

The Spartan Sentinel

...inspiring and equipping...

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Good morning! I hope it's been a great week for you! I want to again say thanks to everyone for all your hard work and flexibility this week as we finished up ISTEP and IREAD testing. Everyone did a great job and I'm proud of our staff and our students!

We talked last week about change and how difficult it can be. We also talked about how if you're not always working to get better you cease to be the best you can be. What this means is if we're always in a state of change, and we know at least part of change can be uncomfortable, even with the proper mindset, then we should almost always feel a little bit of "creative tension" if we're being the best we can be. I'm not talking about major stress, but just those good, hard questions, that don't have easy answers. I've always said I know a PLC is doing the "right work" when they come to me with questions that I don't know how to answer. There is value in the struggle!

One of those areas we've been "struggling" with the last year or so is in the discussion of our grading practices here at Warsaw Community Schools. Our Accountability Committee held several discussions last year and it was very clear that this is not an easy issue. I saw this on Twitter this week:

"You can take the LSAT as many times as you need. Same thing for a driver's license. Also for the Praxis teacher certification test. Pilot's license too. And finally, the bar exam. So, it would appear that NOT allowing redo's for full credit really isn't in-line with the 'real world.'"

This quote got me thinking about this struggle with grading practices. If you're like me, you probably have had teachers where if the work wasn't turned in on time, you earned a zero, or could maybe turn it in for 1/2 credit. Or, if you turned it in on time, but missed half the problems you simply failed the assignment. We've graded like this for years. The issue is when we penalize for a late assignment or don't allow redo's is that we're measuring more than just the student's knowledge of the objective we've taught. We're also measuring their responsibility, their background knowledge, and even sometimes their level of parental support. So if a student doesn't have a stable home life he/she may consistently score lower,

yet still have the same level of mastery of the objective that a student with a solid home life has, but their “grades” would look very different. Does that make sense?

What we want our grades to be is an accurate measure of a student’s level of mastery of a given learning target. We want to separate out issues like home life, responsibility, etc. We can still measure things like responsibility and it’s important for our students to be accountable for their responsibility, we just need to parse it out so that it doesn’t throw off the measure of learning targets.

This quote does a good job of showing the principle that in real life we get more than one chance to demonstrate mastery. I think it is also important to understand that those “second chances” come with a cost. If I fail the Praxis exam, I spend more time studying and practicing, and I spend more money to take the test again. So while I do have more opportunities to demonstrate my mastery, there is a cost involved. I think the author’s point is that so many times in education we don’t even offer the option of a redo, even with a cost.

Anyway, this quote got me thinking and I hope it does for you too. I appreciate each of you and the way you work hard and embrace those “struggles” and tough questions that make us better. Remember, the value is in the struggle; it’s in the journey, because of what it does for you as a person and as an educator. Sure, it would be easier if someone just told us what to do, but we wouldn’t grow near as much! I did see one other quote on Twitter this week that is true of you all:

“Great teachers make a great school.”

Dave