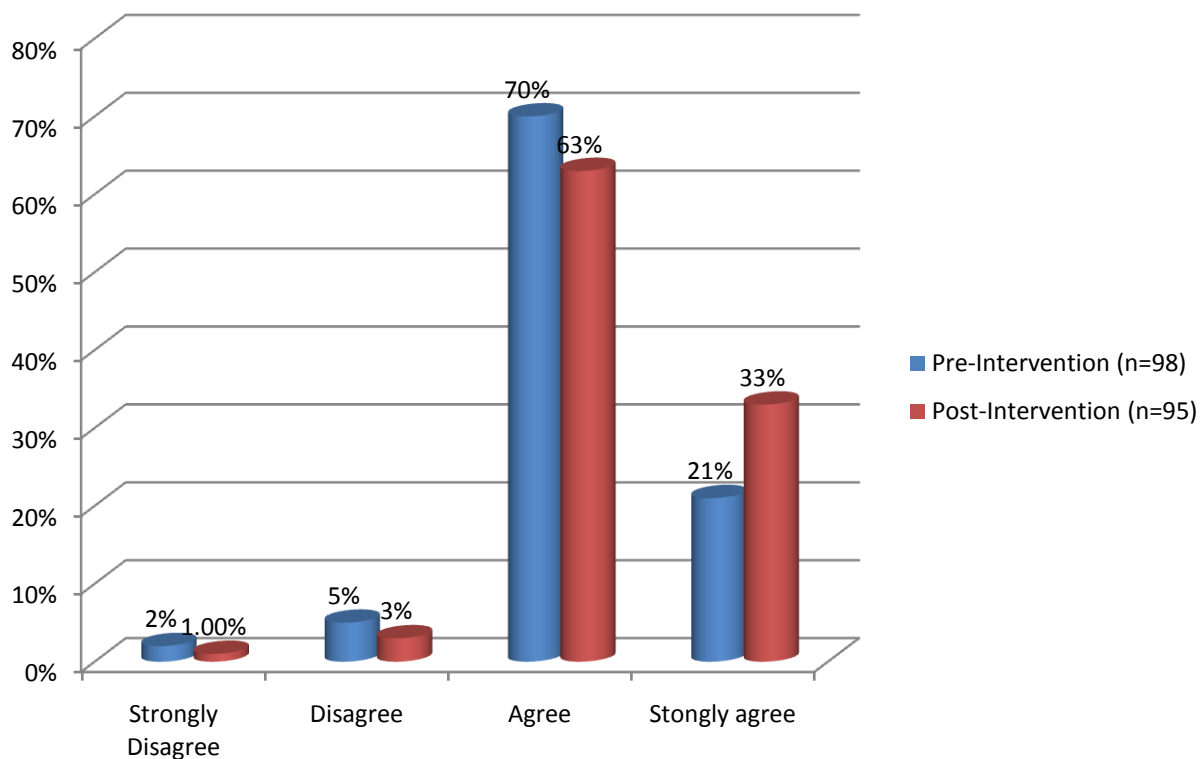
levels at Site A and 20 kindergarteners at Site B, for a total of 158 students, participated by responding to a student survey about their familiarity with standards-based grading. This tool was the same tool that was used during the pre-documentation. The survey was administered during the post-documentation week of December 12, 2011 to December 16, 2011. The graphs shown below show the data for post-intervention.

### **Parent Survey.**

The purpose of the parent survey was to gain parent knowledge of standards and to compare their previous perceptions of grading practices to how they feel about the standards-based grading policies the teacher researchers have been implementing. The survey was sent home (n=158) in the students' backpacks on December 5th, 2012. After being filled out by the parents of the students it was returned the next day when the students anonymously put them in a collection bin. Overall, the teacher researchers had a 60% (n=95) return rate from the parents. This survey had five statements that were responded to on a Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *agree*, and *strongly agree* with *strongly disagree* being number one and *strongly agree* being number four. Refer to Appendices A and B to see the parent survey for Site A and Site B, respectively.

The purpose of the following question represented by Figure 27 was to find out if parents now feel that their student's teacher is better able to explain their student's grade to them in a comprehensible manner. We found that 96% of parents (n=91) feel that their student's teacher is able to explain their student's grade to them in a way that they can understand.

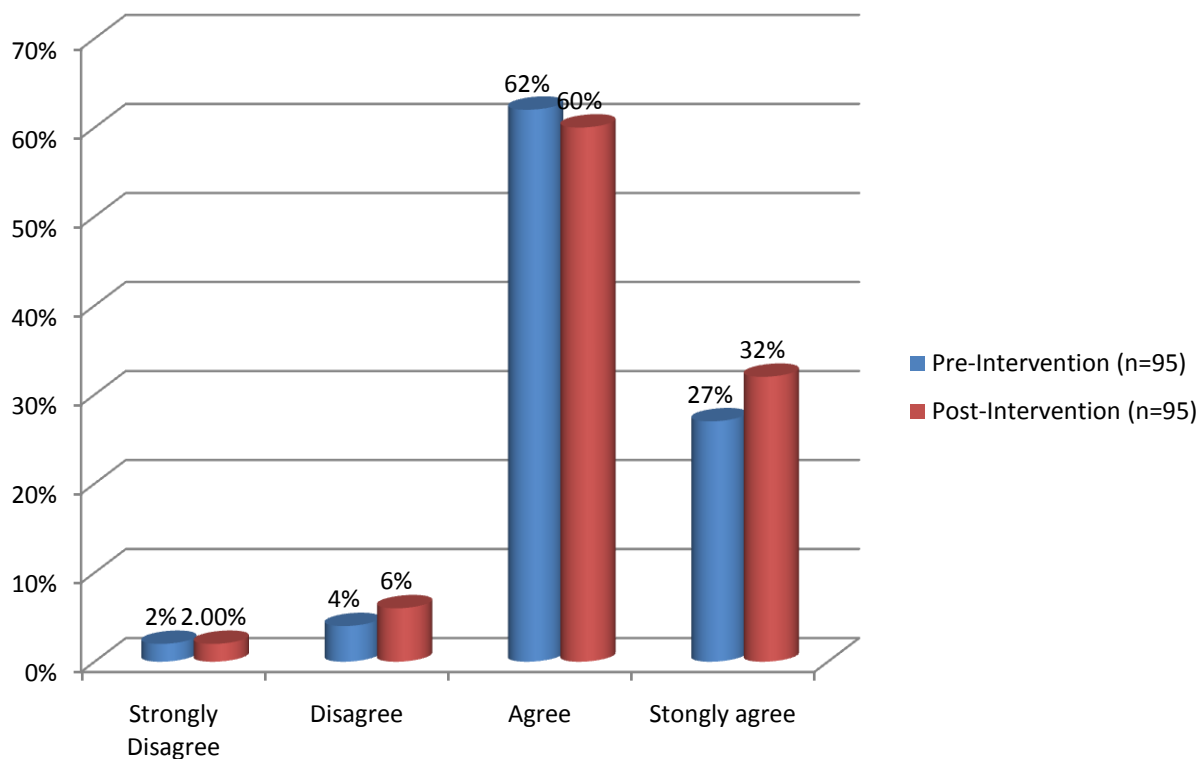




*Figure 27.* My student's teacher can explain to my satisfaction why he or she received certain grades (n=95).

