Assessing & Reporting Student Progress

Philosophy and Recommendations

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LANCASTER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Putting our children first

Introduction

Ron Edmonds, Larry Lezotte, and Wilbur Brooker, pioneers in the Effective Schools Movement, identified seven characteristics common to schools that are successful in producing high levels of achievement for all students. Their research is continuously updated, is focused on learning for ALL, and remains valid and reliable. More than 30 years of subsequent research has confirmed the findings of the original research.

- Effective schools have a safe and orderly environment that supports optimal student achievement.
- Effective schools hold high expectations for all students.
- Effective schools clearly articulate and commit to the mission of the school.
- Effective schools promote a positive school climate that supports optimal student achievement.
- Effective schools frequently monitor and report student progress and adjust instruction.
- Effective schools value and nurture strong positive partnerships between school and home.

Parents learn of their child's progress in a variety of ways, including:

- Home reports summarizing the student's performance on the South Carolina College-and Career-Ready Assessments (SC READY) for English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics for students in grades three

It is important that the information parents receive be consistent across sources or a reasonable explanation provided in instances of discrepancy.

through eight and The South Carolina Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (SCPASS) a statewide assessment administered to students in grades four through eight

- Home reports summarizing the student's performance on other standardized test(s)
- Progress reports and report cards issued by the classroom teacher(s)
- Conferences with the child's teacher(s) and, in some cases, the student
- Letters, notes, emails and/or phone conversations initiated on an as-needed basis by the parent or the teacher

It is important that the information parents receive be consistent across sources or a reasonable explanation provided in instances of discrepancy. A study of the relationship between standardized test scores and classroom grades in English Language Arts, and Mathematics for Lancaster County students in 1999-2000 revealed that the percentage of such students varies widely from school to school within the district. It was of particular concern that there were a number of district students scoring below expectations on standardized tests who have historically earned high classroom grades on a consistent basis.

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An analysis of data by school indicated that, of the students in grades three through five who scored below basic on the state end-of-year assessment, the percentages of those earning grades of A or B for the year ranged from 10 to 52 in reading, from 8 to 60 in

English Language Arts, and from 6 to 48 in Mathematics. A similar analysis at the middle school level resulted in percentages ranging from 3 to 50 in English Language Arts and from 3 to 42 in Mathematics.

These outcomes are somewhat alarming, given the fact that teaching and learning are based on the same academic standards at all schools. Arguably, if teachers are addressing the standards with the required degree of rigor and appropriate expectations for student performance, using research-based instructional strategies, protecting instructional time, and assessing student learning through a variety of meaningful assessment techniques, classroom grades should reflect the results of those practices. The disparity in classroom grades across schools and the significant dissimilarity between classroom grades and standardized test scores are difficult to understand or defend. This information proved that a systemic approach was necessary in order to allow equitable access for our students to succeed. As a result, the document, *Assessing and Reporting Student Progress: Philosophy and Recommendations*, was created.

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In her book entitled *Data Analysis for Comprehensive Schoolwide Improvement* (1998), Victoria Bernhardt suggests four categories of measures which schools should consider in the system for monitoring progress and evaluating effectiveness: student demographics, student achievement, community perceptions and school processes. Practices related to monitoring student progress and reporting it meaningfully to parents are among the most significant of school process issues.

Research indicates that the practice of assigning letter grades is still the most frequently used way of reporting students' progress in the classroom. In a 1989 study that involved over 800 randomly selected school districts, Robinson and Craver concluded that districts stress varying elements in their grades. While all districts stressed academic achievement, some districts also included other elements such as effort, behavior, attendance, and/or cooperation.

The Robinson-Craver study was done using the official policies of school districts. In a separate study, the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL) polled individual teachers on the questions of interest.

An analysis of data related to grading practices clearly demonstrates significant discrepancy in the factors as well as the weighting of factors included in student classroom grades.

> *In effect, grades given by one teacher might mean something entirely different from grades given by another teacher, even though the teachers preside over two identical classes with identical students who are assigned identical work.*
>
> –Marzano and Kendall, 1996

Robert Linn and Norman Gronlund (1995) noted that letter grades are likely to be most meaningful and useful when they represent achievement only, and offered 10 guidelines for effective classroom grading:

Practices related to monitoring student progress and reporting it meaningfully to parents are among the most significant of school process issues.

- Describe grading procedures to students at the beginning of instruction.
- Make clear to students that the course grade will be based on achievement only.
- Explain how other elements (effort, work habits, personal characteristics) will be reported.
- Relate the grading procedures to the intended learning outcomes (academic standards).
- Obtain valid evidence as a basis for assigning grades.
- Take precautions to prevent cheating on tests and other assessments.
- Return and review all test and assessment results as soon as possible.
- Properly weight the various types of achievement included in the grade.
- Do not lower an achievement grade for tardiness, weak effort, or misbehavior.
- Be fair. Avoid bias, and when in doubt (as with a borderline score), review the evidence. If still in doubt, assign the higher grade.

