

**REPORT OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

ALTERATION OF GRADES

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



HOUSE DOCUMENT NO. 17

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
1995**



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

P.O. Box 2120

Richmond, Virginia 23216-2120

WILLIAM C. BOSHER, JR.
Superintendent of Public Instruction

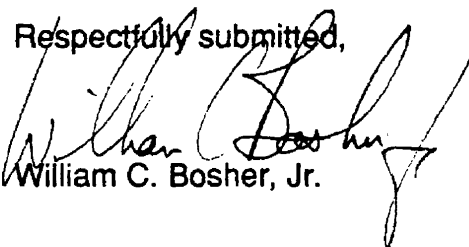
Office: (804) 225-2023
Fax: (804) 371-2099

December 30, 1994

The Honorable George Allen
Governor of Virginia, and
The General Assembly of Virginia
Third Floor, State Capitol
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Governor Allen and Members of the General Assembly:

The report transmitted herewith is pursuant to House Joint Resolution No. 195 of the 1994 General Assembly of Virginia. This resolution requested the Department of Education to study the alteration of grades in the public schools and submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1995 Session of the General Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,

William C. Bosher, Jr.

WCBJr:jct
Attachment

PREFACE

House Joint Resolution No. 195, enacted by the General Assembly in its 1994 session, requested the Department of Education to study the "Alteration of Grades" in the public schools of Virginia. The study was conducted between July 1, 1994 and November 15, 1994 by the following committee of Department of Education staff members:

Dr. Don Ayers
Specialist, Student Services

Ms. Vanessa Crozier
Driver Education Specialist

Mr. Charles Finley
School Accreditation Specialist

Dr. Lawrence McCluskey
Research & Evaluation Specialist

Dr. Katherine Rodgers
Elementary & Middle School Language Arts Specialist

Dr. Thomas Shortt
Director, Secondary Instruction

Dr. Robert L. Stokes, Associate Director for the Office for Accreditation, chaired the committee.

The study committee defined Alteration of Grades as the "act of changing a grade assigned by a classroom teacher without the teacher's knowledge."

The problem of grade alteration was investigated in the study by means of two independent surveys. The first was a survey of central office administrators conducted via telephone in 18 school divisions, and the second survey involved teachers in 28 school divisions. The school divisions in both samples were randomly chosen.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

House Joint Resolution No. 195 directed that the Department of Education study the alteration of grades in the public schools. The study was to determine specifically:

- 1) *local school division policies and practices regarding student evaluation and security of academic assessment and grades;*
- 2) *the frequency of and motivation for grade alteration;*
- 3) *any legal or policy concerns regarding the issue; and*
- 4) *the need to establish a statewide policy addressing the alteration of grades in the public schools.*

To gain information about these areas, the study committee decided to conduct two independent surveys. The first was a survey of central office administrators conducted via telephone who were asked to answer three questions dealing with grade alteration. These questions are contained in Appendix B.

The school divisions contacted were chosen by means of a stratified random sample of all school divisions in the Commonwealth. The strata used in the sample guaranteed that divisions selected were representative of the entire population in terms of geographic location (from the Tidewater area, to the Southwest, to Northern Virginia, and areas in between), economic background (from the highest composite index to the lowest), and political type (urban, suburban, and rural). Eighteen school divisions were chosen. Study committee members contacted by telephone the person in the division who was most knowledgeable about "grade alteration," as defined in HJR #195. In order to ensure the accuracy of the information provided, confidentiality was guaranteed to the respondents.

The second survey involved school teachers in 28 school divisions from around the state. These school divisions were selected using the same stratified random sampling system, except that the constraint was imposed that no school division would be selected for participation in both surveys. As a consequence of this decision, data were collected from a total of 46 school divisions.

The teachers were contacted by means of a mail survey which posed three questions and provided for an open-ended response. The three questions are contained in Appendix E. The questionnaires were mailed to 345 teachers. All replies were anonymous.