In comparing pre and post data, one can see that parents now feel that teachers can better explain their grade to them. While only 21% (n=20) strongly agreed with this statement before interventions, 33% (n=31) were in strong agreement after the intervention. The number of parents who did not feel their student's teacher could explain grades to them decreased after interventions.

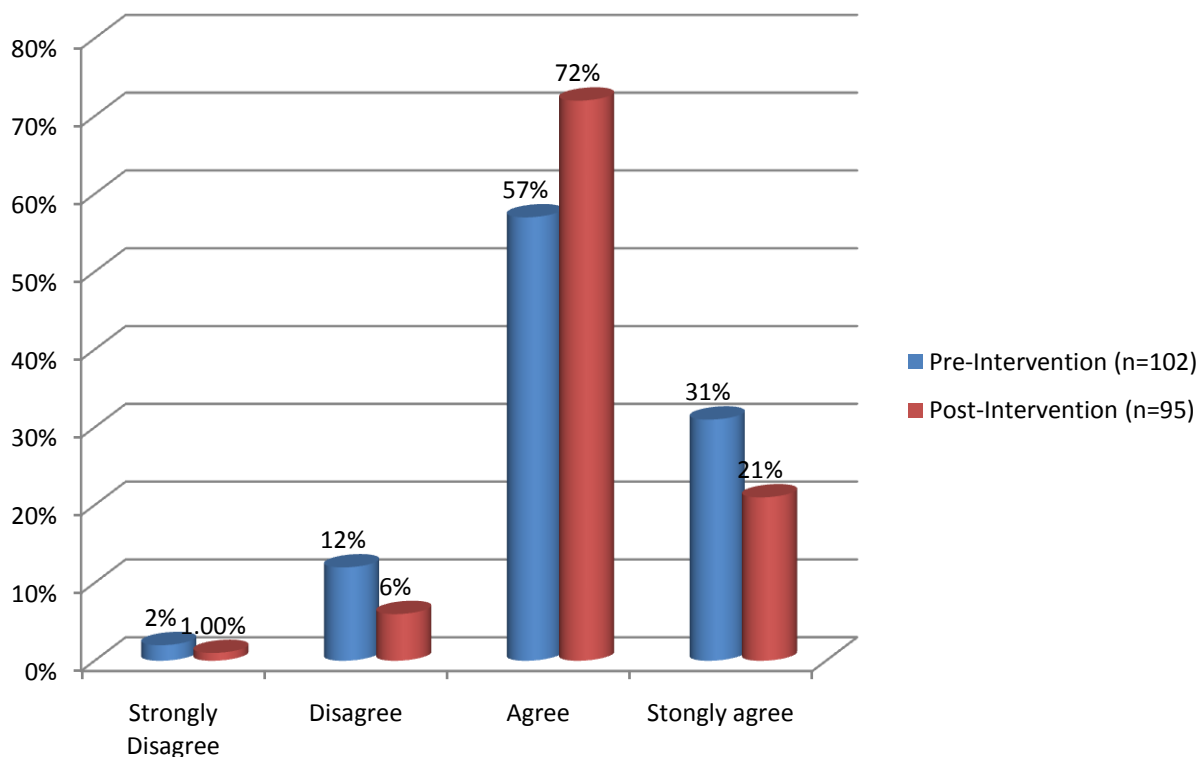
Figure 28 shows data of whether or not parents understood the grades that their student received last quarter. Post-intervention results show that 92% of parents understood their student's grades last quarter.



*Figure 28.* I understand the reasons why student received the grades he/she did last quarter (n=95).

While the percentage of parents who disagreed with the previous statement rose from 4% (n=4) to 6% (n=6) after interventions, the number of parents who strongly agreed that they understood their student's grades rose from 27% (n=25) to 32% (n=30).

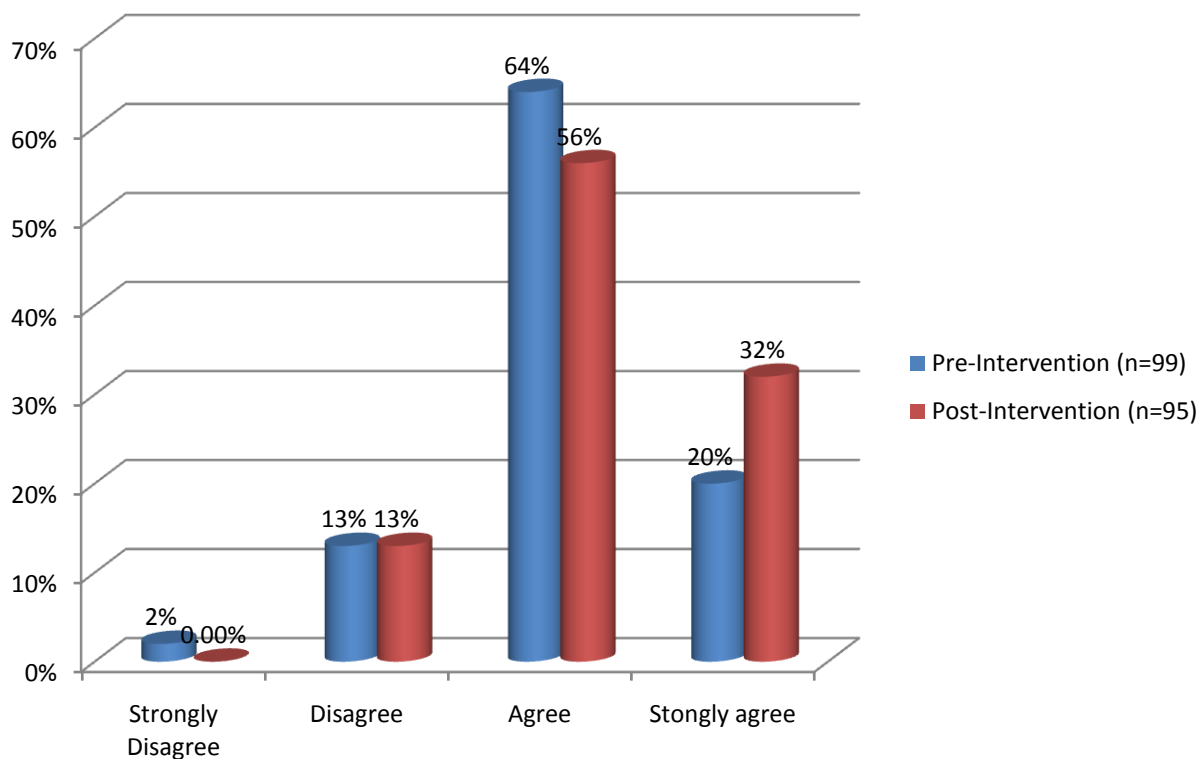
For the survey item related to Figure 29, parents were asked if they knew their student's strengths and weaknesses. Teacher researchers wanted to see if parents felt better informed about their student's strengths and weaknesses after the interventions and found that 93% (n=88) did know their student's strengths and weaknesses.



*Figure 29.* I know my student's strengths and weaknesses in the classroom (n=95).

The data in Figure 29 represents that overall a higher percentage of parents now agree that they know their student's strengths and weaknesses. Prior to the interventions 88% (n=88) agreed with this statement compared to 93% (n=88) after the interventions.

