

A COMPARISON OF GRADE PERCENTAGE POLICIES  
IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL  
ART ROOM

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
CHAPTER	
I.    INTRODUCTION	1
II.   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	7
Purpose/Area of Focus	7
Definition of Variables	7
Research Questions	8
Negotiations	8
Timeline	8
Resources	9
III.  GRADE POLICY ORIGIN	10
Background	10
IV.  DATA INTERPRETATION	18
Quantitative Analysis	18
Grade Categories and Definitions	21
Analysis of Teacher Comments	24
Grade Comparisons	27
V.   CONCLUSION	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY	41

## LIST OF TABLES

4.1	Multiple Grade Category Percentages	23
4.2	Open-ended Teacher Somewhat, Less or Unsatisfied Responses	25
4.3	Open-ended Additional Teacher Responses	26
4.4	Student Grades Averaged with 40% Daily/40 % Projects/20% Tests	28

## LIST OF FIGURES

4.1	Who Developed the Grade Policy?	19
4.2	Teacher Satisfaction with Grade Policy	20
4.3	High Respondent Grade Policy Input and Satisfaction	20
4.4	Little or No Respondent Grade Policy Input and Satisfaction	21
4.5	Grade Distribution for 40% Daily, 40% Projects, and 20% Tests	27
4.6	Grade Distribution Using 25% Daily and 75% Tests	29
4.7	Grade Distribution for 80% Daily and 20% Tests	30
4.8	Grade Distribution for 25% Daily, 25% Projects, 25% Exercises, and 25% Tests	31
4.9	Grade Distribution for 50% Daily, 30% Projects, and 10% Tests	32
4.10	Grade Distribution for 75% Daily and 25% Tests	33
4.11	Grade Distribution for 100% Straight Averaging	34
4.12	Grade Distribution Using 30% Daily, 20% Drawings, 40% Projects, and 10% Tests	35

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

I have taught art for fifteen years in Texas public schools. In my classes numerous students have grown and matured into fine young artists; their artwork has been displayed everywhere from State Capitol exhibits to fast food restaurants. Several of my former students have been recognized on television and in newspapers as well as won scholarships and contest awards. Some have attended college to study art and careers related to art, such as dental reconstruction and tattoo artist. These events lead me to be concerned when I realize that for too many other students, parents, teachers and administrators, art is considered a second class subject. Artistically talented students can be removed from art classes to attend academic remediation classes when they have trouble with state assessments. In every school I have taught, I have had to prove the value of my subject to others in the school, such as “core area” teachers who hold students in their classes because “it’s just art”. Students refuse to do work because “I don’t need this anyway, I’m still going to eighth grade.” At the same time I am required to cover my curriculum and am held to the same grading policies and failure rate issues. Policies that are written for math, science, social studies, and English classes may be appropriate for those subjects, but in my opinion do not accurately or fairly portray student efforts in a project-oriented art class.

My students come from all socioeconomic classes, ethnic groups, and backgrounds. In the early 1990s the high school where I worked “expressed concerns”

over teachers with student failures exceeding 20% in one six-week period. Aside from these concerns, the grading percentage policy-the percentage each type of work was worth-was left to the art department's discretion. We then submitted our department's designation to the district. The failure rate at the high school level was difficult to deal with for many reasons. A number of students were placed in my class because they didn't want to sing, act, learn a language, give a speech, fix a car or build a bookcase; so, art was the only choice left. Art was considered a "dumping ground". Many of those students were difficult to motivate to participate in class assignments or activities. I also had a large Special Education and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) population. The limited-English-proficiency students had a difficult time understanding tests or the meanings of art vocabulary because art definitions are so different from common word meanings. Fellow students who spoke Spanish were unable to translate words they hadn't heard before. I remember an Art I class of twenty-eight having eight Special Ed students. Each student required modifications of the work according to their Individual Education Program Plans (IEP). The higher level art classes also had their difficulties. Art II-IV and AP students didn't need my class to graduate which several students took the time to tell me.

Our original grade policy designated percentages as 50% daily work, 30% projects and 20% tests. The art department, with my input, changed the policy to 40% daily, 40% projects and 20% tests. This lasted for six years. We felt that we spent more time on projects than daily work, and the grading policy needed to reflect the additional effort. The art scores improved and better represented the efforts of students. It took a lot

of work to have the art program taken seriously. In 1995, the high school recognized National Art Honor Society members as graduating with “art honors”. The Advanced Placement art classes I started in 1993 helped raise the school’s Academic Excellence Indicator Scores (AEIS), which rates a school’s academic success. The portfolio scores paralleled the grades the students received in class and there was an improved attitude about art classes from students and by the administration.

When I moved to a new district in 1998, I took a position as a fifth and sixth grade art teacher. The school administration gave me the freedom to develop the lesson activities and grading policy for my classroom. The percentage breakdown for averaging grades consisted of 40% daily work, 40% projects and 20% tests. Because art wasn’t required in order to pass to the next grade level, I had to develop ways of making my students feel my activities and tests were just as important as their required classes. For instance, I implemented “Ketchup” days to give students missing work a day to complete that work. If all of the class was finished with the required work for that nine weeks, that class would join in an activity with the drama and music class, usually on the playground. Students would help their peers who were behind “catch up” so the class could participate. The policies I implemented encouraged students to want good grades in art. My failure rates were generally less than 10% and the reason most students failed was lack of motivation and ability to follow directions.

A change in school structures in the district motivated me to take advantage of an opportunity to move to the seventh and eighth grade middle school in 2003. The middle school had decided the previous year on a grade percentage policy that would be applied

across all disciplines. The academic dean at the time did a study due to high failure rates in the school. She found that every teacher had a different grading percentage policy. After completing the research, the academic dean and the committee concluded that, as a result of the lack of uniformity in grading among teachers or departments, students who could not choose their teachers, could be placed in a class with a teacher who based a majority of grades on daily work, or a majority of grades on tests, or even be in a class where all grades were equal. It was thought that students in a situation not suited to their learning style or their expertise had difficulties, which led to high failure rates. Students could have a teacher with an “easy” (less stringent) policy or vice versa, within the same subject area. There were no consistent standards of expectation in the departments. The school formed a committee to find a solution to the problem. Teachers were required to send in their percentage policies to the administration for review by the committee. The committee took the information and set up a consistent school policy (M. Pieniasek personal communication, April 19, 2005). They implemented a policy that consisted of the following breakdown: 60% daily-and-quizzes grades; 40% test-and-project grades. Teachers were allowed to break down the percentages as long as the activities fell into the appropriate category.

When I joined this campus in 2003, I was able to use this policy by renaming all of my tests “quizzes”; mathematically I could use the 40%-40%-20% and I was comfortable. The next year the district required a nine-week assessment that would count 10% for all subjects. Students also lost elective choices if they are failing one or both of the math or language arts related state assessments. I used the 20% quiz category for an



assessment and quiz grade. This helped students because, as part of mastery learning, they were allowed to re-take failing quizzes for a 70 and the two grades would then be averaged. This breakdown helped students because they are allowed to re-take failing quizzes in order to reach a 70 percent level of mastery, which they were unable to do on the assessment and the two grades would average together. As of 2005 I am required to give quarterly assessments as are required of the core subjects that are valued as 10% of the nine weeks grade calculated with the base grades where 40% is projects/tests. I have found this practice detrimental to final grades since students do not take art assessments as seriously as the required core—math, science, language arts and social studies classes. Many art students rarely studied for my assessment, so their averages would fall as much as one letter grade. Traditional question answer assessments are not considered good evaluators of all students or for all subjects.

As of 2006 the policy has become even stricter and not appropriate to my art class. The official school policy counts daily work/quizzes as 60% of the total grade (and homework cannot count more than 20%), projects/tests count 30%, and the quarterly assessment is valued at 10%. With all of the new changes, the percentages for my class became 10% assessment, 10% quizzes, 50% daily with no more than 20% for homework, and 30% projects/tests. I've watched as the two projects that my students have completed so far this year have less bearing on their averages. This does not show the amount of effort.

With projects now counting as 30%, the two projects we have completed to date each average out to approximately 15% of a student's grade. [When each project takes

about two weeks to complete with four weeks of the class time and one more project to go, in the end, the three projects will only count each as 10% of their grade yet will be requiring approximately 6 weeks of time.] Ignoring the policy and using my own to fit my class bothered me ethically. If a parent reads the policy and compares it to mine when they use our online grade book, Gradespeed, I can be held accountable. I will have to change my grading approach to fit the new policy. It is this change that prompted me to ask other teachers what they thought of their percentage policy.

Every art teacher has to deal with grading artworks and setting time limits. Trying to balance the needs of the students with the requirements of the education policies can be difficult, especially with the variety of grade percentage policies that differ from district to district or even from building to building or teacher to teacher.

