Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence. Helen Keller

Yes, VIRGINIA, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy….The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that’s no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world. Francis Church

Upcoming Events:
Friday, December 7
Boys Varsity Basketball vs. Irondequoit, 7:15 p.m., SHS

Saturday, December 8
Varsity Wrestling @ Cheektowaga, 9:00 a.m.
Boys Varsity Swimming Relays @ Webster, 10:00 a.m.
Varsity Ice Hockey vs. Geneva @ Bill Gray’s Iceplex, 12:00 p.m.

Saturday, December 8
Spencerport Bowling vs. Brighton @ Spencerport Bowl, 3:45 p.m.

Monday, December 10
National Honor Society Induction, 7:00 p.m., HS PAC

Monday, December 10
National Honor Society Induction, 7:00 p.m., PAC

Tuesday, December 11
Faculty Meeting, Ranger Olympics, 2:25 p.m.
Varsity Hockey vs. Gates/E. Irondequoit @ Genesee Valley, 5:00 p.m.
Boys Varsity Swimming vs. Newark, 5:00 p.m., SHS
Board of Education Meeting, 7:00 p.m., District Office
Boys Varsity Basketball @ Albion, 7:15 p.m.

Wednesday, December 12
Varsity Bowling vs. Thomas @ AMF Empire Lanes, 3:45 p.m.

Thursday, December 13
Teacher Leader Meeting, 1:00 p.m., Conference Room
Varsity Swimming @ Gates-Chili, 4:30 p.m.
Varsity Ice Hockey vs. Aquinas @ Lakeshore, 6:30 p.m.
Girls Varsity Basketball/Varsity Cheerleading vs. Thomas, 7:15 p.m., SHS

Friday, December 14
End of Period for Progress Report #2
Varsity Wrestling @ Schroeder, 5:00 p.m.

Saturday, December 15
Indoor Track @ Houghton College, 10:00 a.m.

Monday, December 17
BPT, 2:25 p.m., Conference Room
Varsity Bowling vs. Churchville @ Spencerport Bowl, 3:45 p.m.

Tuesday, December 18
Department Meetings, 2:25 p.m.
Boys Varsity Swimming @ Webster, 4:30 p.m.
Tuesday, December 18  Girls Varsity Basketball @ Pittsford Sutherland, 5:30 p.m.
Tuesday, December 18  Varsity Hockey vs. Geneseo @ Bill Gray’s Iceplex, 6:00 p.m.
Tuesday, December 18  Boys Varsity Basketball/Varsity Cheerleading vs. Brockport, 7:15 p.m., SHS
Wednesday, December 19  Varsity Bowling vs. Canandaigua @ Roseland Bowl, 3:45 p.m.
Wednesday, December 19  **HS Instrumental Holiday Concert, 7:00 p.m., PAC**
Thursday, December 20  Boys Varsity Swimming Relays, 5:00 p.m., SHS
Thursday, December 20  Girls Varsity Basketball/Varsity Cheerleading vs. Churchville, 7:15 p.m., SHS
Thursday, December 20  Boys Varsity Basketball @ Gates-Chili, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, December 21  **Modified Day (Pep Assembly/Elf Day)**
Friday, December 21  Varsity Ice Hockey vs. Batavia @ Falletti Ice Arena, 6:00 p.m.
Friday, December 21  Indoor Track @ SUNY Brockport, 6:00 p.m.

**Student Updates**
Congratulations to sophomore, Isaac Pierre, who was selected as our November Student of the Month for Pride. Well done! 😊 As always, thank you to the Spencerport Lions for their continued support of Student of the Month!

On Wednesday night, December 5, members of Spencerport High Schools CHOICES program and S.L.I.P. attended the Monroe County's Inter-generational Holiday Ball. This event was held at the Burgundy Basin Inn and has become a tradition for the high school students. They spent the evening dining, dancing and engaging with Senior Citizens from across Monroe County. A special guest arrived from the North Pole (Junior Ned LaDuca) and he spent time posing for photos with the guests.
On Wednesday, November 28, 2010, senior members of the Service Learning Internship Program volunteered at Hope Lodge in the old Colgate Divinity complex. Rochester's Hope Lodge opened in 1980, and the first Hope Lodge was opened in 1970 in South Carolina. The goal of "The American Cancer Society Hope Lodge program provides a free home away from home for cancer patients and their caregivers." The students, who followed the direction of master chef Alyssa Libonati, prepared a main dish of breaded chicken cutlets with a garlic pasta. The guests all raved how good the food was and how much they enjoyed the ambiance (the students folded artistic napkins and had candle light for the guests).
Field Trips over 50 miles (2019-2020 school year)-FINAL REMINDER