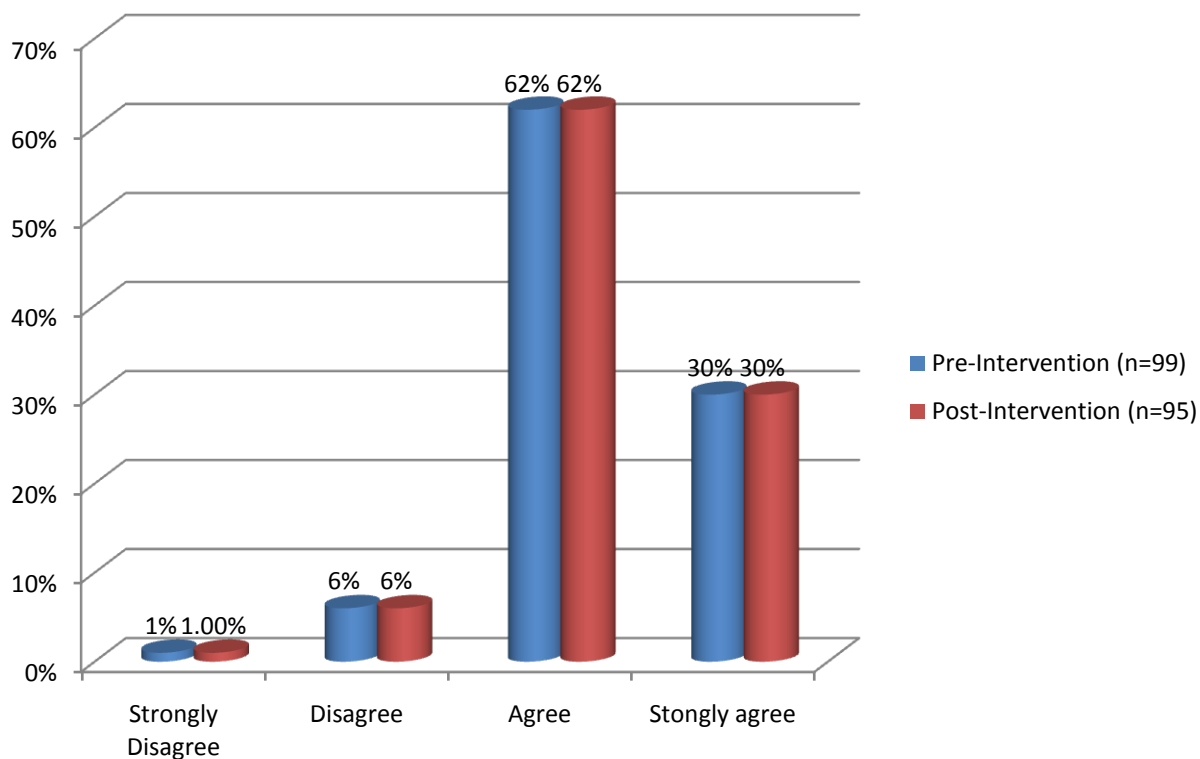
Figure 30 shows that 88% of parents surveyed (n=83) felt confident that they know the grade level standards for their student.



*Figure 30.* I am aware of the standards for this class that my student should meet by the end of the year (n=95).

This figure shows that many of the parents who previously agreed with the above statement may have now decided that they strongly agree. The number of parents who strongly disagreed dropped from 2% (n=2) to 0% (n=0).

Figure 31 below depicts that 93% (n=88) of parents are comfortable helping their student with homework.



*Figure 31.* I feel comfortable enough to help my student with his/her homework (n=95).

Pre-intervention and post-intervention results were identical for parents comfort level in helping their student with his or her homework.

### **Student Survey.**

The purpose of the student survey was to gain knowledge of student understanding of teacher expectations, student understanding of what constitutes student grades, and student perception of traditional grading practices. These surveys were conducted on December 12, 2011 and had a return rate of 100% (n=158). Site A and Site B were separated due to the large discrepancy of grade levels. Site A had a survey of five yes or no questions which the teacher verbally asked the students in small groups. The 20 students responded anonymously by putting a green chip in a box if their answer was yes and a red chip in the box if their answer was no while sitting in small groups at a circle table. Refer to Appendix E to see the student survey for

Site A. One hundred thirty six students at Site B were given a survey to complete in class with five statements requiring a Likert scale response of *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *agree*, and *strongly agree* with *strongly disagree* being number one and *strongly agree* being number four. Refer to Appendix F to see the student survey for Site B. Upon completion, the students handed in the survey at the back of the classroom, upside down in a box.

In Figure 32, the students of Site B responded to the statement, grades I receive are fair. Of the 136 students surveyed, 84% (n=114) responded that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the fairness of the grades they earned on their work.

