



**Educator Update – January 2022**

Keeping Huron County Educators Informed



## **This Educator Update includes the following:**

- 1. Executive Function**
- 2. Student Loan Forgiveness**
- 3. Are your Traditional Grading Practices Equitable?**
- 4. Fresh Ideas for Indoor Elementary Recess**

### **1. Executive Function – Building Executive Function “Studenting” Skills**

In this article in *Edutopia*, California middle-school teacher Sarah Kesty says it’s clear that many students’ executive function abilities got rusty during the pandemic. “Self-management skills are often the secret sauce of school success,” she says. “Empowering students with these skills can boost academic performance, since grades and assessments rely on executive function as a baseline for demonstrating mastery.”

Teachers get weary telling students day after day what they need to be doing. Kesty suggests replacing directions with “thought-provoking questions” – for example, instead of saying, *Please take out your book*, asking *What do we need to be ready for reading?* or *What do you picture on your desk during this time?* The idea is to nudge students toward assuming greater responsibility. “Replacing directions with questions,” says Kesty, “can help increase students’ awareness of patterns and routines, releasing the onus of self-management to the students.”

This applies to academic work as well, especially writing, which requires lots of self-monitoring as students draft, get feedback, revise, edit, rewrite, and share.

“Whenever I design a lesson,” says Kesty, “I hear the voice of my mentor teacher coaching me to consider, ‘What’s the biggest takeaway you want every student to learn?’ It’s an automatic audio track that plays whenever I’m planning...” This reminded Kesty of six “magic questions” teachers can ask to build kids’ “studenting” skills as they work on a project or essay:

- *What do you notice?*

- *What parts do you understand?*
- *What do you think you need right now?*
- *How can you tell?*
- *Where can you look for that information?*
- *How will you remember to use that strategy or take that action?*

“When teachers ask these questions regularly,” says Kesty, “students get used to hearing them, and they can be applied automatically as students solve problems throughout their day... What a gift for students to be able to tackle that type of thinking on their own.”

[“Supporting Executive Function Skills by Asking Questions”](#) by Sarah Kesty in *Edutopia*, December 3, 2021

## 2. Student Loan Forgiveness for certain educators

Wondering if you are eligible for Loan Forgiveness?

### 2022-2023 Federal Shortage Discipline List for Loan Forgiveness

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Art and Music Education: Visual, Music &amp; Dance</li> <li>• Bilingual Education</li> <li>• Career and Technical Education: All</li> <li>• Elementary Education</li> <li>• English as a Second Language (ESL)</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Industrial &amp; Technology Education</li> <li>• Language Arts: All Reading &amp; Literacy</li> <li>• Library Media</li> <li>• Mathematics</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical Fitness</li> <li>• Psychology</li> <li>• School Counselors</li> <li>• School Social Workers</li> <li>• Sciences: All</li> <li>• Social Studies: All</li> <li>• Sociology</li> <li>• Special Education: Administrators</li> <li>• Special Education: All Exceptionalities, Roles &amp; Supports</li> <li>• World Languages: All Languages</li> </ul> |
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Educators who have student loan debt and fall under one of these categories, should go to <https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation> to apply for loan forgiveness or deferment. Not sure if your school is an eligible school? Check at <https://studentaid.gov/tcli/directory-search>. General questions can be address at <https://studentaid.gov/>.

## 3. The Equity Dimension with Traditional Grading Practices

“Of all teachers’ responsibilities,” says veteran educator Joe Feldman in this article in *Independent School*, “perhaps none is more consequential, with more implications, than assigning grades.”

Here’s why:

- A student’s grades affect course placement, athletic eligibility, college admission, scholarships, and job opportunities.
- Grades affect what students think they’re good at, their level of stress, and whether school seems like a place where they can excel.
- Grades affect how parents evaluate their children’s schools.

- Grades give educators important data on students' errors and misconceptions, what worked and didn't work instructionally, PD and staffing needs, and achievement gaps.

The shocking thing, says Feldman, is that in many schools, grading practices are inaccurate and widen economic and racial opportunity gaps. In all too many schools, "teachers choose their own individual way to grade, guided by their best sense but uninformed by either research or best practices," and administrators hesitate to encroach on teachers' "professional autonomy."