## CHAPTER II

### STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

#### Purpose/Area of Focus

The purpose of this study is to investigate the grading percentage policies and practices of teachers in middle schools and school districts, and their appropriateness to my art students' grades. I've wondered about other teacher- and district-structured policies. Is there any consistency with grade percentage policies? Do other art teachers and instructors have effective policies? And are their policies appropriate to their student populations? How much say do the art teachers/instructors have over the development of these policies? My district's grade policy, while consistent across all subjects and appropriate for the conventional questioning and testing activities of the core classes, does not accurately represent art students' projects, nor does it factor in time usage on those activities. This is unfair to students.

#### Definition of Variables

The efforts of the students are to be reflected in the final grade. Grade averages should reflect the amount of time spent on the activity as well as being fair to students' needs. Grade percentages should reflect these conditions.

### Research Questions

1. Do all schools or districts have grade percentage policies?
2. Do other art teachers, art departments, schools or districts have effective policies and if not, why not?
3. How much input do the art teachers/instructors have with the development of these policies?
4. How satisfied are teachers with the policies?
5. What is the required minimum amount of grades to be averaged?
6. What other observations do teachers have about their grading percentage policy?

### Negotiations

The principal and academic dean would need to be informed, since I would be using actual student grades. All online survey participant information and student identification will be confidential. I would need the support and input of middle school teachers in many districts.

### Timeline

- Spring—Research Internet for survey service/software. Try out trial versions to see what would create surveys. Do professional reading. Interview academic dean as well as other teachers.
- August/September— Survey fellow art teachers for evaluation methods/suggestions by email. Develop data collection strategies and collect some baseline data.

- October/November—Analyze and interpret data. Publish findings on personal web page and submit it for publication. Share information at a vertical team meeting and at thesis defense.

### Resources

- Make a request for tuition reimbursement for the cost of the graduate class from the school district.
- Set aside budget money for survey software and printing needs.
- Schedule meeting time with the principal and academic dean.
- Plan for time to implement grading percentage testing.

## CHAPTER III

### GRADE POLICY ORIGIN

#### Background

Our middle school grading policy is outlined in the student handbook. In my spring 2005 conversation with the academic dean, she mentioned that the policy was in place to stay in compliance with the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2004* and that the committee was careful to adhere to the district school board policies (M. Pieniasek, personal communication, April 19, 2005). Because I had to change a policy that I was comfortable with, which I felt strongly was better from my students; I decided to do some research about grade percentage policies being affected by board policy and/or state legislation.

In checking the School Board policy, (EC Local—Curriculum Development), the only mention of grades is: “Teachers shall adhere to the curriculum philosophy of the District. They shall be responsible for teaching the planned curriculum, testing their teaching, and accurately reporting results to parents” (EC Local-Curriculum Development). That would leave the percentage policy open to interpretation. I remembered having a district Fine Arts percentage policy at the first school district I worked for, so I decided to check to see if there were any State of Texas guideline policies governing this matter.

While researching I found a 1994 case about a student who was sent to the Student Adjustment Center (SAC) in Troup Independent School District. The parents on

behalf of their child brought an appeal to the Commissioner of Education. Although the case had more to do with the discipline placement and the student's failing grades as an alleged result of the placement, it mentioned a Texas Education Code. 19 TAC §75.170(a) School District Policy on Grading, Promotion, Retention, Remediation, and Placement "requires that a district adopt a grading policy" (Allen v Troop ISD 1994). I wanted to see the exact wording of the code, so I looked through the Texas Education Code on the Texas Education Agency's website. Using the code's name, I was lead to education code for Drivers Education. Searching through the entire site, I found there were no guidelines other than 70 and above for passing grades and the "No pass, No Play" (Texas Education Code, TEC §33.081) rule: students must pass all courses in order to participate in UIL activities (Handbook of Texas Online). I wondered what happened to the grade policy code, so I made a call to TEA and found out that in 1995-96 the Texas Education Code was revised (A. Gunter, personal communication, Sept. 22, 2006). The Texas Register reports that Subchapter G was repealed and became effective September 1, 1996 (Texas Register 1996). The State Board of Education found that TEA lacked statutory authority because of Senate Bill 1-1995 which governs the administration and operation of schools (Gunter 2006). There has not been a proposal to replace the code.

The academic dean mentioned that "the school district required the inclusion of a specific grade percentage for our nine weeks assessments because of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (M. Pieniazek, personal communication, April 19, 2005)." In reading the information outlined on the website, there is no grading policy per se, but I could infer that, because of the use of assessments to measure student, school, district and state

performance for *No Child Left Behind*, my school wanted to give credence to the district or teacher-designed assessments by giving them a set percentage of a student's grade. For more guidance, I looked in the teacher handbook for my district. There it states: "Campuses and/or departments have agreed on a uniform weighting system for grades. The system for each campus will be reviewed at the beginning of the school year" (East Central ISD, 2005, p. 62-63). My conclusion is that defined policy is not a district mandate, but a campus mandate with district support.

I went back and talked to the former academic dean for clarification. She mentioned that the electives department—physical education, drama, art, Spanish, computer, choir and band all submitted one grade percentage plan to the committee in 2002. It was her intention to address the issue of failure rate by devising a single policy for consistency. What resulted after the policy implementation was that the failure rate was unchanged. It wasn't the manipulation of grades; it is the presentation of information. It's having an adequately challenging presentation without going too far and making the child feel inadequate to fulfill the task or making the task so easy that students would not be challenged (M. Pieniazek, personal communication, Sept. 22, 2006). Negative options would prompt a lack of motivation. Teachers still must represent student efforts with grades, and I question whether teachers are adequately prepared.

Many districts develop grade policies for consistency throughout their schools to better aid parents in understanding the development of their children. In 2003, a school district in Rockville, Md., made changes to their ten-year-old grade policies (*The Bulletin*



2003). Both the old and new policies restrict the use of grades based on effort, participation, behavior and attitude, and with the new requirements, grades should reflect the attainment of academic objectives. Teachers are asked to use multiple strategies to evaluate student achievement of these objectives. In a *Washington Post* article from December 2004, readers wrote to complain about the dramatic changes that occurred when a new policy was adopted. Students, who, under the previous policy attained “A” averages, dropped a letter grade when the new policy went into effect (Madigan GZ06). There were concerns that these students wouldn’t be able to compete against other high school students with higher averages for college admissions (Sobrinio GZ06). The staff writer, Jay Matthews, commented, “We don't yet know how much of an effect the new county grading system will have, but I wager that, if it really lowers average grades in any significant way, it [the policy] will be dead...”(GZ06), meaning the community will change the policy if it negatively affects students.

Liberty Hill Independent School District has guidelines for their grade policy as well. The policy supports the state required Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills and differentiation needs of individual students. The policy covers all aspects of the grade, including re-teaching, retesting, homework, grade percentages, mastery level and a grade “safety net” where a failing student has a floor grade average of 50. Teachers must follow the guidelines when constructing grades for a student (Liberty ISD 2003).

In one study of 144 school districts, grade policy varied widely. “Few districts appeared to give teachers adequate guidance to ensure consistent grading, and no district provided information about staff development to improve grading” (S. Austin, 1992).

Although *The Need for Student Evaluation Standards* (Gullickson 2000) is in reference to testing students, it makes excellent points that relate to grading percentage policy. Educators are poorly trained, differ in opinion, have very little guidelines from education agencies, or avoid professional development in educational grading. Other than a required math course in college, art teachers or even other subjects are not given the opportunity to understand and evaluate the possible scenarios as related to their subject areas. For example,

Kelley (1989), Hills (1991), and Wiggins (1994) identified problems with grade validity and reliability due to grade inflation, inconsistent and often biased practices by different evaluators, and the use of criteria that are not valid for grading purposes. As a result, grading practices vary so significantly across teachers and institutions that grades have limited value as an indicator of student learning. (Gullickson, 2000, p. 7-8).

I learned assessment (testing) strategies as an undergraduate student, but instruction was limited when referring to grade percentage structure and motivations. Student teaching offered few opportunities on assessment and evaluation, and it was dependent on the cooperating teacher's willingness to give instruction on averaging practices, and it was unknown whether there was any kind of school or district policy. As a student teacher, my main concerns were being able to demonstrate basic classroom management skills, presenting information and writing lesson plans as per university requirements. I did experience assigning grades to student work by my cooperating teacher, and wrote a few grades in the grade book; but, my first opportunity to evaluate students and to experiment with grading percentages -average grades- was as a new teacher some seventeen years ago. Teachers in that district were required to follow

district guidelines concerning grading percentages that were given to us annually in the teacher handbook. Changes to that grading policy were made by subject department request and this included all grade levels. Each department decided on their own grade-percentages and submitted them to the district for the next issue of the handbook as required by 19 TAC §75.170(a), which was still in effect. In the early 1990s, I did every grade by hand and/or calculator. Based on my increased experience, I developed a philosophy for averaging that I felt comfortable with. I intuitively knew my grade-percentages were appropriate to the amount of time spent on the work as well as being fair to the students. How did I know this during a time when averages took hours to compute for a set of 150 students with varying needs? I really didn't, it just seemed to feel "right".

