

# Grading Policy Evaluation

July 2023

## Background

Fulton County Schools (FCS) implemented new changes to the grading policy to begin in the 2022-2023 school year. The current grading policy provides detailed grading guidelines for educators to use in their classrooms. The purpose of the newly implemented grading policy is to ensure that grades accurately represent student learning across the district. These changes include quantified and standardized grading practices.

Over two years of decision-making and planning took place to implement the current policy changes. The following actions occurred between December 2019-August 2022 to solidify the policy:



Stakeholders have access to the information on the policy changes on the district’s Grading and Reporting site and the policy manual. The webpage includes infographics by school level with additional documents on the policy translated into the following languages: Hindi, Korean, Chinese, and Spanish. Other policy infographics include details on incomplete/recovery work, transferring grades, and non-academic skills.

An implementation evaluation was conducted to learn about stakeholders’ experiences with the new policy. The New Teacher Project (TNTP), an independent non-profit organization, was contracted by the district to conduct an implementation evaluation on the grading policy. The district compiled three evaluation questions to guide its research.

## Evaluation Questions

1. What are the experiences with the new grading policy among principals, teachers, students, and parents?
2. What resources were used to implement the policy? How are principals and teachers using the grading policy resources at schools and in their classrooms, and what recommendations do they have for effective implementation?
3. How is the grading policy implemented at schools? How are principals supporting and how are teachers implementing the policy, and how does policy implementation vary by zone?

## Methodology and Data

A mixed-methods approach was used to evaluate the grading policy. The quantitative data collection methods include data from surveys distributed to principals, teachers, and parents/guardians. The qualitative data collection methods include data from principal interviews and focus groups with teachers and parents/guardians.

To achieve a representative sample, probability sampling techniques were used to select participants for principal interviews and focus groups from each learning zone. Two schools from each zone were incorporated into the sample for a total of 14 schools. Teachers were evenly clustered from all zones for survey distribution. The survey was administered to a representative sample of 3,099 teachers, 108 principals, and parents/guardians throughout the district.

The survey asked questions to learn about participants’ experiences with the implementation. A Likert scale response system was used for most questions. Table 1 below lists sample questions from the principal, teacher, and parent/guardian surveys. Table 2, on the next page, lists sample principal interview questions and sample focus group questions.

**Table 1. Sample Principal, Teacher, and Parent/Guardian Survey Items**

Sample Principal Survey Questions
District communication about changes to the grading policy was clear.
I have the information I need to implement the new grading policy at my school.
My school has fully implemented the grading policy.
Sample Teacher Survey Questions
Communication from my school leader(s) about changes to the grading policy was clear.
The new grading policy has led to more consistent grading practices.
As a result of changes to the grading policy, grades more accurately reflect student learning.
Sample Parent/Guardian Survey Questions
I feel well-informed about the changes to Fulton County Schools’ grading policy.
The new grading policy is significantly different from how students were grading before.
I understand what my child(ren) need(s) to do to be successful under the new grading policy.

**Table 2. Sample Principal, Teacher, and Parent/Guardian Focus Group Questions**

<b>Sample Principal Interview Questions</b>
How did you learn about the new grading policy?
How did teachers react to the grading policy change?
Did you receive any support in implementing the new grading policy?
<b>Sample Teacher Focus Group Questions</b>
Was the communication from different sources consistent?
How did parents/guardians react to the grading policy change?
What questions or concerns have students expressed?
<b>Sample Parent/Guardian Focus Group Questions</b>
Who provided you with information about the grading policy, and what information did they share?
What questions did you initially have about the policy?
How much have your child(ren)'s grades changed under the new policy?

## Results

### Participation

Survey participation was high with 44% of teachers and 75% of principals responding. Additionally, there were 232 parent survey responses. Most stakeholders who responded to the surveys were from zones 6 and 7. Table 3 below shows the percentage of respondents per zone for each stakeholder group.

