

## Clear and Transparent Principle of Assessment Supporting Document

This document was drafted by a team of Elementary and Secondary DRTs and District VPs to expand on the Clear and Transparent Principle of Assessment as well as Assessment and Evaluation Principle 6.12 and others from Administrative Procedure 360 for Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting on Students Progress and Achievement.

Specifically, the supporting research addresses the following procedures:

- *5.1 To gather evidence on students' achievement, and to determine strengths and learning needs,*
- *5.2 To help teachers plan instruction and set learning goals according to learners' educational development*
- *5.7 To ensure that assessment practices comply with the principles of fair student assessment practices*
- *6.12. Assessments are to be based on student achievement of learning objectives. Effort and attitude are to be reported separately.*

VSB's Clear and Transparent Principle of Assessment: *Quality assessment gives direction and sense of purpose to students by providing them with clearly articulated learning intentions and established and/or co-created success criteria that is understood by the students and aligned with essential curricular concepts and content and to the core competencies and learning standards.*

### Background and Discussion

While curricular learning and student work habits occur in the same context, they are assessed independently with their own criteria. Developing good work habits is key to student success. Supporting learners to set and work towards goals for work habits amplifies the importance of work habits in the classroom. The idea is to teach work habits and provide specific, strength-based feedback as we would for any skill (Jung, 2020, p. 38).

Historically, we have at times assessed both work habits and curricular competencies together: the grade that results is therefore not clear. Does a student's grade solely reflect their achievement in relation to content and curricular competencies or does it communicate an "uncertain mix of achievement and behaviour" (O'Connor, et al., 2018, p. 69).

While it may be tempting to assign grade values to behaviours to increase compliance, this practice may lead to situations where a student's grade is impacted by circumstances beyond their control. Separating work habits from our curricular assessments not only increases the validity of our reporting, but it also makes our assessment more equitable. According to Feldman (2019), "Many traditional grading policies that seem innocuous on the surface can reinforce existing disparities, rewarding students who already have more resources and punishing students who come to the classroom with fewer resources" (p. 54).

When we collect evidence of learning and make a professional judgment on proficiency levels, our assessment process focuses on achievement in relation to content and curricular competencies. If our assessment practice blurs evidence of learning with behaviour, reports of student achievement can be under or overinflated based on subjective observations of participation or factors separate from academic achievement such as attendance, homework completion, neatness, timely work submission, or academic honesty.

### **Participation**

Participation grades may contribute to a 'smooth running' classroom, but when our assessment includes marks for participation or perceived effort, the validity of our reporting may be compromised. Awarding points for participation may also reflect subjectivity and teacher bias and thereby undermine our pursuit of equity. The risk of bias is heightened when "teachers come from a dominant culture and their students don't" (Feldman, 2019, p. 54).

Group work also poses an assessment challenge. Group work should not be assigned a grade unless each group member's learning is evaluated independently, and students are given individual feedback. (O'Connor and Cooper 2008, p. 38)

We recognize that there are subject areas where participation appears as part of the curricular competencies: Home Economics, Physical Education, Career Education, Drama, among others. In such instances, assessment of participation should be aligned with competencies. (Ontario 2010)

### **Homework**

Homework has a role to play in providing opportunities for students to practice skills and review content. Students, however, have different supports at home that contribute to their ability to complete homework. They also have different levels of access to technology. When we grade homework rather than provide descriptive feedback on homework, we "inadvertently translate student economic disparities into achievement disparities, replicating in classrooms the very achievement disparities [we] want to interrupt" (Feldman, 2019, p. 54)

### **Neatness**

Rubrics sometimes include a category with criteria around neatness or presentation. These categories have direct impacts on grades that do not relate specifically to the content and curricular competencies. This doesn't preclude a teacher from requiring certain elements to be included before an assignment is submitted for assessment.

### **Late Marks, Zeros, Academic Honesty**

Taking marks off for late work or for work not handed in distorts the grade and doesn't provide an accurate description of student learning. This is especially true in grades 10-12 where we are required to assign percentages. In these grades, the mathematical damage that is done to a student's grade when zeros are assigned is not a proportional response. Similarly, a zero for academic dishonesty without the opportunity to rewrite or resubmit without penalty will result

in that same inaccuracy in the description of student learning. In either case, “when a student is given a zero, they are effectively being told that they do not need to do the assignment. This is the opposite of accountability” (O’Connor, 2014).

### **Communicating Student Learning and Reporting**

For K-9, we report on curricular competencies using a proficiency scale. In grades 10-12 we report on curricular competencies with a percentage. We report on work habits within the comment section. Comments include descriptions of both work habits and curricular learning.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

The purpose of assessment is to facilitate learning and move it forward in an equitable and inclusive way. When we clearly distinguish between curricular learning and work habits or behaviours, we support students to answer these three questions: Where am I now? Where am I going? How do I get there?

### **References**

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