The theory for my grade percentages was that there should be more grades in the daily grades category than any other category and should comprise short, one- to five-day long activities. Anything lasting longer than one week was considered a project. Projects, although less in number, also had the allocation of a larger percentage to represent the amount of time spent on the pieces. The remaining part of the average-testing would be compiled of not more than two unit tests and a final assessment that would be averaged together for the 20% test category in one reporting period. I must note that I had a student who figured out that he could fail all of the tests and mathematically still pass my class.

As I've needed to adapt to the changing grading percentage policy for my school and have become uncomfortable with it, I started wondering how other teachers

dealt with grades. In *Teachers' Assessment Practices: Preparation, Isolation, and the Kitchen Sink*, "Only about one half of the [143] teachers surveyed indicated that they were aware of their district's policies on grading; most were not aware of the assessment practices of their colleagues" (Cizek, 1995-1996, p. 159). I decided that I needed to be aware. Did other art teachers have an effective policy? Were they given the opportunity to have input into the policy? I began asking at the Texas Art Education Association Conference, regional Visual Art Scholastic Events and any other place I would run into other art teachers. I heard from several teachers that they hated their policies. One teacher sent an email with this direct quote: "i think u are 2 hard on the test grades," when he heard how my grades are currently averaged (10% assessment and 10% quizzes). (J. Perry, personal communication, July 4, 2006). I heard from several who were happy about their grades because the art department came to consensus, or they were using the policy they personally developed. Which one would work for my students? Many talked about taking multiple grades on the same project. I have graded projects in stages, but I haven't counted the same grade several times. For me, making the percentage a greater number took care of that. I do not think I could explain repeating a grade several times to parents who are looking at their child's grades online.

Having the minimum grades required for the final average is difficult for me. Before it was changed, I had my own goal of twelve, but now I am required to have two grades a week with approximately eighteen total grades for the nine weeks. Because I feel that everyone makes mistakes, I drop one of the lowest daily grades for each student. For the last three years I've added a weekly sketchbook assignment that has helped me

get to the magic number eighteen, but the newest version of our policy requires homework to not count more than 20%, which means I have to have less sketchbook grades and more daily activities or break down the daily grade percentage from 50% to 30% and have homework as 20%. It is my opinion that multiple categories are not better. It is possible that when grades are divided into smaller and smaller pieces, they would actually go against the student. There is something wrong to me about sectioning grades down to a minute detail. Having at least one more grade in a category helps the two grades average out, which is a benefit to the student.

“Many teachers seemed to have individual assessment policies that reflected their own individualistic values and beliefs about teaching” (Cizek 1995-1996, p. 159-160). While acknowledging my grading system may not be appropriate for everyone, my main emphasis or intent is to find out how much other systems would affect my student averages. I’ve never had a mathematical basis for my grading policy. It was always a feeling or an instinct. I want to represent the grades fairly for the students to their parents. There has to be a policy that can better represent them than one that is set up in favor of the required courses.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA INTERPRETATION

#### Quantitative Analysis

This section provides results from the teacher survey. The quantitative analysis will be presented first, and then I will synthesize what I learned from the open-ended teacher responses.

There were forty-four respondents to the confidential online survey. Districts varied from ten rural districts with twelve teachers responding to thirty-one teachers responding from twelve urban districts. One teacher was listed as “other”. The 50% of the respondents teach at least three grade levels, sixth, seventh and eighth. The 89% of the teachers report grades on a six-week basis with five teachers on a nine-week reporting period.

The study group of averages is based on a nine-weeks grading period. In order to make comparisons for grades I took the minimum grades required for the six-weeks average, divided them in half, then added the sum to the original total to make them comparable to my nine-week grades. The average of those numbers came to 15.5, which will work with the seventeen total grades from my fourth nine-weeks from spring 2006. Only two grade minimums exceeded my grades at twenty-seven because of a three grades a week minimum.

Out of the grade percentage policies reported in the survey, almost forty-six percent of the grade percentage policies were teacher developed, 5% were department

developed, 7% were school developed and 40% were district developed (Figure 4.1). Two teachers were unsure and of those, one said it was a school or a district policy. All of the teachers who developed their own policy were very satisfied, or satisfied with

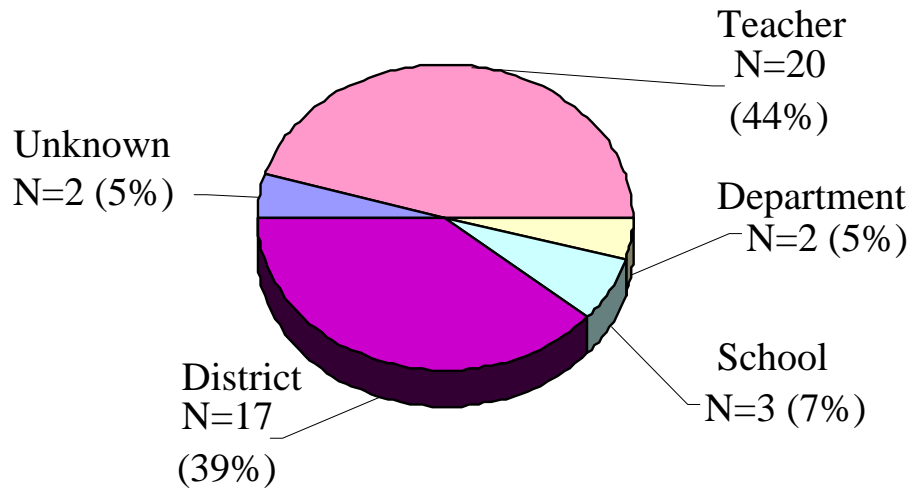


Figure 4.1: Who Developed the Grade Policy?

the fact that they all had full input in the development (Figure 4.2). Half of the teachers whose grade-percentage policies were developed by others said that they were very satisfied or satisfied no matter how much input they had in the policy. The other half of the respondents were somewhat satisfied, less satisfied, or unsatisfied (Figure 4.3). Of these, two respondents had full or much participation and were somewhat satisfied as well as three respondents who had little or no participation in creating the district policy. Seven respondents had little or no input and were less satisfied or unsatisfied (Figure 4.4). Almost seventy-three percent of all respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with their grade percentage policy, no matter who developed it.