**Table 3. Survey Respondents by Zone**

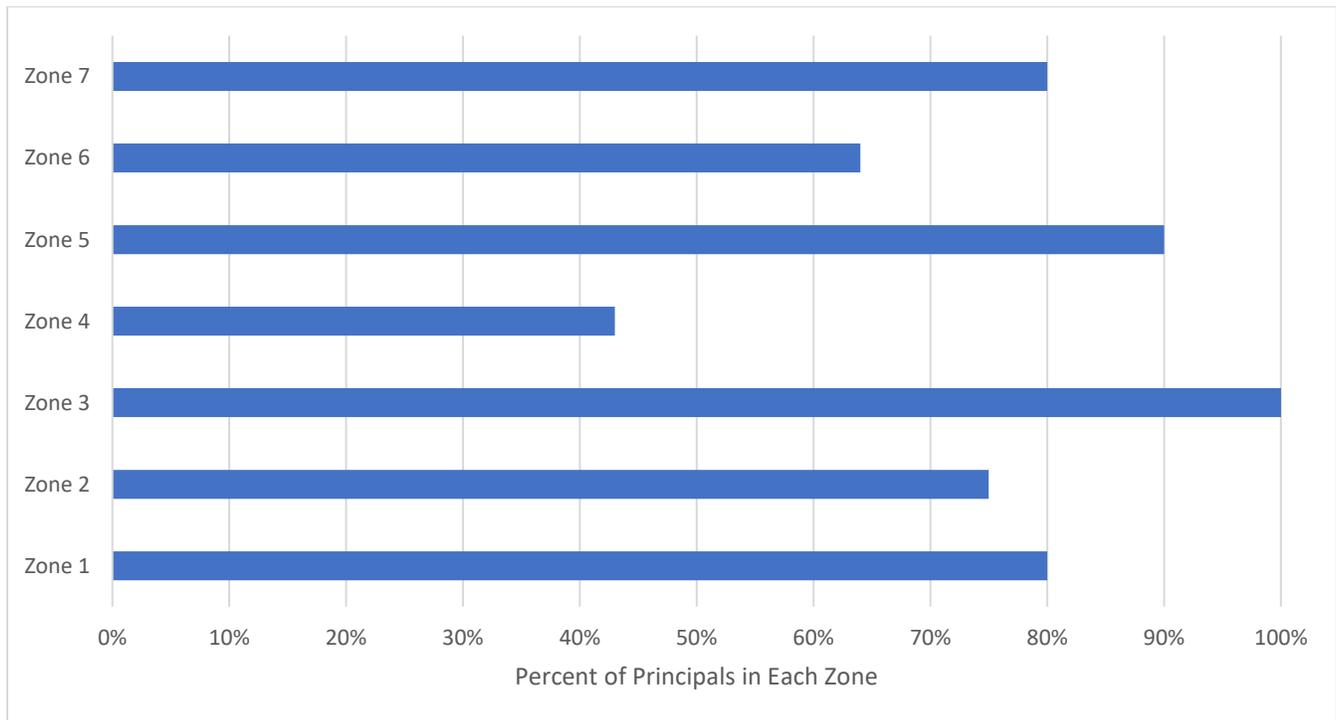
Zone	Principals	Teachers	Parents/ Guardians
<b>1</b>	9%	8%	7%
<b>2</b>	10%	9%	19%
<b>3</b>	16%	12%	4%
<b>4</b>	9%	10%	3%
<b>5</b>	13%	16%	10%
<b>6</b>	18%	20%	40%
<b>7</b>	21%	24%	19%
<b>FAVE</b>	1%	2%	0%

In addition to surveys, ten total parent focus groups were conducted. Two participating schools in one zone combined the parent focus groups. TNTP uncovered common themes from both qualitative and quantitative datasets. Three common discussion topics became broad themes in the data. The broad themes from the data analysis are communication, resources, and implementation. Each theme is unpacked with the experiences of the stakeholder group.

### Principal Experiences

In Figure 1, more than half of the surveyed principals in each zone agree that district communication was clear. Fewer principals in zone 4 agree that there was clarity in district communication. Principals shared that they understood the rationale and purpose behind the new grading policy during interviews. They also appreciated the one-pagers on the FCS Grading and Reporting webpage and most found it to be a helpful resource that explains the policy and highlighted the important information.

**Figure 1. Clarity on District Communication on Grading Policy—Percent of Principals Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing**



About 90% of surveyed principals in Figure 2 strongly agree or agree that they have implemented the new grading policy in their schools. However, less than half of surveyed principals agree that the new grading policy led to more consistent grading practices.