Field trips over 50 miles for the 2019-2020 school year are due to my office (electronically) **prior to Winter Recess (12/21)**. Please make sure all paperwork is filled out completely and is typed. The forms can be found in Schoology under Faculty Meetings 18-19 (Opening Day Documents). These proposals will then be presented to the schoolboard by Ty for approval in January/February. As you plan these trips, please keep the following in mind:

1) All overseas trips need to have travel insurance included in the cost.
2) For any overnight trip, there needs to be a plan in place for supervision of students at night. Either hotel security needs to be arranged to be in the hallways or there needs to be proctors in place to supervise hallways to ensure student safety.
3) A parent meeting must be arranged with me (Sean McCabe 😊) so I can review expectations for the trip related to the Code of Conduct. If I cannot attend the meeting, one of the Assistant Principals will.
4) All required forms must be completed by students and parents. This includes our medical form and the Code of Conduct agreement.
5) Approval for chaperones not employed by the Spencerport Central District must be given by me prior to 12/21/18.

If you have any questions related to this process, please schedule a meeting so we can talk live.

**Upcoming Events for December**

- **Winter Concerts**: **Wednesday, December 19**, (B Day 9th & 10th grade) and **Thursday, December 20**, (C Day 11th and 12th grade) during Advisement. There should be little to no impact on our academic day. Seating charts will be distributed to Advisement teachers and classes will be called down by announcement.

- **Concert Choir**: As in years past, Mrs. Murphy and her students will be singing in the hallways before break. This year this will occur on **Thursday, December 20**, during third block.

- **Winter Spirit Week and Pep Assembly**: Winter Spirit Week will take place from **Monday, December 17, until Friday, December 21**. Our Winter Pep Assembly will take place on **Friday, December 21** (D Day). We will have a modified schedule on this day to accommodate the Pep Assembly at the end of the day. All movement for the Pep Assembly will be by announcements. Please do not release students unless an announcement has been made. **Morning announcements and the pledge will take place at the beginning of 2nd block.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Length</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7:25 – 8:35 a.m.</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8:40 – 9:50 a.m.</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 and Lunch</td>
<td>9:55 – 11:40 a.m.</td>
<td>105 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11:45 a.m. – 12:55 p.m.</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>PEP Assembly</td>
<td>1:00 – 2:00 p.m.</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Return from Assembly &amp; Dismissal</td>
<td>2:00 – 2:10 p.m.</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
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- **Elf Day: Friday, December 21, (D Day):** This will be our 11th Annual Elf Day. I will be meeting with the “elves” and their “owners” to explain the expectations for each. The overall expectation is that “elves” and their “owners” must follow the Code of Conduct and RANGERS’ Creed at all times. I think this is a wonderful event and would ask teachers to support it as much as possible. As always, it is up to each individual teacher to determine if an “elf” is allowed in their room, etc. All proceeds from this event will be donated to a charity determined by the seniors of the Principal’s Advisory Committee. Linda will send out a list prior to the 21st of all of the students participating. Thank you for your continued support of this event.
All staff are encouraged to participate (Jenn Placito is working on a special costume for the HS Admin for Tuesday!! ☺️)

**Staff Reminders**

- **DLC**: In order for Kerry Geedy (DLC Coordinator) and the tutors to use the time they have with students more effectively, I am requesting the following:
  - More specific information than ‘it’s in Schoology’. If teachers can give more specific information other than ‘it’s in Schoology’, that will help the tutors to better guide students to that specific portion of Schoology they need to focus on.
  - Send tutors an email when new files have been uploaded into Schoology and where the files are located in Schoology. This would only pertain to our long-term students. This will alert tutors that there is new information in Schoology so that they can, in turn, prompt and guide students to those assignments and information.
  - Provide teacher notes/keys whenever possible. Kerry and the DLC tutors will keep this information secured. The tutors use the teacher notes/keys to guide them in their work with students. It helps the tutors to know what portion of the content is a focus and, with Math, how that concept in math is being taught.
Kerry and the DLC tutors would be very appreciative if teachers could provide the above information when sending/emailing work for their students to Kerry and the DLC tutors.

