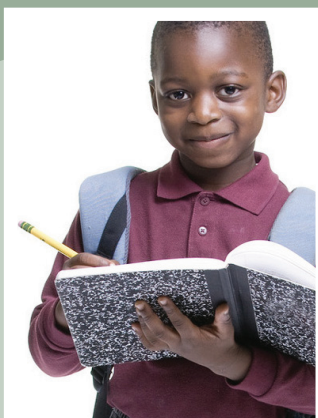


ASSESSMENT



Working Toward Common Vision, Values
and Beliefs in Surrey Schools



DISCUSSION PAPER

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The School District 36 (Surrey) position paper, *ASSESSMENT Working Toward Common Vision, Values and Beliefs in Surrey Schools*, reflects shared understandings of many classroom teachers, helping teachers, vice-principals, principals and other educators throughout the district. Teachers have embarked on conversations, inquiry into practice, reflection and ongoing professional learning to construct understanding of assessment, evaluation and grading. This paper is intended to foster the dialogue and collectively build deeper understandings.

At the Curriculum Instructional Services Centre (CISC) we would like to thank all the educators who have contributed in a variety of ways to the development of the principles and ideas contained in this discussion paper. We acknowledge that this document is a “work in progress” in the building of the common vision, values and beliefs. We also recognize the need for ongoing dialogue and discussion amongst educators, students and parents as we move towards refining and shaping the vision to a reality.

PURPOSE

Assessment, evaluation and reporting are areas of great importance to educators. Teachers and administrators want to ensure that the information gathered on student learning is valid and reliable — that the judgments they make about student learning are credible, fair, free from bias, and connected to their intended purposes. As educators we must ensure that the processes we use to report students' levels of performance are sound and founded in current research. Thanks to decades of study, we now have definitive conclusions and research-based evidence pointing to effective assessment, evaluation and grading practices that support and promote student learning.

This paper is intended to establish a clear district position on classroom assessment, evaluation and grading practices aligned with sound educational principles and current research. This document clarifies and outlines best practices as evidenced in research and further highlights the kinds of assessment, evaluation and grading practices the district supports.

A focus on formative assessment does not just add on a few techniques here and there – it organizes the whole teaching and learning venture around learning and supports teachers in organizing the learning experiences of their students more productively.

- Black et al. (2003)

Assessment has various purposes, all of which require thoughtfully designed implementation in order to serve their intended purposes.

Teachers are required to assess, evaluate and report student progress and level of performance in relation to the learning outcomes as documented in the provincially prescribed curriculum. This discussion paper is a framework for thinking, providing educators with starting points for reflection, deliberation, discussion and learning. Overall, it serves multiple purposes: to build shared understandings of assessment, evaluation and grading; to dispel myths and dated methods that are not in keeping with best practices as evidenced in research or policy; to support teachers throughout the district in all disciplines and at all levels in adopting assessment practices that promote student learning; and to demonstrate how classroom assessment can be used to differentiate and facilitate learning for all students.

Assessment that is explicitly designed to promote learning is the single most powerful tool we have for raising standards and empowering life long learning.

- Assessment Reform Group (1999)

In reality, it is through classroom assessment that attitudes, skills, knowledge and thinking are fostered, nurtured and accelerated – or stifled.

- Hynes, W. (1991)

GENERAL STATEMENTS

Worldwide interest in classroom assessment and how it can be used to enhance the quality of learning and teaching stems from the work of the Assessment Reform Group in the UK and the Assessment Training Institute in Oregon. Throughout most of the 20th century, classroom assessment was considered a mechanism for measuring learning. More recently, however, this purpose of assessment came into question when British researchers Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (1998a, 1998b) launched what is considered to be one of the most significant changes to occur in education. Based on almost a decade's worth of research reports involving approximately 10,000 students from several countries, Black and Wiliam provide new insights into the powerful nature and role of assessment. They affirm that classroom assessment, when implemented effectively, leads to remarkable gains in student achievement.

