

## Ken O'Connor Chat

Wednesday, November 2, 2011

**Pearson School Systems:** Good morning everyone, thank you for joining us. And now, we welcome Ken O'Connor, also known as "The Grade Doctor." Ken is an independent consultant who specializes in issues related to the communication of student achievement. Ken has authored books and articles on the topic and he is generally acknowledged to be one of a small group of leading experts on how to grade and report effectively. 10:01 AM

**Cynthia:** Do you think we will ever get to a time when we don't group by grade level? 10:01 AM

**Pearson School Systems:** And now, I welcome Ken. Ken, it appears there is already a question. 10:01 AM

**Ken:** Generally, probably no. But there are many elementary schools that use multi-age classrooms and I know of one system in Alaska that doesn't use grade levels at all. 10:02 AM

**Bob C:** My question related to the flow of grades from Assignments to Standards each having different grading or conversion scales. What are your best practices around this and how does the cut-off values come into play? 10:03 AM

**Beth Blackwell:** Is there a reason we cannot calculate final assignment grades from standard grades achieved within that assignment? 10:03 AM

**Tony joined the chat** 10:04 AM

**ARodriguez:** Ok. Sorry I missed that one, but I do have some questions related to grading in PowerTeacher. Is this a forum for those questions? Or is this a broader based discussion on general principles of grading student work? 10:04 AM

**Dave:** What are your thoughts about the new feature in PowerTeacher that allows assignment scores to auto-calculate the assignment standards scores? 10:04 AM

**Jan Shout-Ciotti:** I attended the webinar and have been asked if there is any chance the webinar or screenprints might be available for our teachers to review during their individual plan times? 10:04 AM

**Jim Pliner joined the chat** 10:05 AM

**David Powell:** Hello. We have our technical people joining this chat as we thought it was dealing with Power School grading issues. Is that not so? if it is about School Systems in general then we should have had academics online. Could you please let us know if PowerSchool technical issues will be discussed? 10:05 AM

**Mary Jane Warden:** Should traditional and standards grades reporting be used in combination? Our middle school wants to report both letter grade and standards grades. 10:05 AM

**Ken:** Bob I believe that we should score and report student achievement by levels - anywhere from 2 (mastered, not yet) to 7 or 8. The problem comes when we have to convert these levels to letter grades or % grades and for this we should use logic rules. 10:05 AM

**Pearson School Systems:** ARodriguez - this is meant to be for general grading, from Ken's perspective. Ken is familiar with PowerTeacher so you can go ahead and ask. 10:06 AM

**Bob C:** Thanks Ken, districts are all over the map on grade scales and conversion scales - cal parents and overall grades 10:06 AM