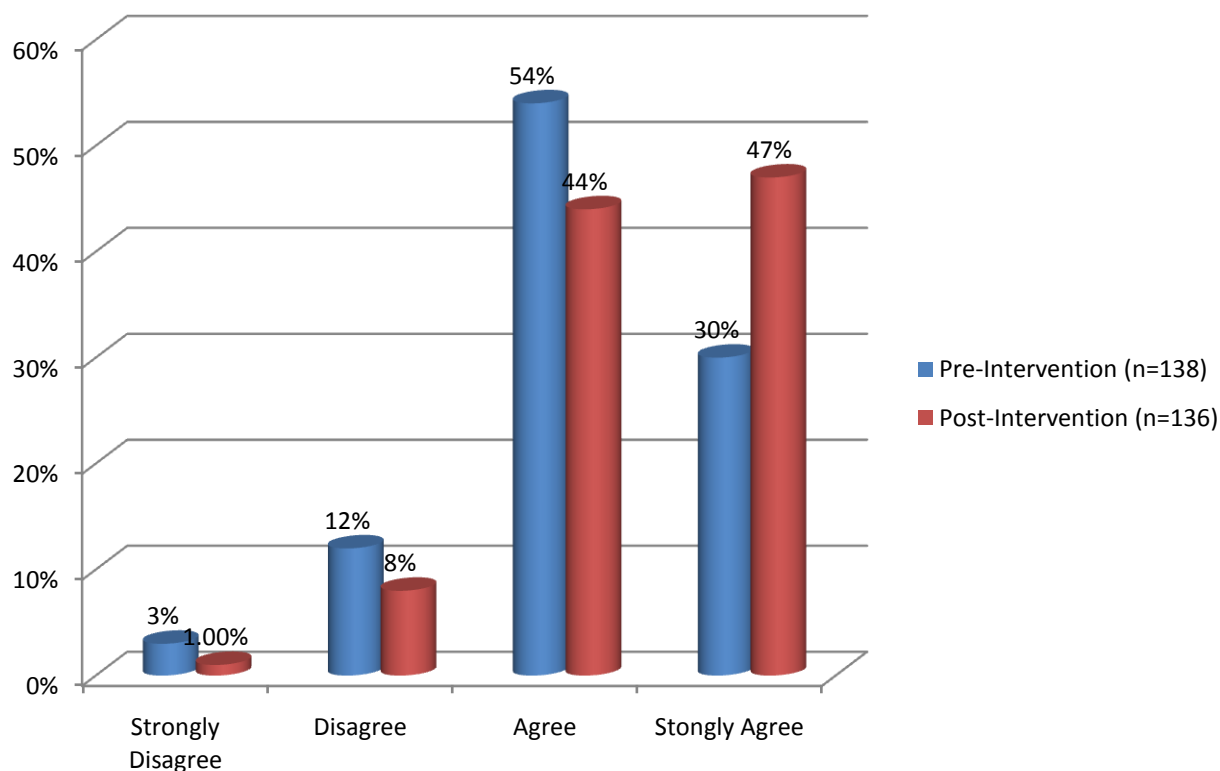
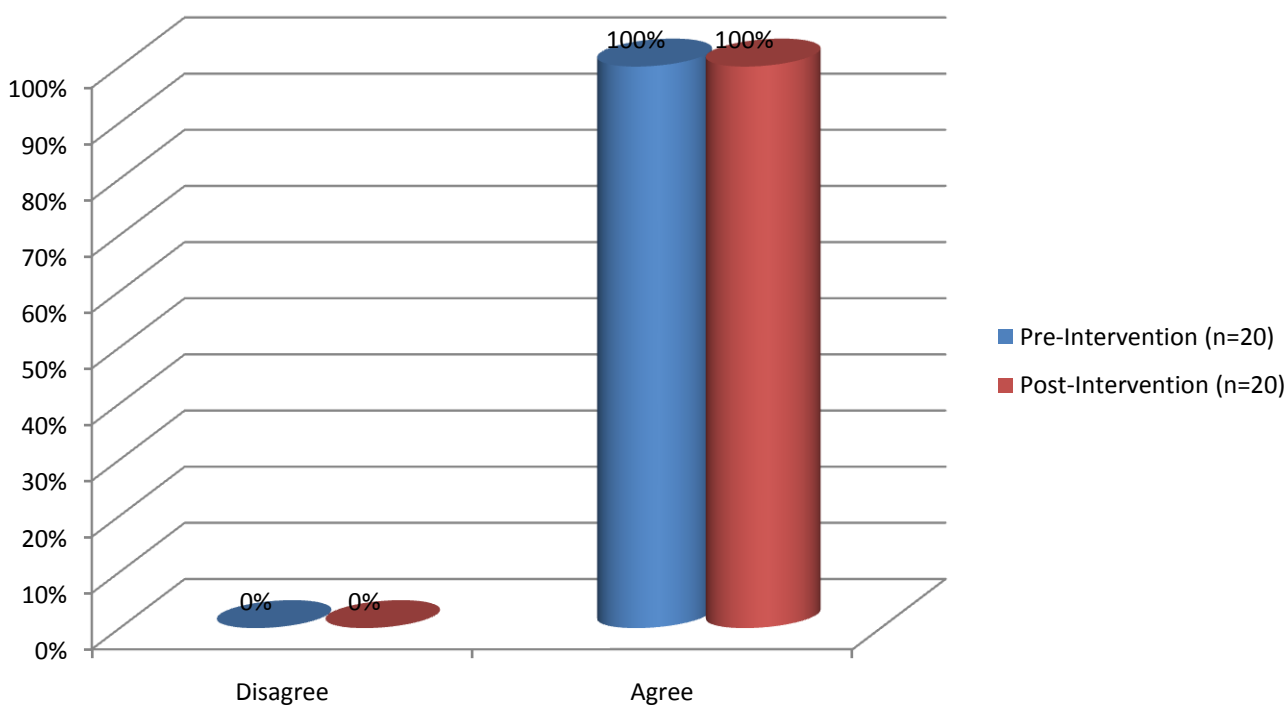


Figure 32. Grades I receive are fair from Site B.

Figure 32 shows that, overall, students responded similarly to the statement about the fairness of grades both before and after intervention. In actuality, the number of agreed responses students decreased by seven students from 85% (n=117) to 81% (n= 114). However,

there was a positive notable increase of students, 17% (n=33), who more strongly agreed with this statement after the teacher researchers implemented intervention. According to standards-based grading practices, there should not be any outside influences that affected the grades that students earned for completed work. The changes shown from agree to strongly agree reflected that students consider their grades as pure achievement of a state standard.

Figure 33 shows Site A student responses to the statement “I know what to do to get good grades.” Of the 20 students surveyed, 100% agree with this statement.



*Figure 33.* I know what to do to get a good grade (n=20) from Site A.

Figure 33 above shows that the kindergarteners and first graders surveyed were consistent between pre and post-intervention knowing what they needed to do to get good grades. Students could only agree or disagree based on the way the survey was presented to the 20

kindergarteners. Teacher Researcher A acknowledged that her students tried to please her like most students their age by adding the green token to the box. She said that her students are already conditioned to answer by giving the choice they think the teacher researcher wanted to see. The teacher researcher was not convinced that any intervention would have changed the responses to this question.

Figure 34 shows student responses from Site B to the question “I know what my teacher expects from me on every assignment given.” Overwhelmingly, 98% (n=133) of students agreed or strongly agreed that they knew teacher expectations.

