

FIRST Educational Resources

Spring STAGR Conference

Challenges & Solutions within SBG

2025



Keynote:
Thomas Guskey



April 29, 2025 | 10:00 am - 3:15 pm CST

www.firsteducation-us.com/stagr

All Sessions Recorded with Access Until September 30, 2025

Welcome!

2025 STAGR CONFERENCE



Welcome to the Spring 2025 STAGR Virtual Conference: Challenges and Solutions within Standards-Based Grading! We're excited you've joined us for a solutions-focused day dedicated to tackling the real challenges of implementing SBG.

This conference is designed to support you—whether you're just starting with SBG or looking to refine your practices. With actionable strategies and real-world insights, you'll leave equipped to make SBG work for your students, staff, and community.

What to Expect

The day begins with an inspiring keynote by Dr. Thomas Guskey, who will address key challenges and share practical solutions for SBG implementation. Throughout the day, expert-led breakout sessions will tackle **NINE** pressing questions such as:

- "If I allow reassessment, kids won't take the first assessment seriously."
- "Won't this system promote laziness?"
- "These changes won't prepare kids for the real world!"

You'll gain actionable insights and strategies that can be implemented immediately in your school or district.

Stay Connected

Engage in live sessions to ask questions, share ideas, and connect with peers. Can't attend live? Recordings will be available for September 30th, 2025!

Thank you for joining us in this important work. We look forward to learning and growing together at the Spring 2025 STAGR Virtual Conference!

Sincerely,
The FIRST Educational Resources STAGR Team



Becky Peppler
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Agenda

All times are Central (CST)

2025



10:00 am - 10:45 am

Opening Keynote
with Thomas Guskey



11:00 am - 11:45 am

Breakout Sessions
3 sessions to choose from



12:00 pm - 12:45 pm

Breakout Sessions
3 sessions to choose from



12:45 pm - 1:30 pm

Lunch/Break



1:30 pm - 2:15 pm

Breakout Sessions
3 sessions to choose from



2:30 pm - 3:15 pm

Closing Session
with Breakout Presenters



10:00 AM - 10:45 AM
KEYNOTE

HAVING PROBLEMS? NO WONDER! ESSENTIAL PREREQUISITES TO IMPLEMENTING STANDARDS-BASED GRADING WITH DR. THOMAS GUSKEY

Description: School leaders struggle with problems in their efforts to reform grading and reporting that could have been anticipated and avoided. This presentation describes three crucial prerequisites, supported by research evidence, that eliminate those problems and help bring honesty and integrity to the grading process. These steps provide the necessary foundation for implementing grading policies and practices that prioritize students' best interests, facilitate communication between school and home, and make grades honest, accurate, meaningful, and equitable.



ABOUT DR. GUSKEY

Thomas Guskey is Professor Emeritus in the College of Education at the University of Kentucky where he served as Department Chair, Head of the Educational Psychology Area Committee, and President of the Faculty Council. He began his career in education as a middle school teacher and earned his doctorate in educational measurement and evaluation at the University of Chicago. He served as an administrator in Chicago Public Schools before becoming the first director of the Center for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning, a national research center.

Dr. Guskey is the author/editor of 30 award-winning books and more than 300 book chapters, articles, and professional papers. He was named a Fellow in the American Educational Research Association, the Association's highest honor, and received the Association's prestigious Relating Research to Practice Award. He has also received the Distinguished Contributions to the Field Award from Learning Forward, the Jason Millman Award from the Consortium for Research on Educational Assessment and Teaching Effectiveness, and the Distinguished Achievement Award from the Association of Educational Publishers. Perhaps most unique, in the 158-year history of his undergraduate institution, Thiel College, he is one of only three graduates to receive the Outstanding Alumnus Award and be inducted into the Thiel College Athletic Hall of Fame.

His most recent books include Grading with Integrity (2024), Engaging Parents and Families in Grading Reforms (2024), and Implementing Mastery Learning (2023).

