Relief from unreasonable grading requirements. One of the CTU’s bargaining objectives for the current contract (July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2019) was to secure relief from overly burdensome and/or controversial grading requirements. For example, under the direction of some over-zealous principals and network chiefs our members have been directed to input a grade for every student, every day, in every subject! In other cases, principals have handed down un-agreed mandates such as “no zeros” or “competency-based grading.”

Common Sense Grading Policy. The BOARD does not currently have a uniform grading policy, but rather a mix of contradictory mandates and local initiatives. For example, many teachers are told to allow make-up assignments for absent students (remediation), but BOARD policy also requires teachers to automatically lower grades for certain numbers of absences. Our objective was to amend the existing policies in a way that would protect our members from abuse without creating new, unreasonable demands on teachers where grading is working fine already. Over the past five months, members of the CTU (officers, staff, and rank-and-file teachers) have negotiated with the BOARD and achieved the most reasonable terms we could.

Elements of the CPS grading policy. The entire CPS grading policy is a fairly long document and can be downloaded from CTUNET.COM/GRADING. Here are the key elements of the policy:

- Grades are a tool for providing regular, ongoing feedback to students (and parents) which means that students should know how they are doing in your class and why.
- Grades should be connected to your classes’ learning objectives and should be based on reasonable standards.
- Exceptions to the policy should be discussed and agreed to by the educators involved.
- Within these guidelines, grading is up to the individual teacher.

What does this mean in practice?

1. Provide feedback.
   a. You should pass out some kind of a course guide (syllabus) at the beginning of the year that explains how you will grade students.
   b. Depending on how frequently the subject meets, you should enter about a grade/week in gradebook so that students can gauge their progress.
   c. Principals cannot mandate excessive graded work, nor dictate what types of assignments teachers give.

2. Grades should reflect student achievement.
   a. Grades must be connected to how a student is doing in your course, not to things like principal pressure or the student’s behavior.
   b. Grades should consider a few different types of work (formative and summative assessments, different categories) such as: homework, quizzes, in-class assignments, projects, papers/reports, presentations, tests, etc.
   c. Teachers are protected against pressure to change grades arbitrarily.

3. Individual circumstances should be communicated and agreed.
   a. To the extent possible teachers should agree in course or grade level teams how they will do grades.
   b. Principals who wish to adopt special school-wide grading practices (such as “No Zeros,” etc.) must get the approval of the faculty first.
Frequently Asked Questions

Is there going to be a minimum or maximum number of grades in each subject?

(1) Teachers can only be mandated to enter one grade per week per subject, except in weeks with fewer than four (4) instructional days.

What principal practices are most likely to change?

(1) Requirements that teachers enter multiple grades/subject each week will be removed.
(2) Principals will also need to seek agreement from faculty before implementing special school-wide policies.

What teacher practices are most likely to change?

(1) Teachers are expected to publish grading practices at the beginning of the school year and share with students and parents.
(2) Grades for participation should include criteria, e.g. a rubric based on the CCSS speaking & listening standards, that makes clear how on-task behavior earns a high grade, and off-task behavior results in a lower grade.

How will the process of adopting a special grading practice at my school work?

(1) The policy calls for a collaborative process.
(2) This means discussions in grade level groups, course teams, and/or a meeting between the PPC and principal.

What does it mean that grades should reflect student achievement?

(1) Grade things that matter for the course, not student behavior. If a student’s behavior is interfering with his/her ability to listen, perform tasks, etc., then you should be grading that, not the behavior.
(2) Also, use categories (at least three) that reflect a few different types of work and weight the categories so that the largest category is not more that 50% of the grade.
(3) There should be enough grades per category that one bad assignment doesn’t doom the student to a failing grade.

Do my grading practices have to agree with those of my colleagues?

(1) No, but the goal of the policy is for course and grade-level teams to meet and share grading practices.
(2) For example, your grade level might agree about what categories you will use, how much Homework will count, etc. If you cannot agree, consult with your principal.

My principal uses every new policy CPS puts out against the teachers. Can this be used against us?

(1) In the past, principals could issue mandates that you had to follow without question.
(2) If there is any issue related to the interpretation or enforcement of these guidelines, use your PPC to work it out.
(3) You also have the right to contact your field rep for additional assistance.

This all seems like a lot to implement for the fall. What resources will be available to help?

(1) CTU’s Quest Department is developing materials to assist members in implementation of these guidelines.
(2) These materials will be available on the CTU website, and professional development will be available in the fall to help with implementation of the new grading policy.

As a teacher or librarian, I’m already evaluated under REACH. Do these guidelines affect my REACH evaluation?

(1) REACH evaluation is a separate process, based on evaluator-observations and assessment of professional responsibilities as measured by the REACH Frameworks, and student growth measures. REACH evaluation is separate and distinct from the grading guidelines.
(2) Assessing student learning is addressed in the REACH Framework for Teaching and the Teacher-Librarian Framework in components 1e (Designing Student Assessment), 3d (Using Assessment in Instruction), and in component 4b (Maintaining Accurate Records) of the REACH Framework for Teaching.