Their extensive review, a meta-analysis of over 250 studies involving students from kindergarten to undergraduate classes in various subject areas, is overwhelmingly supportive of the contribution that *formative assessment* can make to improved student learning, specifically to students who are struggling or at risk. The distinction between summative assessment and formative assessment is pivotal to understanding the most effective uses of assessment in the classroom. Giving more tests or increasing the amount of time spent on assessment, for example, does not promote learning. Factors that do make a difference, on the other hand, include the following practices:

- involving students in the classroom assessment process;
- increasing descriptive, specific feedback;
- decreasing evaluative feedback.

The researchers conclude that when these practices are used intentionally, and when formative assessment is used by teachers to adjust their ongoing instruction or by students to adjust their learning strategies, student achievement increases by 2 to 3 grade levels. This effect on student achievement is four to five times greater than the effect of reduced class size (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis and Chappuis, 2006). Few interventions in education come close to having the same level of impact as formative assessment. Overall, the implications are that students who are taught in classrooms that implement formative assessment learn more than their peers who are taught in classes without formative assessment.

It's time to talk about grades, grading and report cards openly, if we haven't before, questioning assumptions, embracing alternatives, and focusing on the promise of what teaching and learning can be. How we interpret and implement grading practices has a dramatic impact on how we differentiate instruction, and vice-versa: differentiated instruction directly impacts our grading policies.

- Rick Wormeli (2006)

Formative assessments are ongoing assessments, reviews, and observations in a classroom. Teachers use formative assessment to improve instructional methods and provide student feedback throughout the teaching and learning process.

- Fisher & Frey (2007)

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The research surrounding classroom assessment has led many prominent educators to clarify the key differences between formative assessment, summative assessment, and reporting and grading (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshal & William, 2004; Clarke, Owens & Sutton, 2006; Earl, 2003; O'Connor, 2007; Popham, 2008; Stiggins, 1998; Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis & Chappuis, 2006; Wiggins, 1998; Wormeli, 2006). All assert that assessment works best when its purpose is clear, and when it is carefully designed to fit that purpose. The following section summarizes the distinguishing features of each aspect of assessment: formative assessment, summative assessment, grading and reporting.



Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is a process involving a series of varied activities that provide teachers and students with assessment feedback — feedback that allows teachers to make adjustments to their current instruction and feedback that encourages students to make adjustments to their current learning strategies. The purpose of formative assessment is to enhance learning. Also called assessment *for* learning, this type of assessment happens while learning and instruction are still underway. These are the assessments that we conduct throughout teaching and learning to identify student needs, plan our next steps in instruction, and provide students with feedback they can use to improve the quality of their work. The feedback students receive reveals increments of achievement and how to do better the next time. On these occasions, the grading function is put aside. The purpose is to improve learning while there is still time to act — before the graded event.

Of key importance when carrying out classroom observations is that the criteria for observation are written and given to the person being observed, so that both observer and observee are aware of the aspects being judged. Without this knowledge, the teacher is cast in the role of the student who does not know the learning objective of a task. Too many criteria can make the observer spend the entire time trying to keep track of them, and much of a lesson can be missed by the observer writing furiously. It is better to have a few, focused criteria. Whatever the subject of the person observing, formative assessment will be embedded in the practice of a school if there are always some generic assessment criteria listed for observations.

- Shirley Clarke (2005)

The key attributes inherent in classrooms that are effectively implementing formative assessment are described in the following section:

- Formative assessment guides instruction. It gives teachers information about what students know and can do, and what confusions, preconceptions, or gaps they might have. It makes each student's learning visible so that teachers can determine their next steps in helping students move forward with their learning.

In the Classroom:

Teachers consciously use assessment feedback “on the spot” to determine levels of understanding and misunderstanding. Everything is a potential source of information: teacher observations, group discussions, quizzical expressions on a student’s face, questions posed and answered by students, seatwork, project work, highlighted rubrics, homework and tests. Once teachers determine how students are progressing, they use this evidence to make necessary instructional adjustments while the learning is still taking place. These modifications may involve re-teaching, trying alternative instructional approaches, or offering more opportunities for practice.

- Formative assessment is a key, foundational component of differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction is rooted in formative assessment practices. Assessment for learning leads to differentiation when the teacher gathers evidence of learning, both formally and informally, and uses this information to create a wide range of learning options and pathways to support every student's learning.