- Ken:** Aaron can you answer Beth and ARodriguez' questions? 10:07 AM
- Pearson School Systems:** David Powell, this is a general discussion around Ken's philosophy of grading. If you have technical questions regarding PowerSchool, you can reference PowerSource. 10:08 AM
- Jim Pliner:** Hi I'm new to the chat. We have recently moved from a traditional 100 pt scale to a 4 point proficiency scale. We read 15 fixes and are working hard to move completely to a standards based reporting system. Currently, we proficiency score standards based content but they are not reported to the parents to the standard. Are there any middle schools that have transitioned to totally standards based grade reporting? 10:08 AM
- Ken:** Dave, I think it is a great feature because we don't really need assignment scores. We need scores for the standards that were assessed in the assignment. 10:08 AM
- Ken:** Mary Jane, up to grade 8, I see no reason for subject letter grades but if eliminating them is going to cause opposition to standards-based grading and reporting I think it is necessary to keep both. 10:10 AM
- ARodriguez:** I think Mary Jane and Jim have the same question...that is a similar question for our middle school. 10:10 AM
- Ken:** Jim, I have seen lots of middle school standards-based only report cards. 10:11 AM
- Bob C:** Ken, in districts that revert to traditional grades in Grades 9-12, what have you seen/heard from districts who need pre-requisite grades in Spanish, Math and LA to enroll in specific leveled classes at the HS level? 10:12 AM
- Pearson School Systems:** Jan Shout-Ciotti - Hi Jan, yes, the recorded webinar will be available soon and posted in PowerSource. 10:12 AM
- William James:** My question is: Say teacher A uses weighted grades in Q1, then another calculation method in Q2, and this makes up the S1 grade. Then in Q3, they do something different, and then they do nothing in Q4. Q3, Q4 is used for S2 grades. Then finally S1, S2, and E1 is used to make the final grade for Y1. How do you straighten it all out and/or explain to a parent how the grade for the student came into being? 10:12 AM
- Jan Shout-Ciotti:** Thank you so much! 10:12 AM
- Ken:** Bob, you are right schools are all over the place but as there is no one 'right' system. What is needed in each school district is clear, public indication of how their school is doing it. 10:13 AM
- ARodriguez:** Is there a resource of best practices document for using Standards based grading in the upgraded PowerTeacher? 10:14 AM
- ARodriguez:** And have you seen any high schools doing standard based grading without traditional grades or do they do both? 10:15 AM
- Mary Jane Warden:** Thanks, Ken. Pearson folks: Is there a way in ReportWorks to pull from the standards grades table and the stored grades table and present them as a grid? 10:16 AM
- Ken:** William, I don't fully understand your question but I will try at least a partial answer. One of the best features of PowerTeacher is that for any set of scores a teacher enters for a student, a number of summary metrics are provided - mean, weighted mean, median, mode, highest, more recent and number of times assessed. I think this makes it clear to all, including parents, that there is not one right answer. 10:16 AM

**Beth Blackwell:** We have a standards based report card with letter grades. What are the pro's and con's of having the standard grades calculate the letter grade verses having the assignments calculate the letter grade? 10:17 AM

**Ken:** ARod, I am aware of high schools who take standards-based approaches and have no grades at all but I am not aware of any high schools who sb grading and only provide grades for standards. Although I do know one high school where the only time there is a grade is on the final report card. 10:19 AM

**ARodriguez:** Beth, great question. I am looking forward to hearing the answer. 10:19 AM

**Pearson School Systems left this message:** 10:21 AM

Mary Jane - thank you. I will pass your question along and someone will get in touch with you from Support.  
What district are you with?

**Mary Jane Warden:** Lincolnwood SD74. Thanks. 10:22 AM

**Bob C:** Ken, in districts that reverts to traditional grades in Grades 9-12, what have you seen/heard from districts who need pre-requisite grades in Spanish, Math and LA to enroll in specific leveled classes at the HS level? 10:23 AM

**Ken:** Beth, I am not entirely sure of the answer to that question so Aaron might want to answer from a Pearson perspective, but as a matter of principle I think it should be from the standards grades because they have real meaning. A student getting a 3 or a 75% on an assignment doesn't tell us much of value but if we know which standards in the assignment the student was strong on and which need improvement we have useful information. So it is that information that should accumulate to the subject grade - if we have to have them! 10:23 AM

**Mary Jane Warden:** Ken, can you refer us to a middle school who is doing standards-based grading? We'd like to take a look at their report card. Also, do you know other middles schools that are doing both? Thanks. 10:24 AM

**William James:** I was hoping for a magic recalculate all grades feature hidden somewhere in the program. I wouldn't have thought a teacher would use 4 different methods for calculating grades in 1 year, but I was wrong. It makes parents mad when that can't add 5 grades, then divide by 5 and get the yearly grade that is on the report card. 10:25 AM

**Beth Blackwell:** Our issue would then be that standard grades do not calculate into the final grade, they are two separate grading features. One does not associate the other 10:25 AM

**Ken:** Bob, I haven't but if schools want to use the bad practice of tracking for those courses, surely they can come up with alternative methods of determining eligibility or placement. 10:25 AM