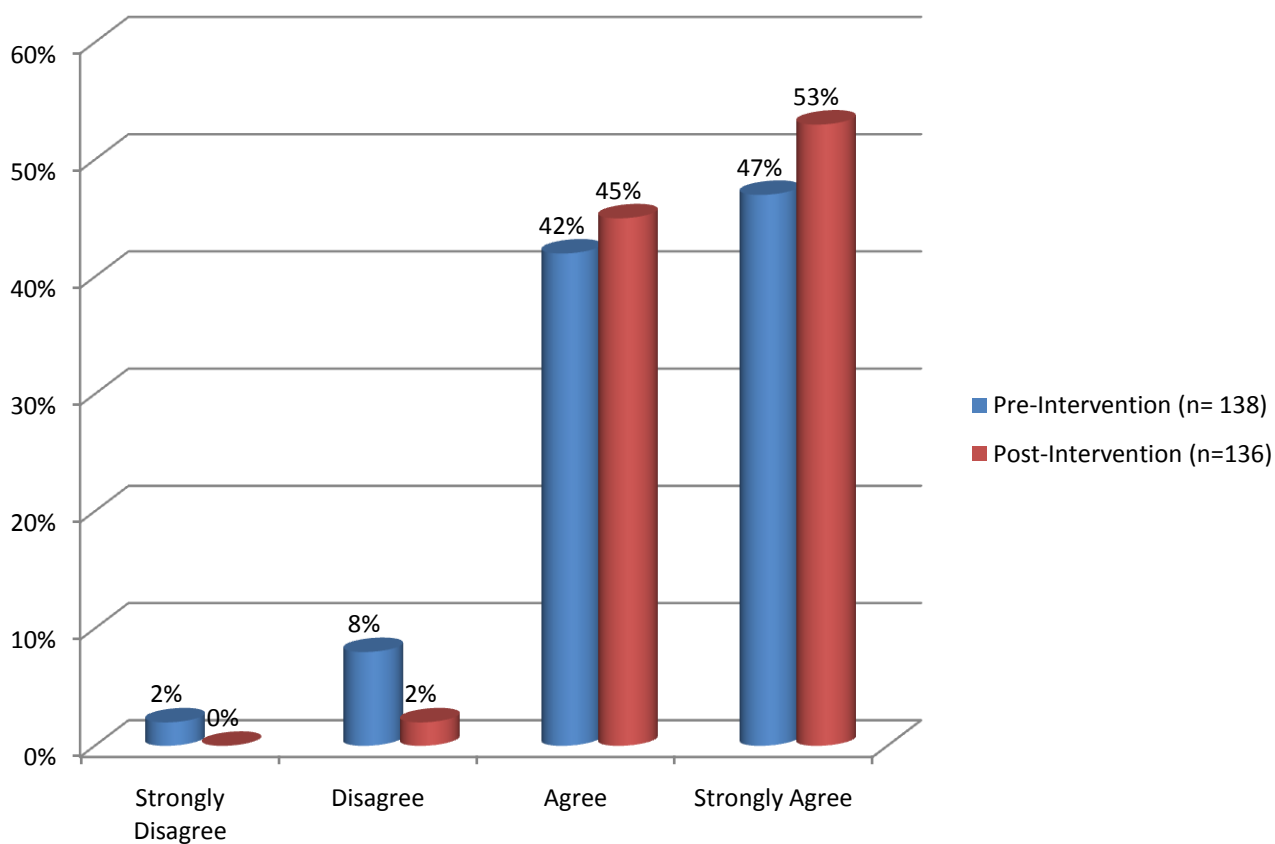
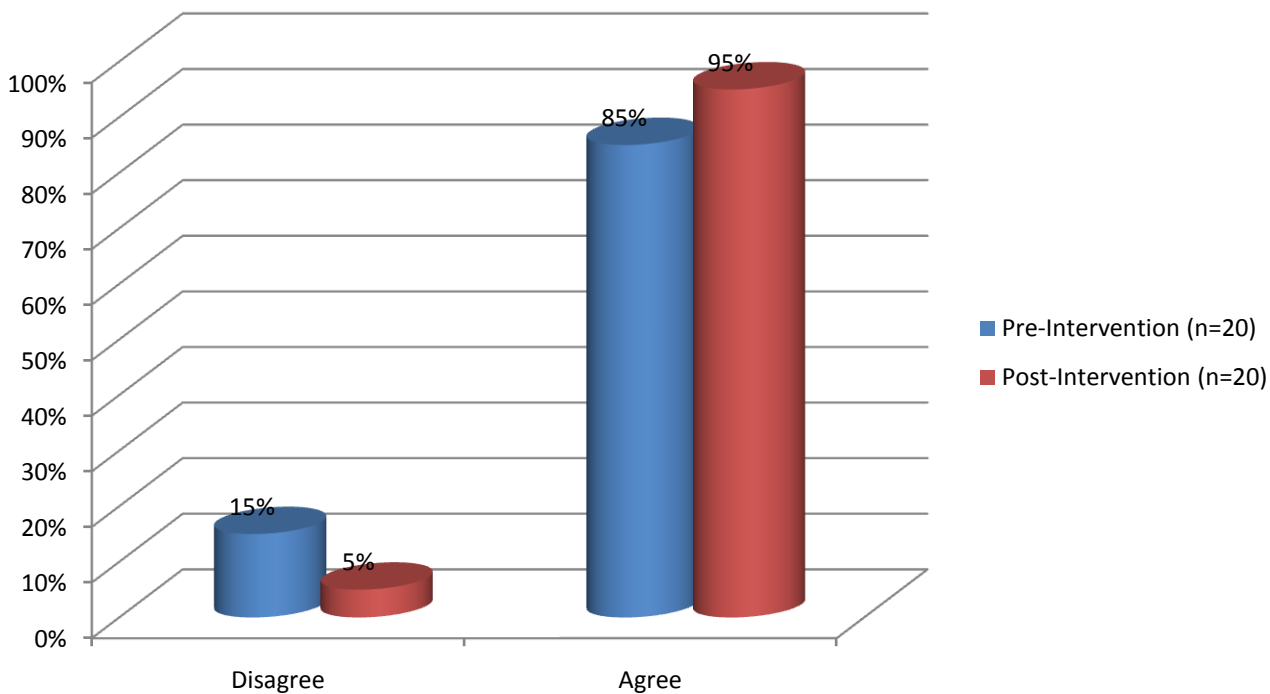


Figure 34. I know what my teacher expects from me on every assignment that is given from Site B.



The data presented in Figure 34 shows that there was a decrease in students, from 10% (n= 14) to 2% (n=3), who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement presented in question number two of the student survey administered at Site B. On the positive end of the spectrum, students responses of agreed and strongly agreed increased 9% (n=10) from 89% (n=123) to 98% (n=133). Teacher Researchers at Site B commented that one reason for this increase was due to the increased call for teacher accountability across the state. Standards-based grading practices also placed more responsibility on students for the grades they earned. If students did not achieve proficient grades on a piece of evidence for a state standard, they knew that they would have another opportunity to prove proficiency. Consequently, students were more likely to ask for clarification of teacher expectations of the state standard being taught.

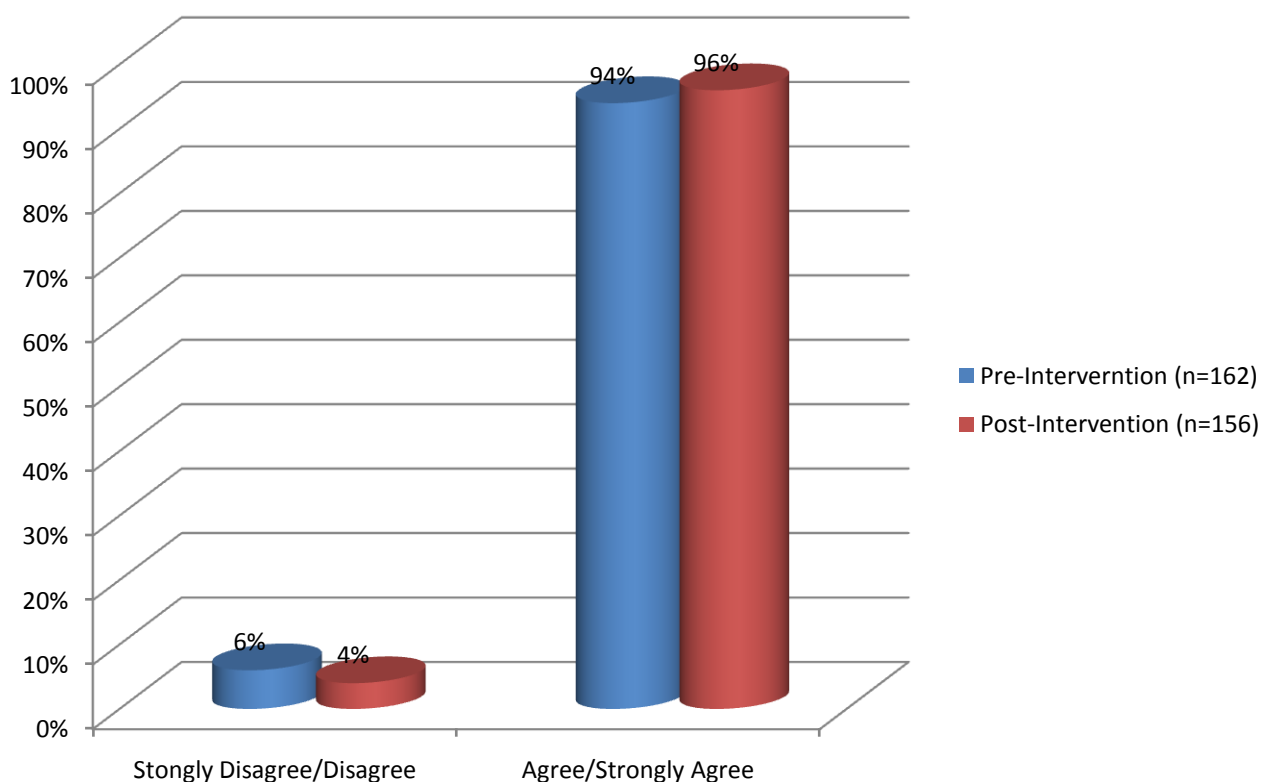
Figure 35 below shows how students at Site A responded to a similar question posed at Site B that states “I understand directions.” Post-intervention data shows that 95% (n=19) of students agreed with this statement.