In the Classroom:

Teachers recognize that today’s classrooms are more complex and diverse than in the past. Students come with different experiences, knowledge, and skills to apply to their learning and teachers come to know these differences through formative assessment practices that are conducted in the midst of teaching and learning. Teachers use this assessment feedback to make adjustments that accommodate all students, not just those with special needs. Instructional approaches, learning materials and assessment tasks are varied. In terms

Whether you call it diagnostic assessment or assessment for learning, determining what your students already know, understand and can do before they start a new unit of study is a cornerstone activity of a differentiating teacher.

- Hume (2008)

Differentiation doesn't mean a different program for each student in the class, and it doesn't mean ability grouping to reduce the differences. It means recognizing and accepting that each student is a unique individual. It means using what you know about learning and about each student to improve your teaching so that students all work in ways that have an optimal effect on their learning. And assessment provides the necessary information to do it.

- Lorna M. Earl (2003)

of instruction, teachers plan some learning contexts that are the same for all students, some for groups of students and some for individuals. Learning materials are varied and, in addition to including printed text, may also include multi-sensory digital learning tools and other resources. Likewise, assessment tasks are designed to allow students to demonstrate their accomplishment of learning outcomes through visual, active and oral modes, as well as through writing.

- Descriptive feedback is the key to successful formative assessment. Students learn from assessment when the teacher provides each student with specific, timely, criterion-based feedback that guides and supports learning. Descriptive feedback is not judgmental or evaluative. It is not an end point. Rather, it focuses attention on the task and reflects what needs to be done to move forward to the next stage of learning.

In the Classroom:

Students receive oral and written feedback frequently as a regular part of the teaching and learning process. Before performance is evaluated, students “practice” — using assessment feedback as a guide to improved performance. Rather than numerical scores or letter grades, the feedback students receive tells them what they are doing well and what they need to work on. The use of clear, constructive language helps students to begin to take ownership of the criteria. Rubrics, such as the performance scales in the BC Performance Standards, serve as the basis for descriptive feedback. Students and teachers often begin by working with the general criteria in the performance standards and then, as a class, generate more detailed criteria that are specific to the targeted learning outcomes.

- Metacognition (knowledge of how we learn) is the ultimate goal of formative assessment. Fundamental to this is that teachers foster student independence by helping them develop the capacity to monitor the quality of their own work. This requires that students know what quality work looks like, are able to objectively compare their work to a standard and can determine how to improve the quality of their work.

Feedback can be the vital link between the teacher’s assessment of a child and the action following that assessment, which then has a formative effect on the child’s learning.

- Hargreaves et al.
(2000)

We must constantly remind ourselves that the ultimate purpose of evaluation is to enable students to evaluate themselves. Educators may have been practicing this skill to the exclusion of the learners. We need to shift part of this responsibility to students. Fostering students’ ability to direct and redirect themselves must be a major goal – or what is education for?

- Costa A. (1989)

In the Classroom:

Students practice the metacognitive skills of self-reflection and self-assessment. To deepen understanding of their learning strengths and what is required to move their learning forward, students take active responsibility for their learning by focusing on three questions:

- *Where am I going?*
- *Where am I now?*
- *How do I close the gap?*

Teachers understand that this is complex and difficult work that does not develop spontaneously. To support the development of independence through formative assessment, teachers craft instruction that includes a number of variables: modeling and teaching the skills of self-assessment; showing strong and weak examples of the products and performances students are expected to create; working with students to develop clear criteria for their work; giving students un-graded tests and quizzes to help them understand their misconceptions and misunderstandings; and providing regular opportunities for students to identify their own strengths and areas that require improvement.

- Student motivation is linked to formative assessment. According to current cognitive research, people are motivated to learn by experiences of success and competence. Assessment that encourages learning fosters motivation by emphasizing progress and achievement rather than failure. Grades and comparison with others who have been more successful are unlikely to motivate learners. Formative assessment, on the other hand, helps students' learning, promotes positive self esteem, fosters students' belief in their own ability, and helps overcome difficulties and fear of failure (Black and Wiliam, 1998b).

