

STAGR FALL VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

20 25

Standards • Targets • Assessment • Grading • Reporting



***Fires in Grading: From Lighting the Healthy Ones to
Extinguishing those that Hinder Student Learning***

TUESDAY , OCTOBER 28TH 2025

Virtual Conference with recorded access to all sessions until 01.31.26

WWW.FIRSTEDUCATION-US.COM/STAGR



Welcome!



FALL 2025 STAGR CONFERENCE

We're so glad you've joined us for a powerful day of learning focused on navigating the fires that spark in grading reform—fueling the healthy ones that drive innovation while extinguishing those that hinder student learning.

What to Expect

The day begins with an inspiring keynote from Rick Wormeli, followed by breakout sessions that dig into clarity, consistency, and communication in grading practices. You'll also experience a bold feature session with Ken O'Connor and an interactive fireside chat to close the day.

Throughout, you'll gain field-tested strategies, examples, and resources you can use immediately in your school or district. Plus, every registration includes a copy of *Extinguishing the Fires in Grading & Assessment Reform* to extend your learning beyond today.

Stay Connected

Engage in the chat, ask questions, and connect with colleagues across the country. Can't attend live? You'll have access to all recordings until January 31, 2026.

Thank you for being part of this important work. Together, we'll light the right fires in grading reform and move toward practices that truly serve students.



Becky Peppler
Director,
FIRST Education STAGR Center
becky@firsteducation-us.com



Dr. Garth Larson
Co-founder and CEO,
FIRST Educational Resources
garth@firsteducation-us.com



Don Smith
Director of Professional
Services
dones@firsteducation-us.com



CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

at a glance

- 10:00 am – 11:00 am CST
 - Opening Keynote with Rick Wormeli
- 11:15 am – 12:00 pm CST
 - Live Breakout Sessions
- 12:00 pm – 12:30 pm
 - Lunch Break
- 12:30 pm – 1:30 pm CST
 - Feature Session with Ken O'Connor
- 1:45 pm – 2:30 pm CST
 - Live Breakout Sessions
- 2:45 pm – 3:15 pm CST
 - Closing & Fireside Chat



KEYNOTE AND SESSION DESCRIPTIONS CAN BE FOUND ON THE NEXT
FEW PAGES OF THE CONFERENCE PROGRAM

*****TIMES LISTED ARE CENTRAL TIME ZONE*****

Keynote Description

10:00 am - 11:00 am central

Why Do We Still Light the Fires of Grading Reform?

Presenter: Rick Wormeli

Description: The ultimate goal in any education reform is improved student learning and achievement and a compassionate and competent society. Keys to all of that are found in collective and individual teacher efficacy, and in particular, with assessment and grading reform; it's that transformative. Assessment and grading practices imbue almost everything we are as educators: student interactions, instructional design, equity measures, the lens through which we consider new research, how we spend our time and energy, how we cultivate student motivation and maturity, our core values as teachers, how we see our roles in the classroom, and much more. We wonder weekly, though: Are we concerned about grades becoming so transactional? Has the definition of fairness been corrupted? Is there unrecognized bias in assessment and grading? Do grades reflect compliance with tasks or evidence of learning? How do we report lateness and teach responsibility? Are we conflating the report of one thing with the report of something else? Are assessment formats getting in the way of accurate expressions of proficiency? What is the role of agency and student self-monitoring of academic progress? What leads to real learning and success for every one of our students? Dauntingly, our current practices and the answers to these questions are often the fragile gatekeepers for lives of dreams fulfilled - or deferred (Hughes). There is great urgency in grading reform, yes, but critiquing and changing these practices is a prickly and steep climb. Join us for a compelling and candid address as we validate and inspire the push for grading reforms in today's schools. We'll look at what tethers us to ineffective and hurtful practices, and what aligns with modern pedagogy, student success, and professional ethics. Come, find the stamina needed to minimize hypocrisies and maximize the mechanics of accurate and ethical grading!