*Figure 35.* I understand directions from Site A (n=20).

There was a slight increase, 10%, in the amount of students that agree that they understood teacher directions. Looking at the big picture of educating students, even this slight increase after intervention was significant since these students are comprehending directions at a young age. These data numbers coincided with Site B's data from Figure 34.

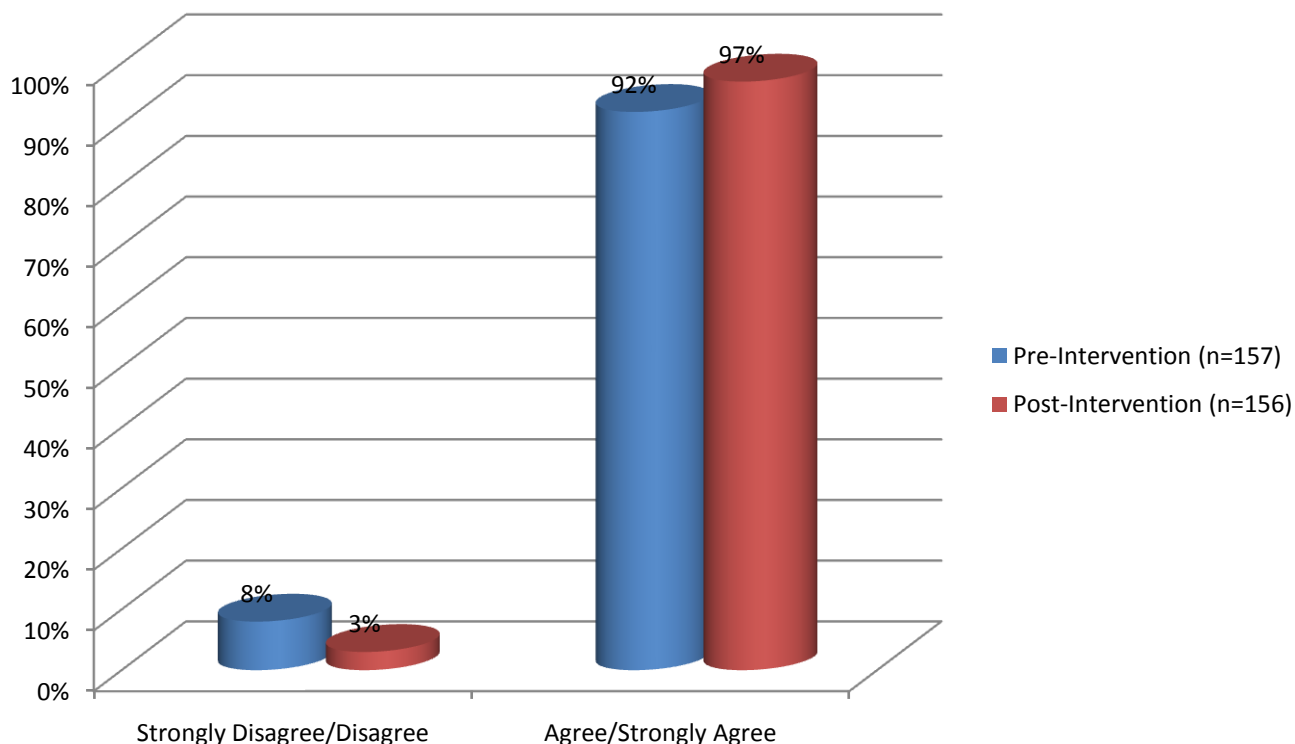
Figure 36 shows combined data for both Sites A and B. The statement presented to students was "I know what I am good at and what I need help with in this class." 149 (96%) of the 156 students questioned answered in a positive manner by agreeing or strongly agreeing with this proclamation. The degrees with which the students responded were combined due to the nature of the way the Site A survey was administered.



*Figure 36.* I know what I am good at and what I need help with in this class Sites A and B.

Figure 36 shows that there was a minor increase in the number of students who knew what their personal strengths and weaknesses were in the classroom from 94% (n=153) to 96% (n=149). Since one of the theories behind stands-based grading was that students knew what they were strong at in the classroom and what they needed to work on in the classroom, even this minute sway in numbers was a positive for the teacher researchers when it came to student accountability.

Figure 37 illustrates the percentage of students at both sites that agree or strongly agreed when asked to respond to the statement “My teacher helps me when I do not understand something.” An awesome 97% (n= 152) of students answered with a positive reaction.

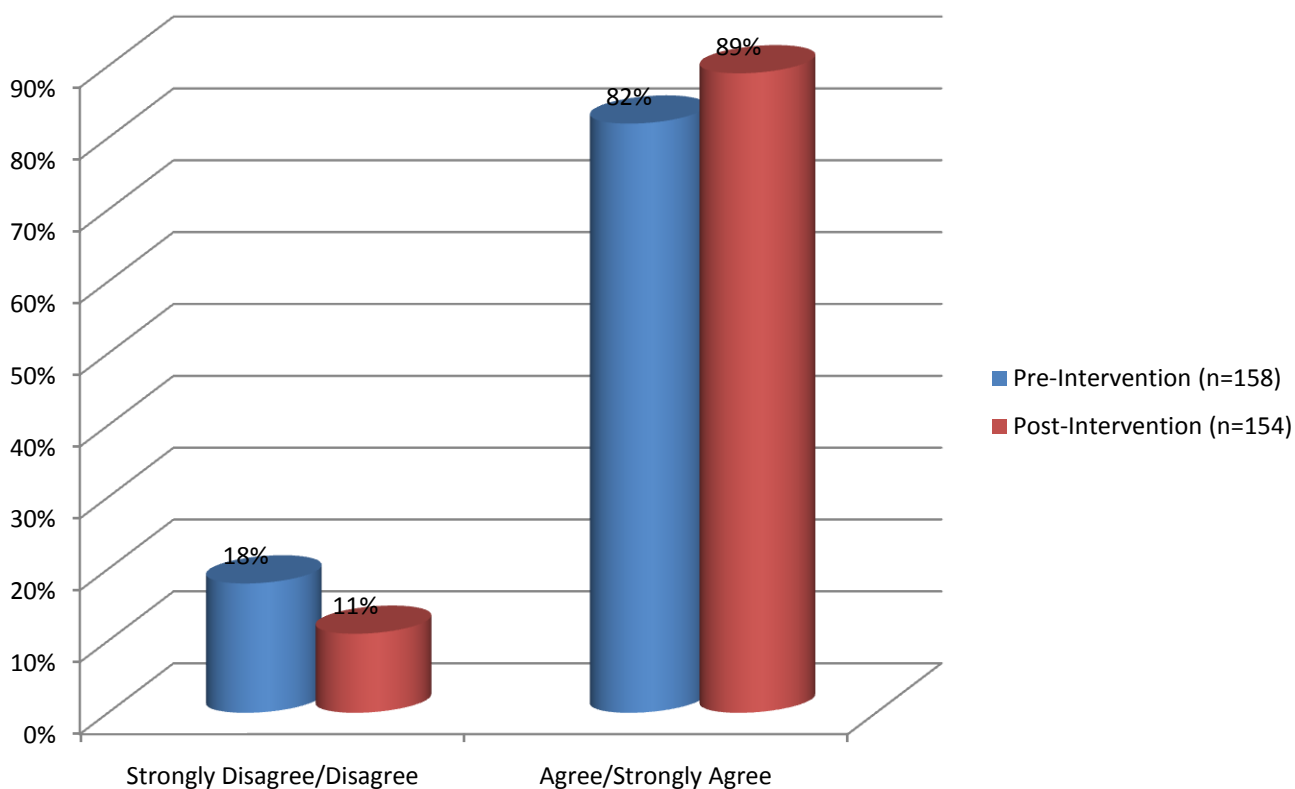


*Figure 37.* My teacher helps me when I do not understand something Sites A and B.