We are very fortunate to have a great DLC with outstanding teachers to work with our students who are unable to attend school for a variety of reasons. It is essential that we supply work to our students at the DLC in a timely and consistent manner. Everyone’s assistance with this request is greatly appreciated and if you have any questions, please let me know.

- Please note, if you are interested in being asked to cover classes when a substitute teacher is not available, please let Linda Pelin know. She will add you to the list she keeps!!

- Please continue to be vigilant in always locking classroom doors when an adult is not present in the classroom. Students should never be left unsupervised in any classroom.

- We will be practicing another lockdown in the near future. Tim O’Connor will send a separate email to staff with details on this drill. As always, please make sure to have students take these drills seriously and follow all of the directions given over the PA (or by you). When students and staff are directed to move to the safest place in a classroom it is the expectation that students will move to this area and sit on floor (obviously with the exception of students who might have medical issues).

- If anyone is interested in flexing their schedule to come in early to help with supervision between 7:00-7:20 please let Tim know. You can then leave earlier on the day of your choosing during the week.

**ELA Regents Exam**
On Tuesday, January 22, the ELA Regents Exam will be administered at 8:00 a.m. in the East Gym. Similar to how we organized the process in June for the Global Exam, we will be pulling desks from classrooms to fill the East Gym and using those rooms to facilitate Testing Accommodations. Teachers who are impacted by the use of these rooms will be given an alternate schedule as we did last June. This schedule will be sent out electronically in early January for planning purposes.

**Upcoming Faculty Meetings**
12/11: Hard to believe, but this will be our one faculty meeting for December. Thank you to Jackie and Aurora for turning this into a wellness activity for us. Please refer to Jackie’s email on 12/3 for more information and to sign up for an activity. Immediately following this will be our staff holiday party so mark your calendars! This year we are going to hold the party at the high school (East Cafeteria), and we will have it catered by “Mangia Mangia”. So right after you complete a healthy activity, you can indulge in some fried appetizers ;-)! As Jackie advised me, “As long as it is in moderation.” We will also make sure there are some healthy snacks as well.
Principal’s Message
I hope everyone had a great week. Continued areas of instructional focus for our school will be our grading discussion and technology integration. In terms of our grading discussion during our last Teacher Leader meeting, there was a great conversation about our grading philosophy as a building. When we meet again with Teacher Leaders and other teachers from each department, we are going to give everyone the opportunity to provide more feedback on this philosophy. We will then be developing an activity for one of our faculty meetings and/or on January 25 to give the entire faculty an opportunity to provide more feedback. I truly believe the discussions and work we have done on grading over the last two years has been extremely beneficial. I see the fruit of this work when visiting with teachers and seeing how they have reexamined their grading practices and are really thinking about what their policy is and why it is what it is. Grading discussions are tough work! They can be emotional for some people and can also become very territorial. But fear not!! We will continue to push these conversations and engage in thoughtful and meaningful dialogue until we reach a place where as a building we have one guiding grading philosophy that each of us can build our grading practices around. Great, great, work, and I appreciate everyone continuing to be open to this dialogue. I will be meeting with the School Board in January to give them an update on our work so far. I will also be discussing with the School Board my ideas on moving away from weighted grade point averages and ending the practice of having a valedictorian and salutatorian. Many districts in Monroe County have moved away from this model, and I am hopeful we can eventually as well. I am working with my Principal’s Advisory Council to collect their ideas on these topics and to make sure they have a voice. Obviously if we move away from this model, it would be implemented over time; and again, it would be a decision that would need to be supported by our School Board. I have included an article on grading after my message that you can read if interested. It provides an interesting overview of a high school that worked on their grading philosophy as a building.

