



Response to Channel 5 Story on Tennessee Virtual Academy's Grading Procedures

February 11, 2013

The NewsChannel 5 story mischaracterizes TNVA's grading procedures. TNVA students earn the grades they receive. Our academic team simply modified our internal grading procedure to recognize middle school students' most recent progress and unit assessment scores rather than averaging a series of scores. Consistent with our school's unique mastery-based learning model, this modification was designed to help increase student engagement by rewarding students who made an extra effort to master the material and improve their scores. Our decision did not impact the integrity of our grading system and had no relationship to any state tests.

In schools all across Tennessee, principals, academic leaders, and teachers develop their own internal grading procedures and policies. They can vary by school, course and class. The decision by our academic team was made carefully and with the best interest of our students in mind. Our goal as educators is to advance student learning by finding the best ways to measure individual student progress, identify gaps, and provide remediation, enrichment, and academic support to meet the individual needs of all students.

Josh Williams

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Additional Background

In December 2012, our school's academic team modified our grading procedures for middle school. Our academic team believed this would align with TNVA's mastery-based learning model, improve the measurement of individual student progress, and enable the school to better identify students most in need of intervention and remediation. The decision was approved by TNVA's Head of School and communicated to teachers by the school's academic administrator.

The modification involved two of the six features that compose students' midyear grade: unit course assessment grades and progress in the curriculum.

Unit Course Assessment Grades: TNVA's curriculum uses assessments as a tool to help students achieve mastery of the content. The curriculum is mastery-based and is designed to

enable students to take the assessments more than once. Students that do not score well on an initial unit assessment are encouraged to review the material and retake the assessment before moving on to new content. If the student makes the effort and earns a higher score it cancels the lower score. This recognizes students' effort, achievement and mastery of content. This is a common practice in traditional schools too (e.g. make-up tests, alternative assessments, extra credit opportunities). The learning management system allows teachers to track student engagement and see how well students are mastering the content as they move through the curriculum.

Progress Grades: Online schools allow students the flexibility to learn at their own pace in a highly individualized learning model. Some students start and end strong, showing high engagement and consistent achievement. Other students may struggle in the beginning but "catch up" over time and demonstrate progress. Some may struggle throughout and show a regular pattern of low engagement. By recording students' most recent progress score, rather than averaging a series of scores over several weeks, we could more accurately recognize students' current progress in their individualized learning program. This also helped differentiate students and identify those who needed more instructional intervention and remediation.