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## **Study critiques schools over subjective grading**

**An education expert calls for greater consistency in evaluating students' work.**

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If you have ever rolled your eyes when your child says a teacher's grade was unfair, you might want to think again. Your child might be right.

Douglas Reeves, an expert on grading systems, conducted an experiment with more than 10,000 educators that he says proves just how subjective grades can be.

Reeves asked teachers and administrators in the United States, Australia, Canada and South America to determine a final semester grade for a student who received the following grades for assignments, in this order:

C, C, MA (Missing Assignment), D, C, B, MA, MA, B, A.

The educators gave the student final semester grades from A to F, Reeves said.

Why? Because, he said, teachers use different criteria for grading.

Some average letter grades. Others consider effort (which in this case seemed to be picking up toward the end) and attendance.

"If you went to a Redskins game -- the thing society takes really, really seriously -- and one official says a goal was scored and another official says no goal and a third official scratches his head, there would be hell to pay," said Reeves, founder of the Leadership and Learning Center, a Colorado company that provides professional development services, research and solutions to educators and others.

"But for some reason, we let grades be all over the map."

The consequences, say Reeves and other experts on grading systems, are more than just a few unhappy students. Reeves said ineffective grading can lead to widespread student failure.

Grading regimes that work, he said, offer accurate, precise and timely feedback that is aimed at helping students improve -- not penalizing them -- and is only one type of response.

"You don't give grades to adjudicate a result. You give it to kids . . . to help them get better," he said.

Grades have long been a source of controversy in school systems across the country.

Most use a system in which 90% and above is an A, 80% is a B, and so on. Reeves supports wholesale change, such as the overhaul undertaken in the past few years in the Grand Island public schools in Nebraska.

These schools changed the grading system in part to make sure that students taking the same classes got the same scores.

Some of the changes:

- \* Setting learning targets and linking grades to the achievement of those targets.
- \* Giving grades based solely on achievement and separately reporting attendance, effort and participation.
- \* Grading only individual achievement, not group work.
- \* Giving scores only to certain assignments and choosing carefully which scores should be included in the final grade.
- \* Making sure students understand how their grades are being determined.

The first step toward change, Reeves said, is eliminating "dumb errors."

Giving kids no credit for not turning in work or flunking them in some other way defeats the purpose, he said. A better result would be to force them to do the work, before school, during recess or after school.