



Assessment, Grading, and Reporting Guide for Elementary Schools

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Introduction

Education in Saskatchewan is based on curriculum outcomes in various subject areas. Good Spirit School Division has developed a set of guidelines for teachers to use to assess student learning of curriculum outcomes. This handbook is intended to support teachers with the understanding of outcome-based assessment, grading, and reporting practices by providing guidelines for assessing student achievement.

Purpose of Grading and Reporting Student Outcomes

The purpose of an outcome-based report card is to effectively communicate authentic and accurate feedback to stakeholders about student achievement and learning characteristics. Reporting informs and enhances learning and instruction.

Effective Grading Practices

To provide context for the guidelines outlined in this handbook, we look to Ken O'Connor (2007) to ensure we are employing effective grading practices. O'Connor states, "... effective grades need to meet four overarching criteria ... they must be consistent, accurate, and meaningful, and must support learning (p. 4)."

- **Consistent:** The grading standards set need to be consistent from teacher to teacher. "Students achieving at the same level should get the same grade regardless of context" and teachers, "... should determine grades in similar ways and apply similar or the same performance standards (p. 5)."
- **Accurate:** Grades must only measure the achievement of students and not other behaviours such as effort, participation, lates, homework completion, etc.
- **Meaningful:** The grades communicated to stakeholders must be useful and "... must directly reflect specified learning goals (p. 6)."
- **Support Learning:** "Grades need to support learning ... We want students to understand that school is about learning. Grades are artifacts of learning: as such, they should reflect student achievement only ... We also must allow new evidence to replace old evidence when it is clear that a student knows or can do something today that they didn't or couldn't previously (p. 6)."

A Comparison of Outcome-Based and Traditional Assessment, Grading and Reporting Practices

Outcome-Based Assessment	Traditional Assessment
Grades focus on student achievement only.	Grades focus on student achievement and may include effort, motivation, homework completion, and other behaviours.
Students have the opportunity to demonstrate their learning.	All students are given the same assessment, usually a written test.
Involves students in the assessment process by providing information on the learning goals and how they will be assessed.	Teachers control the assessment process with little to no student involvement.
Triangulation (conversations, observations, products) of summative assessment evidence.	One type of summative assessment (test) combined with other assessments (assignments, projects, quizzes, etc.).

General Guidelines for Outcome-Based Assessment, Grading, and Reporting

Guideline #1: Outcome-based grading practices focus on student achievement of curriculum outcomes.

To measure effectively what a student knows, understands and is able to do, in relation to a curriculum outcome, the grade assigned to an outcome for reporting purposes must be based solely on the student's level of achievement.

Traditional grading practices may include a student's effort, motivation, and behaviour as they participate in and complete projects and assignments. Outcome-based grading focuses on the student's ability to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the knowledge or skills outlined in the curriculum outcome. Effort, motivation, and behaviour do not reflect a student's understanding of an outcome and will be reported separately.

Guideline #2: Provide students with clear expectations of what they need to do to achieve each outcome they will be learning about during a unit of study.

Before students are summatively assessed on an outcome, they need to be aware of what they need to know, understand, and be able to do to show the breadth and depth of their learning. Provide students with their learning goals at the beginning of a unit and give them information about how they will be assessed on those goals. This can be in the form of an “I can” statement to students so they can clearly understand what is expected from them.

Traditionally, students are given an outline of what they will be learning but are often not provided with a rubric or similar information on how they will be assessed. Assessments are often made at the completion of a unit and questions are based on the material covered rather than on a specific outcome.

Guideline #3: Involve students in the assessment process.

Anne Davies (2011) explains the reasons why students need to be involved in the assessment process. “The research is clear. When students are involved in the classroom assessment process, they become more engaged in learning (p. 54).”

Guideline #4: Outcome-based assessment practices provide different ways for students to demonstrate their learning.

The assessment measure used in outcome-based education is not the same for all students. O’Connor (2007) quotes a section from Manitoba’s assessment/grading policy that helps us to understand outcome-based assessment:

All students are given an equal opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do as part of the assessment process. Adaptations ... are available for students *including* students with learning or physical disabilities, to allow them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, provided that the adaptations do not jeopardize the integrity or content of the test (p. 9-10).