The information gathered from the surveys supplies a reasonable assessment of the frequency of grade alteration around the state. Telephone contacts were made with 18 central office personnel and replies were received from 208 (60.3%) teachers. Statistically, the information collected from the teachers can be shown to be within about seven percentage points (plus or minus) of the values that would be found if all of the teachers in the state were contacted.

The survey responses indicated that grades are sometimes altered for a variety of reasons. Chief among these are: sports eligibility; student progress; parental pressure; and teacher standards (failure rate too high).

Conclusions

Although grade alteration in the public schools of Virginia does occur, it is not a common practice. Reports from respondents supported this conclusion. The research also supported the conclusion that grade alterations that do occur are not divisionwide occurrences.

Even though the respondents to the survey supported the conclusion that grade alteration in the public schools is not a common practice, it should be noted that under certain circumstances grade alteration may be appropriate. For example, it may be appropriate to alter a grade if it is found to be in error or there is a local policy that allows a student to appeal a grade and the appeal is upheld. In any event, as stipulated in the Constitution of Virginia, such practice "...has always been, within the exclusive jurisdiction of the local school boards and not within the jurisdiction of the state Board of Education."

Recommendations

Based on the results of the surveys, the study committee concluded that a statewide policy addressing the alteration of grades in the public schools is not needed. However, the study committee suggests that the Board of Education acknowledge the awareness of the practice in some school divisions and encourage local school boards to develop or refine procedures to ensure the integrity of fair and consistent grading practices. These procedures should become part of the administrative manual containing school policies and procedures in each school division.

FINDINGS

The data analysis in this study is straightforward. The problem was to discover if grade alteration, as defined in the legislation, does occur. Frequency distributions of respondents from both the central office administrators and the teachers were compiled. Because these survey responses came from educators in two different groups of school divisions, any comparisons between central office personnel responses and teacher responses is not possible.

Central Office Survey Results

Of all central office personnel responding to the telephone survey, none reported any knowledge of grade alteration. Many replied that they did not have a policy about grade alteration, since grade alteration was unheard of. Others said that the policy against "changing grades" was inherent and implied in the ethical code of the school division. A few divisions had policies on this topic, but most were verbal understandings, rather than written records.

Teacher Survey Results

Teachers, however, reported different perceptions. These are as follows:

- ▶ Twelve percent of responding teachers reported that grades that **they had given** were changed without their knowledge of the change having taken place. (See Appendix G)
- ▶ Apart from one respondent who reported that grades were "Routinely" altered, there seems to be a large proportion of teachers who report that grades are at least sometimes altered. Only about half of the teachers responding to our survey said grades are "Never" altered, and some of these noted "not to my knowledge" after their response.
- ▶ Additionally, several teachers raised the question as to how they should know whether or not their grades had been changed. For example, in an isolated case, one teacher reported that an administrator had been asked the question of whether or not the teacher's grade for an individual student had been changed. According to the teacher, the administrator responded that since many grades had been changed, a specific incident was difficult to recall. Information about how many of these changes had been made without the individual teacher's knowledge was not collected in the survey.

With regard to the questions of whether or not the local school division has a

policy regarding grade alteration, fewer than 20% responded positively. The others said that their divisions had none or that they did not know if their divisions had such a policy.

Discussion

It is clear that grade alteration does take place in the public schools of Virginia. Grades given by the "primary teacher," the teacher responsible for assigning the grade, are changed on occasion by administrators or other teachers who have the opportunity to do so.

