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The Inclusive Grading Model

Before schools can implement fair policies and practices for grading exceptional and struggling learners, they first must have in place a high-quality grading and reporting system for *all* students. As we discussed in Chapter 2, this system should separate “product” goals related to academic performance and achievement from indicators of “process” and “progress.” In addition, the product goals should *identify clear standards* that address specific aspects of academic performance. Once this foundation is established, schools can more easily develop procedures for determining grades for struggling learners that are fair, accurate, and meaningful. In this chapter we will describe the five steps of an Inclusive Grading Model (Jung & Guskey, 2007, 2010a, 2010b; Jung, 2009) that can guide educators in this process.

Five-Step Inclusive Grading Model

Earlier we described how teachers typically receive little guidance on how they should grade struggling learners. As a result, most arrive at the end of the grading period asking questions such as, “How do I accurately measure what my students have learned and are able to do?” and “How do I fairly report that level of performance? The majority of teachers answer these questions by making informal grading adaptations. But as we discussed in Chapter 1, those adaptations seldom result in grades that are meaningful or fair.

Instead of asking "How should I measure . . . ?" at the end of the marking period, a far better approach is for teachers to ask, "What should I measure?" at the beginning of the marking period. In other words, teams of educators working collaboratively should decide up front what are the most appropriate standards to measure for each student. Once these standards have been identified, measuring students' performance in relation to those standards can be clear, consistent, and equitable. Furthermore, with questions about what to measure and how to measure resolved, the process of grading becomes a lot easier.

This approach provides the basis for our Inclusive Grading Model, shown in Figure 3.1. The model's five steps are as follows:

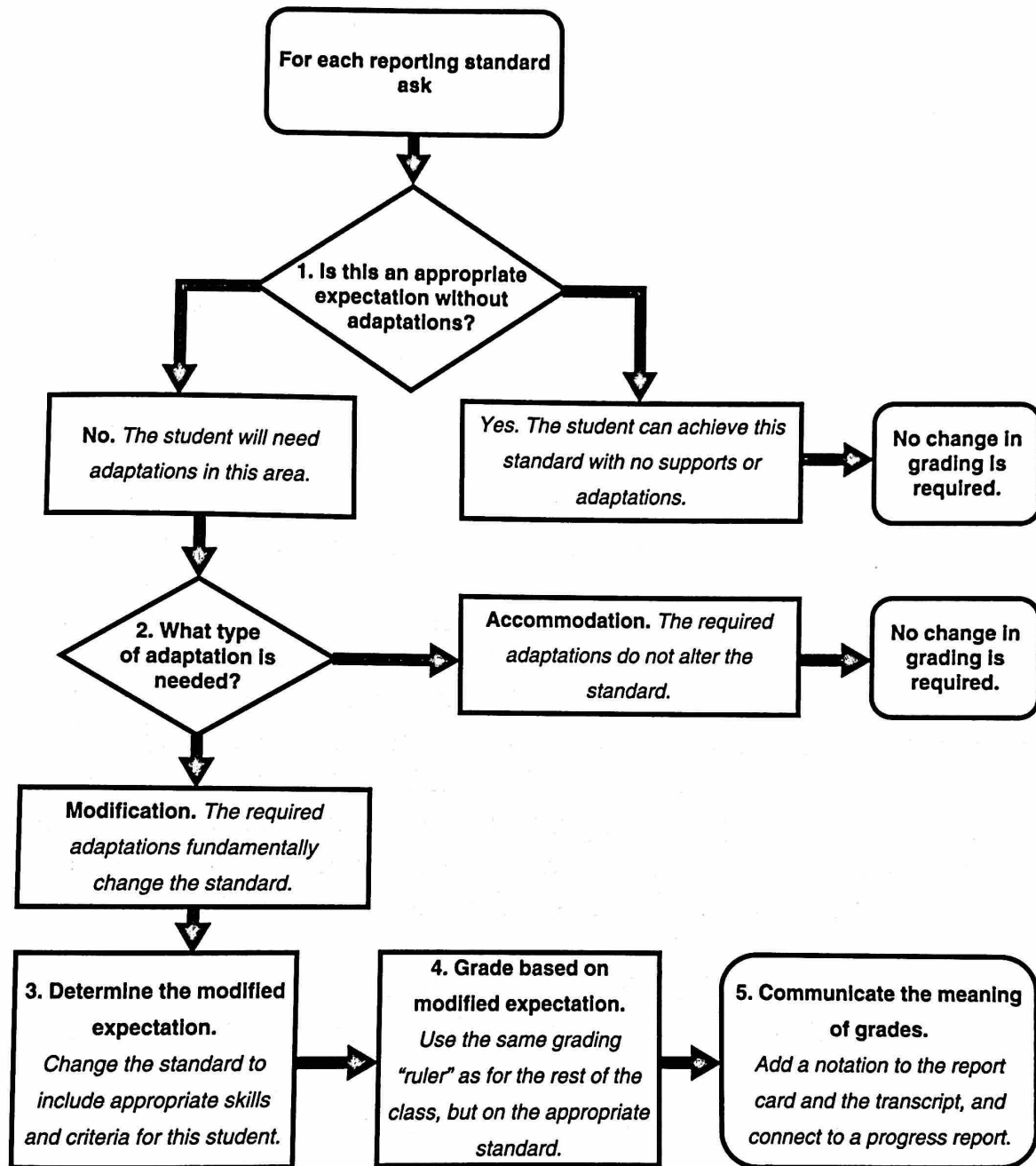
1. Determine if adaptations are needed for each grade-level standard.
2. For each adaptation, determine if an *accommodation* or a *modification* is needed.
3. Establish the appropriate expectation for each area requiring modification.
4. Apply appropriate and equitable grading practices to the appropriate standards.
5. Clearly communicate the meaning of the grades.