In the Classroom:

The teacher understands that the relationship between assessment, grades and motivation is neither simple nor predictable. For some students (generally for those who do well), grades can be motivating, while for others (typically those who do not do well) grades are de-motivating. Emphasis is

When students are involved in self-assessment, their teachers can see the gaps between what they have taught and what students have learned. By collecting students' self-assessments, teachers enrich the depth and variety of their data collections about student learning. Teachers go beyond looking at the products and include the students' thinking about their own learning as a key part of their collection of information.

In addition, when teachers provide time for students to assess their own learning on a regular basis, students have time to process new information. Providing time for students to pause and think, to look for proof and to connect to criteria allows teachers to slow down the pace of their teaching to match the speed of student learning. Students have the opportunity to think about and consolidate their learning before moving on to another topic and covering more curriculum material.

- Gregory, Cameron & Davies (2000)

therefore on learning for learning's sake rather than for rewards. Students are intrinsically motivated to learn by:

- *feeling ownership and having a sense of control and choice in their learning;*
- *getting frequent and specific feedback on their performance and learning;*
- *encountering tasks that are challenging, but not threatening;*
- *being able to self-assess accurately;*
- *encountering learning tasks related to everyday life and interests.*



Summative Assessment

Summative assessment is an event that measures student learning. Also known as assessment *of* learning, it occurs at the time when the level of achievement is to be documented for purposes of communication and reporting. Teachers collect and interpret evidence that has been obtained from a variety of contexts and applications. Teachers choose assessment methods to address the prescribed learning outcomes and the continuum of learning required to reach the outcomes. Options include not only tests and quizzes, but also a rich variety of products and demonstrations of learning — portfolios, performances, presentations, simulations, multimedia projects, and a variety of other written, oral, and visual methods and products.

The key attributes inherent in classrooms that are effectively implementing summative assessment are described in the following section:

We have so much to gain by admitting students to the “secret garden” of assessment to empower them to direct and manage their own learning.

- Broadfoot (2002)

Every teacher who wants to practise formative assessment must reconstruct the teaching contracts so as to counteract the habits acquired by their students.

- Perrenoud (1991)

The goal of summative assessments is to judge student competency after an instructional phase is complete.

- Fisher & Frey (2007)

- Student achievement is based on evidence of students' mastery of the prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs). The collection and interpretation of the evidence represents the nature and complexity of the knowledge, concepts, skills and dispositions set out in the curriculum. Effective summative assessments are based on well-constructed performance-based tasks that ask students to demonstrate both procedural learning (application of process and skills) and content learning (knowledge of content information).

In the Classroom:

Teachers begin by targeting specific PLOs the assessment is intended to measure, and then they design tasks that require students to apply these identified outcomes. If a science teacher, for example, determines that the most important learning target focuses on science processes and skills, then the assessment is designed to yield enough evidence to lead the teacher to a confident conclusion about student achievement in relation to these specified learning outcomes. There may be an expectation that students learn some content information, but since process skills are more important than scientific information in this case, scientific process tasks or items would comprise the majority of the consideration and weighting in the evaluation.

- Quality summative assessments are carefully designed to assure that the evidence of student achievement produces defensible and accurate descriptions of student proficiency in relation to defined learning outcomes. If the assessment process is reliable, the inferences about a student's learning would be similar when they are made by different teachers, when the learning is assessed using various methods, or when students demonstrate their learning at different times.

In the Classroom:

Teachers reflect on their assessments and take into account quality standards. To ensure that their assessments of learning are credible and defensible, teachers ask themselves the following questions:

- *Do I have enough information about the learning of this particular student to make a definitive statement?*

A rubric is a particular format for criteria – it is a written down version of the criteria, with all score points described and defined. The best rubrics are worded in a way that covers the essence of what teachers look for when they judge quality and they reflect the best thinking in the field about what constitutes good performance.

- Arter & McTighe (2001)

We need to develop approaches to help teachers both assess and grade more accurately and consistently. One key to accomplishing this is shared understanding of performance standards – our “How good is good enough?”