Standards • Targets • Assessment • Grading • Reporting

Morning Breakout Descriptions

"Lighting the Fires: Common Pitfalls and Missteps in Grading"

11:15 am - 12:00 pm central

From Points to Problems: How Traditional Points-Based Systems Spark Fires

Presenter: Garth Larson

Description: Points and percentages have long been the foundation of traditional grading—but too often, they spark confusion, inaccuracies, and resistance. In this practical, no-nonsense session, Dr. Garth Larson exposes the most common problems caused by points-based systems: inflated averages, distorted feedback, and grading decisions that fail to reflect learning. Rather than diving deep into research, this session focuses on real-world classroom scenarios and practical missteps that every educator can recognize. Participants will unpack how these systems unintentionally fuel frustration for students, staff, and families—and walk away with clearer, more consistent alternatives rooted in levels of proficiency. If you've ever heard, "But I gave them points for trying!"—this session is for you.

Fueling the Wrong Fires: How to Avoid Common Grading Mistakes

Presenter: Becky Peppler

Description: In this session, we will explore how seemingly minor grading missteps can unintentionally fan the flames of confusion and frustration. We'll analyze common errors educators make during the transition to standards-based grading, such as mixing academic performance with behavior, inconsistent reassessment practices, and unclear reporting methods. You'll walk away with practical strategies, clear examples, and proactive tools to recognize, correct, and prevent these issues before they escalate—ensuring your grading system stays effective, fair, and focused on student learning.

Reigniting the Why

Presenter: Don Smith

Description: In many districts, Standards-Based Grading started with bold intentions—clarity, consistency, and a stronger focus on student learning. But somewhere along the way, the fire started to fade. Confusing scales, inconsistent practices, and grading myths have left educators burned out and communities skeptical. In this session, we'll confront the smoldering issues head-on and return to the purpose that lit the spark in the first place: ensuring grades reflect learning, not compliance. Through real stories, reflection tools, and practical strategies, participants will walk away ready to reignite their commitment, recalibrate their systems, and restore trust in a more meaningful approach to grading.

Feature Session Description

12:30 pm - 1:30 pm central

Busting Myths in Grading: Navigating the Fires of Subjectivity and Professional Judgment

Presenter: Ken O'Connor

Description: In this session, we'll confront two of the most misunderstood fires in grading: professional judgment and subjectivity. We'll explore how grading can be both rigorous and fair, debunking common myths that erode confidence in educator expertise. Together, we'll unpack the reality that all human judgments are inherently subjective—and examine how professional judgment, when grounded in clarity and consistency, is not only possible but essential to meaningful and equitable grading practices.



Standards • Targets • Assessment • Grading • Reporting

Afternoon Breakout Descriptions

"Extinguishing the Fires: Practical Tools and Solutions"

1:45 pm - 2:30 pm central

Fireproofing Your Grading Policies: Designing Systems that Work

Presenter: Garth Larson

Description: When grading policies are vague, inconsistent, or overly complex, they become a spark that ignites confusion, inequity, and pushback. In this hands-on session, Dr. Garth Larson shares clear, field-tested policy examples that extinguish grading fires before they start. From reassessment protocols to late work guidelines and reporting practices, participants will explore how to create policies that are fair, functional, and student-centered—without overcomplicating the system. The focus is on simplicity, clarity, and schoolwide consistency. Whether you're looking to refine your current policies or design new ones that actually work, this session offers the practical tools you need to fireproof your grading system and confidently move your team forward.

Fireproofing Family Conversations: Helping Parents Understand Grading Reform

Presenter: Chad Lang

Description: One of the hottest fires in grading reform doesn't start in the classroom—it starts at home. When families misunderstand or mistrust new grading practices, the resistance can spread fast. This session equips educators with clear, empathetic, and effective strategies to communicate grading reform to parents and guardians. Participants will explore practical metaphors, real-world examples, and interactive activities that spark "aha!" moments with families.

We'll tackle common concerns and model how to address them without fanning the flames. Most importantly, we'll emphasize a foundational truth: grades are meant to communicate learning, not just notify families of performance. True communication invites clarity, conversation, and partnership—far beyond the passive ping of a gradebook alert. Whether you're just beginning your reform journey or facing pushback midstream, you'll leave with ready-to-use tools to turn confusion into clarity and parents into partners.