Figure 37 above shows that 97% (n= 152) of students agreed that the teacher researchers were helpful when a concept was not completely explicit. Standards-based grading practices stated that teachers needed to be very helpful so that every student was awarded the same opportunity to achieve success of a specific state standard. There was a minor improvement, 5% (n= 7) in the number of students that felt comfortable admitting that they did not understand a concept or standard. One of the middle school students was quoted as saying, “I get embarrassed telling the teacher I don’t get something when the whole class is around. I’m glad she lets me come in for lunch help because I always get it after that.”

Figure 38 illustrates the student responses for the statement “I ask for help when I do not understand something.” This was one of the lowest number of agree and strongly agree responses. 89% (n=137) of students commented that they asked for help. A middle school

student responded, “I need help, but I am too shy to ask for it. I need it bad. My mom can’t always help me because she doesn’t always understand what we are learning.” Two students commented that they did not want to agree or disagree with this question because “...I only ask questions sometimes.”



*Figure 38.* Sites A and B I ask for help when I do not understand something.

Figure 38 shows that there was an improvement of 7% (n=7) in the amount of students that asked for assistance as the interventions were being implemented. No matter how many formative assessment the teacher researchers administered, student consciousness and requests for help was the most noteworthy way a teacher assisted students in the mastery of a specific standard. Fortunately, this improvement decreased the amount of students (7%, n=14) who were

not asking for help. Unfortunately, the teacher researchers agreed that even one student that did not ask for help was one too many.

### **Summary.**

The results showed that the teacher researchers were able to address students' strengths and weaknesses according to the state standards. The results of the student survey Figure 27 (*agree/strongly agree*) showed 84% (n=114) agreed with the fairness of the grades that were assigned to them. This proves that when students know what standards they need to master they decide to do their work to prove they are proficient or they choose not to get the extra help in order to meet the standards. The students received their grade based on showing the teacher they meet or did not meet a standard. Grades were documented on a goal/target sheet where students were able to monitor their grades daily. Each student knew if they were meeting or not meeting each standard. If a student was showing weakness they had assistance from the teacher to get to the proficient range. Overall, all students, teachers, and parents knew what their grade was going to look like before the report card came home. There were no big surprises with the grade they received and they knew the grade they received was fair.

Another area we analyzed was the parent survey Figure 34 (*strongly agree*) 21% (n=20) on the pre- survey stated (my student's teacher can explain to my satisfaction why he or she received certain grades). After implementing standard-based grading 33% (n=31) *strongly agreed* that parents now feel that teachers can better explain their students grade to them. This survey result enforces that standard-based grading is the way to go. If a student receives a grade that is in question, the teachers are able to pull out the goal/target sheet and pinpoint exactly what standard they are showing weakness in. Again, students and parents are able to monitor the grades throughout a quarter and know where their strengths and weaknesses are. We noted two

other areas that we believe were positively impacted by standards-based grading. Figure 35 showed a 6% increase that stated parents strongly agreed with understanding why their student received the grades they did and the data from Figure 36 showed the percentage of parents who agreed increased by 16% stating that parents now agree with understanding their student's strengths and weaknesses.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Conclusions.**

Based on the results, we believe that standard-based grading is a growing trend in education. We all plan to continue using the standard-based grading system and portfolios. We believe these interventions will benefit our students, their parents, and teachers. In addition, we believe we are better teachers and see the rewards of standard-based grading.

### **Recommendations.**

One of our main recommendations would be to have a standard-based report card. We would highly recommend sending a parent letter home quarterly stating the standards that would be covered. Within our classroom we recommend having portfolios with goal/ target sheets. This will assist students in monitoring their grade and giving them the chance to see improvements. They will also be able to pinpoint their weakness and ask for assistance. Parents will be able to monitor their grade as well and know exactly their child's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers will be able to pinpoint where there are weaknesses and re-teach a lesson in order for their students to be proficient.

One final recommendation would be to start these interventions at the beginning of the school year. This will ensure that parent and students know exactly what they will be learning and how they will be graded. By starting this right away everyone will be on the same page from

the start. There will be no surprises. There will be no guessing on how to help the students'. Time will not be lost trying to figure out their weaknesses. Each quarter the students will grow and be successful. They will be prepared when they move on to the next grade. Standard-based grading gives the reward of learning and the feeling of being successful.



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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

**Preguntas Para los Padres**

Gracias por su ayuda con estas preguntas. Me ayudarán mucho para buscar y probar formas diferentes para enseñar y dar notas a sus estudiantes. No tienen que participar, pero agradezco su ayuda.

Por favor, no escriben su nombre, las preguntas son anónimas y confidencial. Por favor, dibujen un círculo alrededor de una frase para cada declaración.

Cuando devuelvan estas preguntas tengo su permission para usar este información en mi proyecto.

1. Creo que la maestra de mi estudiante puede explicarme porque tiene notas diferentes. Estoy...

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1	2	3	4

2. Yo sé en cuales areas diferentes mi estudiante entiende bien o no entiende bien en la clase.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1	2	3	4

3. Yo sé los “standards” del estado de Illinois o calidades que mi estudiante necesita aprender en cada clase antes del fin de año.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1	2	3	4

4. Yo entiendo las razones porque mi estudiante recibió las notas que recibió el cuarto pasado.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo

1 2 3 4

5. Yo estoy cómodo para ayudar a mi estudiante con su tarea en esta clase.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
--------------------------	---------------	------------	-----------------------

1 2 3 4

Aquí pueden escribir más sobre este tema o si tienes una pregunta:

## Appendix B

**Parent Survey**

Thank you for taking the following survey. It will help me to research and implement a new grading system that will keep you better informed on your student's progress toward meeting grade level standards. Your participation is not required, but would be greatly appreciated.

**Please do not put your name on the survey. Responses will be kept confidential.**

**Please circle the response which best describes how you feel about each statement.**

1. My student's teacher can explain to my satisfaction why he/she received certain grades.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

2. I understand the reasons why my student received the grades he/she did last year.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

3. I know my student's strengths and weaknesses in the classroom.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

4. I am aware of the standards for this class that my student should meet by the end of the year.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

5. I feel comfortable enough to help my student with his/her homework in this class.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

Please add any additional comments or concerns about grading:



## Appendix C

**Teacher Survey**

Thank you for taking the following survey. It will help me to research and implement a standards-based grading system that will provide specific information on student's progress toward meeting grade level standards. Your participation is not required, but would be greatly appreciated. Returning this survey gives consent to use your information in my research project.