11:00 AM - 11:45 AM SESSIONS



CAN I JUST TAKE SOMEONE ELSE'S PRIORITY STANDARDS & LEARNING TARGETS: WHY DOING THE WORK IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE FINAL PRODUCT WITH DON SMITH

Description: Teachers around the country spend months to years working on prioritizing standards and writing learning targets. It is human nature to feel bogged down at some point and wonder if there is a way to accelerate the process. We will talk about why doing the work is as important as the actual final product of having clearly written learning targets and how skipping the process can lead to further confusion.

We'll address:

- Why doing the work of prioritizing is valuable
- Pitfalls to accelerating the process
- Ways to accelerate the process if needed, while avoiding the pitfalls

Walk away with a clear idea about why we need to do the work as well as ways to support teachers.



MY CURRENT ASSESSMENTS WORK JUST FINE': RETHINKING ALIGNMENT AND IMPACT WITH BECKY PEPPLER

Description: "My current assessments work just fine." While this is a common sentiment, are they truly meeting the needs of your students and aligning with standards and learning targets? In this session, we'll challenge the status quo by exploring what makes an assessment effective, purposeful, and aligned to student learning goals.

Together, we'll cover:

- How to evaluate whether your assessments are truly measuring what matters.
- Steps to align assessments with standards and learning targets.
- Practical strategies for redeveloping assessments that drive deeper learning and meaningful feedback.

Leave with tools and insights to design assessments that ensure clarity, alignment, and success for every student.

11:00 AM - 11:45 AM SESSIONS



"THESE CHANGES WON'T PREPARE STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE OR THE 'REAL WORLD.'" WITH GARTH LARSON

Description: The concern that standards-based grading does not prepare students for college or the workforce is a recurring challenge within this process. This session addresses this misconception head-on. Participants will explore how SBG fosters accountability, resilience, and lifelong learning by reframing failure as a growth opportunity and emphasizing the separation of academic achievement from behaviors. Through real-world examples and actionable strategies, this session will communicate the benefits that can be shared with parents, staff, and stakeholders effectively.

- Goals:

- Understand Misconceptions: Analyze common myths around SBG and its impact on college and career readiness, and learn how to counter them with research and evidence.
- Explore Solutions: Discover strategies to support students in developing critical life skills, including accountability, meeting deadlines, and responding to failure constructively.

Communicate Change: Develop tools and language to address parental and community concerns, showcasing how SBG aligns with preparing students for success beyond K-12 education.



12:00 PM - 12:45 PM

SESSIONS



WHY ARE WE MAKING THESE CHANGES AND STILL GIVING A LETTER GRADE? *WITH DON SMITH*

Description: The symbol given at the end of the learning cycle carries different meanings around the country. In this session, we will explore why some districts choose to keep a letter grade and how they go about calculating that grade.

We'll address:

- Why symbols matter to different communities
- How to still give a letter grade while using a SBG system

Walk away with ideas for how to still give a letter grade in your system.



IF I ALLOW REASSESSMENT, KIDS WON'T TAKE THE FIRST ASSESSMENT SERIOUSLY': STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS *WITH BECKY PEPPLER*

Description: "If I allow reassessment, kids won't take the first assessment seriously." Sound familiar? This session tackles one of the most common concerns educators face when implementing reassessment policies. Join us as we explore proven strategies to foster student accountability, increase motivation, and ensure students give their best effort on the first attempt—while still honoring opportunities for growth through reassessment.

We'll address:

- Why this concern arises and how to shift the mindset around reassessment.
- Practical strategies to balance accountability and student learning.
- Real examples of reassessment systems that motivate students to aim for success the first time.

Walk away with actionable solutions to help your reassessment policy drive proficiency without compromising effort or expectations.