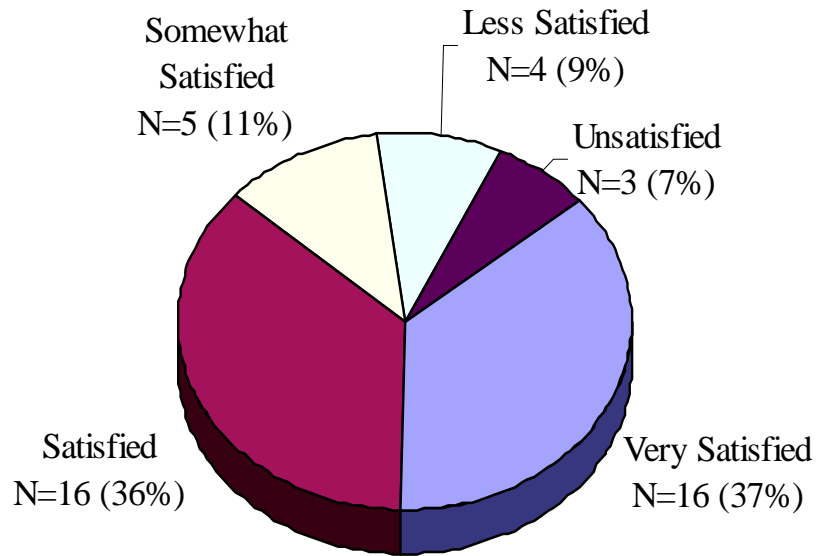


Figure 4.2: Teacher Satisfaction with Grade Policy

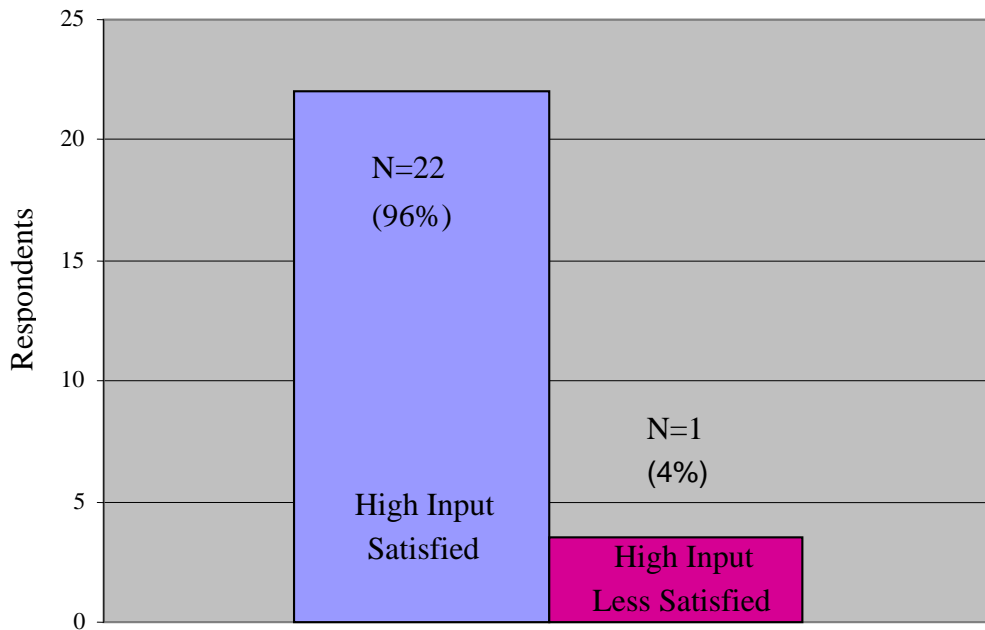


Figure 4.3: High Respondent Grade Policy Input and Satisfaction



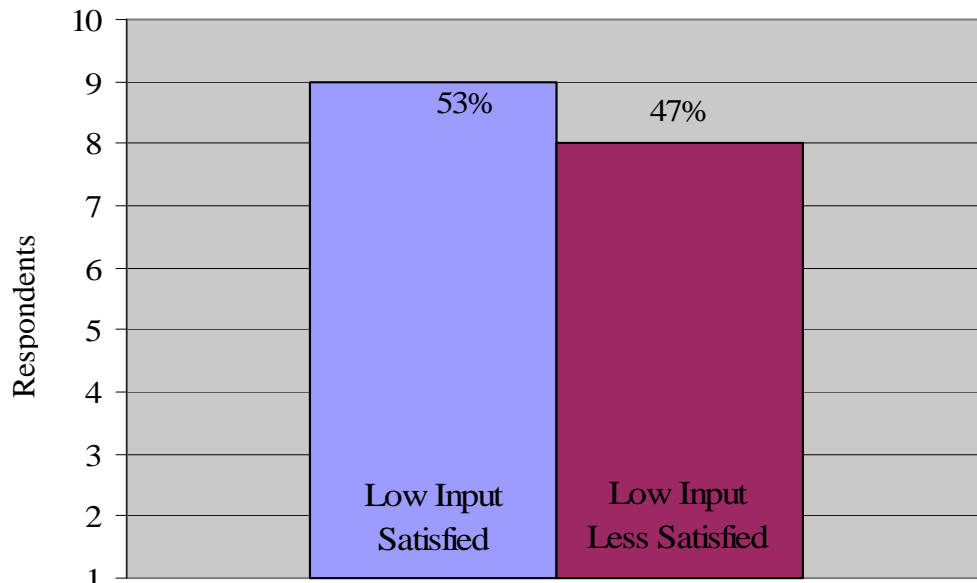


Figure 4.4: Little or No Respondent Grade Policy Input and Satisfaction

### Grade Categories and Definitions

Grade percentage policies break down into one, two, three and four categories or percentages and one exception (Table 4.1). Four teacher responses use straight averaging, meaning all grades are averaged equally, regardless of the importance of the assignment (#5, #21, #39, #43 2006). One teacher based her averages on the amount of time spent on the work by repeating grades. An assignment that students worked on for one or two days was worth one grade. “If it takes a week, it is worth two grades. If it takes two weeks, it is worth three grades...” and so on (#10 2006). The teacher responses mentioned nineteen category names for their grades.

Let me explain some of the listed categories as well as the additional categories teachers wrote: Daily Grades would include any assignments that take one to five days.

They are not limited to sketches but will also include writing, vocabulary, homework, participation, skills and fundamentals. Some teachers choose to separate these to give more importance to the grades and work with their teaching style. Skill Grade would be an evaluation of the craftsmanship used on a project. The stages in construction of an art work, such as ceramic green ware, bisque ware, and glazing, would be considered a Process Grade category. Fundamental Grades were not clearly explained by the teacher and I could make assumptions that it is related to skills or daily grades, but it may not be an accurate portrayal of what the teacher does in the classroom. Participation and Performance Grades can be taken on a daily basis or a weekly basis and would represent the amount of time students spent on task in the classroom. Quiz Grades are short tests that are used to take a quick measurement of knowledge information students have learned and Test or Exam Grades will include higher level thinking. Notebook Grades are used to evaluate short daily activities that are organized into a folder for one grade. Drawing Grades would encompass any manner of drawing activities not considered a project or daily grade. Warm Ups are short drawing or writing focus activities at the beginning of class.

Table 4.1: Multiple Grade Category Percentages

Respondents				
5, 21, 39, 43	100%			
4	D=20%	P=80%		
2	D=25%	T=75%		
14	Sk/H=25%	PTW=75%		
15	H=25%	P etc.=75%		
44	D=40%	M=60%		
36, 37	D/H=40%	T/P=60%		
1	D=40%	T=60%		
16	D/H=40%/50%	P=60%/50%		
18	D=50%	M=50%		
9	D=60%	PTQ=40%		
17, 32	D=60%	P=40%		
23	D=60%	T/P=40%		
22	D=70%	P/T=30%		
7, 33	D=75%	T=25%		
24	D=75%	T/P=25%		
34	D=80%	E=20%		
19	D=25%	Par=25%	P=50%	
11	Per/Pro=30%	F/Pr/Par=50%	S=20%	
38	D=30%	P/W=50%	T/Q=20%	
28	Pro=30%	Pr/Par=50%	S=20%	
27	D=30%	P=60%	H=10%	
35	WU/Q/Prog/Par=30%	T/P/Pres=60%	H=10%	
40	D/H/B=30%	P=50%	T=20%	
41	D/Par=30%	P=50%	H/WU=20%	
20	D/Q=35%	P=50%	H=15%	
8	Pr=50%	P=30%	Q=20%	
26	F=50%	S=20%	Pro/Par=30%	
6	D=60%	T=20%	W=20%	
31	Sk/Pro/D=60%	T/Q=30%	B/Par=10%	
25	D=20%	P=40%	T=30%	Q=10%
13	D=20%	P=40%	Dr=20%	N=10%
3	D=25%	T=25%	Ex=25%	P=25%
30	Sk=25%	WU=25%	P=40%	T=10%
29, 42	D=50%	P=30%	Q=10%	T=10%
10	Grade is	repeated based	on amount	of time
12	Grades equal	exception of	week long	entered twice

B=Behavior  
 D=Daily Grades  
 Dr=Drawings  
 E=Exams  
 Ex=Exercises  
 F=Fundamentals  
 H=Homework  
 M=Major Grades  
 P=Project Grades  
 Par=Participation  
 Per=Performance  
 Pr=Process  
 Pro=Product  
 Prog=Progress  
 S=Skills  
 Sk=Sketches  
 T=Tests  
 W=Writing  
 WU= Warm Up

### Analysis of Teacher Comments

Twelve teachers responded to what they would change about their grading policy (Table 4.2). Some teachers said that they wouldn't change a thing, where as others would list the percentages they would rather be using. Of those, what they would change would better represent information that was important in their class. Two teachers would rather not represent students by grades, but would rather send out parent letters or give students a pass/fail grade (#9, #15 2006). One teacher commented that every category had to have a grade in it or it would "tweak" the grade (#26 2006). From my own grade experience this reporting period; progress reports reflected only project and daily grades. Since I didn't have quizzes or tests at the time, the grades were a reverse bell curve. Students were either in the "A" range with extremely high grades or the "F" range, with very little in between. It seemed to throw off the accuracy of the averages to have one category unused, which was difficult for this respondent to accomplish during some reporting periods. One teacher was upset with the school board for "watering down" the grade policy (#34 2006). All of the teachers with negative responses would like to have more input in the grade percentage policy (#1, #11, #28, #29, #35, #42 2006).

