

[Education Week's blogs](#) > [Walt Gardner's Reality Check](#)

Changing Grades Is Only Up to Teachers

By Walt Gardner on June 23, 2017 7:59 AM

Share 0

Now that graduation season is over, it's time to ask how many cases of illegal grade changing were included in the data. I say that because principals are under enormous pressure to show year-to-year improvement in their graduation rates. As a result, some are tempted to resort to tactics that are not only unethical but illegal ("**Principal repeats grade-fix trick that got last one ousted: staff,**" *New York Post*, Apr. 23). Although I'm referring now to what took place at DeWitt Clinton High School in the New York City system, I question if the practice is limited to that school alone.

Former principal Santiago Taveras was removed from his post in November after he changed grades and then retaliated against an assistant principal who refused to pass an undeserving student. His successor, Pierre Orbe, tried to force teachers into doing the same, or face the consequences.

State education codes are clear that only teachers can change a grade, unless there is a clerical error or fraud. Yet teachers are often subtly threatened if they don't comply with what their principals demand. What I'd like to know in the present case is where the teachers' union was in the matter. When I was teaching in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the best principals I had backed their teachers and refused to cave in to pressure from parents.

But today the situation is different. Pressure is more likely to come from school headquarters to change grades to allow more students to graduate than from irate parents. If graduation rates don't continue to rise, principals fear being demoted or losing out on bonuses. Of course, officials at school headquarters will deny the practice exists. It's a mini scandal that further undermines taxpayer confidence in public schools.