Step 1: Determine if Adaptations Are Needed for Each Grade-Level Standard

Most exceptional and struggling learners work on grade level for some skills and below grade level for others. Even within a single subject area, these students are likely to have areas of strength and other areas that need to be targeted for improvement. A student like Norah from our snapshots in Chapter 1, for example, may have reading comprehension skills that are above grade level and fluency skills that are significantly below. Because of these differences, it is important to determine specifically where adaptations are needed for individual students and where they are not.

The first step in grading struggling learners involves considering *each* reporting standard for the grade level and deciding whether or not an adaptation to the standard is required for the student. An adaptation is needed if the team decides it is unlikely that the student will be able to meet the standard during the current marking period or academic year without any changes or special support. The team that makes this determination typically consists of the general classroom teachers, school

Figure 3.1 Inclusive Grading Model



SOURCE: Jung & Guskey, 2010a.

administrators, parents, and any specialists who might be involved in the student's instructional program. In the case of Carlos, the fifth-grade English learner from our snapshots, this conversation may involve his two general classroom teachers, the school principal, his parents, and the EL teacher.

For Janis and Jimi in our snapshots, both of whom have disabilities, the entire individualized education program (IEP) team would engage in this conversation. Typically at the middle and high school levels, only one general education teacher participates in an IEP team meeting, even though students have many teachers. But in cases like

Janis's and Jimi's, involving *all* teachers in the conversation about adaptations is important, even if all are unable to attend every IEP meeting.

SNAPSHOT: Carlos

Carlos's team met and discussed each of the standards that students in fifth-grade language arts were expected to meet. Collaboratively, the team decided that almost all of the required standards needed to be adapted in order for Carlos to access the curriculum and make progress toward closing the gap with his peers. In general, most of the skills needed to be adapted to a lower grade level. The team noted, however, that Carlos's comprehension skills are very high when reading text in his native language. Although he has difficulty reading English text, when he is able to read it, or when it is read to him, he retains the information exceptionally well.

In this step of the Inclusive Grading Model, if a standard does not need adaptation for a particular student, there is no need to adapt the grading process for that standard. For standards that need no adaptation, teachers should *grade as they would any other student in the class*. The criteria expected struggling learners are expected to meet should be the same as those that all students are expected to meet. No penalty or advantage should be given because of the student's status as a struggling learner or for qualification for any special program. When adaptations are needed, however, the team should move to step 2 in the model.

Step 2: For Each Adaptation, Determine if an Accommodation or a Modification is Needed

Once teams identify standards that need adaptation, they must decide whether those adaptations are *accommodations* or *modifications*. Accommodations are adaptations that provide access to the general curriculum but *do not* fundamentally alter the grade level standards (Freedman, 2000, 2005).

