



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on October 6, 2022

Virginia Schools Implement “Equitable Grading” Behind Parents’ Backs

In an effort to combat alleged “privilege” and “institutional bias,” Virginia’s Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) have surreptitiously implemented so-called equitable grading, in which students are given multiple chances to complete assignments and cannot get a zero for failing to complete one.

Emails obtained by local parents through a Freedom of Information Act request and subsequently shared with the [Washington Examiner](#) show that various FCPS high-school principals have in recent years adopted such practices while publicly denying that they were doing so.



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According to the *Examiner*:

“Equitable grading” practices vary based on how the concept is implemented, but the primary stated goal of proponents is to combat “institutional bias” and eliminate racial disparities in grade outcomes through a variety of tactics. Among the least controversial is the removal of grade penalties for late assignments and the ability to retake or redo assignments, often on an unlimited basis.

But proponents of the novel grading practices also advocate the elimination of “zero grades” by using a 50-100 scale. Under that scale, a student cannot receive a grade lower than 50, even if the assignment was never submitted, thereby creating a much higher grade floor and enabling students to achieve passing grades more easily.

One of the primary proponents of “equitable grading” is Joe Feldman, whose book *Grading for Equity: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How It Can Transform Schools and Classrooms* was purchased for an FCPS faculty summer reading club with federal Covid-19 relief funds.

In a 2019 interview with [Harvard Ed. Magazine](#), Feldman said:

Grading practices must counteract institutional biases that have historically rewarded students with privilege and punished those without, and also must protect student grades from our own implicit biases. Our grading must stop using points to reward or punish, but instead should teach students the connection between means of learning and the ends — how doing homework is valuable not because of how many points the teacher doles out, but because those actions improve a student’s learning.

In other words, because not all students come from households that are conducive to doing things right



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the first time, they should be graded not on producing quality work within a given time frame but simply on eventually getting it done. In an interview with the [Los Angeles Times](#), Feldman argued that people “get redos all the time” at their jobs, citing the unlikelihood of being fired or having one’s pay docked for being late to a meeting. That may be the case for minor infractions, but one doubts the *Times*’ editor would take kindly to his reporters routinely missing deadlines. And who wants to drive across a bridge designed by an engineer who expects to get a do-over with no penalties if the structure collapses?

When one parent caught wind of the district’s attempts to implement “equitable grading” and Langley High School’s volunteering to be part of a pilot program, she emailed a school-board member, asking if the rumors were true. That email made its way to Langley principal Kimberly Greer, who told the inquiring parent that “there is no truth to the rumor that Langley will be piloting a grading initiative for the school division.”

However, in an internal response to the email, Assistant Superintendent Douglas Tyson, while claiming there was no pilot program at Langley, did note that “a group of teacher leaders” would be reading Feldman’s book. “This,” he added, “has not been shared with the community.”

In reality, FCPS was already hip-deep in the “equitable grading” swamp. A June 14 email from the FCPS High School Principals Association to outgoing superintendent Scott Brabrand revealed that the district had been “renovat[ing] its grading system to be more reflective of standards of equity in grading” since 2015, and was in the midst of a three-year plan that would see all high schools “having equitable grading practices.”

The Fairfax County Parents Association told the *Examiner* that equitable grading “sounds like another unresearched experiment being run on our kids that is the product of a discussion where opposing views were shut out and interest groups citing thin empirical evidence reached a consensus.”

They also criticized FCPS’s “concerted effort to avoid letting parents know that a change in grading has occurred or is occurring.”

“If the new grading system was so spectacular,” they observed, “one would think a school system would not hesitate to share the information with parents.”





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