> Letter grades are likely to be most meaningful and useful when they represent achievement only.
>
> – Robert Linn and Norman Gronlund

Recommendations

In light of the above discussion, the district recommends the following guidelines for the assignment of classroom grades district wide and at respective instructional levels.

- Report student progress on the basis of academic achievement only; address effort, behavior, and/or attitude on the comments section of the report card or through a parent conference or other parent contact.
- Report a grade of "A" only in situations where the student has clearly demonstrated a high level of performance on the appropriate grade level standards.
- Report a grade of "B" only in situations where the student has demonstrated significant progress toward mastering appropriate grade level standards.
- Use data to determine appropriate interventions and to prescribe academic assistance for individuals and groups of students.
- Assure that grades are derived from a variety of assessment types and formats including but not limited to: rubrics, checklists, multiple choice, etc.
- Emphasize the development and use of rubrics that address the criteria under which projects, presentations, essays and other classroom assignments will be evaluated.
- Incorporate the use of rubrics into the classroom assessment process on a regular basis; review the rubric with students prior to the assessment. This should be the same rubric that is used to evaluate the assignment.
- Assure that homework is a meaningful, reasonable, logical extension of classroom instruction and is viewed by teachers, students, and parents as an instructional tool rather than an assessment instrument.
- Conduct parent-teacher conferences at least twice each year and/or as requested by parent or teacher.
- Provide open parent-teacher communication through phone, email, Remind 101, Talking Points, Google Classroom, etc.

Elementary Schools

Grades K-1

- ✔ Report student progress, using the following indicators:
  - **Meeting** (3) – I have met the grade-level expectation.
  - **Developing** (2) – I am making appropriate progress toward the grade-level expectation.
  - **Needs improvement** (1) – I am not meeting the grade-level expectation. I need lots of support.
- ✔ Use district/state numerical grading scale starting at the beginning of second grade.

Grades 2-5

- ✔ Use the following indicators to report student progress

A..... 90-100

B..... 80-89

C..... 70-79

D..... 60-69

F ..... Below 60

Grades per grading period

- ✔ A teacher must provide students in each class a minimum number of chances for grades each grading period, depending on the grade level.
- ✔ Base grades on at least 9 separate assessments/assignments each nine weeks in mathematics and ELA. Base grades on at least 6 separate assessments/assignments each nine weeks in science and social studies.
- ✔ Assign no grade lower than 50 at the end of a grading period. Grades should be recorded as earned by each student and subsequently adjust the average at the end of each grading period.

- ✔ For grades 2-5, a minimum of 4 grades in ELA and mathematics and a minimum of 3 grades in science and social studies by the midpoint of each grading period.
- ✔ Parent-Teacher Conferences must be held in the fall and the spring. Some students may require additional conference time as needed.

◆ Guidelines for honor roll

- ✔ Use only academic area grades (English Language Arts, mathematics, science, social studies) to determine honor roll eligibility.
- ✔ Implement school-based recognition programs to celebrate student accomplishments in non-core areas.

◆ Defined Program Grades K-5

- ✔ Instruction in the subject areas shall be scheduled for each student for a minimum of 1800 minutes or 30 hours per week including lunch, or the equivalent time on a yearly basis.
- ✔ On an average school day, the schedule should strive to meet the following instructional guidelines. Integrated units may be employed to satisfy these recommendations.
    - English Language Arts - 120 minutes
    - Mathematics - 90 minutes
    - Science - 30 minutes
    - Social Studies - 30 minutes
    - Art - 45 minutes per week
    - Music - 45 minutes per week
    - Physical Education/Health
      – 150 minutes of physical activity and physical education per week (60 minutes of PE/90 minutes of physical activity/a certified dance instructor may account for 1/4 of the minutes for physical education)

- ✔ As outlined by the South Carolina Department of Education in conjunction with the South Carolina Board of Education, all students in grades K-12 must have 180 instructional days of school.

◆ Honors

- ✔ Principal's Choice Awards
- ✔ School-Based Awards Ceremonies
- ✔ Fifth-Grade Celebration (4th grade celebration for HES, ILE, VWE; 6th grade celebration for ILIS)

◆ Homework

- ✔ Homework will be assigned at the teacher's discretion in collaboration with administration and used to reinforce what is being taught in the class. Additional reading is expected daily. Research suggests that it improves student achievement. Reading choice is encouraged to foster the love of learning.

◆ Re-testing

- ✔ Re-testing will be allowed at the discretion of the grade-level team in collaboration with the administration.

◆ Make-ups

- ✔ Students will have the number of days absent plus one additional day in order to make up work.

◆ Academic Extra Credit

- ✔ Academic Extra Credit will be allowed at the discretion of the grade-level team in collaboration with the administration.