SNAPSHOT: Janis

Janis has difficulty taking notes in her 10th-grade classes because of the learning disability that affects her abilities in written expression. Janis's IEP team determined that audiotapes of lectures in science and history

are a very effective alternative for her. Because of her learning disability, Janis also may need to be administered assessments orally. Although the format for answering questions on assessments is different, the content of the questions and the substance of responses remain the same.

Providing Janis with an alternative mode of response does not lower the grade-level expectation. Having Janis take the assessment orally is an example of an accommodation.

SNAPSHOT: Carlos

Because Carlos is an English learner newly arrived to the United States, his teachers and family determined that social studies and science assessments need to be administered orally for a short time. They decided on this accommodation because his conversational skills are much stronger than his written academic skills in English. His teachers will measure the quality of his oral responses with the same criteria used to judge the performance of other students.

In the above example, Carlos's teachers are merely providing Carlos with access to the curriculum, not lowering the social studies standards. Therefore, in this case, taking the assessments orally is an example of an accommodation.

Some struggling learners, however, require more substantial supports in certain areas than accommodations can offer. For these students, some or all of the grade-level standards may not be achievable during the academic year, and curricular *modifications* are needed. A modification is an adaptation to the curriculum that fundamentally alters the grade-level expectation (Freedman, 2000, 2005). The instructional team decided, for example, that Carlos is unlikely to meet the grade-level standards in writing for language arts in fifth grade and modifications to most of the standards are needed. An IEP team similarly may determine that Jimi, the eighth grader from our snapshots who has Down syndrome, will not be able to achieve the eighth-grade mathematics standards this academic year. For Jimi, the mathematics standards will need to be modified in order to provide opportunities within mathematics that are appropriate for his present level of development. Although both types of adaptations are included in the IEP, historically teams may not have recorded accommodations and modifications differently.

Any of the four students from our examples could require *both* accommodations and modifications. Looking at Table 3.1 we can see that the team has decided that is exactly what Carlos needs—accommodations for some standards and modifications for others. Specifically, he needs modifications for most language arts standards, but only accommodations in the area of comprehension for both Reading (Key Ideas) and Writing. For grading and reporting purposes, making the distinction between accommodation and modifications is necessary for each reporting standard that requires adaptation. In Chapter 4 we discuss the distinction between accommodations and modifications in greater detail. After teams have determined which standards need to be modified, they can move to Step 3.

Step 3: Establish the Appropriate Expectation for Each Area Requiring Modification

For standards that need modification, the educational team has in effect agreed that the student is unlikely to meet that standard during the academic year. Assigning failing marks for grade level standards that the team has already determined inappropriate provides no helpful information about the student's performance or level of achievement. So instead, the educational team must establish modified expectations that student will be able to achieve with appropriate services or supports.

Modified expectations should be directly linked to the grade-level standards. Because most grade-level standards do not include prescribed criteria for evaluation, however, teams need to clarify specific expectations for that grade level. Then they must determine how those expectations can to be modified to give the struggling learner a reasonable chance at success.

Jimi, for example, may not be ready to work on eighth-grade science standards in mineral identification. The IEP team may choose to develop science standards on the skill of sorting and classifying that are fundamentally related to the eighth-grade science standards but are also developmentally appropriate for Jimi. For students with formal individualized plans, such as an English learner (EL) plan or an IEP, the modified expectation should be recorded as an annual goal with short-term objectives.

For Carlos, the team determines that two of the language arts standards require accommodations and all others need to be modified. Table 3.2 includes examples of modified curricular standards used in determining the grade for Carlos for the Language reporting standard. The curricular standards requiring adaptation are in the

