

New grading policy at middle school

The pilot program will be amended throughout the year

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COVENTRY—Alan Shawn Feinstein middle-schoolers will soon see the effects of new policies on grading and homework this year.

The pilot program, created by a team of 30 faculty and administration and headed up by Dr. Michael Almeida, principal, and Dr. Arthur Lisi, assistant principal, will be tested out this year.

According to Almeida, administration will continue to review and make

changes on the policy based on feedback and results.

Come next May or June during a school committee meeting, said Almeida, they hope to pass the policy as an official school document.

“Basically, this policy recognizes the latest research and best practices in education,” Almeida summed up. “It provides students with opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and competency level.”

The homework policy outlines four different types of homework and pro-

vides guidance for teachers in assessment.

The four categories are as follows: preparation assignment, checking for understanding assignment, practice assignment and extension of learning assignment.

“Teachers will need to communicate to the kids how they will be assessed or graded,” said Almeida, explaining that grading homework is different than other assignments since it is not an authentic learning measure.

There is no guarantee that the student actually completed the assignment, he said.

The grading policy will be used to assess student work such as quizzes, tests, homework and projects, according to Almeida.

The goal of the new policy, he said, is to provide students with authentic assessment of their learning and knowledge of the subject matter.

In order to accomplish this, students will be given three grades for each of their six classes based on three principles: product, process and progress.

“For product, [students will be graded on] what they know and are able to do,” said Almeida. This category will consider the students’ knowledge and competency of the subject matter.

To assess students’ process, the teacher will take into consideration the work ethic and learn process. Possible factors include how prepared the student was for class, participation, completion of homework and how well he

or she works with other students.

For these two grading assessments, students will be graded on a rubric.

For the last assessment—grading upon progress—students will be given a narrative from the teacher. For example, the teacher could write that the student is making great progress this trimester, said Almeida.

A student could also receive insufficient evidence (IE) if the teacher does not have enough evidence to determine a grade.

Almeida explained that the new policy encourages students to continue to work and improve and not become discouraged after receiving a particular grade. For example, they hope to not

See *SCHOOL*, Page A-2

School rethinks grading process for students

Continued from Page A-1

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give students a zero on assignments.

“The idea is to not just give a zero since it is such an extreme grade that weighs the overall grade to the left,” said Almeida, explaining the dramatic effect a zero has on a student.

With the new policy, students are encouraged to demonstrate that they understand the concept, even if they had the wrong answer.

“We want to truly assess their learning. That’s not an authentic grade when you start putting zeros on assignments,” he said. “[A wrong answer] doesn’t mean they can’t do the work or know what is expected.”

For this reason, according to Almeida, teachers will accept late assignments. While there may be consequences associated with a late assignment,

they still want to see the work completed.

“When a kid takes an assessment and doesn’t do well, they will have [at least one] opportunity to retake the assessment,” said Almeida.

According to Almeida, the school has needed this policy for a long time. He stated that when Lisi was hired at the school, with a background in guidance, they decided it was time to explore a new policy.

“We looked at failure rates and it became very obvious that our response to intervention program needed to be supported by us addressing some inequities in the grading practice,” said Almeida.

Teachers have always had the freedom to grade as they deem accordingly and as a result, there is less consistency for the student, according to Almeida.

“Because of that, we had a

moral obligation to address the grading,” he said.

The faculty, administration and teachers have shown positive responses to the new policy, according to Almeida.

“Teachers are very appreciative of something to have guidance with. This provided clear consistency and ultimately, provides equity for students,” said Almeida. “It [gives] better grounds to guide their practices and will be there for a long time.”

The school committee responded positively to the policy at the last meeting on Sept. 13.

School Committee Member Judith Liner stated that it was “long overdue” and “phenomenal.”

“I know parents will be thrilled once it is introduced,” Liner said.

Almeida reiterated that the policy is a “work in progress” and changes will be made throughout the year as needed.