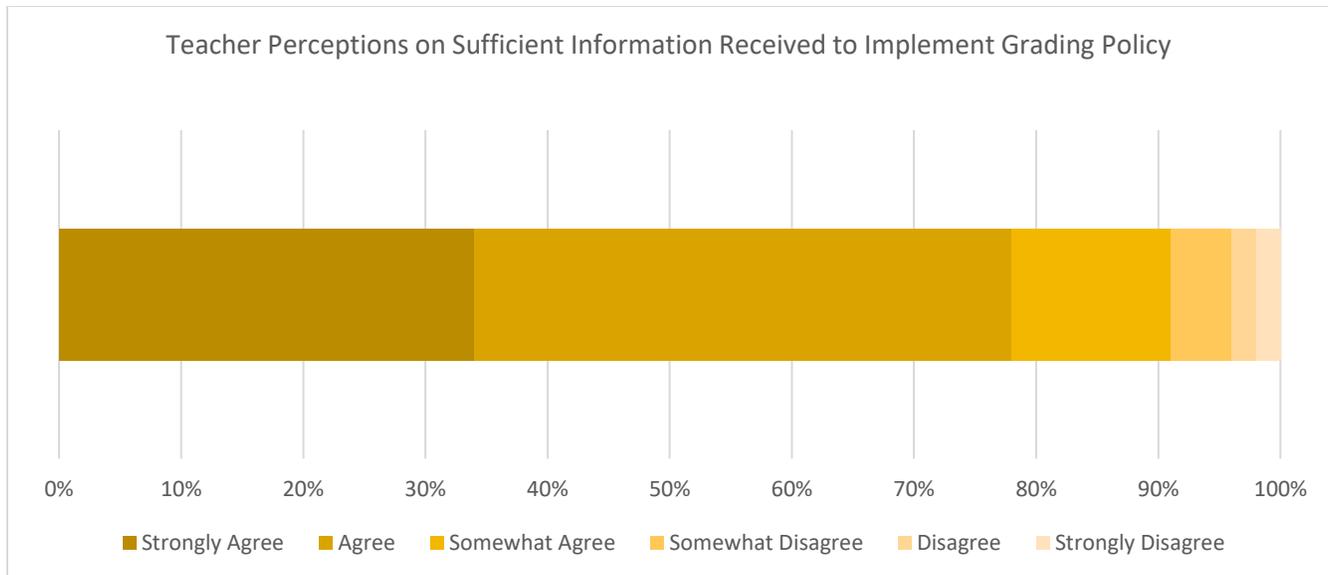
**Figure 2. Principal Perceptions on the New Grading Policy According to Survey Responses**



### Teacher Experiences

Similar to principals, most surveyed teachers—78%—also agreed that communication was clear and consistent when learning about the new grading policy according to Figure 3. Teachers in zone 4 reported to have the information needed to implement the new grading policy.

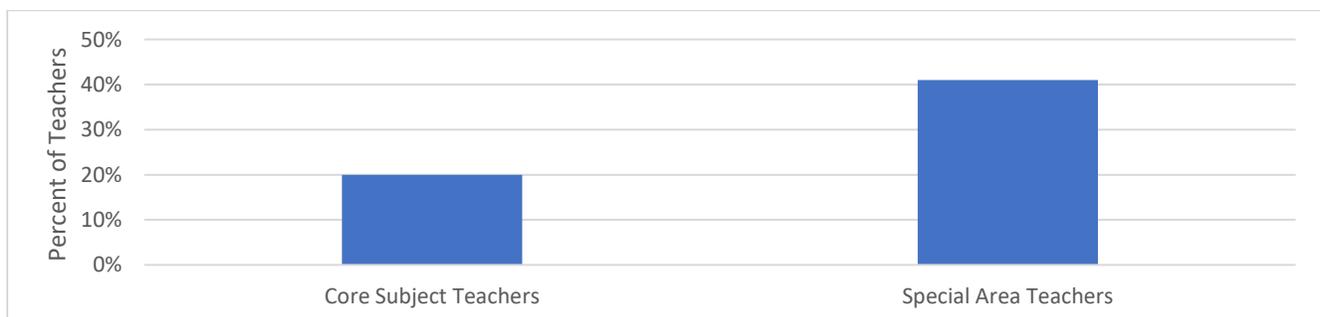
**Figure 3. Teacher Perceptions of Sufficient Information Received to Implement Grading Policy According to Survey Responses**



Teachers in focus groups cited that professional learning communities (PLCs) were a helpful source of support in learning and implementing the new policy. Although, teachers did discuss wanting more input on the policy and to be a part of additional discussions about grading in the future.

The survey data also shows that most teachers reported that they have implemented the new grading policy, but they were less likely to agree that the policy has led to more consistent grading practices. Special area teachers (CTAE, Health Education, PE, and ROTC) were less likely to have fully implemented the policy and less likely to agree that the policy is more consistent or accurate than teachers of core subjects according to Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Consistency in Grading Among Core Subject Teachers and Special Area Teachers—Percent of Teachers Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing**



In focus groups, special area teachers in elementary school shared that the policy is unrealistic for teachers to implement given the number of students they see each week. Additionally, special education teachers and English Language Learner educators experienced more difficulty implementing the policy.