In terms of technology integration, I continue to be very impressed by the work I see going on in every classroom. I certainly appreciate the manner in which teachers are using Schoology in their classrooms. I also greatly appreciate and respect the work of our DCT team. I heard great feedback from about the workshops hosted by DCT members during our last faculty meeting. Cory Allen continues to meet with Teacher Leaders on a regular feedback to receive their feedback so make sure to share any concerns/questions with your Teacher Leaders, and we will discuss as a group at our Teacher Leader meetings.

As we all know December can be a very hectic time of the year for all of us (including our students). I greatly appreciate everyone’s efforts to blend our focus on academics with those memorable moments we try to provide our students (spirit week, pep assembly, etc.). I have had numerous former students return and tell me how “jealous” their college roommates are when they look at our incredible yearbook (thank you Adam Ashworth, Jody Wyant, and yearbook club!!) and see all the fun activities we do with our students to make Spencerport High School a memorable and positive experience for them. Simply great stuff.

As always, please feel free to see me at any time with questions, comments or concerns. I hope everyone has a restful and enjoyable weekend with family and friends!
How Grading Reform Changed Our School

Jeffrey A. Erickson

At a suburban high school in Minnesota, grading reform has resulted in a fundamentally new way to approach learning.

Last summer, I took great joy in watching my daughter take swimming lessons. One of the most difficult tasks for her was swimming the front crawl 50 feet to the other side of the pool. During the three week course, with ongoing guidance and feedback from her teacher, she relentlessly practiced this task every day. Only during the last class did she finally reach her goal and swim across the pool. Her final report for the class recommended that she move to the next level. How shocked I would have been if her teacher had informed me that my daughter's final mark in the swimming course would be determined by the average of her performance over the entire course—that even though she had mastered the front crawl at the end of the class, she failed because the teacher had included all her unsuccessful attempts in calculating the grade. Perhaps this scenario seems outlandish. But in the world of schooling, averaging is just one of many common but questionable practices that can significantly distort the accuracy of grades.

The Guiding Question

At Minnetonka High School, a suburban school serving nearly 2,900 students in Minnetonka, Minnesota, the need for grading reform became evident in the early 2000s. Parents were calling for more transparency and consistency. Teacher surveys revealed that the purpose for grading varied from classroom to classroom and that teachers were using a wide range of factors to determine grades. Attendance, behavior, effort, extra credit, and participation were all in the mix along with actual achievement of curriculum standards. We needed to articulate a clear focus for grading. Changing our school's grading practices required that we take a fundamental look at one guiding question: What should go into a grade? Our answer: Grades should reflect only what a student knows and is able to do. This principle became the impetus for our work. As we analyzed our policies and procedures, we discovered many practices that were either inflating or deflating grades.

Inflating Grades

Is there a connection between a strong bladder and grades? Amazingly, in some cases there is. A substitute teacher was covering a colleague’s classes for the day. The regular teacher instructed him that if a student asked to go to the bathroom, he should ask that student for his or her pink pass because the student might decide to keep the pass and remain in the room. Why? At the end of the quarter, students could submit their unused pink passes for extra points to
be added to their final grade. This may seem like an extreme example, but it’s common practice for teachers to award extra points for bringing in tissue boxes, completing extracredit assignments, returning permission slips, contributing canned food to the food drive, and so on. Such practices inflate grades and distort their meaning. The whole grading process becomes a game rather than a reflection of learning. Another source of grade inflation is grading “on the curve.” When scores on a particular test are initially low, the teacher applies a curving process, and everyone’s score is magically inflated. Typically, the top student score in a class becomes the “perfect” score, and the rest are sorted from that point.

Deflating Grades
Factors unrelated to student achievement of standards—such as behavioral infractions, unexcused absences, cheating, late or missing work, or averaging—can also deflate grades. An example of the effects of averaging occurred when Pam decided to take a risk and register for an advanced placement course in the fall of her junior year. Unfortunately, she soon became overwhelmed by the course’s content and demands. After trying hard but receiving a first quarter grade of F, she decided to change to a general level class, where she achieved great success. During the second quarter, she earned an A on her classwork and a B+ on the final exam. Two weeks later, the final grades for the semester were issued. Before I reveal the grade Pam received, what grade do you think would demonstrate what she knew and was able to do for this course? Pam was surprised and confused when she saw that her final grade was a D+. Following common practice with course transfers, her first quarter F had been carried over into the new course. Needless to say, her parents called the school. Fortunately, Minnetonka district policy allows a teacher to conduct additional assessments if he or she agrees that a report card grade does not fairly represent the student’s performance. In this case, the teacher gave Pam two additional summative exams that she had missed from the first quarter, and her grade was converted to an A. Student behavior can also complicate grades. For example, in our school, many students used their cell phones to text or send emails during class. Some teachers attempted to use grades to control this behavior. One teacher would reduce a student’s percentage grade by two points every time the student inappropriately took out a cell phone. In some cases, this practice reduced students’ grades by two letters. Schools also frequently consider student attendance when calculating grades. Students with unexcused absences and tardies may find their grades reduced at the end of the quarter—a consequence issued up to nine weeks after the offense.