Feldman lists six grading beliefs and practices that have a negative effect on teaching and learning – most acutely on fairness and equity:

- The belief that students are primarily motivated by extrinsic rewards like grades and points; research shows that learning and creativity are undermined by extrinsic rewards;
- Counting errors in homework and classwork against students' grades; these two areas work best when they are low-stakes opportunities to practice and learn from mistakes;
- Averaging grades across a semester, which penalizes students who steadily improve from a low baseline and reach mastery after weeks of effective effort and feedback;
- Using a 0-to-100 percentage scale where a zero can have a devastating effect on a student's summative grade; using a 0-to-4 scale, a poor grade has a proportionate impact;
- Including effort, participation, homework completion, and behavior in academic grades, which can be highly subjective and tends to work against disadvantaged students; keeping these areas separate from academic achievement levels the playing field;
- A pressure-cooker environment in which everything is graded "sows distrust, shame, and deceit," says Feldman; studies have shown that a less-pressured classroom fosters psychological safety, relationships, and trust and encourages participation, risk-taking, and hard work.

On top of these is the unfairness and inequity that result when teachers are free to decide their grading practices. "What confidence or uncertainty do you have," asks Feldman, "that two teachers in your school who teach the same course would assign the same grade to a student?"

Over the last six years, Feldman has worked with a number of schools on improving grading policies. In one independent school in Washington, D.C., the principal saw the need for change but knew that top-down reforms would spark resentment and resistance. She shared a few articles with the faculty and issued an open invitation to dig deeper into the instructional and equity dimensions of grading. To her surprise, almost half of the faculty expressed interest, and she and Feldman led a series of workshops exploring the impact of different grading practices. Feldman suggested three criteria:

- Accuracy – grades are a valid reflection of a student’s academic performance;
- Bias-resistance – the design reduces subjectivity and implicit bias;
- Motivation – grades encourage students to strive for academic success, accept struggles and setbacks, persevere (including retaking tests), and gain critical life skills.
- Members of the committee tried out new practices for a year and were so impressed by the results that they insisted on implementing them for the whole school.

In the schools he’s worked in, Feldman has found that improved grading policies have seven positive effects:

- Students are less stressed, student-teacher relationships are stronger, and classrooms are more relaxed and productive.
- Grade inflation decreases because teachers aren’t padding grades with homework completion, behavior, and students “doing school.”
- Grades provide teachers, students, and families with more-accurate data on actual learning.
- The percent of students receiving As goes down, most dramatically among economically advantaged students.
- The percent of students getting Ds and Fs decreases, most dramatically among students of color and those from low-income families.
- There’s a stronger correlation between teachers’ grades and their students’ standardized test scores, especially among less-advantaged students.
- Finally, says Feldman, “Teachers find that learning and implementing these grading practices improves their work as educators and has led to improved student learning.”

[“Letter Perfect?”](#) by Joe Feldman in *Independent School*, Winter 2022 (Vol. 81, #2, pp. 72-77)

#### 4. Ideas for Indoor Recess in Elementary Schools

In this *Learners Edge* article, Marcee Harris suggests ten ways to engage students when the weather nixes outdoor recess:

- Finger knitting – Inexpensive yarn and their fingers are all students need to create a bracelet, scarf, or belt (see a YouTube video with directions at the link below).
- Directed drawing – The link below has an *Art for Kids Hub* video for drawing an ice cream tower.
- Virtual field trips – Students can visit a rain forest, the ocean floor, a museum in Paris, and more.
- A magic bin – Invite students to use odds-and-ends materials to create their own invention, inspired by the book, *Miss Makey and the Magic Bin*.
- Origami – See the link below for easy-to-follow directions for making a dragon and other origami projects.

- Code.org – This website introduces students to the basics of coding – creating poetry, an app, or a video game.
- GoNoodle – Release pent-up energy with dance-along, sing-along, workout music videos.
- Chopstick challenge – This team-building activity needs only chopsticks – see the video below.
- Human tic-tac-toe – Student teams race each other to make three in a row using their bodies or other classroom items.
- Several classic games, including *Heads Up 7 Up* and *Silent Ball*.

[“Fresh Ideas for Indoor Recess”](#) by Marcee Harris in *Learners Edge*, January 11, 2022