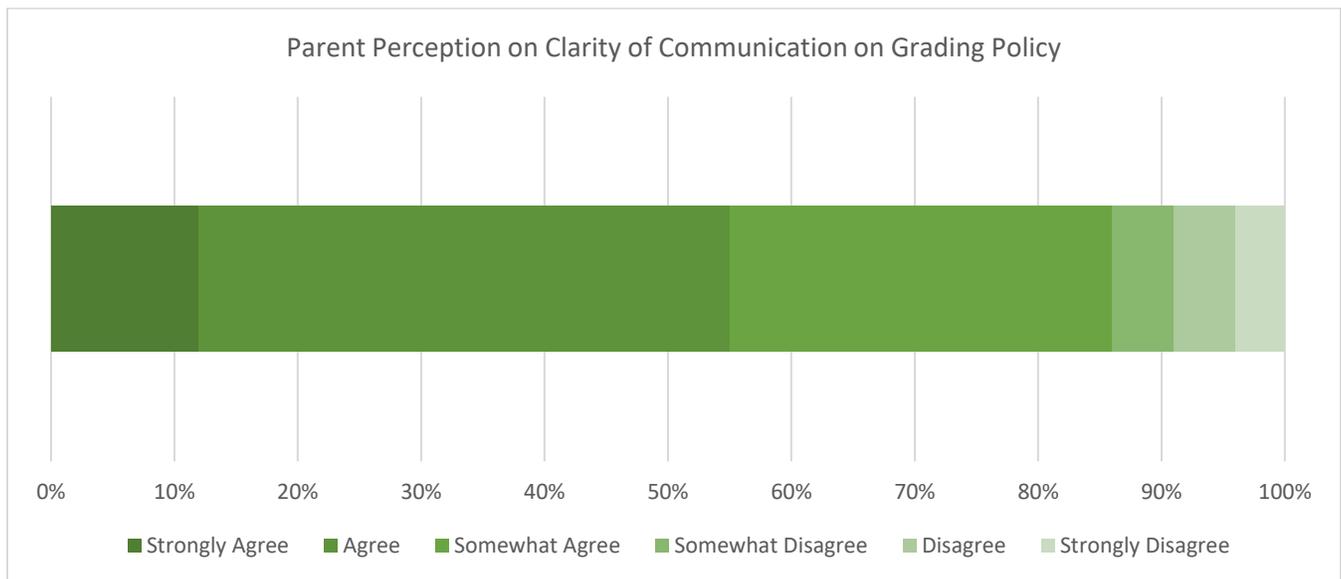
Other teachers expressed confusion about the guidelines in the new grading policy on assessing nonacademic skills progress as well as the recovery policy.

Both teachers and principals stated that the 4.5-week timeline is not enough time to collect data for progress reports at the start of the school year. Teachers and principals have also noticed a misalignment between the grading policy and the curriculum. For some teachers, the pacing that the district provided does not coordinate with curriculum units.

### Parent/Guardian Experiences

In contrast to principals and teachers, less than half of parents surveyed felt well-informed about the changes to the grading policy as seen in Figure 5. Some of the parents in focus groups mentioned that they were not aware of changes made to the policy and did not know what their child needed to do to be successful under the new policy.

**Figure 5. Parent Perception on Clarity of Communication on Grading Policy According to Survey Responses**



When discussing effective resources used to inform them about the grading policy changes, parents mentioned that written information from their children’s school was the most helpful and informative. Students received information on the policy at curriculum night, sent home information in newsletters, and communicated in other ways.

## Limitations and Considerations

The limitations should be considered when reviewing the results. Most of the principals, teachers, and parents/guardians that took the surveys were from zones 6 and 7. Despite efforts to solicit responses from zones 1-5, there was not a representative sample in the evaluation. Efforts include sending reminders to complete the survey three times a week over two weeks for all stakeholders and several invitations to teachers and parents for focus groups. The lack of data from those zones means that the broad themes uncovered in the data analysis were more reflective of the perceptions of the stakeholders from zones 6 and 7.

## Conclusions

- Communication on the new grading policy was mostly clear for principals and teachers.
- The one-pager on the grading policy from the district’s Grading & Reporting webpage was deemed a useful resource by most principals.
- A majority of surveys reported showed that parents did not know about the new grading policy. Some parents learned about the policy through the infographics on the Grading & Reporting page.
- Most principals and teachers have fully implemented the policy, and they are less likely to agree that the new grading policy has led to more consistent grading practices.
- Special area teachers, special education teachers, and teachers of English Language Learners found the implementation of the new grading policy difficult for their curriculum.
- Certain teachers were confused about the nonacademic skills category of the new grading policy and the recovery policy.

## Recommendations

1. Consider grade levels and subjects where modifications and additional guidance may be needed.
2. Ensure the curriculum and grading policy align with all grade levels and subjects.
3. Prioritize communication with parents and caregivers.
4. Continue to communicate the reasons why the changes were made to the grading policy to all stakeholders.