The reasons that these grade changes occur, at all levels of schooling as reported by the teachers, can be categorized as follows:

- 1) Sports Eligibility
 - Eligibility to play for the high school--the student needs a particular grade to participate in some sport
 - Eligibility to compete for a college scholarship to an institute of higher education
- 2) Student Progress
 - Social promotion--a student needs to be placed with his/her age group
 - Promotion--an advocate thinks the student is ready to move to next grade
 - Expediency promotion--promotion to get the student out of his/her current school (Usually the student or the student's parents are viewed as "trouble makers")
- 3) Parental Pressure
 - Grades--student should have all A's
 - College Entrance--student needs academic grade index to apply for a particular school
 - Influential local individual--pressure on administrator to change grade (student can't "possibly" deserve grade given)

- 4) **Teacher Standards (Failure Rate too High)**
- **Teacher's grading practices deemed unfair**
 - **Teacher fails too many kids**
 - **In classes where special education students are included, regular classroom teacher expectations were too high. The SPED Director changed grade in order to adjust for SPED disability**

Individuals other than the regular classroom teacher have the opportunity to change student's grades, and they sometimes take advantage of it. Sometimes the change is made for apparently justifiable reasons. In one case, the classroom teacher had made an error in calculating the student's final grade, and inspection of the teacher's grade book revealed this. The grade change was made in absence of the teacher's knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

Although grade alteration in the public schools of Virginia does occur, it is not a common practice. Reports from respondents supported this conclusion. The research also supported the conclusion that grade alterations that do occur are not division-wide occurrences.

Even though the respondents to the survey supported the conclusion that grade alteration in the public schools is not a common practice, it should be noted that under certain circumstances grade alteration may be appropriate. For example, it may be appropriate to alter a grade if it is found to be in error or there is a local policy that allows a student to appeal a grade and the appeal is upheld. In any event, as stipulated in the Constitution of Virginia, such practice "...has always been, within the exclusive jurisdiction of the local school boards and not within the jurisdiction of the state Board of Education."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the surveys, the study committee concluded that a statewide policy addressing the alteration of grades in the public schools is not needed. However, the study committee suggests that the Board of Education acknowledge the awareness of the practice in some school divisions and encourage local school boards to develop or refine procedures to ensure the integrity of fair and consistent grading practices. These procedures should become part of the administrative manual containing school policies and procedures in each school division.

APPENDICES A-G

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA -- 1994 SESSION

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 195

Requesting the Department of Education to study the alteration of grades in the public schools.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 14, 1994

Agreed to by the Senate, March 8, 1994

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth's public school teachers are vested with the responsibility of providing quality instruction to students; and

WHEREAS, through daily contact and participation in the shared activity of education, classroom teachers may effectively review a student's academic strengths and weaknesses and are therefore responsible for evaluating the educational progress of each student; and

WHEREAS, the evaluation of students may include the assignment of grades as a measure of academic achievement, and these grades affect a wide range of concerns, such as student promotion, eligibility for participation in extracurricular activities, and a school's accountability for the academic performance of its pupils; and

WHEREAS, it has been reported that, in some school divisions, grades assigned by a classroom teacher have been subsequently altered by individuals other than such teacher, and the classroom teacher is neither informed of nor given an explanation for the change; and

WHEREAS, maintaining the integrity of the student evaluation process is critical not only for the accurate measurement of academic achievement, but also for guidance in addressing any educational deficiencies; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Department of Education be requested to study alteration of grades in the public schools. The Department shall consider, among other things, local school division policies and practices regarding student evaluation and security of academic assessment and grades; the frequency of and motivation for grade alteration; any legal or policy concerns regarding this issue; and the need to establish a statewide policy addressing the alteration of grades in the public schools.

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Department, upon request.

The Department shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1995 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

**GRADE ALTERATION QUESTIONNAIRE
OF LEA CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATION
(HJR #195)**

Alteration of grades is defined as the act of changing a grade assigned by a classroom teacher, without the teacher's knowledge of the alteration.

1. Do you have any knowledge of students' grades ever being changed without the knowledge of the teacher who assigned the grades? (IF NO, GO TO QUESTION #3. IF YES, ASK FOR DETAILS (WHY? WHO CHANGED THE GRADE?) THEN ASK QUESTION #2, IF NECESSARY)

2. In your school division, how often are students' grades changed without the knowledge of the teacher who assigned the original grade?

