

Understanding Assessments and Final Grades

Recently, many secondary students breathed a sigh of relief. Summatives are handed in, exams have been written, and students have just started a new semester.

A lot has changed in assessment and evaluation practices since many of us were students.

Did you know that...

...marks and grades are determined based on achievement of the overall expectations outlined in the Ontario curriculum policy documents for each course;

...70% of a final grade is based on work completed during the term and the other 30% is from tasks (e.g. a summative and an exam) at the end of the term;

...students are provided with multiple methods to demonstrate their learning (e.g. paper and pencil tasks, oral presentations, portfolios, demonstrations, performances, products) and are expected to submit assignments within timeframes specified by their teachers;

...students who are not successful at the end of a course are eligible for credit recovery. Student Success teachers in each of our secondary schools work with teachers to identify each curricular expectation where the student has not demonstrated sufficient mastery. An individualized program is then established for the student to enable him or her to complete the required work and to obtain the credit. Provincial research demonstrates that credit recovery not only provides the student with an opportunity to earn the current credit, it also prepares students to be successful in the next year's course.

Educational research is clear that the quality of instruction has the greatest impact on student learning. For several years now, teachers, principals and vice-principals at the OCDSB have been working hard to improve student achievement by continuing to learn about assessment and evaluation and share effective practices.

Here are some examples of our big work:

Ongoing Feedback: Students need timely, descriptive feedback while they are learning. Feedback tells students what they're doing well and identifies next steps in order for them to reach the next level of performance. Feedback also helps to inform teacher practice. Sometimes feedback happens orally while the learning is happening; other times, it is written comments on a piece of work.

Shared Marking: In professional learning sessions, small groups of teachers work together to plan a learning task. The task is given to students across a number of classes. Afterwards, the teachers meet to jointly mark the students' work. The intent is to develop consistency in marking across teachers. We call it teacher moderation. Teachers and administrators tell us that this collaborative approach has been some of their greatest professional learning.

The OCDSB Secondary School Assessment Plan and Student Evidence Record Templates: Beginning in September 2014, every secondary teacher in our district will use a common assessment template to report on student achievement. The Assessment Plan template identifies overall curriculum expectations for each course as outlined in the Ontario curriculum policy documents, as well as the performance standards in each of the four achievement chart categories. Teachers will list the various tasks for evaluation throughout the course. Marks will be entered for each task on the Student Evidence Record using the province's four levels of achievement. Students will be able to monitor their own achievement using a copy of the Student Evidence Record. Teachers will use their professional judgment to determine the grades for reporting purposes based on each student's most consistent level of achievement with special consideration to more recent evidence of achievement of overall expectations. This is a significant step towards building consistency across all secondary schools and to improving communication with students and parents.

Parent Involvement - Helping parents understand the assessment and evaluation process is an important part of our work. In order for parents to be partners in supporting their child's learning, we need to ensure that parents have the right information and resources. We have been working on the development of a "Parent/Guardian Guide to

Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting, Grades 9-12." We are nearing completion and I suspect that it will be available in the next 6 weeks – stay tuned!

All of our work is guided by provincial and Board policy. For more information, check out the provincial policy document on assessment and evaluation entitled  [Growing Success, 2010](#) or our  [Board policy and procedure](#). We're committed to continuing our focus on this important work over the next number of years. We'll know we have it right when our students can accurately describe the strengths of their work, their current level of performance, and their next steps in their learning!

Sincerely,

Jennifer