Middle Schools

Grading scale

- Use the following indicators to report student progress

A..... 90-100

B..... 80-89

C..... 70-79

D..... 60-69

F ..... Below 60

Grades per grading period

- A teacher must provide students in each class a minimum number of chances for grades each grading period, depending on the grade level.
- Base grades on at least 9 separate assessments/assignments, regardless of weighting, each nine weeks in each core subject.
- For unit-bearing courses, weight each end-of-course test 20% of the student's final grade or each final exam 10% of the student's final grade; the exams should be cumulative.
- For non-unit-bearing courses, weight each final exam as 10% of the student's final grade; the exams should be cumulative.
- For non-unit bearing courses, assign no grade lower than 50 at the end of a grading period. Grades should be recorded as each student earned and subsequently adjusted at the end of each grading period.
- For unit-bearing courses, assign no final average lower than 50 for the grading period for the first half of the course.
- Use grades in all courses to determine honor roll eligibility.

◆ Honors

✔ Use student average to determine eligibility for *National Jr. Honor Society* and *Jr. Beta Club*

- *National Jr. Honor Society* - 94 average on the *Uniform Grading Scale*
- *Jr. Beta Club* - 91 average on the *Uniform Grading Scale*

High Schools

◆ Grading scale

✔ Comply with all requirements of the *Uniform Grading Scale*.

✔ Use the following indicators to report student progress

A..... 90-100

B..... 80-89

C..... 70-79

D..... 60-69

F ..... Below 60

◆ Grades per grading period

✔ A teacher must provide students in each class a minimum number of chances for grades each grading period, depending on the grade level. The grades should come from various types of assessments. Base grades on at least 5 assessments/assignments each 4.5 weeks in each course.

✔ Weight each final exam 20% or end-of-course test 20% of the student's final grade.

✔ For unit-bearing courses, assign no final average lower than 50 for the grading period for the first half of a course.

Honors & class rank

- ✔ Determine class rank and scholarship eligibility based on the *Uniform Grading Scale*.
- ✔ Determine honor graduate status based on the *Uniform Grading Scale*
  - Highest Honor – 4.6 minimum GPA on the *Uniform Grading Scale*
  - High Honor – 4.4 minimum GPA on the *Uniform Grading Scale*
  - Honor – 4.2 minimum GPA on the *Uniform Grading Scale*
- ✔ Use grade point average to determine eligibility for *National Honor Society* and *Beta Club*
  - *National Honor Society* – 4.4 minimum GPA on the *Uniform Grading Scale*
  - *National Technical Honor Society* – 3.9 minimum GPA on the *Uniform Grading Scale*
  - *Beta Club* – 4.1 minimum GPA on the *Uniform Grading Scale*

Converting Grades on Transcripts (Out-of-State, Non-Public Schools)

- ✔ When transcripts are received from accredited out-of-state schools (or in state from accredited sources other than the public schools) and numerical averages are provided, those averages must be used in transferring the grades to the student's record.
- ✔ If letter grades with no numerical averages are provided, this conversion will apply: A = 95, B = 85, C = 75, D = 65, F = 50.
- ✔ If the transcript indicates that the student has earned a passing grade in any course in which he or she had a numerical average lower than 60, that average will be converted to a 65 numerical grade on the new scale.
- ✔ See *SBE Regulation 43273* for additional information on transfers and withdrawals.

District-Wide Procedures

Power School Timeline

All grades must be entered no later than seven calendar days from the date the assessment was adinistered. Students, parents and administration must be notified if posting of the grades requires an extended time frame beyond one week.

Student Progress

Student progress can be monitored daily through the PowerSchool Portal. Parent contact must be made for students who are not passing or at-risk of not passing at the midpoint of the grading period. School-based administration will determine the method of communication.

Parent Communication

Teachers are required to proactively communicate student progress to parents. (i.e. phone, email, Google Classroom)

Assessment Examples

Grades should come from a variety of formative and summative assessments/assignments. Some examples include: rubrics, projects, check lists, teacher observation, exit tickets, Google forms, quizzes, group tasks, interviews/conferences, anecdotal records, running records, teacher notes, journals, hand signals, tests, cold read assessments, polls, multiple choice, open-ended response, portfolios, student generated assessments, self and peer assessments, essays and reading engagement inventories.

Google Classroom

All teachers should maintain an updated Google Classroom for all course activities/assignments. This will be crucial should the need arise for virtual instruction days.

Homework Policy and Guidelines

Homework will be assigned at the teacher's discretion in collaboration with administration and used to reinforce what is being taught in class. Additional reading is expected daily. Research suggests that it improves student achievement. Reading choice is encouraged to foster the love of learning.

In the event that a teacher assigns homework, the following guidelines should be followed:

- **Elementary (Grades 1-5):** Individual teachers should assign no more than 10 minutes per grade level per day. For example, 1st graders should receive no more than a total of 10 minutes of homework per day, and 5th graders should receive no more than 50 minutes of homework per day.
- **Middle (Grades 6-8):** Individual teachers should assign no more than 20 minutes of homework per day in their class.
- **High (Grades 9-12):** Individual teachers should assign no more than0 minutes of homework per day in their class.

District support

To support teachers and school administrators in their efforts to improve the assessment and reporting of student progress, the district will provide professional development opportunities, including but not limited to:

- Construction and grading of quality, standards-based classroom assessments and the meaningful interpretation of resulting data.

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