1. Routinely 2. Regularly 3. Rarely 4. Never

3. Does your school division have a policy about grade alteration? (IF YES, REQUEST A COPY)

1. Yes 2. No

NOTES:

Name _____ Title _____

School Division _____ Phone _____

GRADE ALTERATION TELEPHONE SURVEY OF LEA
CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATION
(HJR #195)

LEAs SURVEYED

Don Ayers

Albemarle County
Shenandoah County
Warren County
Falls Church City
Martinsville City

Charles Finley

Arlington County
Campbell County
Fairfax County
Manassas City
Newport News City

Thomas Shortt

Bland County
Giles County
Lancaster County
Scott County
Tazewell County

Bob Stokes

Accomack County
Buckingham County
Gloucester County
Henrico County
Lunenburg County
Mathews County
Richmond County
Surry County
Hampton City
Richmond City
Staunton City
Suffolk City
Virginia Beach City

RESULTS OF LEA CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATION
 TELEPHONE SURVEY REGARDING THE ALTERATION OF GRADES
 (HJR #195)

1. Do you have any knowledge of students' grades ever being changed without the knowledge of the teacher who assigned the grades? (IF NO, GO TO QUESTION #3. IF YES, ASK FOR DETAILS (WHY? WHO CHANGED THE GRADE?) THEN ASK QUESTION #2, IF NECESSARY)				
Number Responding	28	YES	0	NO 28

2. In your school division, how often are students' grades changed without the knowledge of the teacher who assigned the original grade?				
ROUTINELY	0	REGULARLY	0	RARELY 0 NEVER 28

3. Does your school division have a policy about grade alteration? (IF YES, REQUEST A COPY)				
Number Responding	28	YES	2	NO 26

**GRADE ALTERATION QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS
(HJR #195)**

Directions: For each of the following questions, please reply by circling the number of your choice of response. To insure your anonymity please do **NOT** share your responses with anyone or sign this questionnaire.

Definition: Alteration of grades is defined as the act of changing a grade assigned by a classroom teacher without the teacher's knowledge.

1. Has anyone ever changed a grade that you had given a student without consulting with you before changing the grade?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

2. Based on your knowledge, how often are students' grades changed without the knowledge of the teacher who assigned the original grade in your division?

- 1. Routinely
- 2. Regularly
- 3. Rarely
- 4. Never

3. Based on your knowledge, does your school division have a policy regarding grade alteration?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

4. If you know of any instance in which grades have been altered without the knowledge of the teacher assigning the original grade, please tell us the reason for the grade change. (optional)

The student's grade was changed because _____

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY.

SAMPLE OF LEAs IN TEACHER SURVEY OF GRADE ALTERATION
(HJR #195)

SCHOOL DIVISIONS
Appomattox County
Bath County
Botetourt County
Brunswick County
Chesterfield County
Clarke County
New Kent County
Northampton County
Page County
Patrick County
Prince William County
Rockingham County
Scott County
Washington County
Chesapeake City
Portsmouth City
Richmond City
Roanoke City

**RESULTS OF TEACHER SURVEYS REGARDING
THE ALTERATION OF GRADES
(HJR #195)**

1) Has anyone ever changed a grade that you had given a student without consulting with you before changing the grade?

Response	# of Responses	Percentage
YES	25	12.0%
NO	183	88.0%
TOTAL	208	100.0%

2) Based on your knowledge, how often are students' grades changed without the knowledge of the teacher who assigned the original grade in your division?

Response	# of Responses	Percentage
ROUTINELY	1	.5%
REGULARLY	11	5.3%
RARELY	98	47.1%
NEVER	98	47.1%
TOTAL	208	100.0%

3) Based on your knowledge, does your school division have a policy regarding grade alteration?

Response	# of Responses	Percentage
YES	39	18.8
NO	155	74.5
DON'T KNOW	14	6.7
TOTAL	208	100.0%