

Assessing & Reporting Student Progress

Philosophy and Recommendations

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Introduction

Ron Edmonds, Larry Lezotte, and Wilbur Brooker, pioneers in the Effective Schools Movement, identified six characteristics common to schools that are successful in producing high levels of achievement for all students. Their research has withstood the test of time. More than thirty years of subsequent research has confirmed the findings of the original research.

- ◆ Effective schools have strong instructional leaders who attend to the quality of instruction.
- ◆ 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.

This paper addresses two characteristics of the effective schools correlates:

- ◆ the on-going and meaningful monitoring of student progress and
- ◆ the reporting of outcomes in such a way as to continually strengthen the school's relationships with parents and the community.

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

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 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 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 reading, 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 at performing below expectations on standardized tests who have historically earned high classroom grades on a consistent basis.

It is of particular concern that there are a number of district students scoring at the below basic performance level on standardized tests who have historically earned high classroom grades on a consistent basis.

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 at all schools are based on the same prescribed academic standards. 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. Such a great disparity in classroom grades across schools and the significant dissimilarity between classroom grades and standardized test scores are difficult to understand or defend thus prompted this document, *Assessing and Reporting Student Progress: Philosophy and Recommendations*.

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 prog-

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ress 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

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

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:

- ◆ 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.

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Recommendations

In light of the above discussion, the district recommends the following guidelines for the assignment of classroom grades districtwide 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.
- ◆ Assign a grade of “A” only in situations where the student has clearly demonstrated a high level of performance on the appropriate grade level standards.
- ◆ Assign 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; avoid using prior year data as an influencing factor in the assessment of a student’s current work.
- ◆ Assure that grades are derived from a variety of assessment types and formats.
- ◆ 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, logical extension of classroom instruction and is viewed by teachers, students, and parents as an instructional tool rather than an assessment instrument.
- ◆ Adopt a parent-teacher conference format in which the student serves as the conference leader by discussing, reflecting on, and sharing insights regarding his or her academic work.

Elementary Schools

◆ Grades K-1

- ✓ Report student progress, using the following indicators:
 - The skill consistently demonstrated.
 - The skill sometimes demonstrated.
 - The skill is not demonstrated.

- ✓ Beginning first semester of second grade, use district/state numerical grading scale.

◆ 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 eight assessments each six weeks in reading and mathematics and at least six assessments each six weeks in other subjects.

- ✓ Assign no grade lower than 50 at the end of a grading period.

◆ 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.

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 10 separate assessments, regardless of weighting, each nine weeks in each core subject.
- ✓ Administer benchmark assessments at appropriate times and weight them according to district guidelines.
- ✓ For unit-bearing courses, weight each final exam or end-of-course test 20 percent of the student's final grade; the exam should be cumulative.

- ✓ For non-unit-bearing courses, weight each final exam as one-tenth of the student's final grade.
- ✓ Assign no grade lower than 50 at the end of a grading period.
- ✓ Use grades in all courses to determine honor roll eligibility.

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.
- ✓ Base grades on at least five assessments each 4.5 weeks in each course.
- ✓ Weight each final exam or end-of-course test 20 percent of the student's final grade.
- ✓ Assign no grade lower than 50 at the end of a grading period during 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 – 4.28 minimum GPA on the *Uniform Grading Scale*
 - High Honor – 4.125 minimum GPA on the *Uniform Grading Scale*
 - Honor – 3.875 minimum GPA on the *Uniform Grading Scale*
- ✓ Use grade point average to determine eligibility for *National Honor Society* and *Beta Club*
 - *National Honor Society* – 4.125 minimum GPA on the *Uniform Grading Scale*
 - *Beta Club* – 3.75 minimum GPA on the *Uniform Grading Scale*

District support

To support teachers and school administrators in their efforts to improve the assessment and reporting of student progress, the district will give priority to the following professional development initiatives:

- ◆ Construction and grading of quality, standards-based classroom assessments and the meaningful interpretation of resulting data, with particular emphasis on the use of rubrics to support both instruction and assessment;
- ◆ Effective use of the student-led conference format for parent-teacher conferences;
- ◆ The role of school staff in helping parents understand what classroom grades and standardized test scores really mean and how to convey that meaning to their children.

Reflective questions to be addressed to school faculties

- ◆ For what purpose(s) do we assess student learning and how do we use assessment results to shape instruction?
- ◆ What are the implications of these recommendations for us individually; as a grade level, team or department; or a school?
- ◆ To what extent are we using rubrics to support quality instruction and assessment individually; as a grade level, team, or department; as a school?
- ◆ What help do we need with rubrics-based instruction and assessment individually; as a grade level, team, or department; as a school?
- ◆ To what extent are our assessment and reporting practices consistent within and across grade levels or departments?
- ◆ To what extent do our classroom assessments match the level at which students are expected to perform on state assessments?
- ◆ What practices do we support for assigning, grading and weighting of homework?
- ◆ How do we convert letter grades to number grades under the Uniform Grading Scale?
- ◆ What other issues are important for us to discuss as a grade level, team, department or school?

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