Table 4.2: Open-ended Teacher Somewhat, Less or Unsatisfied Responses

If your answer was somewhat satisfied, less satisfied, or unsatisfied, what part(s) of the grade percentage policy would you change and why?	
1.	I think the policy should be 40%test/60%project (Respondent #1)
2.	I would like to give just a pass/fail grade (Respondent #9)
3.	I'd give a bit more weight to the skills portion-- this particular category is where our daily sketch grades fit into. I find more importance on this work than I do a project grade. (Respondent #11)
4.	In my previous school I was allowed to use parent letters, not grades. My kids were very motivated to produce art, the grades were not important to them. (Respondent #15)
5.	Nothing. I like the grading policy. (Respondent #23)
6.	We have to have assignments in each category, or it tweaks the grades!! Sometimes I don't need all 3 categories, or the # of assignments in each category is uneven, and it makes it difficult to determine a correct grade average. (Respondent #26)
7.	I feel that 50% is too much weight for one category. (Respondent #28)
8.	I don't like that my projects aren't worth very much. We spend most of our time on them. I have to take several grades on them to have any effect. Students won't study for art tests, so they hurt their average with nothing else to help bring up the grade. (Respondent #29)
9.	Get rid of school board members watering down grading policy (Respondent #34)
10.	I would raise the percentage on homework, because I feel a student should have more responsibility and ownership for outside the classroom work (Respondent #35)
11.	I think the project grades aren't weighted enough and there is too much emphasis on tests. (Respondent #42)
12.	wouldn't change a thing (Respondent #43)

Additional comments about grade percentage policy were varied (Table 4.3).

One teacher tried to make her grades balanced for students who were better at art versus students who were better at written work (#3 2006). Several respondents commented that grades should reflect the effort and focus of the individual student which is in the child's control (#3, #12 2006). One of these also pointed out that effort is more important because of inclusion and differentiation for students with special needs (#38 2006).

Teacher input is needed for developing a grade percentage policy as per a respondent

who was unhappy with their policy (#34 2006). And finally one teacher sympathizes with the need for a standard policy which may not be ideal for all and some will be unhappy with it, but it is good for the “practical everyday” (#28 2006).

Table 4.3: Open-ended Additional Teacher Responses

Do you have anything you might want to add about your grade percentage policy?	
1.	project and studio grades only it is all about the art produced by the student (Respondent #1)
2.	NO or None (Respondents #2, #5, #7, #24, #25, #26, #27, #32)
3.	I tried to make the grading policy fairer for all. Some students perform better on written work, and some students perform better on visual/artistic work. I tried to make the grading policy fair to both by finding a balance. I also grade art projects according to student involvement and effort rather than if the finished product is well done. (Respondent #3)
4.	The method I use is simple to use. If a project deserves more weight - I tell the students & simply increase the number of times I enter that grade. Effort/focus is what matters the most to me - it is the biggest predictor of student improvement and success & is easily within the student's control. (Respondent #12)
5.	The art curriculum on our campus is Studio based, so most grades are derived from a variety of factors that contribute to a final product. The final product reflects the time spent on the activity, how much focus and attention was given to the task at hand, and how well the student listened or participated during the lesson. (Respondent #14)
6.	Yes we are required to have at least three test grades/projects a six weeks. At the present we have a new administration and all grading policies are being reviewed and may totally change. I only give homework in my pre-AP class and I do not give quizzes-I do daily work and projects. (Respondent #16)
7.	Our district is trying to find percentages that work for everyone. It is very difficult to find an ideal that everyone is happy with. I do feel as though ours may not be theoretically ideal, but it is good for the practical everyday. (Respondent #28)
8.	I would like it to be 40% 40% 20%. (Respondent #29)
9.	A grading system for portfolios in the upper art classes (Respondent #30)
10.	It's almost exclusively based on EFFORT (Respondent #31)
11.	Include more teacher input. (Respondent #34)
12.	Major Grades = 50% Daily Grade = 25% Homework = 25% (Respondent #35)
13.	Grading is child specific and based on all aspects of effort and achievement as all classes have inclusion and or other differentiating elements. (Respondent #38)
14.	The 13 grades from the previous is a strong suggestion. I do not always have that many and feel free not to worry about the exact number. (Respondent #40)
15.	No, it's my policy that I've worked on to accommodate my teaching style. (Respondent #43)

## Grade Comparisons

Using a class of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders' averages from my fourth nine-week Art I class, I will be comparing the actual averages students earned using my grade percentage policy of 40% daily, 40% projects, and 20% tests/quizzes to other grade policies (Table 4.4). Daily grades consist of seven sketches, ceramic glaze grade, balance questions and sculpture questions. There are four project grades: green ware, mandala project, toy scratch art project and a paper mache Alibrijes (fantasy creature). The nine weeks assessment and mandala quiz are in the test/quizzes category. Blanks in the table indicate grades that were excused from the student's average. In Figure 4.5, there were three A's (100-90), seven B's (89-80), three C's (79-75), nine D's (74-70) and two F's (69 and less) (Figure 4.5). The overall class average is 77.1 and the failure rate is 8.3%.

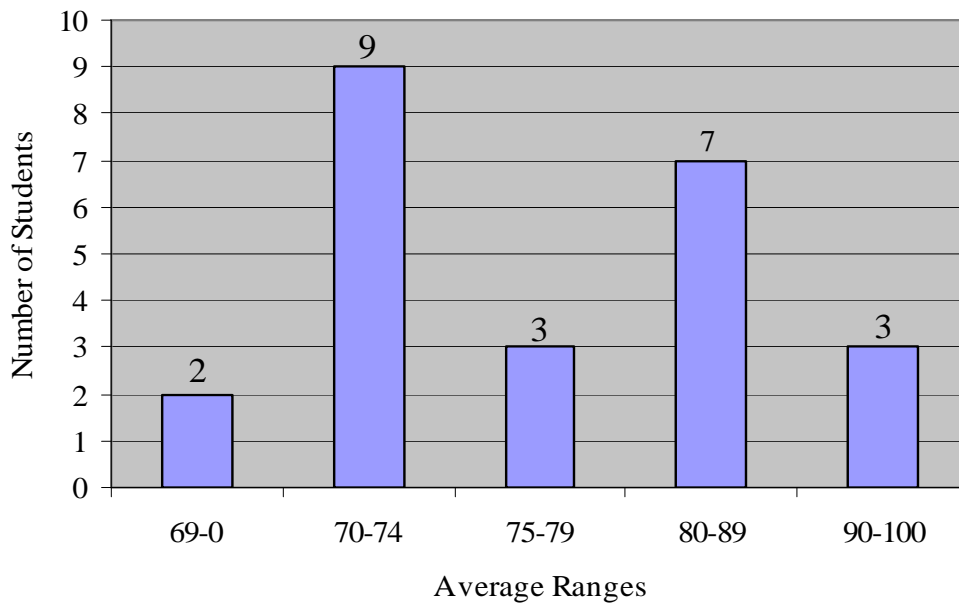


Figure 4.5: Grade Distribution for 40% Daily, 40% Projects, and 20% Tests

Table 4.4: Student Grades Averaged with 40% Daily/40 % Projects/20% Tests

I.D #	Cat 1	Cat 1	Cat 1	Cat 1	Cat 2	Cat 2	Cat 2	Cat 2	Cat 2	Cat 2	Cat 2	Cat 2	Cat 2	Cat 2	Cat 2	Cat3	Cat 3 9W Test	Cat 1 40%	Cat 2 40%	Cat 3 20%	Avg.
	Proj.	Proj.	Proj.	Proj.	Sketch	Sketch	Daily	Sketch	Sketch	Sketch	Daily	Sketch	Daily	Sketch	Sketch	Quiz		Proj.	Daily	Test	
1	85	85	90	100	90	95	100	80	80	85	100	70	80	100	100	20	71	36	36	9	81
2	85	100	100	100	0	0	100	70	80	0	100	85	80	100	100	70	11	39	26	8	73
3	90	25	85	100	70	60	90	90	100	90	90	100	100	100	100	60	41	30	36	10	76
4	70	70	60	90	50	0	0	100	70	0	80	80	0	100	100	100	100	29	21	20	70
5	70	100	100	100	0	0	100	0	80	0	100	85	60	100	100	65	34	37	23	10	70
6	50	50	70	70	70	65	90	60	70	100	100	60	100	100	100	90	36	24	33	13	70
7	85	25	70	85	85	70	80	65	90	70	80	80	70	80	100	40	75	27	32	12	70
8	85	60	60	85	90	0	100	70	70	90	100	0	70	100	100	100	26	29	29	13	70
9	100	100	80	100	100	95	100	55	100	0	100	100	90	100	100	90	17	38	34	11	83
10	85	95	85	100	90	95	95	95	90	100	100	80	90	100	100	60	88	37	38	15	89
11	95	90	90	100	90	90	100	95	90	90	100	95	100	100	100	100	93	38	38	19	95
12	70	85	65	100	100	80	80	100	50	70	100	0	90	100		100	100	32	31	20	83
13	50	25	85	100	85	85	60	80	70	80	90	100	85	100	100	50	45	26	34	10	70
14	50	30	50		85	50	80	0	100				80		100	80	15	17	28	10	55
15	70	50	0	50	100	95	80	100	70	50	70	100	75	100	100	70	46	17	34	12	63
16	50	100	100	50	0	100	100	100	80	70	100	85	90	100	100	90	10	30	34	10	74
17	70	40	95	100	90	95	100	95	70	100	100	0	90	100	100	60	45	31	34	11	75
18	85	90	90	100	95	95	100	95	100	100	100	90	90	100	100	100	105	37	39	21	96
19		95	95	100					100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	95	39	40	20	98
20	50	75	70	100	85	90	95	95	85	100	100	80	80	100	100	70	69	30	37	14	80
21	100	80	60	100	85	60	100	65	70	0	80	0	80	100	100	60	26	34	27	9	70
22	50	60	60	100	90	85	95	80	80	100	100	85	90	100	100	80	45	27	37	13	76
23	100	60	100	100	70	0	100	100	90	100	100	100	0	80	100	80	55	36	31	14	80
24	85	90	80	100	100	55	90	95	50	70	90	100	0	100	100	100	100	36	31	20	86