Practicality + Best Practice
Establishing a common purpose for grades enabled Minnetonka High School to reexamine and change many of the practices that were inflating or deflating grades. On the basis of our belief that grades should show what a student knows and is able to do, we developed a policy for consistently and objectively reporting student academic achievement. Teachers are now required to use two assessment categories—formative (not more than 15 percent of the grade) and summative (not less than 85 percent). Grades in these two categories determine the quarter and semester grade. Within the summative category, teachers of the same course must conduct at least four common assessments, one of which must be a performance task. Throughout the learning process, the formative assessments inform the students of their progress in mastering material that will appear in the upcoming summative exam. Teachers are responsible for articulating clear learning targets that students understand and can attain. Of course, few people would argue that participation, effort, and positive attitude are unimportant. However, including these elements in a grade would distort our purpose of communicating achievement. Instead, we report students’ performance on these factors to students and parents during conferences. We also developed a system to replace the old practice of applying the “curve” to adjust test scores. Now, after every assessment, the teacher conducts an item analysis. If a significant number of students miss certain questions, the teacher reflects on whether he or she provided enough instruction on those topics. In terms of scoring, the teacher omits these test questions from students’ grades, reteaches the lesson, and reassesses the topic. We determined that behavioral infractions are legitimate concerns and should be addressed—just not with grades. When grades cannot be used to control students, we must replace them with sound classroom management and student engagement strategies. For instance, we replaced the system of reducing grades for unexcused absences with a highly responsive and immediate intervention and consequence system. When a student skips a class, a phone call goes home that same day. A staff member meets with the student within 36 hours to find out why the student was absent and issues a detention for an unexcused class absence. Initially, some educators and parents expressed fear about what would happen: Would students skip class when grades were no longer connected to attendance? This proved not to be the case. Instead, we experienced a 55 percent reduction in unexcused absences, a 66 percent decline in disciplinary referrals, and a 37 percent reduction in suspensions. We did not eliminate consequences for misbehavior; we simply developed more effective and appropriate consequences. Homework practices were another fruitful area for change. Homework had typically been graded based on completion. Parents were often confused when they saw that their child’s mark on the final chapter or unit summative test was a D or F after the child had received a series of perfect homework scores. Over time,
homework practices have evolved. Instead of giving students homework scores that reflect completion, teachers now frequently give a quiz on the previous day's homework, thus providing real-time progress updates. As a result, students and parents see a higher level of consistency between the homework grades and final assessments.

Second Chance for Learning
Of all the grading dilemmas, retakes and redos surge to the top as one of the most highly disputed. Those who argue against retakes claim that this practice coddles students and doesn't reflect the real world. Imagine that you've just taken a major test for your high school Spanish class, and in spite of your preparation you bombed it. You ask the teacher for a chance to take a retest to improve your learning and score. Your teacher tells you that he doesn't offer retakes and that you just need to try harder next time. You leave defeated, muttering, "Well, I just can't get Spanish." If this pattern continues, it won't take much time for you to doubt your potential for growth and success. Students need multiple chances to grow and show what they know. If the goal is for all students to master essential learning, the philosophy teach, test, and move on should be replaced with teach, test, and now what? The essential question that each teacher should ask after every assessment is, Now what do I do for the students who didn't get it? In Minnetonka, the only unacceptable answer is "move on." When the answer is to provide a retake, the most important step is what happens between the first and second test. The purpose of retakes is never for the student to simply show up and hope for the best. Corrective instruction must occur between the test and retest. For example, Polly, a social studies teacher, requires students to review all incorrect answers on the original assessment and find the correct answers. Next, the student must come in and work with her to complete review pages. Only when it's evident that the student is ready to be reassessed does Polly offer a retake. The new score replaces the old one—there's no averaging or limit to what the student can earn. This is not letting students off the hook; it's holding them accountable for mastering the information. Each year, we have refined and more deeply implemented our new grading philosophy. At the end of the 2009–10 school year, we posed the question to staff, "What if no student failed at Minnetonka?" In analyzing the data, we discovered that the primary reason for course failure was not lack of understanding of the material, but missing work. We decided that the consequence for not doing the work should be—doing the work. Students are now required to complete missing work during their lunch periods or before school. We also stepped up communication; teachers phone parents of struggling students every three weeks to report on progress. This combination of increased student accountability and improved homeschool communication has produced dramatic results. The number of F's in grades 9–12 has dropped 63 percent, and the number of D's has dropped 32 percent from 2009 to the current term. When an entire faculty implements this consequence and moves away from practices that deflate grades—and hope—an entire culture can be transformed.