12:00 PM - 12:45 PM SESSIONS



SHOW ME SOME RESEARCH THAT SAYS THIS ACTUALLY WORKS! *WITH MATT TOWNSLEY*

Description: One of the biggest potential challenges educators will face when implementing reformed grading practices is answering the question “Where is the research that says these new grading practices work?” After all, if a school is going to put the time and effort into transitioning to a new grading system, it is reasonable for those closest to the action to understand why the change is worth pursuing and the benefits that it may provide. Drawing from real-world examples and the scholarly literature, this session will explore how educators can respond to parents, coworkers, school board members and community members who are asking for supporting research to be provided. With an active researcher as your guide, learn where to quickly access grading research and how to summarize it for a non-academic audience.

We will explore:

- How to understand research behind reformed grading practices
- How to effectively communicate the grading research with stakeholders
- How to access grading research quickly and efficiently



1:30 PM - 2:15 PM SESSIONS



"WON'T THIS SYSTEM JUST PROMOTE LAZINESS? THERE'S NO ACCOUNTABILITY FOR KIDS IN THIS SYSTEM!" *WITH GARTH LARSON*

Description: A common concern about standards-based grading is that it promotes laziness and removes accountability. This session challenges that myth, showing how separating academics from behavior fosters greater accountability. Using real-world examples and behavior rubrics, participants will learn to design systems that prioritize effort, preparedness, and timeliness while preserving academic integrity. Practical strategies will be provided to address student behavior and promote responsibility across schools and districts.

Goals:

- **Clarify Accountability:** Learn how separating grades from behaviors raises expectations and enhances student accountability.
- **Utilize Behavior Rubrics:** Develop and implement rubrics to assess behaviors like timeliness, effort, and preparedness.
- **Build Support Systems:** Explore strategies to enforce behavioral expectations, linking them to privileges and extracurricular eligibility.



MY KIDS ARE NOT GOOD TEST TAKERS': BALANCING FORMATIVE WORK AND SUMMATIVE GRADES *WITH BECKY PEPPLER*

Description: "My kids are not good test takers." This common concern arises when grades rely solely on summative assessments. In this session, we'll unpack the purpose of formative work in supporting learning and why it doesn't belong in the final grade.

We'll also explore:

- How formative assessments guide instruction and help students build mastery.
- Why summative grades should reflect learning, not the process of learning.
- Practical strategies for differentiating assessments to meet student needs while maintaining common learning outcomes.

Leave with a clear understanding of how to balance formative and summative assessments to ensure grades reflect what students truly know and can do.

1:30 PM - 2:15 PM

SESSIONS



GIVING POINTS AND PERCENTAGES ARE MORE ACCURATE THAN USING LEVELS OF PROFICIENCY WITH MATT TOWNSLEY

Description: For as long as many of us have all been in school, points and percentages have been the norm, and have been assumed to provide students and parents with a precise down-to-the-tenth-of-a-percentage number in the electronic grade book. When schools begin to transition to alternative grading practices such as standards-based grading and standards-referenced grading, student learning is communicated using performance categories such as Not Yet (1), Beginning (2), Developing (3), and Proficient (4). Absent proper training, support and examples, some teachers may also believe that a better way to grade students is through points and percentages or that in doing so, it is more accurate than using performance categories that describe levels of proficiency. In this session, participants will understand the research supporting the use of a finite number of performance categories and see examples of rubrics that utilize levels of proficiency.

We will explore:

- How to deeply understand the shift from points to performance categories
- Key research supporting the use of performance categories and levels of proficiency
- Practical examples of rubrics that utilize levels of proficiency



2:30 PM - 3:15 PM CLOSING



FROM QUESTIONS TO ACTION: YOUR NEXT STEPS IN SBG WITH GARTH LARSON, BECKY PEPPLER, DON SMITH & MATT TOWNSLEY

Description:

Throughout today's sessions, we've explored major challenges and solutions in standards-based grading. But what happens next? How do you take what you've learned today and turn it into meaningful change in your school or district?

In this closing session, our expert panel will help you:

- Reflect on the biggest takeaways from the conference.
- Identify the first steps you can take to implement or refine SBG in your setting.
- Discuss strategies for gaining buy-in from colleagues, parents, and administrators.
- Troubleshoot the roadblocks you anticipate facing when bringing SBG back to your school.