Using the fourth nine weeks grades, the first grade percentage policy for comparison is 75% tests and 25% daily grades (#2 2006). Going by the literal interpretation of this policy and going by my definition of tests as paper-and-pencil activities done in class without collaboration and study aids, the two test grades were put in the 75% category and all other activities were placed in the 25% category. Five students who performed well on the two tests and not as well on daily work raised their averages dramatically, as much as 19 points. For my class, the grade frequency distribution consisted of six A's, zero B's, one C, two D's and fifteen F's (Figure 4.6). For the policy the class scored an average of 69.9 overall had a failure rate is 63%.

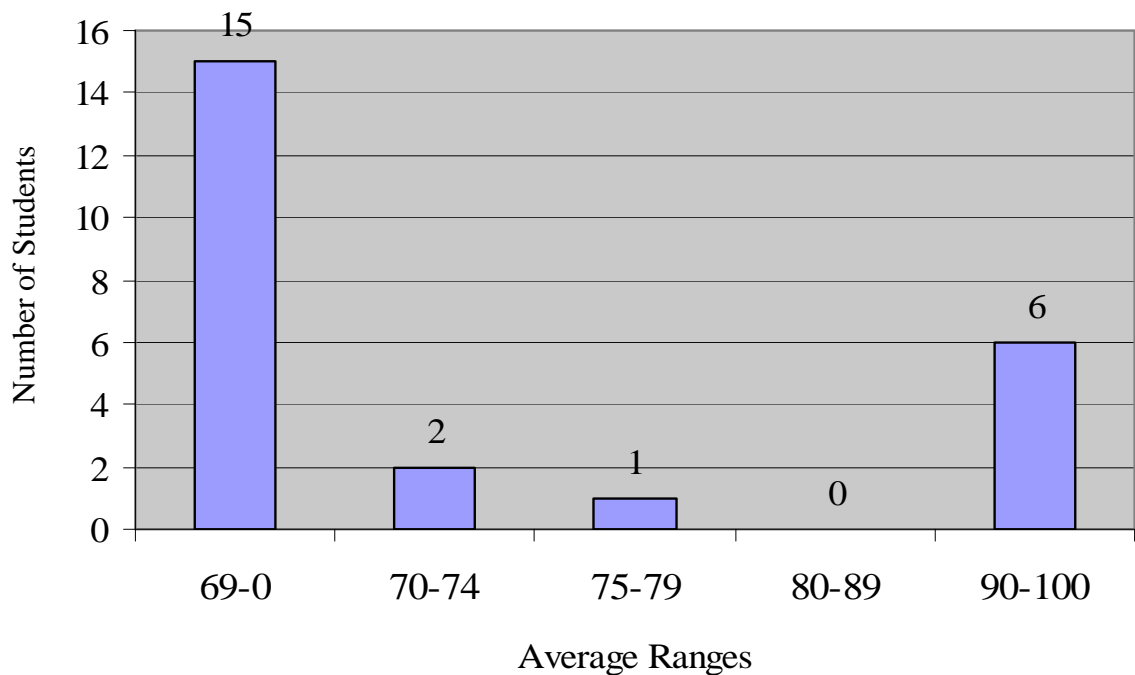


Figure 4.6: Grade Distribution Using 25% Daily and 75% Tests

My next numerical test dealt with the breakdown of 80% daily and 20% tests. This teacher stipulated that projects counted as tests. Applying this policy to my classroom grades resulted in much more emphasis on to minor assignments and rendered projects less important than they would be under my grading policy. Applied to my class, the students that were weaker on the daily grades were adversely affected and strong projects did not help grades. The frequency distribution for this policy is three A's, seven B's, four C's, five D's and five F's (Figure 4.7). The class scored a 77.7 average and had a 21 percent failure rate.

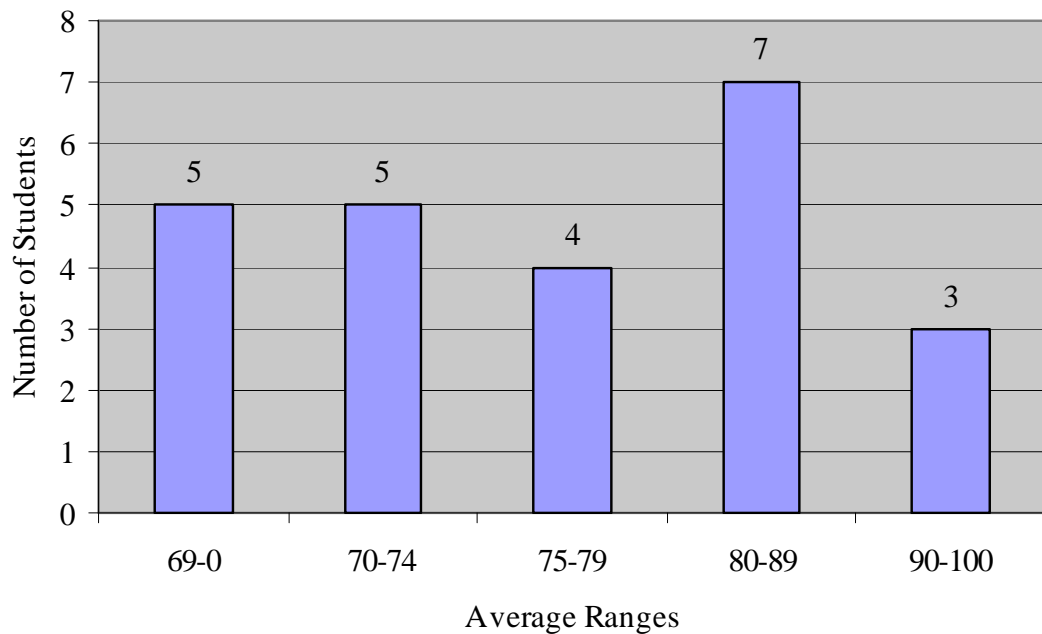


Figure 4.7: Grade Distribution for 80% Daily and 20% Tests

The third grade policy format tested contains four categories: 25% daily, 25% exercises, 25% projects and 25% tests. On the surface, this policy appears balanced, but when I worked the numbers I re-assigned sketchbook work as “exercises”. Since there were eight sketches under exercises, but only three other daily assignments, each daily work became more important than even each project. It could be inferred that under this policy 50% of the grade would be daily. The changes with this policy compared to 40%-40%-20% are more subtle, with the class average going up two points and eight students losing an average of two points from their final grade. These students scored lower on tests than on other assignments. There are three A’s, five B’s, six C’s, five D’s and five F’s (Figure 4.8). The overall class average is 77.5 and the failure rate is 21 percent.

