

Equitable Grading Practices (EGP) Project Report: 2021-22 Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored inequities that have long existed within educational systems. Across Oregon and the United States, many students engaged in distance learning during the pandemic rather than learning in a physical classroom. As a result, historically high numbers of students found themselves failing at least one course ([Alexander, 2020](#); [Thompson, 2020](#)). Educators and schools struggled to know how to respond, leaving many wondering how to transform grading practices to help all students be more successful while maintaining rigorous learning outcomes.



In May 2021, ODE began a partnership with Dell Technologies and Advanced Learning Partnerships (ALP) to create a series of five professional learning modules designed to be completed by school-based teams to promote more equitable grading practices in Oregon classrooms. Over 80 school-based teams across 50 districts and Education Service Districts (ESDs) utilized the modules during the 2021-22 school year.

PLC Vision and Goals

In Oregon, districts adopt their own policies and practices around grading as aligned with [OAR 581-022-2270](#). Transforming grading practices at a local level must also transform instructional and assessment practices. The primary goals of the PLC are for school-based teams to:

- Determine their vision for grades and grading practices;
- Reflect on educators' current practices with this vision in mind;
- Integrate research on grading practices into their learning;
- Create an action plan to continue to work toward equitable grading practices; and
- Collaborate and share their experiences with others throughout the state.

"This is probably the most exciting thing I've ever done professionally."

— Participating middle school teacher with over 20 years of experience

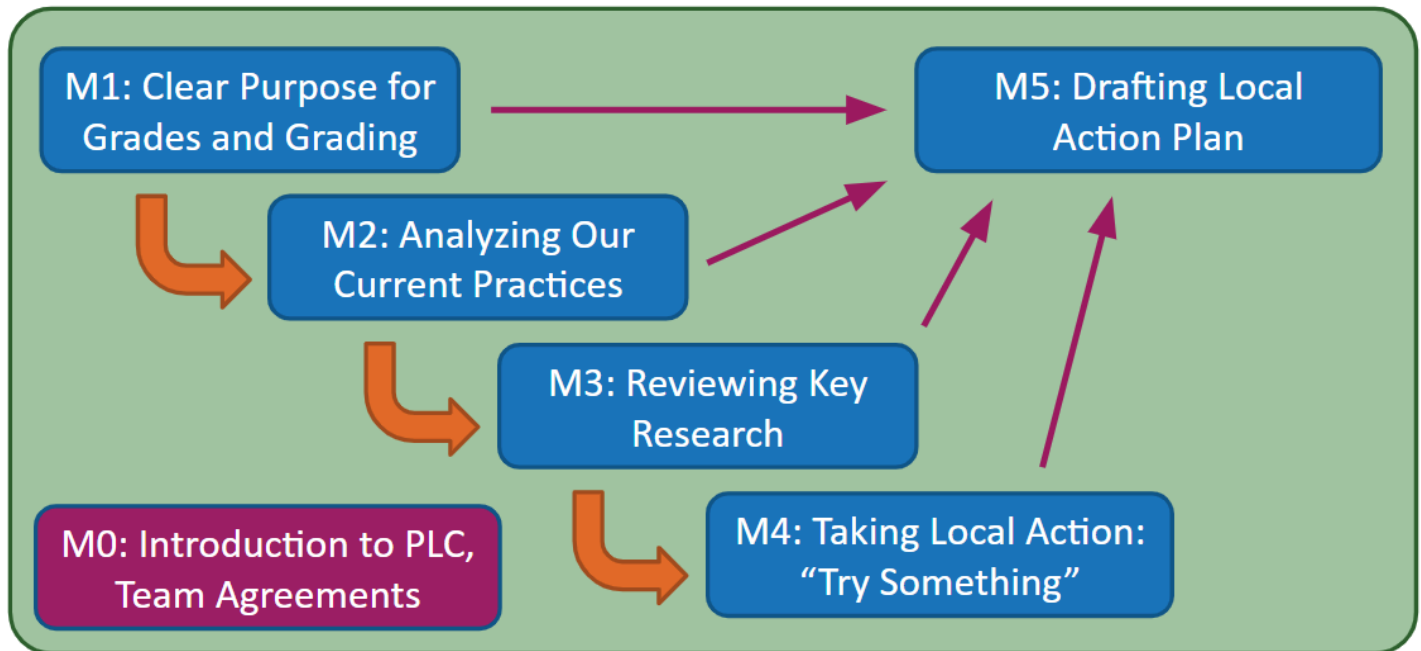
Learning Design and PLC Launch

A design team, including ALP consultants Dr. Robert Dillon and Dr. John D. Ross and ODE specialists, developed a statewide PLC framework with support from Dell Technologies. Their goal was to engage school teams in equitable grading practices tailored to Oregon educators, students, and families.

Following promotion through conferences and meetings, two PLC cohorts launched in Fall 2021 and Spring 2022, each with a team lead and at least two educators. These teams facilitated local leadership, shared insights at staff meetings, piloted grading changes, and supported research efforts.

ODE fostered connections among team leads and structured the modules to align with existing professional learning frameworks. The flexible design allowed experienced teams to advance quickly while others progressed at their own pace.