**Ken:** Mary Jane please e-mail me and I will send you the information you are asking for. 10:26 AM

**Mary Jane Warden:** Thank you Ken! bye! 10:26 AM

**Pearson School Systems:** Hi Mary Jane, Ken's contact information is at the beginning of the chat. 10:27 AM

**Ken:** William, you say 'parents are mad when . . .' That is because we do not communicate clearly with them about what we are doing and why. Parents understand that doctors don't do things the same way as when the parents were young and so they can understand that school is different too if we communicate/educate them. 10:28 AM

**Ken:** kenoc@aol.com 10:29 AM

**Ken:** I think I have answered all the questions up to now. Any more? 10:29 AM

- Pearson School Systems:** Hi Ken, here is a more popular question: Should summative assessments be weighted higher than formative assignments/assessments? 10:30 AM
- BobC:** If a district is thinking about implementing standards - besides reading your books, what advice would you give them, lead time? Any benchmarks? 10:31 AM
- William James:** I agree, but I am just the computer tech turn PowerSchool Admin that gets to talk to the parent after the teacher leaves for the summer. Thanks. 10:31 AM
- Beth Blackwell:** Is there a way to get the standards grades to calculate the assignment grade and then the assignment grades to calculate the final mark for that subject? 10:31 AM
- Ken:** Yes, summative assessments should be 100% of grades and formative assessments should be 0%. Formative assessments are FOR learning and should receive descriptive feedback not scores. 10:32 AM
- ARodriguez:** Ken, I am not as familiar with the gradebook as I am with the Admin site. When I am showing teachers new to PowerTeacher how to enter assignments they often ask about the score type - whether or not to do points or percent and how it plays into the rest of the calculations (we have category weights). How would you explain this to a teacher new to the software? 10:32 AM
- Ken:** Aaron can you answer Beth's technical question? 10:33 AM
- Dave:** Following on Beth question about assignment calculating the standard score... If I use the feature to have the assignment scores auto-calculate the assignment standard scores and there are 5 different standards aligned to the assignment. PowerTeacher will give each standard the same calculated score even if the student should have different scores for each standard. 10:33 AM  
So should you only align one standard to an assignment?
- Pearson School Systems:** Hi Beth, I will pass your question on to Support and someone will contact you. What district are you with? 10:33 AM
- Jan Shout-Ciotti:** Could I be copied on Beth's response? 10:34 AM
- Ken:** BobC, make sure your standards - content and performance - are clear. Develop a timeline, develop policy/procedures, communicate all this clearly to all stakeholders.
- ARodriguez:** William James, I share your concern and have been in your shoes. This year we are making greater use of PowerTeacher Admin to get at gradebook errors/inconsistencies so we can discuss these with teachers well before they leave for the summer. 10:34 AM
- Ken:** William, it shouldn't be your issue. The support should ensure that there is a comprehensive communication plan and questions should go to her/him, not you. 10:36 AM
- Pearson School Systems:** Hi Jan, yes, you can be copied. Please email me at [PssMarketing@pearson.com](mailto:PssMarketing@pearson.com) and you will be copied. 10:36 AM
- Beth Blackwell:** Beth is with Pattonville School District in St Louis MO where standard have been the norm for about 10 years now and we are looking forward to Pearson upgrading their software to include final marks generated from standards since students need GPA's for college scholarships and entry. 10:37 AM
- Ken:** ARod, the answer for me is that everything should be entered as level scores, not points or % because levels have meaning and points and % have little or no real meaning. 10:37 AM