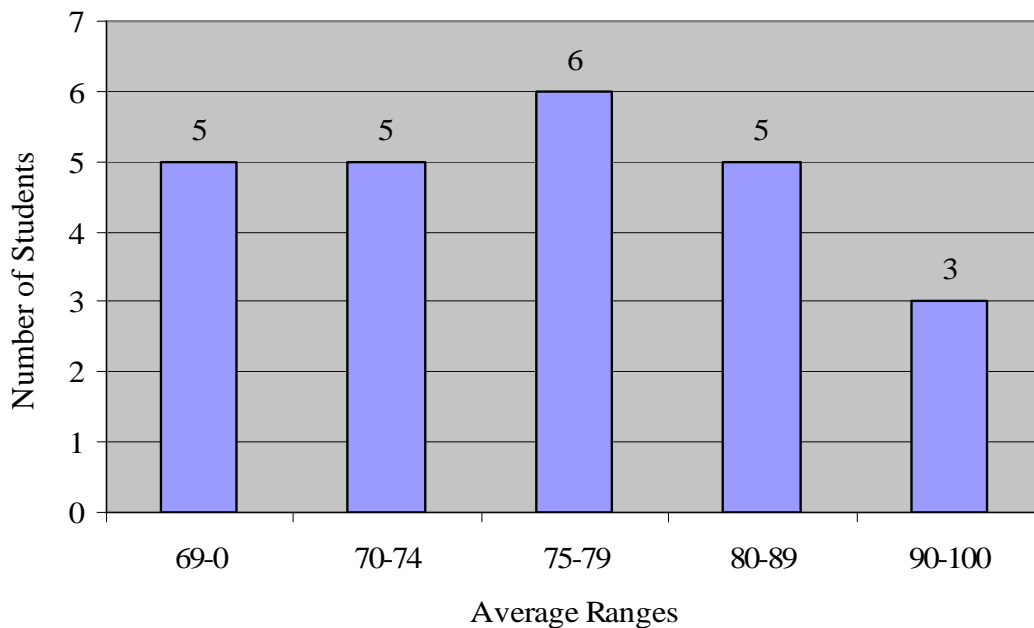


Figure 4.8: Grade Distribution for 25% Daily, 25% Projects, 25% Exercises, and 25% Tests

This grade percentage policy, 50% Daily, 30% Projects, 10% Tests, and 10% Quizzes, is the 2006 format I'm using for my school and it also gives more weight to daily work (#29, #42 2006). We are required to have our nine week assessment count 10% of the grade. The one quiz grade is moved to its own category to take 10% off of the original school percentage of 60% daily. There were three A's, six B's, four C's, six D's and five F's (Figure 4.9). The failure rate is 21% and the class average is 77.4%

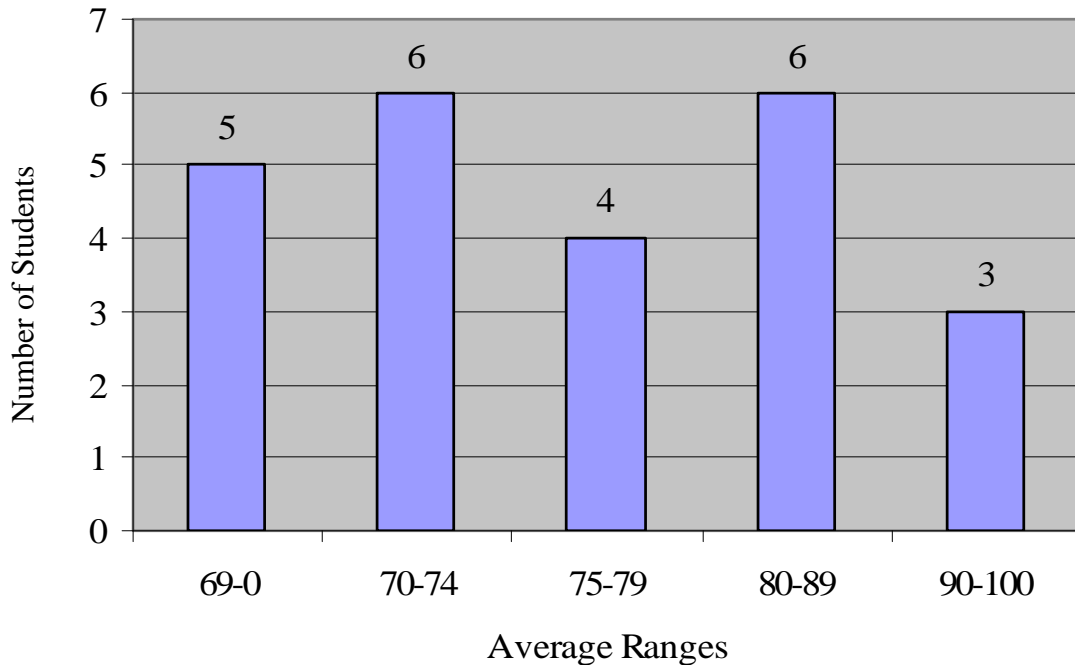


Figure 4.9: Grade Distribution for 50% Daily, 30% Projects, 10% Tests, and 10% Quizzes

Using 75% daily and 25% tests, daily grades of 75% should have similar results to 80% daily. The only difference would be the test grades would be stronger by 5% of the total grade. This would benefit students who are stronger on tests. Daily grades would also be worth more in the average, because there are more of them in the average. I would need to try respondent twelve's suggestion of repeating each project grade so they would have more worth. There were three A's, four B's, five C's, seven D's, and five F's (Figure 4.10). There is a failure rate of 17% and the class average is 76.9 overall.

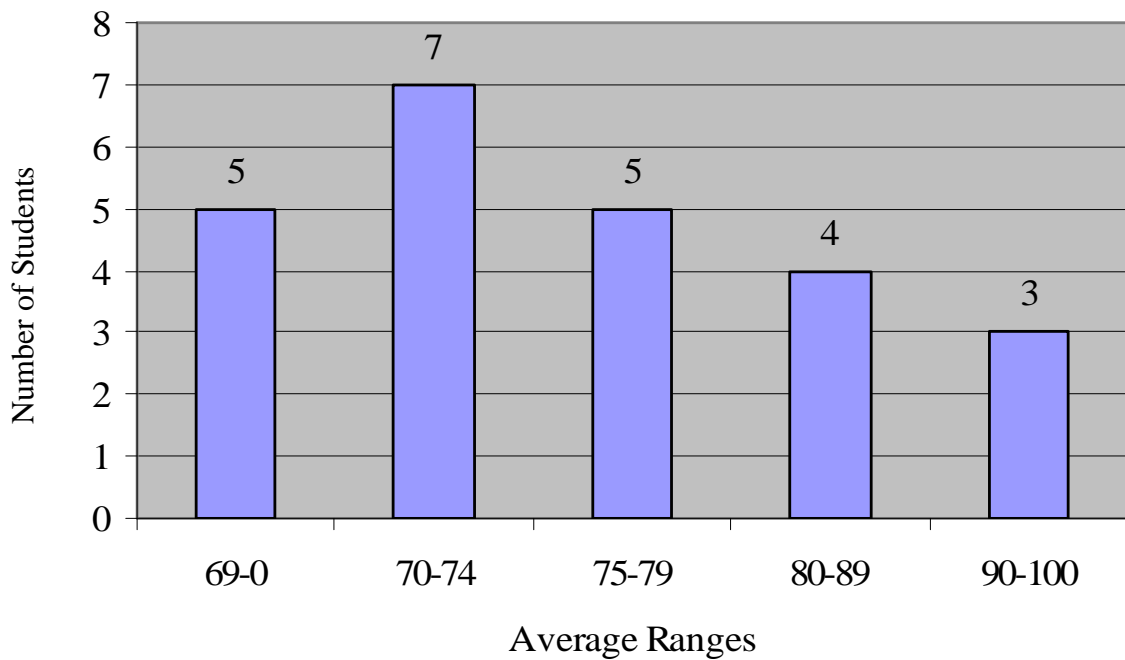


Figure 4.10: Grade Distribution for 75% Daily and 25% Tests

If I were to add up all seventeen grades and divide by seventeen this would be called straight averaging. Because eleven grades are dedicated to short assignments, students who do well on them would have much higher grades. Students who were in the low 70's and below could raise their grades substantially or fall greatly. There are four A's, seven B's, five C's, four D's and four F's (Figure 4.11). The class average is 78.8 and there is a 17% failure rate.