Fire Drills: Embedding students into your SBG processes

Presenter: Don Smith

Description: Too often, students are left out of the very systems meant to support their learning—resulting in confusion, disengagement, and a lack of ownership. In this session, we'll tackle one of the hottest fires in grading reform: the myth that accountability only flows from teacher to student. Instead, we'll explore how to run "classroom fire drills" that prepare students to track their progress, respond to feedback, and engage deeply with learning targets and standards. From goal-setting routines to reflection protocols, you'll leave with practical strategies to make students first responders in their own learning—confident, capable, and connected to the process.

Standards · Targets · Assessment · Grading · Reporting

Closing Session Description

2:45 pm - 3:15pm central

Fireside Chat: Practical Answers to Your Burning Questions with Garth, Don & Becky

Description: Join us for this interactive, solution-focused fireside chat to close out your conference experience. We'll directly address common grading "fires" submitted by participants throughout the day, providing actionable strategies and real-world solutions you can implement immediately. This fast-paced, practical session is your opportunity to hear targeted advice and concrete next steps to address your school's most pressing grading challenges.



Standards • Targets • Assessment • Grading • Reporting

SPEAKER

Bios



DR. CHAD LANG

Dr. Chad Lang is the Director of Teaching & Learning (HS) for Linn-Mar Community School District in Iowa. With two decades of experience as a teacher, administrator, and district leader, Chad has extensive expertise in curriculum development, grading reform, and Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work. Under his leadership from 2018-2025, Glenwood CSD achieved National Model PLC at Work District status and received a National Blue Ribbon Award for

West Elementary from the U.S. Department of Education. Chad has been recognized as the Missouri Athletic Administrator of the Year in 2018 and the Iowa Central Office Administrator of the Year in 2023. He co-authored the book *A Parents' Guide to Grading and Reporting: Being Clear About What Matters* with Matt Townsley, and his work has been published in *Phi Delta Kappan* and *ASCD's Educational Leadership*. Chad also serves as an adjunct professor in schools of education at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, Buena Vista University, and the University of Northern Iowa.



DR. GARTH LARSON

Garth Larson, Ed.D, is the Co-Founder and CEO of FIRST Educational Resources. He began his career as a high school English teacher and Associate Principal, later serving as an elementary principal and the Director of Learning for the Winneconne Community School District in Northeast Wisconsin. In 2015, he co-founded FIRST Educational Resources, aiming to enhance student achievement across the United States. Since then, over 2500 school districts worldwide have partnered with his

company. Garth consults globally, providing customized professional development on topics such as Professional Learning Communities, Learning-Centered Grading Practices, Leadership, and School Improvement. He is the co-author of six books, including *Collaborative Systems of Support*, *PLC 2.0*, *Grading for Impact*, *The STAGR Process Roadmap*, *Extinguishing the Fires Within Assessment and Grading Reform*, and *Simplifying School Improvement: A Framework for Impact in Today's Schools*.



SPEAKER

Bios



KEN O'CONNOR

Ken O'Connor (also known as "The Grade Doctor" has been an independent consultant from 1996 to the present. He has been a staff development presenter and facilitator on assessment, grading and reporting in 45 states and 9 Canadian provinces and 21 countries outside North America. He has presented at NESA Conferences in Bahrain, Bangkok, Kathmandu, Athens, Muscat and Istanbul, and at ECIS in Amsterdam. He was a member of the ASCD Faculty and the ASCD

Understanding by Design cadre. Ken's primary area of expertise and support with FIRST includes assessment and grading for learning.



BECKY PEPPLER

Becky Pepler is the Director of FIRST Education STAGR (Standards, Targets, Assessment, Grading & Reporting) Center (a division of FIRST Educational Resources). Becky Pepler'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.



RICK WORMELI

One of the first Nationally Board Certified teachers in America, Rick brings innovation, energy, validity and high standards to both his presentations, and his instructional practice, which includes 36 years teaching math, science, English, physical education, health, and history, and coaching teachers and principals. Rick's work has been reported in numerous media, including ABC's "Good Morning

America," "Hardball with Chris Matthews," National Geographic and Good Housekeeping magazines, What Matters Most: Teaching for the 21st Century, and the Washington Post. With his substantive presentations, sense of humor, and unconventional approaches, he's been asked to present to teachers and administrators in all 50 states, Canada, China, Europe, Thailand, Japan, Vietnam, Korea, Australia, and the Middle East.