- Ken O'Connor (2007)

- *Was the information collected in a way that gives all students an equitable chance to show their learning?*
- *Would another teacher arrive at a similar conclusion?*
- *Would I make the same decision if I considered this information at another time or in another way?*

Teachers do not work in isolation. They work with other teachers to review evidence of student learning. Teachers use performance standards to build common criteria, to establish models of exemplars and to communicate important aspects of learning. They establish agreement among themselves about what is expected and what can be learned from a particular assessment.

- Evidence from a variety of performance tasks provides a profile of student achievement. Since there are many extraneous factors that contribute to a student's performance on any single task, students complete a number of performance tasks to provide an accurate representation of their learning. The way a teacher determines the level of performance on a task is often through the use of a rubric or performance scale that outlines important aspects of the performance and the levels of achievement. In this way, quality work is easily defined. Focusing on the learning allows one scale or rubric to be used even when the form of presentation is different.

In the Classroom:

Students show their learning in many different ways. To develop understanding of student learning, teachers allow students to demonstrate their learning in ways that suit their individual strengths. For example, one student may choose to do an oral presentation to demonstrate understanding of a concept, while another may choose to complete a written product. To make an accurate judgment of student learning, the teacher requires a base amount of evidence, but the base amount is not the same for each student. The more consistent a student's performance is, the less evidence is needed; the more inconsistent, the more evidence is needed.

It is assessment which helps us distinguish between teaching and learning.

- Fisher & Frey (2007)

Performance standards specify "how good is good enough." They relate to issues of assessment that gauge the degree to which content standards have been attained...They are indices of quality that specify how adept or competent a student demonstration should be.

- Kendall & Marzano (1997)

- In today's classroom, the balance between formative assessment and summative assessment is being reconfigured. When the focus of classroom activity is on measurement, all assignments — homework, practice activities, projects, papers, labs, quizzes and tests — result in a score that contributes to the final grade. Alternatively, when the focus of classroom activity is on learning, assessment *for* learning has a much higher profile than assessment *of* learning. In this reconfigured environment, formative assessment makes up a large part of the school day. This results in varied activities that are not necessarily scored or marked for grades. Summative assessments are periodic and reserved for those occasions when it is necessary to measure learning in relation to PLOs and document student achievement.

In the Classroom:

Teachers recognize the need for a different kind of balance between formative and summative assessments. Purpose dictates which one they are using, why they are using it and when they are using it. For example, consider a teacher who has taught his students to self assess their writing using a criterion-referenced rubric that describes various levels of achievement, such as the BC Performance Standards for Writing. Students draft responses, give each other suggestions for improvement based on the rubric, get descriptive feedback from the teacher based on the rubric, revise their writing and track their progress over time. The purpose here is to improve student writing, not to grade it, so all of this is assessment for learning. At some point, usually near the reporting period, the teacher and students will need to see the effect of their work on the level of achievement the student has attained. Then assessment of learning has a role to play and the teacher might ask students to write a separate paper as a final, summative assessment.

Consider a second example where instruction and learning are focussed on having students apply critical thinking skills to a range of issues, situations and topics. The teacher works formatively with students over time before any summative assessment is completed. This looks different in every classroom, but typical instructional approaches might include:

Giving grades or marks for every piece of work leads to inevitable complacency or demoralization. Those students who continually receive grades of, say, B or above become complacent. Those who continually receive grades of B- or below become demoralized. Interestingly, girls and boys find different reasons for any apparent failure.

- Shirley Clarke (2005)

- *generating criteria with students on what constitutes “critical thinking”;*
- *teacher and student modelling of what critical thinking, speaking and listening look like during discussion;*
- *guided practice that scaffolds students’ ability to think and communicate critically;*
- *and multiple opportunities for students to practice and receive feedback on written and oral communications that respond to critical thinking tasks.*

None of these activities contribute to a grade; rather, they offer students opportunities to practice and receive feedback that prepares them for summative assessment.