Table 3.1 Accommodations and Modifications for Carlos

Language Arts		Type of Adaptation Needed	
Reporting Standards	Curriculum Standards	Accommodation	Modification
Reading	<i>Foundational Skills</i>		✓
	<i>Key Ideas and Details</i>	✓	
	<i>Craft and Structure</i>		✓
	<i>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</i>		✓
	<i>Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity</i>		✓
Writing	<i>Text Types and Purposes</i>		✓
	<i>Production and Distribution of Writing</i>		✓
	<i>Research to Build and Present Knowledge</i>		✓
	<i>Range of Writing</i>		✓
Listening	<i>Comprehension and Collaboration</i>	✓	
Speaking	<i>Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</i>		✓
Language	<i>Conventions of Standard English</i>		✓
	<i>Knowledge of Language</i>		✓
	<i>Vocabulary Acquisition and Use</i>		✓

middle column, and the modifications deemed appropriate are in the right column. Notice that the reporting standards in the left column do not include specific criteria for evaluation. The team would have to discuss what is expected for fifth graders in language arts and what an appropriate expectation is for Carlos this academic year. The team has agreed that Carlos has skills on these standards

at approximately the second-grade level and that he should be able to increase his skills to a fourth-grade level this academic year.

Table 3.2 Example Language Modifications for Carlos

Language	Grade-Level Curricular Standards	Modified Expectation
	<i>Conventions of Standard English</i>	<i>In his writing, Carlos will write in complete sentences with appropriate capitalization and subject-verb agreement in at least 80% of sentences.</i>
	<i>Knowledge of Language</i>	<i>Carlos will distinguish between and consistently use informal language for conversation and formal language in the academic setting.</i>
	<i>Vocabulary Acquisition and Use</i>	<i>Carlos will consistently distinguish between literal and figurative phrases (e.g., take steps) based on fourth-grade vocabulary in what he reads and writes. Carlos will demonstrate use of a fourth-grade vocabulary.</i>

For Conventions of Standard English, the team felt that a focus on complete sentences, subject-verb agreement, and appropriate capitalization was the appropriate target for Carlos in the upcoming year. In the area of Knowledge of Language, Carlos is having difficulty in distinguishing between the informal type of language that should be used when talking with his friends and the more formal language that is used in academic writing and speaking. His conversational skills are quite good, and he is ready to build his competencies in academic language. Similarly, although Carlos has a vocabulary of second-grade words, he does not yet have a mastery of nonliteral phrases (e.g., "I didn't catch that," "moving forward," "taking steps") that are often used in the English language. The team felt this was an important skill for him to make gains in this year.

Determining the modified standard is undoubtedly the most difficult step of the Inclusive Grading Model. For this reason we will expand on this step in Chapter 5. Once teams have determined the appropriate criteria for standards requiring modification, they can move to Step 4 in the model.

Step 4: Apply Appropriate and Equitable Grading Practices to the Appropriate Standards

Appropriately modifying the standards for a student answers the question, "What to measure?" The team determined that the grade-level standard was not appropriate and developed a modified expectation that represents the level of work the student is able to complete successfully. With questions about *what* to measure answered, adaptations to the grading process are no longer needed. Rather than basing the grade or mark on the grade-level standard, teachers can now assign report card grades *based on the modified expectation*.

Using this model, modifications are not based on students or subject areas, but on the individual reporting standards. In other words, it is not the *student* who needs to be modified for the standard, but certain *standards* that need to be modified for the student. For the majority of struggling learners, most grades will be based on grade-level standards. In subject areas where only accommodations are needed, struggling learners' grades should be based on the same criteria used to evaluate the performance of other students in the class with no penalty for accommodation. Carlos, for example, should be graded based on the content of his responses on his social studies assessments. The grade should not be lowered because he responded orally. It also should not be raised based on his attitude, effort, progress, or any other factor that is not a part of every other student's product or achievement grade.

For subject areas in which modified standards are used, grades should be based on the modified expectations, not the grade-level standard. Jimi, for example, is working on a modified expectation that involves sorting and classifying objects by simple characteristics rather than the grade-level expectation of mineral identification. There is no need to report a failing grade in science based on his inability to identify minerals. Nor would it be fair or meaningful to raise his grade because of his effort or behavior. Instead, Jimi should be graded on the standard the team determined was appropriate (e.g., Jimi will sort objects by size, shape, and color with 80% accuracy). Whatever grading scale is used for his classmates should be used for Jimi. On his report card, a 4 means exemplary, a 3 means proficient, a 2 means progressing, and 1 means struggling. Therefore, if he demonstrated exemplary performance and exceeded his goal, then he has earned a grade of 4. If he simply met his goal and demonstrated proficient performance, then he has earned a 3.