Professional Development
To sustain the fundamental kind of grading reform undertaken by Minnetonka, educators need meaningful professional development. They not only need to study grading research, but they also need new learning opportunities around effective classroom management, assessment, and instruction. Minnetonka created the High School Instructional Leadership Team to redesign professional development in the school. The team works to set the agenda and professional development for all monthly staff meetings and other teacher work days. During each meeting, teachers share research as well as their own experiences. For example, in a recent meeting, Sarah described an experience concerning her 9th grade English students. During the second semester, the students read two Greek tragedies, *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*. When they took their summative assessment for the first play, some students demonstrated a sound understanding of the play itself but performed poorly on a specific section dealing with passage analysis. The students requested a retake. Sarah's dilemma was how to balance the need to start the next play with the fact that students had not mastered the skill of passage analysis. Knowing her students well, she was concerned that they would spend much of their time working on the old material and fall behind with *Antigone*. Sarah's solution? During study of the second play, she continued to have her students practice passage analysis through intensive formative assessments. When they took the *Antigone* summative assessment, students who had previously struggled with passage analysis had the option to complete an extra section in which they applied this skill to the new play. Sarah replaced the students' previous results with their new scores. As a result of this strategy, more than 50 percent of her students increased their scores and demonstrated a higher level of mastery of passage analysis. Sarah said that her students felt empowered by this experience.

For the reluctant teacher, the argument that "retakes are great, but they won't work in my classroom" is diminished when colleagues like Sarah show how they've used retests with good results. This timely professional development has transformed our school and sustained our grading work.

A Culture Transformed
Parents, students, and teachers had been comfortable with the old system, with its cushion of "free" points from extra credit and homework completion. We spent much time during the first year educating parents and students about the new policy. During parent-teacher conferences, we held breakout sessions that helped parents understand the need...
for grading reform and the research supporting it. Initially, some parents and students feared that Minnetonka's new grading policies would mean that grades would be lower. After the first semester grades that first year were calculated, it was clear that these fears would not come true. Although there were slightly fewer As, the combined percentage of As and Bs was the same. In addition, we have seen a significant increase in overall student achievement. Between 2006 and 2010,

- ACT composite scores rose from an average of 24.1 to an average of 25.7.
- The number of students taking advanced placement (AP) exams rose from 505 to 661.
- The number of students participating in the AP Scholars program rose from 160 to 258.
- The Minnesota Comprehensive Reading Exam (grade 10) passing rate increased from 85.5 percent to 92.3 percent.

The school climate has changed, too. No longer do teachers receive panicked calls at the end of the quarter seeking extra credit opportunities to boost a grade. Regardless of the teacher, the protocols for late work, retests, and evaluating nonacademic factors—to name a few—are the same. Teachers, principals, students, and parents share a common understanding of the school's grading and assessment policies. Ever since we began the process years ago, teachers have been highly involved in the conversation. They routinely ask themselves, Do my grades reflect students' academic achievement? Are there nonacademic factors influencing the grades?

More broadly, the questions Why are we doing this? and What research supports it? have become central to our ongoing conversations about school improvement. Our relentless focus on grading and assessment practices has helped create a culture of learning at all levels.