Grading & Reporting

Grading and reporting are records and statements of student learning. Grades communicate students’ current performance or achievement in relation to prescribed learning outcomes outlined in the IRPs published by the BC Ministry of Education. The fundamental purpose of reporting is to enable teachers to communicate to parents and students the level of achievement



the student has attained. The teacher’s role is to ensure that grades are sound: that they are built on assessments of high quality; that they reflect achievement of learning outcomes only; that they do not include behaviours such as effort and participation; and that they are defensible and credible representations of the nature and quality of students’ learning. To ensure accuracy and consistency, sound practices of formative assessment must align with sound practices of summative assessment.

The following guidelines distinguish between effective and ineffective grading practices (O’Connor, 2007; Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, Chappuis 2006).

Grading practices represent what we believe about teaching and learning. It’s important that they align with our vision for differentiated instruction. Any practice that hinders a student’s full development or the expression of that development should be questioned, and some commonly accepted grading practices are in that hindering category.

- Rick Wormeli (2006)

GRADING PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT LEARNING	GRADING PRACTICES THAT DO NOT SUPPORT LEARNING
<p>Organization of Evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The evidence of learning (e.g., a grade-book or mark book) is organized by learning outcomes that include skills, processes, knowledge and understanding as outlined in the PLOs. 	<p>Organization of Evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The evidence of learning (e.g., a grade-book or mark book) is organized by methods of assessment (e.g., tests, quizzes, homework, labs, etc.).
<p>Collection of Evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The balance between formative and summative assessment is reconfigured. Formative assessment is predominant in the classroom. Student work is assessed frequently (formative assessment) and graded occasionally (summative assessment). 	<p>Collection of Evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summative assessment is predominant in the classroom. Everything a student does is given a score and every score goes into the mark book for the final grade. There is no distinction between “scores” on practice work (formative assessment) and scores on work to demonstrate level of achievement (summative assessment).
<p>Most Recent Evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most recent evidence replaces evidence from the beginning of the instructional sequence, when it is reasonable to do so. Student work at the end of the instructional sequence or unit of study is considered more representative of the student’s level of performance and achievement and considered for grading purposes. 	<p>Most Recent Evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All assessment data are cumulative and used in calculating a final summative grade. No consideration is given to identifying or using the most current information. Student work at the beginning of an instructional sequence is factored in equal to the work at the end of the instructional sequence or unit of study.
<p>Factors Included in Grades</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final grades are based on achievement only. They are a reflection of what students know, understand and can do. Only evidence from summative assessments (assessment of learning) is used to determine grades. This includes final drafts, projects, performances, portfolios, tests, quizzes, etc. Extra credit work is evaluated for quality and is only used to provide extra evidence of learning. Credit is not awarded merely for completion of work. Cheating, late work and missing work are recorded as “incomplete” rather than as zero. There is an expectation that students will replace an “incomplete” with a score or mark without penalty. Grades for group work are based on individual evidence of achievement. Borderline grade cases are handled by collecting additional evidence of student achievement, not by counting non-achievement factors. Student self-assessment is an aspect of the process and where appropriate contributes to the grading process. 	<p>Factors Included in Grades</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final grades are based on a mix of achievement and non-achievement factors (e.g., late assignments, incomplete assignments, attitude, effort, attendance, cheating). Evidence from summative assessments (assessment of learning) and formative assessments (assessment for learning) are used to determine grades. Examples of the later include first drafts, homework, practice questions, all tests and quizzes and other practice work or learning activities. Extra credit points are given for extra work completed, without connection to extra learning. Cheating, late work and missing work result in a zero in the grade-book. There is no opportunity to make up such work. Grades for group work include group scores. Borderline grade cases are handled by considering non-achievement factors. Student self-assessment is not a consideration in the grading process.
<p>Determining Grades</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final grades are criterion referenced. They are based on preset standards with clear descriptions of what each symbol means. These descriptions go beyond numerical calculations A = 86-100% and B = 73-85%; they describe what A, B, etc., performance looks like. Final grades are based on various measures of central tendency: the mean (average); median (middle score by rank); and the mode (the most frequently occurring score). Grading is primarily an exercise in professional judgment. 	<p>Determining Grades</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final grades are norm-referenced. They are based on a curve - a student’s place in the rank order of student achievement and/or based on student’s performance compared to others in the class. Or, they are criterion referenced but based on numerical calculations of all the scores and interpreted based on A = 86-100% and B = 73-85%. Teachers and departments have not ensured that they have a shared understanding or definition of each standard. Final grades are based on calculation of mean (average) only. Grading is a numerical, mechanical exercise.
<p>-----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students on adapted programs receive grades. Students on modified programs do not receive grades. Students are provided with structured written comments that indicate level of attainment of the goals and objectives specified in their IEPs (modified outcomes). Final grades for students taking locally developed courses (LD), and working toward a school completion certificate, are criterion based. They are based on preset standards with descriptions of what each symbol means. Learning outcomes for LD courses are based on IEP goals and final grades are based on the degree to which the learning outcomes of the course are achieved. 	<p>-----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students on modified programs are given letter grades, percentages or are ranked on a performance scale based on preset standards. Final grades for students taking locally developed courses are based on preset standards without a clear description of what each symbol means. Learning outcomes for the LD course are not based on IEP goals developed for the student.

