When students advancing from one grade to the next happened to draw a tough grading teacher, they earned only a 1 or 2. This is a benefit of tougher grading. By contrast, students earning an A from an easy grader earned an FCAT score of 4 or 5 and 32% of them attained an FCAT score of 1 or 2. Only 5% of the tough graders’ A students attained an FCAT score of 1 or 2. By contrast, only 28% of students earning an A from an easy grader earned an FCAT score of 4 or 5 and 32% of them earned only a 1 or 2.

**Benefit of Tougher Grading**

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**Briefing:**

This study found that students taught by tough-grading teachers learn more in school. Unfortunately, it also found that parents have a more favorable view of teachers who are easy-graders.

Author David N. Figlio is a professor of economics at the University of Florida and author Maurice E. Lucas is Director of Research and Assessment for the Alachua County, Florida (Gainesville) public schools. Their study examined the grades assigned by Alachua County’s third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers.

To date, few empirical studies link the grading patterns of individual teachers to student achievement. Alachua County was an ideal site for such an investigation because its students take both the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS).

The ITBS is a nationally normed achievement test and the FCAT is designed to determine how well students have achieved Florida’s “Sunshine State Standards.” Figlio and Lucas compared FCAT scores to student grades to determine teacher grading standards and ITBS scores to determine student achievement.

There was a substantial discrepancy between the absolute level of the grades and the FCAT scores. Only 9% of the students who were awarded A’s actually performed at the A level (a score of 5) on the FCAT. Only 50% of the A students performed at the 4 or 5 level on the FCAT and 17% failed to achieve minimum competency (a score of 3 or above).

Importantly, there were substantial differences among teachers in the accuracy of their reported grades. The few who assigned grades that closely corresponded to students’ FCAT scores were classified as “tough” graders. The others were called “moderate” or “easy.”

Sixty-five percent of students receiving a A from a tough grader earned an FCAT score of 4 or 5, i.e., the equivalent of A or B. Only 5% of the tough graders’ A students attained an FCAT score of 1 or 2. By contrast, only 28% of students earning an A from an easy grader earned an FCAT score of 4 or 5 and 32% of them earned only a 1 or 2.

**Featured Research:**

"The Gentleman’s ‘A’ “

By David N. Figlio, University of Florida
Maurice E. Lucas, Alachua County Schools

Inflated grades may be the reason.

Like an inaccurate medical report, they can mask a problem until it is untreatable. In truth, inflated grades avoid short-term discomfort at the risk of long-term failure. Many factors encourage teachers to assign inflated grades. In addition to maintaining a positive image, inflated grades sidestep parent and student disappointment as well as the need to revise instruction. Teachers know that low grades are far more likely to elicit criticism than high ones.

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In truth, inflated grades avoid short-term discomfort at the risk of long-term failure. Like an inaccurate medical report, they can mask a problem until it is untreatable. With so much at stake, it would seem that all states and school districts need to examine this issue.

The Education Consumers Consultants Network is an alliance of experienced and credentialed educators dedicated to serving the needs of parents, policymakers, and taxpayers for independent and consumer-friendly consulting. For more information, contact J. E. Stone, Ed.D., at (423) 282-6832, or write: professor@education-consumers.com