

LVEA TODAY



Feeling the pressure to give higher grades?

Teachers are reporting increased pressure to give higher grades to some students. Teachers, mostly at the secondary level, have heard or felt the nudging to give fewer (if not eliminate) low grades or marks. Whether it's part of Student 360, Mastery Grading, RtI, inclusion, etc. there seems to be a growing insistence from somewhere (e.g. admin, parents, state, etc) to show evidence of enhanced learning in the form of higher grades – i.e. fewer D/Fs or other low marks.

LVEA contends that all educators got into this profession to help students learn. We all want to help struggling students improve and better master course concepts. It seems now that times have changed. Prerequisites to courses/programs like AP, IB, honors and Gate have been essentially removed. These lower barriers can be a good thing, but they can also shift pressure to educators to elevate the performance of unprepared students...to sometimes false levels to reflect a learning environment that is more acceptable to those who are not in the classroom. Increasing expectations can be good since it stretches students to higher levels of learning; however, not all students will succeed. It's as if teachers have to compensate for all lack of preparation. Yes, this can be a healthy challenge but it can also be a stressful, time-consuming endeavor that will make your job more difficult and frustrating.

If/when barriers are removed and educators are expected to get ALL of their students to reach higher levels, how is this going to work? Yes, you'll all work diligently to get your students to succeed but it's naïve to say they'll all magically get As and Bs. Some administrators have suggested that there should be no D/Fs. LVEA is concerned that teachers will be pressured to give only strong grades. Here's the truth and law: administrators cannot issue or pressure teachers to give certain grades – CA Ed Code 49066 forbids it!

49066. (a) When grades are given for any course of instruction taught in a school district, the grade given to each pupil shall be the grade determined by the teacher of the course and the determination of the pupil's grade by the teacher, in the absence of clerical or mechanical mistake, fraud, bad faith, or incompetency, shall be final.

You are the credentialed expert in your classroom and the sole determiner of student grades.

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Craig Hochhaus, President
LasVirgenesEA@gmail.com
(805) 402-7347

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Jake Anderson, CTA Staff
janderson@cta.org
(818) 309-7206

Las Virgenes Educators Association

100 E Thousand Oaks Blvd, #145
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360
(P) (805) 497-8220
(W) www.lveateachers.com

Will admin and other leaders encourage you to try everything possible to help your students get over the hump and succeed? Yes they will...and that's fine! In fact, we talk to teachers every day and to find new ways to help students reach high levels!

But when you've tried everything practically possible and students still don't get an anticipated grade, then you have no choice but to issue the grade that the student has earned. Period. It's the law and no one can pressure you to do otherwise. Furthermore, colleagues and college professors that teach subsequent courses are counting on it!

Tax Sheltered Annuity (TSA) - Optional Retirement Investment

Lots of Tax Sheltered Annuity (TSA) Financial Salespeople have been finding creative ways to get through our district's email filter and this has led to lots of questions from members. We're consequently updating our past TSA article for your information. You may have heard about a TSA as an optional way to save for retirement. This is the money you can contribute to a pre-tax TSA investment account, over and above what you, the district office and the state of California already contribute to STRS (State Teachers Retirement System) for your future retirement. In 2011 SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union became our district's Third Party Administrator (TPA) that facilitates the flow of employees' optional 403(b) and 457(b) contributions to all approved financial institutions.

Many school employees have traditionally invested money in a pre-tax 403(b) TSA account. As an employee, you can invest up to \$18,500 (increases to \$19,000 in 2019) each calendar year if you are under the age of 50. This limit increases by \$6,000 if you are 50+ years of age and \$3,000 if you have been employed with your employer for 15+ years. You will not be taxed on this contribution until it (and any earned interest) is withdrawn in later years – preferably when you're retired and hopefully taxed at a lower percentage rate. Once you have made a contribution to a 403(b) plan, you cannot withdraw any funds without tax penalty until the age of 59½. You have a large choice of investment companies through SchoolsFirst, including SchoolsFirst itself, CTA, CalSTRS Pension2 and many private investment companies, like Fidelity, Franklin Templeton, Oppenheimer, Putnam and many more.

Another option is the Roth 403(b). This is set up similarly to a regular 403(b) except the contributions are made after-tax. All future withdrawals are then tax free; however, the earned portion of the account cannot be withdrawn without tax penalty until the age of 59½.

Employees also have a third option that's called a 457(b) plan. The contribution limits are the same as a 403(b). With a 457(b), you can withdraw funds without a tax penalty once you stop working for LVUSD. If you continue working for LVUSD, you must wait until you are 70½ years of age to withdraw these funds without tax penalty. Compared to a 403(b) with its wide range of investment options, you are limited to fewer options with a 457(b) – contact SchoolsFirst for more information. You can actually invest in both a 403(b) and 457(b) and maximize each contribution limit!

While LVEA encourages members to invest in TSA plans to supplement their retirement, please make sure you compare products, fees and contracts before you sign up for a 403(b) or 457(b) plan. Many products carry high fees, sales charges, surrender fees and/or contracts, so please read the product information carefully before signing up!

If you have any questions about 403(b) or 457(b) investment options, feel free to contact Kush Thandi of SchoolsFirst at 714-258-4000 x4116 or kthandi@schoolsfirstfcu.org.

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