Similar decisions can be made for Carlos, who is working to build fourth-grade vocabulary in a fifth-grade class. Measuring and reporting progress on a standard the team has already agreed to be unattainable would be meaningless and, arguably, illegal. Adding points for

homework or promptness in turning in assignments also does not make the product grade fairer. In fact, it distorts the grade's meaning. Instead, Carlos should be graded using the same "ruler," but on the fourth-grade vocabulary standards that the team deemed appropriate.

For Carlos, the team decided that his vocabulary goals should be to understand and use a fourth-grade vocabulary in general, and in particular to be able to understand the nuances of literal and nonliteral phrases and words with that vocabulary. Those are the skills on which his grade on the Vocabulary Acquisition and Use standard in language arts should be based. Table 3.3 includes an example of the progression from gradebook marks to overall grades for Carlos. Additional detail on monitoring progress for modified expectations is presented in Chapter 5.

Step 5: Clearly Communicate the Meaning of the Grades

Finally, teachers must provide additional information for the grades that are based on modified standards so that everyone is aware of exactly what was measured. Providing grades based on modified standards without communicating precisely what was measured is no more meaningful or fair than giving failing grades based on grade-level standards.

It is important to remember that some special notation, such as a superscript number or an asterisk, should be included on the report card and permanent record (or transcript) beside *each* grade that is based on modified standards. This notation for the standards the team agreed to modify can be seen on Carlos's report card in Figure 3.2 and Jimi's in Figure 3.3. An accompanying footnote might be worded, "Grade based on modified expectations," and direct the family to information about the standards on which the grade or mark was based.

By law, any notation on the transcript cannot identify the student as qualifying for special education services. Wording such as "special education goals" and "IEP goals," for example, cannot be used in transcripts, because these phrases identify the student as receiving special services. The wording "modified standard" is a legal notation, however, so long as modifications are available to any student, such as ELs and those receiving intensive intervention.

Report cards are different. Because the report card is considered a private document, designed only for parents and students, disclosing special education status in this context is not illegal. Nevertheless, broader notations on the report card, such as "based on modified standard," are preferable, since they can then be used for students who need modifications for a variety of reasons.

Table 3.3 Gradebook Marks and Overall Grades for Carlos

LANGUAGE ARTS: Reporting Period Two															
Reporting Standards	Curriculum Standards	Assessment Marks										Summary	Grade		
Reading	Foundational Skills*	2	2	3	2	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	3*		
	Key Ideas and Details	3	2	3	3	4	3	4	4	4		4			
	Craft and Structure*	2	2	3	2	3	3	4	3			3			
	Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*	2	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	3			
	Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity*	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	2		2			
Writing	Text Types and Purposes*	1	2	1	1	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	3*		
	Production and Distribution of Writing*	1	2	1	2	2	3	2	3	3		3			
	Research to Build and Present Knowledge*	1	2	1	2	2	3	3	3			3			
	Range of Writing*	1	1	2	1	2	2	3	2	3	3	3			
Listening	Comprehension and Collaboration	3	3	3	4	3	3	4	4	4		4	4		
Speaking	Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas*	3	3	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4*		
Language	Conventions of Standard English*	1	1	2	1	2	2	3	3			3	4*		
	Knowledge of Language*	2	3	2	2	3	3	4	3	4	4	4			
	Vocabulary Acquisition and Use*	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	4			4			
*Grade based on modified expectations.															

Furthermore, status as a student with a disability or EL is not information needed to understand progress. Families of students who have significant disabilities do not need another document that announces their child has a disability. They know that already. What matters for them and for the families of all struggling learners is that everyone understands what standard was measured and how the student performed relative to what was measured.

