10 December 2019

To Unit 5 Administration and School Board:

We, members of the Foreign Language Department at Normal West, have been implementing the mandated conversion to Standards Based Grading in our level I and II courses for the past year and a half, and we have dedicated hours of PLC and district task force time and money to prepare before the SBG rollout. Throughout this process, we have identified concerns related to the SBG philosophy, its impracticality for language learning, and its implementation in Unit 5.

We have discussed these concerns within our department. We have shared them with various administrators at the building level and the district level. Our concerns have not been addressed. We have now moved past the point where our concerns are speculatory. We are seeing our concerns play out in our classrooms, in our gradebooks, and our students' lives. These concerns are affecting our morale. They are affecting students' behavior. They are affecting our students' grades.

- **SBG does not effectively and accurately communicate grades and academic progress to teachers.** As we examine our Spanish I SBG grade books in preparation for final exams and posting grades, we are concerned about what we see. SBG involves the combination of aligning language standards to the 1-4 scale, identifying what those standards and SBG marks will look like in our classrooms, and then having the SBG average converted back into the traditional grading scale; through this process, most, if not all, students' grades have been distorted in some way.

  Further, since not all strands are assessed the same number of times, the strands assessed with less frequency become weighted disproportionately higher than strands that are assessed with more frequency. Since not all rollup skills have the same number of strands, the strands within these roll up skills are further inflated.

  Since all of the strands are averaged, the students' grades become the average of disproportionately weighted strands, averaged in disproportionately weighted rollup skills, that are then averaged together for the final grade.

- **Teachers cannot effectively and accurately communicate grades and academic progress to students and parents.** Because the system of grade calculation has become so convoluted, as described above, teachers find it challenging to explain a student's grade on a given assessment and in the class in general. During parent-teacher conferences, the greatest challenge for teachers and Spanish I parents was understanding what the SBG grades truly meant in terms of student progress. Often parents saw a 3, identified it as an A, and thought that their child was efficiently mastering the content. However, due to the aforementioned layers of grade transposition, the student may be showing an A in Infinite Campus when in reality they are vastly underperforming for A standards. This grade inflation led to confusion and frustration at conferences, and it has continued to do so since then. Further complicating this issue is the disconnect from the rubrics, which assess skills, to the learning targets that we actually teach. The rubrics communicate skills that students have, not mastery of learning targets.
- **Key tenets of SBG do not prepare college- and career-ready students.** Several components of the SBG philosophy do not adequately, appropriately, and realistically prepare students for life after high school. Whether students continue their studies, join the workforce, or enlist in the military, the SBG philosophy of continuous retakes and loose deadlines will not align with the expectations of their new environments. Anecdotal evidence of this problem presents itself daily in our classrooms. We have all had students say to their peers, or even to us, that they aren't prepared for the assessment, but it doesn't matter because they can retake later. We impose restrictions on retakes such as full completion of formative work and study plans, but we continue to see this lack of initial effort.

  In true SBG, late work is purely hypothetical. We can tell students that the work is late, but there is no way to hold them accountable to a deadline. In a level 1 language class, the apathy created by retake possibilities and a lack of deadlines is extremely detrimental to students and can derail their language studies before they truly begin. Our 49-minute classes are simply not enough to foster significant acquisition, and students see no intrinsic value in doing work that earns them no credit. This passive attempt at learning, coupled with limited individual accountability, can produce adults who are unmotivated and irresponsible—in other words, adults who are unemployable. We have seen direct evidence of this in our classrooms. Students regularly tell us that they will not do

homework. They say that it is a waste of their time since there are no scores or points associated with it.

- **The SBG philosophy does not align with successful language learning.** SBG fragments language acquisition into the four language rollup skills (speaking, reading, writing, and listening,) then into strands of those skills, and then further still into sub-strands of details. Language learning is in no way a fragmented process; language learning is holistic in nature in that its primary goal is to understand and be understood. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) and the Advanced Placement College Board standards and rubrics regarding language learning all align to this holistic approach. While individual components contribute to language interpretation and production, prioritizing success in these bite-sized bullet points will not generate bilingual and biliterate students. SBG requires us to fracture language and thus our curriculum, itemize components of cultural awareness and sensitivity, and water down our expectations.
- **SBG's implementation in Unit 5 has been inconsistent and wreaks havoc on grades and performance.** The implementation of SBG has been inconsistent since its inception. Last year our administration told us to operate under the idea of the decaying weight, yet when we returned in August the administration informed us that, instead, Infinite Campus would calculate a simple average. Halfway through this semester, in the middle of reporting and communicating strands and grades to our educational stakeholders, the district administration added the option of the 2.5. Because district- and school-level administration has continually changed the expectations, we, the teachers, find it even more challenging to maintain an accurate grade book that reflects what students do and do not know.
- **Administration does not honor teachers' professional expertise.** Though administrators repeat the refrain that we, the teachers, are the experts in our content areas, they do not respond to our concerns about SBG. The Spanish teachers at West have dedicated ourselves to being lifelong language learners. We know exactly how challenging it is to learn a new language because we have been through it ourselves. We know that language is not about the ability to conjugate a verb, use a compound sentence, or recall specific level 1 vocabulary. Language is about dedication, immersion, and interaction. When we tell our administration that SBG does not foster language

learning, we do not receive a genuine acknowledgement of our concerns. Though administration touts that we are the language experts, the refusal to listen to us when we say that the implementation does not lend itself to doing what is best for students leads us to conclude that we are not believed to be the experts.

- **Inter-rater reliability has become an even more significant issue.** Administration promoted SBG and its adaptation as an opportunity to reduce inter-rater reliability. However, unreliability and inconsistency have become worse. When discussing student responses and how we have graded them, the Spanish teachers have discovered that our interpretations of a 1, 2, 3, or 4 are different even though we understand what those scores mean in theory. A 3 meets expectations, but is reported as an A on transcripts, so some of us grade with the "A" in mind, whereas others grade with the classification of "meets expectations" in mind. This discrepancy has worsened, not improved, under SBG. Prior to implementation of SBG we had consistent grading practices district wide.
- **SBG is consuming resources better used in other ways.** Last year and this year, the district has been paying for a high number of task forces to align curricula to SBG. Both years, the district has run between 20 and 30 task forces, each with at least two teachers, and with 10 hours allocated to each teacher. The district, then, has been paying between 400 and 600 hours of task force work yearly for SBG work. We feel that this time and money could be better spent.
- **SBG has drastically increased our workload.** Previously we reported one district wide consistent score that communicated to students how they had performed, that parents understood, and that teachers felt had value and directly correlated to the language that students had acquired. Now we grade assessments. Once graded, we apply a rubric to the assessments that does not communicate anything about the actual language, but rather about how a student performs a skill. Once we have applied the rubric to the scored assessments, we enter a myriad of scores that are then averaged together. Where as before in a traditional grading system 1student received 1grade that they understood, now a student receives between 4 and 18 scores on an assessment. These scores also have to be entered by a teacher. Previously for a class of 30 students, a teacher would enter 30 scores. Now we enter between 240 and 540 per class. On a recent assessment Spanish 1 teachers at West entered more than 5000 scores.

Despite ALL of these concerns we see REAL value in the task force WORK that we have done. We have updated our assessments and most feel that they are improved. We have developed more consistent retake policies. We have had great professional dialogue about assessment in general. However, we can no longer meaningfully discuss student performance on our assessments. We no longer provide meaningful feedback to parents or students. We spend more time doing this than we have ever done before. We support the practices and theories that underpin SBG, but the implementation and lack of educator voice in the process is untenable.