This session is designed to bridge the gap between learning and action. Whether you're just beginning your SBG journey or refining an existing system, you'll leave with concrete next steps to ensure lasting impact.



SPEAKER

Bios



GARTH LARSON

Garth Larson, Ed.D is the Co-Founder and CEO of FIRST Educational Resources. Garth has previously worked as the Director of Learning for the Winneconne Community School District in northeast Wisconsin, was an elementary principal in two separate buildings and started his career in education as a high school speech and English teacher. In 2011, Garth formed Wisconsin Educational Resources (now FIRST) with a focus on improving student achievement across the United States. Since 2011, over 2000 school districts throughout the globe have become partnership districts with his company. Garth currently consults with school districts around the world and provides customized professional development around a variety of topics, mainly Professional Learning Communities 2.0, Learning-Centered Grading Practices, Leadership and School Improvement. Garth is also the author of Collaborative Systems of Support: Learning for ALL with co-authors Tom Hierck and Chris Weber, Target-Based Grading in Collaborative Teams: 13 Steps to Moving Beyond Standards with co-author Tom Hierck, Grading for Impact: Raising Student Achievement through a Target-Based Assessment and Learning System and PLC 2.0: Collaborating for Observable Impact in Today's Schools with co-author Cale Birk.



BECKY PEPPLER

Becky Peppler is the Director of FIRST Education STAGR (Standards, Targets, Assessment, Grading & Reporting) Center (a division of FIRST Educational Resources). Becky Peppler's rich educational background began as a dedicated Chemistry and Forensic Science teacher. She later elevated to an instructional coach and the distinguished role of the 6-12 Science Curriculum Chair. Honored with the Excellence in Science Education Award from Wisconsin, Becky's innovation didn't stop there. She was instrumental in spearheading the shift of the Winneconne Community School District towards Target Based Grading. This initiative, along with her expertise in meaningful assessment, has positively impacted over 100 school districts nationwide. An advocate for inclusive education, Becky believes every student deserves a chance at academic and personal success. Beyond her primary roles, she also co-authored the "STAGR Process Roadmap Laminated Guide" with Dr. Garth Larson and Ken O'Connor, and "Extinguishing the Fires Within Assessment and Grading Reform" with Dr. Garth Larson, Matt Townsley and Don Smith, a testament to her unwavering dedication to providing educators with the tools they need to thrive.



SPEAKER

Bios



DON SMITH

Don Smith has 20 years of professional experience in public schools. Don previously served as the Director of Teaching and Learning for the Winneconne Community School District, in Wisconsin. Prior to that, Don was the Director of Teaching and Learning in the School District of Waupaca. Don also served as the Principal at Fond du Lac STEM Academy and Fond du Lac STEM Institute, as well as the District

Assessment Coordinator for the Fond du Lac Area School District (WI). Don is a co-author on Extinguishing the Fires of Assessment and Grading Reform, as well as a co-author of the laminated guide, Leveraging the Block Schedule for Student Learning Growth. Don continually leads professional development sessions centered on research based practices in instruction, assessment and grading. In 2022, Don began working full time with FIRST Educational Resources.



MATT TOWNSLEY

Matt Townsley serves as an associate professor of educational leadership at the University of Northern Iowa. He previously taught and worked as a district administrator in Solon, IA. Matt authored multiple books, including Making Grades Matter: Standards-Based Grading in a Secondary PLC at Work, Using Grading to Support Student Learning, A Parents' Guide to Grading and Reporting: Being Clear

about What Matters, and Extinguishing the Fires within Assessment and Grading Reform. Through conferences, professional development, and workshops, Dr. Townsley has consulted with thousands of teachers and administrators across the country on assessment and standards-based grading. Matt's writing appears in journals such as Educational Leadership (ASCD), School Administrator (AASA), and ASCD Express. He has been featured or quoted on CNN.com, The Washington Post, California public radio, the Center for Digital Education, Education Week, USA Today, and other media outlets. Matt's primary area of expertise and support with FIRST includes assessment and grading.