Figure 3.2 Example Language Arts Portion of a Report Card for Carlos

Elementary Report Card						
Student: Carlos Reporting Period: <input type="checkbox"/> 1 st <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 nd <input type="checkbox"/> 3 rd <input type="checkbox"/> 4 th		Standard Marks		Process Marks		
		4	Exemplary	++	Consistently	
		3	Proficient	+	Sometimes	
		2	Progressing	-	Rarely	
		1	Struggling	N/A	Not Assessed	
		N/A	Not Assessed			
*Based on modified expectations.						
Teacher	Language Arts					
[Photo]	Standard Goals			Process Goals		
	Reading			3*	Preparation	++
	Writing			3*	Participation	++
	Listening			4	Homework	++
	Speaking			4	Cooperation	++
	Language			4*	Respect	++
	<p>Description: During this reporting period, the class spent time developing a multimedia news article based on a current event. Students are working on using formal fifth-grade vocabulary and rich descriptors in their writing and speaking. I want their news articles to have a logical flow with a beginning paragraph, several detail paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. They will be working on these as they gain skills in new media and weaving these together creatively yet logically in the next two weeks.</p> <p>Comments: Carlos has made remarkable progress in his gaining of third- and fourth-grade vocabulary, surpassing his goals. He has not yet mastered the fourth-grade level but is quickly progressing. His fluency is improving and is at about 40 words per minute with the grading passages he is given. He tries hard, and his exceptional comprehension shows his effort as well as his potential. I feel that with all he has learned this grading period, he is on track to meet his goals by the end of the year. With additional time spent in homework activities (he has missed a few), I think we can boost progress even quicker. Keep up the great work!</p>					

Figure 3.3 Example Language Arts and Physical Education Sections of a Report Card for Jimi

Secondary Report Card						
Student: Jimi Reporting Period: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 st <input type="checkbox"/> 2 nd <input type="checkbox"/> 3 rd <input type="checkbox"/> 4 th	Achievement Grades		Standard Marks		Process Marks	
	A	Excellent	4	Exemplary	++	Consistently
	B	Good	3	Proficient	+	Sometimes
	C	Basic	2	Progressing	-	Rarely
	D	Below Basic	1	Struggling	N/A	Not Assessed
	U	Unsatisfactory	N/A	Not Assessed		
	* Based on modified expectations.		* Based on modified expectations.			
Teacher	Language Arts					
	Achievement			B*	Process Goals	
	Reading Literature			3*	Participation	++
	Reading Informational Text			3*	Homework	++
	Writing			3*	Punctuality	++
	Speaking and Listening			3*	Effort	++
	Language			3*		
	Vocabulary			3*		
	Description : This quarter our class focused on various forms of mass media communication and personal communication. Students analyzed news reports from different organizations and media outlets, comparing and contrasting forms and content. In personal communication, students wrote several types of business letters and reviewed aspects of formal conversation. Comments: During this reporting period, Jimi continued to work on writing his name independently and has nearly mastered that skill. He has made wonderful progress in taking turns in conversation! He now uses active listening skills when another person is talking and contributes to the conversation when it is his turn. Keep up the great work!					
Teacher	Physical Education—Health 200					
	Achievement			A*	Process Goals	
	Engages Regularly in Physical Activity			4	Participation	++
	Achieves and Maintains a Health-enhancing Level of Physical Fitness			4	Homework	++
	Demonstrates Competency in Motor Skills and Movement Patterns			4*	Punctuality	++
	Applies Movement Concepts, Principles, and Strategies			4*	Effort	++
	Respects Self and Others			4		
	Values Physical Activity			3		
Description: Our class learned about field sports this reporting period, particularly soccer, lacrosse, and field hockey. Students learned the rules of play in each sport, analyzed different field strategies, and had extended opportunities to play each. Comments: Jimi really seemed to enjoy physical education this reporting period. He shows excellent sportsmanship and is always courteous and supportive of others. He has made fantastic progress this year in his motivation to be involved in exercise and sports. He has made remarkable improvement in his coordination as well.						

Using the Inclusive Grading Model, anyone viewing the report card can see (1) how the student performed on the level of work that was appropriately challenging, and (2) which grades are based on work that is different from that expected at the student's assigned grade level. With this information, families and instructional teams can plan more effective intervention and make more appropriate placement decisions for students who are struggling.

Summary

In this chapter we described a five-step Inclusive Grading Model for assigning fair and meaningful grades or marks to struggling learners. The model focuses on the distinction between two types of adaptations to standards for struggling learners: accommodations and modifications. These adaptations are essential in standards-based grading. We showed how keeping this distinction in mind brings clarity to the reporting process and offers families more accurate information on precisely how their child is performing in school. Finally, we illustrated how modifications can be noted on report cards and transcripts. In the next chapter we will elaborate on Step 2 of the Inclusive Grading Model and offer additional information to help teams clarify the differences between accommodations and modifications.

Grading
Exceptional
AND
Struggling
Learners

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