Module Titles and Sequence



Importance of School-Based Teams

In order to increase the likelihood of success, the design team agreed that school-based teams would create more sustainable change than district-level teams or individual educators. Knowing that school-based leadership is vital to creating focus and sustainability, participating teams ranged in size from 3-8 participants with all teams including a school and/or district administrator. The roles of team members also varied, from classroom educator to instructional coach to other school and district-based leadership. Each team utilized a team lead (usually the school administrator) to facilitate the interactions of their local team, serve as a single point of communication with the design team, and steward the eventual creation of an action plan. Over 400 educators participated from over 80 schools across over 50 local school districts and ESDs.

EGP PLC Fast Facts

438 educators in 81 schools across 51 Oregon school districts and ESDs

Nearly one in four Oregon districts participated in the PLCs

Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning Modules

The design team built consensus around equitable grading and assessment by exploring research from experts like Dr. Thomas Guskey, Dr. Susan Brookhart, and Joe Feldman. This led to the co-development of online learning modules for schools and districts statewide.

To enhance participation and accountability, ALP consultants proposed incentives, including graduate credit from an Oregon university. Structured modules guided participants, incorporating formative assessment strategies such as clear learning targets, success criteria, and self- and peer-monitoring.

Five Canvas-based modules were designed for integration into existing school PLC structures, with flexible timelines. Modules included pre-meeting activities, in-person discussions, and artifact creation, including discussion board posts summarizing key insights.

The design team hosted statewide PLC gatherings biweekly, fostering collaboration among educators. Some sessions featured Oregon teams sharing their learning artifacts, promoting inquiry, encouragement, and engagement. Participants found these meetings motivating and valuable.

Six Key Steps for Success

1. **Develop targeted learning modules with clear objectives** – The design team condensed over a century of research into five concise, evidence-based modules, ensuring school teams focus on proven practices rather than popular but ineffective approaches.
2. **Appoint a PLC coordinator** – Each school team designated a leader to facilitate communication, ensure engagement, and sustain dialogue on grading practices. School and district leaders played a crucial role in maintaining reform efforts beyond the PLC.
3. **Foster interaction and integration** – Rather than prescribing a rigid curriculum, the PLC provided resources and peer connections to help educators explore equitable grading within their own contexts. Teams successfully integrated cognitive, emotional, and reflective approaches, including student empathy interviews.
4. **Balance structured learning with action-oriented flexibility** – While existing PLCs benefited most, teams had the freedom to adjust timelines and engagement levels, ensuring content met their needs without forcing a strict schedule.
5. **Create a safe space for open dialogue** – Grading is deeply personal yet often overlooked in equity efforts. PLC leaders encouraged transparent discussions, challenged existing beliefs, and included student and family perspectives.
6. **Encourage cross-team collaboration** – Districts with multiple PLC teams benefited from shared learning and feedback, leading to powerful reflections on both effective and inequitable grading practices.

Lessons Learned

1. **Strong interest in equitable grading** – Educators in Oregon are highly engaged in exploring equitable grading, with initial attendance exceeding expectations. ODE plans to keep PLC materials accessible and continue collaboration.
2. **Existing PLC structures support success** – Schools with established PLCs seamlessly integrated the materials, while those without struggled to add another commitment to their schedules.
3. **Choose familiar online platforms** – Districts should use an LMS that educators already know, ensuring effective engagement through features like discussion boards for asynchronous interaction.
4. **Prioritize flexibility and differentiation** – External factors influenced participation, so PLCs should accommodate varying schedules and experience levels. Reflection and dialogue should support educators at all stages of grading reform.

Key Resources

Brookhart, S. M. (2013). *Grading and group work: How do I assess individual learning when students work together?* ASCD.

Feldman, J. (2019). *Grading for equity: What it is, why it matters, and how it can transform schools and classrooms.* Corwin Press.

Guskey, T. R. (2015). *On your mark: Challenging the conventions of grading and reporting.* Solution Tree Press.

Guskey, T. R. (2020). *Get set, go! Creating successful grading and reporting systems.* Solution Tree Press.

Guskey, T. R., & Brookhart, S. M. (2019). *What we know about grading: What works, what doesn't, and what's next.* ASCD.

Marzano, R. J. (2000). *Transforming classroom grading.* ASCD.

O'Connor, K. (2018). *How to grade for learning: Linking grades to standards.* Corwin Press.

Reeves, D. B. (2008). *Leading to change: Effective grading practices.* Educational Leadership, 65(5), 85–87.

Reeves, D. B. (2011). *Elements of grading: A guide to effective practice.* Solution Tree Press.

Stiggins, R. J. (2005). *Assessment for learning: Building a culture of confident learners.* Phi Delta Kappan, 87(4), 324–328.

Stiggins, R. J., & Chappuis, J. (2017). *An introduction to student-involved assessment for learning.* Pearson.

Vatterott, C. (2015). *Rethinking grading: Meaningful assessment for standards-based learning.* ASCD.

Final Note

While the Canvas modules and professional learning resources remain publicly available, ODE is no longer actively supporting the PLC. For more information, please contact the [ODE Assessment Team](#).