ISSUES RELATED TO AVERAGING IN DETERMINING STUDENT GRADES

Averaging can be a deficit model of evaluation. Unless caps are implemented, low scores are given greater power. The median reduces influence of extreme scores.

When averaging is used, it helps if the points/weights between scale scores are similar; i.e. in some grading scales the "A" may have a seven point range while the "F" may have a 75 point range.

Averaging assumes that students seldom "mess up," when, in fact, we know some of us do. There are students who initially do not show mastery of a concept who later demonstrate mastery. How long should they "drag the baggage" of initial low grades?

When is a grade/score no longer relevant to mastery? What if the subject has sequence (i.e.math or the writing process)? If we can accept that averaging affects student motivation, we also might assume the practice affects learning. For example, we know that when students practice a skill over time, most get better at that skill. That's the learning process; yet many teachers grade too early in the learning cycle to obtain a valid indicator of the student's skill mastery.

It appears that teachers may do this because they believe the promise (or threat) of a grade is what motivates students to do the work; however, this practice works primarily for students who are going to receive good grades anyway.

Should we grade in pencil as long as possible?

If the above statement is accepted as true, then averaging reduces motivation for students to keep working. Students (especially potential dropouts) must believe there is "pay off" for coming to school and for completing and re-doing their work.

What if, for each student, we placed only one grade in the grade book for each skill or standard and that grade could be continually erased and revised as each student showed greater mastery of the skill? After a

period of time, the grade would be an indicator of how far the student had come and also reflect his/her highest level of mastery at that period in time. A grading system like this also would lend itself to allowing students to set goals for themselves and work towards those goals. We have evidence that this approach positively impacts learning (Marzano).

Unless we average "repeated measures of similar content," a grade based on averaging loses its ability to predict, which is a major problem of End-of-Course (EOC) testing and other norm-referenced measures related to educational accountability, such as (AP/IB/ACT/SAT scores, and national test standards, etc.)

Averaging is **not typical** of the working world; for example, we do not average praxis scores when teachers re-take tests or when lawyers re-take the bar examination.

Averaging hurts some students more than others; for example, those born on 1st base and those not born in the ball park typically demonstrate less consistency in their work, especially if they have little or no support outside of school. A few extreme scores can change the picture drastically!

When averaging was initially instituted, school populations were more homogeneous (neighborhood schools); today schools are more diverse.

If 70 is required as a passing grade, and grades are based on averaging, which of the following students is likely to be more successful in Algebra II? Student A did poorly during Semester I (had a baby; parents divorced; started working 30 hours per week, etc.) and ended the semester with a score of 64, but at the end of Semester II, he/she had an average of 88 if only Semester II work were considered. Student B maintained an average score of 72 throughout the year.

What does a grade, based on averaging, really mean/predict? Does it depend on "what" is averaged and the subject? If so, should each teacher, school and school district determine the factors to be averaged?

Today what is the primary reason students need teachers? If only to dispense information, some argue dispensing content may be done as well or better with computer programs!!