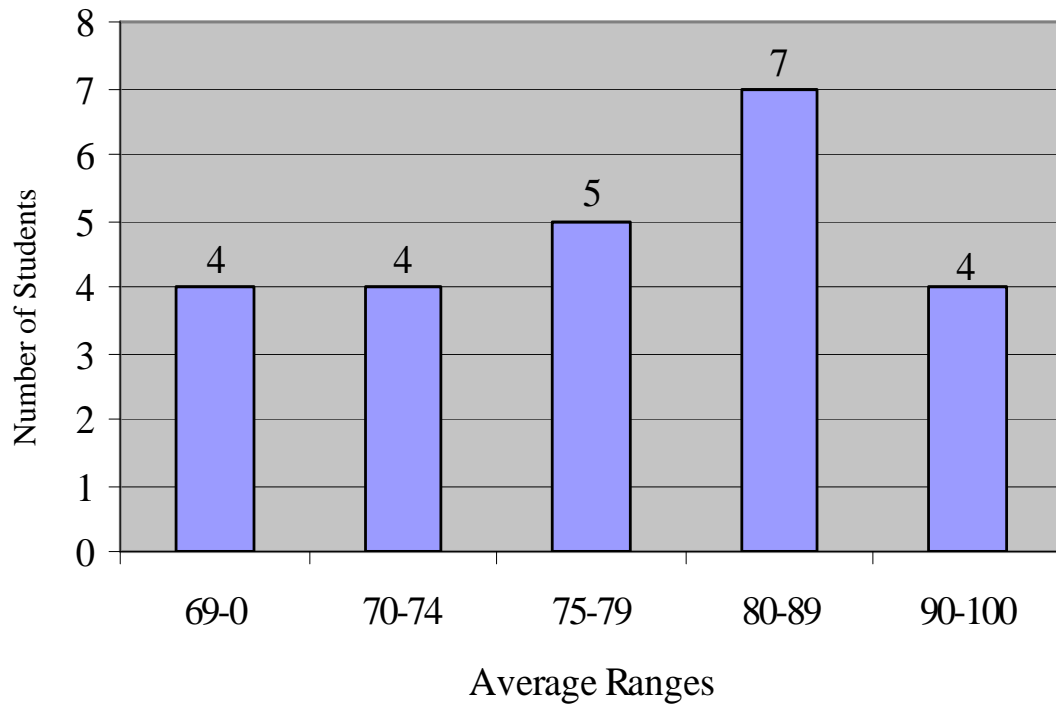


Figure 4.11: Grade Distribution for 100% Straight Averaging

Figure 4.12 shows the results for 30% daily, 20% drawing, 40% projects and 10% tests. This is very similar to the policy that my school district uses. It has the 10% tests my district requires and the 40% projects that I would like to use. The grade is still heavier with daily grades. I placed the three daily grades I had in the daily category and the eight sketches in the drawing category. There are four A's, four B's, six C's, six D's and four F's (Figure 4.12). The class average is 77.3% and the failure rate is 17%.

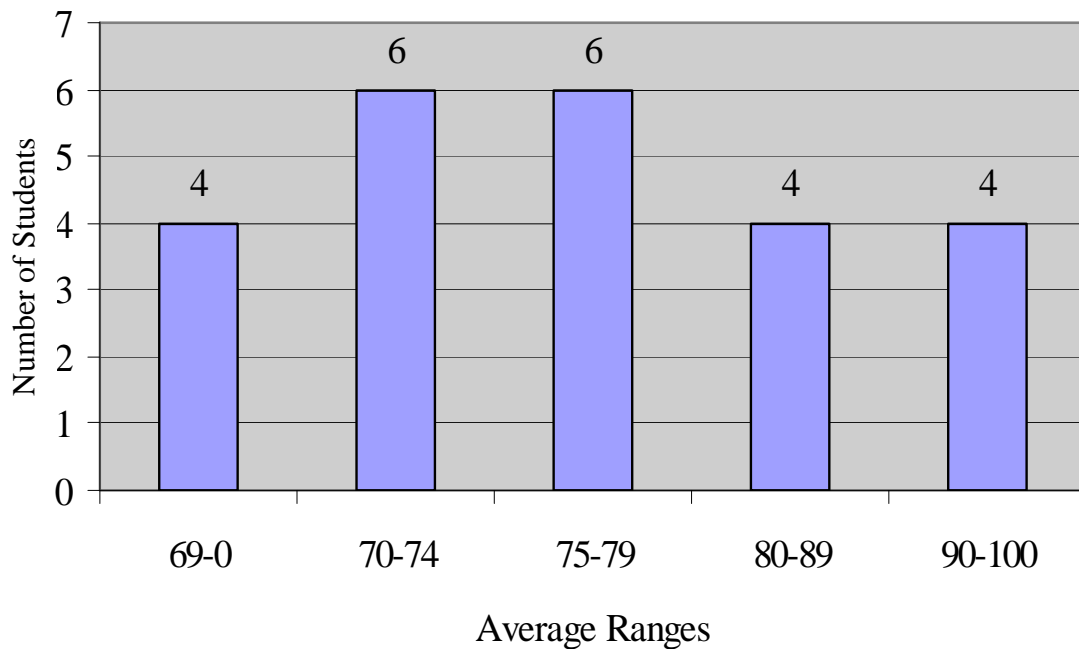


Figure 4.12: Grade Distribution Using 30% Daily, 20% Drawings, 40% Projects and 10% Tests

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

While my particular distribution plan generated the lowest number of failures, for this particular group of students, it must be noted that the percentages only applied to this one particular group of students among six different groups I teach. It only applies to one reporting period among the four reporting periods we have during a school year. Specifically, it was the last reporting period. Sometimes the last reporting period can have differing effects on students. Students who have been failing suddenly develop a sense of urgency to succeed, but there are others who feel they have already done their work for the year and allow the grades to slack off and only produce enough to keep themselves “under the radar.” This could explain the high numbers of Cs and Ds that appeared in all distributions. Overall, I can conclude that a grading policy of 40% daily, 40% project, and 20% tests will give the most favorable failure results of 8% (two students) for my situation. Having more grades distributed in the A-B ranges would also benefit students. Straight averaging (100%) appears to have a more even distribution of grades in each division, but the failure rate would increase to 17% (four students). This does not mean that the other grading policies are inappropriate for the teachers who use them. Each teacher has tailor-made their policies to fit their teaching style.

When putting grades in the 25% daily, 25% tests, 25% projects and 25% exercises, I found the answer for the teachers who mentioned that her grades were skewed when she didn't used all of the categories (#26 2006). Today's grade averaging



programs are very sophisticated and when one category isn't used, it will automatically adjust to divide the unused percentage between the remaining categories. For example, if she only used three categories of 25% each, the program will count the grade categories at 33% each, until she adds a grade in the unused category. The only problem that would occur is when too few grades are entered in one category. By putting one grade in a category worth 25% could drastically change the child's average negatively or positively.

One aberration in the statistics must be noted. The distribution with 75% tests generated an extremely high failure rate, while the other distributions generated failure rates for the most part within 20%. It must be conceded, while my failure rate would be high under this grading policy, I cannot automatically conclude that a district or teacher with this distribution would create high numbers of failing students. Other factors would have to be considered. . .for instance if the district puts big emphasis on test average, it is very likely that the individual community has accepted these numbers, and subsequently, the students must place emphasis on development of the study habits required to succeed on tests. Another consideration is necessary; results were not actually the same if someone else's definition of tests did not match my definition of tests (traditional pencil-and-paper exams done without collaboration or notes). According to a math teacher with both high school and college experience, all of these activities have fallen under tests: performance assessments, experiments, research papers, classroom presentations, collaborative projects, PowerPoint and HyperCard slideshows, notebooks, portfolios, and "30 pop quizzes rolled together to count as one test" (S. E. Gonzales, personal communication, Oct. 15, 2006). It also might be considered that from a mathematical

point of view, under this policy each test in my class counted for three-eighths or 37.5 percent of their final grade.

Because teachers are expected to be adaptable to the dictates of their schools and districts, they can be happy with the policy they are given, but with 44% of the teachers developing their own and 27% having some or many issues with the policy they were given, it would be better for the teachers to have an opportunity to give input. With the large number of teachers who developed their own policies, it would be difficult for many of them to have someone else tell them how to average their class, myself included, but if they are given the opportunity to give input, the transition will be a lot easier. School Districts wanting consistency should have a general outline for what should be counted as a grade. It would benefit the students for content area vertical teams representing both core subjects and electives to come to consensus on grade percentage policies that are by department and would be consistent through all of the secondary levels. Potential grade policy suggestions should be tested with actual student averages as I have done to study the effects it will cause. If a district does choose one specific policy, it should be available for yearly review, and teachers need to be informed to know how to ask for changes as one elective department did. The “elective teachers requested a change in policy to reduce impact of test grades which we felt were not our main focus” (#33 2006). There should be flexibility in the policy to enable teachers to adjust the grade percentages within school or district parameters.

The categories used to divide the types of grades vary greatly. There are some basic categories that most teachers use, such as daily work, home work, tests, projects

and quizzes. Classification into the differing categories varied widely by district and even by teacher. The choice of the various categories should not make too much difference as long as the teacher provides sufficient information and justification as to what assignments fit into what category. The teacher should also ensure that the categories are applied fairly and consistently and should be constructed such that parents or administrators who read their categories should have no problem understanding their meaning.

Failure rate is something that will remain a source of concern and consternation for every teacher and administrator. It did not help the situation when the state rescinded grade policy guidelines and never replaced them. School districts that became lax because of the policy change are now playing catch-up, and teachers who have had ten years to develop their personal policies have to change their teaching style to accommodate new policies. For the most part, teachers who have had success in the profession genuinely want to do what is best for their students. Part of doing what is best, is having a plan for representing student grades in average form. It should be fair to the student and represent the emphasis of the subject. Most art teachers take great steps to insure the policy they use works for their students. If districts or schools are going to set strict grading policies, they have to give the teachers the ability to adapt to and participate in the changes. They also may have to accept that teachers will have varying interpretations of what assignments might fall in each category. Better than trying a one-size-fits-all policy on percentages for everyone, districts and schools should consider

having a departmentalized grade policy for percentages so that the teachers are able to represent what is important for their subject.

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