- Ken:** Beth, it was my understanding that what you are asking for can be done in PowerTeacher 2.3. Aaron is that correct? 10:39 AM
- Pearson School Systems:** Hi Beth, I will check to make sure. I am new to the product. Please email me at PssMarketing@pearson.com. 10:41 AM
- Beth Blackwell:** If Aaron is who Ken talks to...that's who I want to have a business dinner with! 10:41 AM
- Ken:** Apart from the technical questions which Aaron has said he will get answers to people, again, I think I am up-to date in answering questions. Who is next? 10:41 AM
- Pearson School Systems:** Hi Ken, here is another popular question: When creating a rubric should it always go from the highest point value to the lowest? Or can it start with the lowest and go to the highest? 10:43 AM
- Dave:** If I use the feature to have the assignment scores auto-calculate the assignment standard scores and there are 5 different standards aligned to the assignment. PowerTeacher 2.3 will give each standard the same calculated score even if the student should have different scores for each standard. So should you only align one standard to an assignment in using this feature? 10:43 AM
- Ken:** Some people are dogmatic about this but I am not. Which way it goes is unimportant compared to the clarity of language, the clear progression between levels and other features that make for quality rubrics. 10:44 AM
- Beth Blackwell:** Ken, what is the Weighted Mean feature in standards grade scale choice? 10:44 AM
- Ken:** Dave, "PowerTeacher 2.3 will give each standard the same calculated score even if the student should have different scores for each standard. "If that is what it does (and it shouldn't) then yes the standards should be separate. My understanding of why the assignment score is there is that PowerTeacher has to be accessible to a wide range of practices. If you are standards-based, I don't know why you would ever determine or enter assignment scores. 10:47 AM
- ARodriguez:** Ken, when you typed levels, is that for mastery based on a rubric? 10:48 AM
- Ken:** Weighted mean allows for varying weight of scores. 10:48 AM
- Dave:** Thanks - that is what I thought... 10:48 AM
- Ken:** ARod, yes by levels I mean if we have a rubric that has 4 3 2 and 1, we have 4 levels in the same way that AP has 5 levels and IB 7 and traditional letter grades are really five levels but we complicate it by basing those letter grades on percentages! 10:50 AM
- Beth Blackwell:** Ken, we agree with your comment about not entering assignment scores. We want to only enter rubric scores and have these calculate a final grade. Will PowerTeacher 2.3 allow us to do this? If so, where can we find the directions? We've looked under PowerSource. 10:51 AM
- Ken:** and percentages is a system of 101 (rather meaningless) levels. 10:51 AM
- Pearson School Systems:** We have just a few minutes left with Ken. Are there any other questions? 10:51 AM
- BobC:** Ken can you expand on one of your last statements. If you are true standards based- why enter assignment cores.... Do you have any data about schools creating and using assignments, associating and scoring standards BUT NOT THE ASSIGNMENTS? 10:52 AM

- Pearson School Systems:** Hi Beth, I will pass this along to Support as well. 10:52 AM
- Ken:** Beth, I thought that was what 2.3 was going to make possible. Aaron will get an answer to this for you...and me. 10:52 AM
- Pearson School Systems:** Everyone, we are in the final stretch here. Does anyone have additional questions? 10:55 AM
- BobC:** Thanks Ken and Pearson! I very much appreciate the opportunity to share in any manner with content experts with or without audio and or video! 10:55 AM
- Ken:** BobC, what I mean is students would do assignments and tests, but we would record scores only for the standards in each not an overall score. Telling a student that they got a 3 or 75% for an assignment is not very useful but identifying which standards are strong and which need improvement is useful information. The overall scores should not be given in addition to standard scores because the standards scores are then ignored by students and parents. 10:56 AM
- Beth Blackwell:** Thanks Ken and Pearson for your time!!! 10:56 AM
- Pearson School Systems:** Thank you BobC! 10:56 AM
- Ken:** Thanks for the thanks! I am glad you found it useful. 10:56 AM
- Pearson School Systems:** Thank you for joining, everyone. If you have additional questions after the chat, Ken can be reached at:  
kenoc@aol.com  
www.oconnorGrading.com 10:57 AM

For more information about PowerTeacher please visit our website at [www.PearsonSchoolSystems.com](http://www.PearsonSchoolSystems.com), call 877.873.1550, or email us at [pss\\_sales@pearson.com](mailto:pss_sales@pearson.com).