

Hello and welcome back to school!

I have the pleasure of teaching your student in English Language Arts (ELA) this year. I'm writing to briefly introduce myself, and to introduce a very exciting instructional change I am making to our 9/10 class this year.

This is my fourteenth year teaching in District 25, and I have taught ELA for six. In addition to my years at TMS, I taught for seven years as a teacher for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. I have tried on many hats at TMS, including yearbook editor, ELA department head, and reading specialist. I am also National Board Certified. More information about me and our ELA class can be found at www.scholarsrm239.weebly.com.

In an effort to encourage a more student-centric learning environment and to better replicate an independent learning style encouraging life-long learning, we will be piloting a new grading system in your child's ELA class. Below I have copied the wording from our class website & letter to students:

You will be responsible for tracking your intellectual development and assigning yourself a grade. There will be no points assigned to tasks and there will not be individual grades in the grade book. I will provide ample feedback on coursework, writing prompts, and classroom participation; objective assignments (i.e. multiple choice reading checks and grammar quizzes) may include a numeric score, but will not be entered into the grade book.

Throughout each quarter, you will be required to keep a portfolio (digital, paper, or a blend of both) of all your work, including reflection logs and personal growth statements. Based on my feedback and your honest evaluation of your quality of work, you will assign yourself a grade each quarter. At the midterm, you will fill out a [Google form](#) to write about what you've learned so far in the quarter, and what your plans are as we continue. The quarterly process will include considerable reflection and will be [video-recorded](#). If you assign yourself a grade that is not compatible with my assessment of your performance and quality of work, I reserve the right to assign an alternate grade. You are always more than welcome to dispute; this process requires you to schedule an appointment with me to defend your work using your portfolio as evidence.

The following categories should be taken into account when self-assessing: quality of writing, performance on comprehension checks and quizzes, independent reading, class participation and preparedness, daily engagement in content material, and use of feedback to improve performance.

This change was inspired by the research of educational professionals who have studied the effects of student-driven learning, specifically Mark Barnes, author of *Role Reversal: Achieving Uncommonly Excellent Results In The Student-Centered Classroom* and most recently *Assessment 3.0*. I encourage you to read these books to get a better understanding of why I have made changes in grading. I am confident that this modified version of Barnes' system will yield more authentic, intrinsically motivated learning and will result in your student having a greater understanding of his/her learning processes. This will, in turn, better prepare students as responsible and engaged citizens, and take the focus off of a grade that can be very arbitrary and actually misrepresentative of what has been learned throughout the year.

I am excited about this year, and happy to discuss with you your student's progress or anything happening in our classroom at any point during the year. I'm also very eager to work with your child and share in this exciting experience with him or her. Feel free to contact me via email or phone with questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Joy Kirr