Adapted from Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, Chappuis (2006) and O’Connor (2007)

In summary, to effectively grade and report student learning in systems that are outcomes-based (as is the BC education system), teachers, schools and districts need to examine their grading practices, procedures and policies in order to determine if they conform with fair, sound grading practices. The expectation is that grades will focus on learning, that the evidence collected is of high quality and accurately summarizes student achievement, and that the emphasis is on the learning process. Responding to other issues such as inappropriate student behaviour requires different responses by teachers and schools. Using grading to apply consequences and punishments is not effective in changing and modifying student behaviours in the long term. Further, it is not compatible with outcomes-based assessment.

The following serve as guidelines for teachers, schools and the district to incorporate into their grading practices and policies (O'Connor, 2007).

Achievement of Learning Outcomes

To ensure that grades reflect achievement of learning outcomes:

- do not include non-achievement factors: effort, participation, attendance, cheating — ensure the grade is based on learning;
- do not reduce marks on work submitted late — find alternative ways to address deadlines;
- do not give bonus points for extra work — find other ways to acknowledge and celebrate students' increased commitment to their studies;
- do not punish academic dishonesty through grading practices — the issue of academic dishonesty is a serious one and requires consequences and an appropriate response by the school;
- do not build attendance into grades — lack of attendance and lack of student engagement are important issues for the teacher and school to investigate.

Quality Evidence that Accurately Summarizes Student Achievement

To ensure that evidence is of high quality and that it accurately summarizes student achievement:

- do not assign grades that are determined by poorly constructed methods, such as letter-number relationships (A=86-100%, B- 73-85%, etc.);
- do not grade students by comparing a student's performance to other students' performances;

A grade should give as clear a measure as possible of the best a student can do. Too often, grades reflect an unknown mixture of multiple factors... Unless teachers throughout a school or district completely agree on the elements and factor them into their grading in consistent ways, the meaning of grades will vary from classroom to classroom, school to school.

-Tomlinson & McTighe (2006)

Marzano mentions considerable meta-analyses of educational studies that show that a grade based on frequent use of rubrics with clear descriptors results in a more accurate rendering of students' mastery at the end of the grading period, while basing a grade primarily on mathematical averages often distorts its accuracy.

- Marzano (2000)

- do not base grades on calculation of mean or averages only;
- do not include zeros in grade determination when evidence is missing or as punishment.

Recognition that Learning is a Process

To emphasize the learning process and acknowledge that high levels of proficiency are achieved solely as a result of trial, practice, adjustment based on feedback and more practice:

- do not use information from formative assessments and practice to determine grades (homework, daily work, practice work, group assignments, etc.);
- do not summarize evidence accumulated over time when learning is developmental and will grow with time and repeated opportunities;
- do not exclude students from the grading process by making it a complex, mysterious methodology.

Formative assessment does make a difference, and it is the quality, not just the quantity, of feedback that merits our closest attention. By quality of feedback, we now realize we have to understand not just the technical structure of the feedback (such as its accuracy, comprehensiveness and appropriateness) but also its accessibility to the learner (as a communication), its catalytic and coaching value, and its ability to inspire confidence and hope.

- Sadler (1998)

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