**Please do not put your name on the survey. Responses will be kept confidential.**

**Please circle the response which best describes how you feel about each statement.**

1. I can justify grades to parents.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

2. I can explain to parents what standards their child is not meeting.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

3. I create my lessons and assessments to align with the Illinois State Standards.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

4. I know the Illinois State Standards that my students need to meet by the end of the year.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

5. I clearly state student expectations for each assignment either verbally or written.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

Please add any additional comments about standards or grading:

## Appendix D

**Open-Ended Questions for Teacher Interview**

1. If a parent were to call you and ask why their student received a “D”, how would you explain it to them?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Do you feel that the assessments you use are based on state standards? Why or why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Do you know all of the standards for the courses you teach?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Are you confident that you could teach and assess on the standards?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How do you make sure each standard is addressed?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. How concerned do you think parents are about their child’s grades? Do they contact you often to ask about grades?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. Do you think the grades that your students receive in class correlate with their ability to learn the material?

## Appendix E

**Student Survey**

Thank you for taking the following survey. It will help me to research and implement a standards-based grading system. The purpose of this research project is for you to be aware of your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to being proficient on the Illinois State Standards. Returning this survey gives consent to use your information in my research project.

**Please do not put your name on the survey. Responses will be kept confidential.**

**Circle the response which best describes how you feel about each statement.**

1. Grades that I receive are fair.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

2. I know what my teacher expects from me on every assignment that is given.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

3. I know what I am good at and what I need help with in this class.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

4. My teacher helps me when I do not understand something.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

5. I ask for help when I do not understand something.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

6. I know what it takes to meet the Illinois State Standards.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

## Appendix F

**Student Survey for K-1**

This survey will be done orally in small groups with the teacher reading the questions about standards-based grading. The students will put a green chip in a box with the questions number on it if they agree and a red chip in the box if they disagree. At the end of the survey, the teacher will collect the boxes and tally the chips.

1. I know what to do to get a good grade.
2. I understand directions.
3. I know what I am good at and what I need help with in class.
4. My teacher helps me when I do not get something.
5. I ask for help when I do not understand something.

Any additional comments or observations from the discussion:

## Appendix G

September 6, 2011

Dear Parents and Students,

Attached is a letter asking for your consent to let your child participate in my Masters Degree research project. I am collecting data on standards-based grading. The standards movement is hardly a new and revolutionary idea. In every school in the country, there are athletic teams and musical groups that routinely take a standards-based approach to education. When a student fails to make a free throw in basketball or hit an F-sharp in band, they do not receive a B- in those subjects. Rather, those students get immediate feedback to improve their performance. Essentially, the standards movement asks parents, teachers, and students to apply the same techniques to academic classes.

The most important reason for you to support academic standards in school is that the standards are a fair and effective way to give students the “rules of the game” when they are in school. By comparing one child’s performance to a clear standard, parents, students, and teachers all know precisely what is expected. Every time the student attempts a task, the performance is compared to the standard, not to another child’s performance. The most important advantages for students and parents are fairness, clarity and improved learning. Standards are fair because the student knows what must be done before the task is attempted. In a standards-based system, the rules are clear: Either the student meets the standard or the student does not. If the standard is not met, the student typically receives another opportunity to meet the standard.

The standards we are currently working on in Unit 1 of Language Arts and English are:

- **Point of View:** Analyze how an author develops and contracts the points of view of different characters or narrators in the text.
- **Proving Point of View:** Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **Proving Context Clues:** Support claims with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating and understanding of the topic or text.
- **Context Clues:** Use context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- **Root and Affixes:** Use common, grade-appropriate Greek or Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word.
- **Narrative Text Structure:** Analyze the structure an author uses to organize texts, including the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.
- **Reading Comprehension:** By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature in the 6-8 grade complexity band proficiently.
- **Nouns:** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing and speaking.
- **Proofreading:** Demonstrate the command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
- **Persuasive Writing:** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
  - Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claims, reasons, and evidence.

Students have already seen and, for the most part, understand the concept of their grading and evidence portfolios. I will be available for questions and concerns at Open House on Thursday, September 8<sup>th</sup>. A parent survey will be sent home next week.

Sincerely,

## Appendix H

**Middle School****A = 100%-90% = Exceeds****B = 89%-80% = Meets****C = 79%-70% = Approaching****D = 69%-60% = Below****F = <60% = Warning**

<b>Point of View</b> CC.7.R.1.6 I can determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his/her position from that of others.				
Date	Assignment Description	Points	Percentage	E/M/A/W/B
<b>Summary Achievement:</b>				

<b>Fiction vs. Nonfiction</b> CC.7.W.9a & 9b I can apply 7 <sup>th</sup> grade reading standards to literary fiction and literary nonfiction (IL.1.7.12 I can identify, compare & contrast organizational patterns in fiction and nonfiction.)				
Date	Assignment Description	Points	Percentage	E/M/A/W/B
<b>Summary Achievement:</b>				

<b>Context Clues</b> CC. 7.L.4a I can use context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.				
Date	Assignment Description	Points	Percentage	E/M/A/W/B
<b>Summary Achievement:</b>				

<b>Narrative Text</b> IL. 2.7.14 I can identify whether a given passage is narrative, persuasive, or expository.				
Date	Assignment Description	Points	Percentage	E/M/A/W/B
<b>Summary Achievement:</b>				



## Appendix I

Dear Parents,

Attached are your student's grades and papers from the first quarter of language arts and LA lab. You will also find your student's current grade as well. Please review these things over the weekend, sign, and return the bottom back portion of this paper.

During second quarter, the focus will be on the following learning standards:

### Language Arts

- Determine the meaning of an unknown word or content-area vocabulary using knowledge of prefixes, suffixes, and/or word roots.
- Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.
- Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
- Determine the main idea in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide a summary of the text.
- Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his/her position from that of others.
- Read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, poems, and nonfiction at grade level.
- Use context clues as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- Identify, compare, and contrast organizational patterns in fiction and nonfiction.
- Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of an idea.
- Identify elements of fiction: theme, rising action, falling action, conflict, point of view, resolution, and flashback.
- Identify whether a given passage is narrative, persuasive, or expository.

### LA Lab

- Demonstrate command of conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
- Write informative and explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, students will be taking the Scholastic Reading Inventory test. The SRI test is taken two times a year, once during second quarter and again during fourth quarter. This test shows students progression in reading comprehension and vocabulary. According to the district, a student who scores 1000 on the test is reading at the seventh grade level. So students should hypothetically be above 1000 after they test in the spring. Ask your student how they did on the test. Feel free to contact me with any questions about this test.

This quarter I am stressing reading. Students need to be reading at home for enjoyment. I suggest that a seventh grader should be reading two hours a week. Some kids read 20 minutes a day, while others read two hours on Sunday. Please allow your student to read for enjoyment. I give them enough academic reading as school. By reading for enjoyment at home, reading at school improves. I take classes to the library every 2-3 weeks. Students can also choose books from my extensive classroom library. I will not be recording grades, but I will see the benefit of the extra reading in the classroom. I appreciate your help in this matter.

I continue to enjoy my group of seventh graders this year. I have already seen tremendous growth in some of them. Please feel free to contact me at any time with any questions or concerns.