Use a variety of assessment measures to account for the diverse learning needs of your students. More than one assessment measure may be needed when assessing a classroom of students.

Traditional grading practices rely on giving all students the same assessment to measure their learning. This assessment is often in the form of a test given at the end of a unit of study. All students are given the same test to complete and no adaptations are made to the assessment to take into account different learning needs.

Guideline #5: Data for summative assessment should be triangulated (student products, observations, and conversations).

Teachers should use a variety of assessment evidence to triangulate the summative assessment evidence they collect about student learning. In her book, *Making Classroom Assessment Work*, Anne Davies (2011) talks about the process of triangulation and gathering evidence through observations, conversations, and products. “When evidence is collected from three different sources over time, trends and patterns become apparent, and the reliability and validity of our classroom assessment is increased (p.46).”

Frequently Asked Questions

Why does the division need a new student progress report?

First, the Ministry of Education revised all the curricula during the past five years. Now, what students know, understand and can do is clearly stated in outcomes. Our report card must align with instruction centered on outcomes.

Second, assessment research shows that we can better represent student learning if we leave behind percentages and a grade for an entire subject. We want to be sure what we do in the division reflects best practice.

In what grades will the student progress report be used?

The student progress report will be used in grades one through nine. Kindergarten will use a similar student progress report tailored to its particular needs.

How did the school division come up with this particular design?

Before beginning the redesign of the student progress report, we wanted to be sure that our direction would be in sync with what other provinces, territories and divisions in Saskatchewan are doing. As a result, we have the confidence that our student progress report is in harmony with both best practice and the direction of other divisions and provinces.

Why are we using outcome-based reporting?

Outcome-based reporting is used because it correlates with the outcomes of our provincial curriculums. Outcome-based reporting provides a means for reporting individual student achievement on outcomes.

What does it mean if there is no level indicated beside a strand?

It is entirely possible that some strands or outcomes will not be assessed in a particular term. Teachers group the outcomes in the curriculum to form units of study. In Science, for example, students may have been focussing on Life Science, and not yet touched Physical Science or Earth and Space Science. In those cases, the Physical Science and Earth and Space Science strands would be left blank until students will have taken up those outcomes. In Math and ELA, a specific outcome may not have been address in a term then the teacher would indicate Not Evaluated for this reporting period.

Is there a level that students are expected to reach?

Students at **MEETING** are considered to be working at grade level.

How do I report outcomes that are considered “end of year” outcomes in Term 1 and Term 2?

“Outcomes define what a student is expected to know and be able to do at the end of the grade or Secondary Level course. Therefore, all curriculum outcomes are required. Indicators clarify the breadth and depth of each outcome.”

Renewed Curricula: Understanding Outcomes Saskatchewan Curriculum 2010
ELA outcomes are said to be “end of the year” outcomes. This means that the student has the entire year to reach the outcome. However, teachers will inevitably focus on various parts of that outcome at different parts of the year. That being said, a student may meet part of the outcome successfully during the first term. The teacher will have gathered evidence in various forms to show that the student has done so (checklists, anecdotal notes, work samples). Therefore, a student may be “meeting expectations” on an outcome during term one and still be progressing until the end of the year. A discussion should occur with parents in regards to the evidence that the students have shown and what has been worked on.

Example:

CR 1.4 I can use grade-appropriate reading strategies (e.g. retell, make connections, sequence) to help me understand what I read.

Teacher may be working on “retelling” with students. Student has been progressing well in using this strategy after reading. Student has shown that he/she can use the strategy to help him/her understand what is read. Teacher has documentation of this. Therefore, student would get a “meeting expectations” for this outcome.

What happens if a student has not reached grade level in a particular strand by the end of the year?

Children learn according to different rhythms. Just because a student has not reached the desired level for an outcome in a particular time period does not mean that he or she will not acquire the knowledge or skill. The school will continue to support the student in his or her learning. With responsive teaching/differentiated instruction in the classroom, and support from the school and home, the student can continue to progress through that learning outcome and beyond.

What are the Learning Behaviours, and how will they be assessed?

The Learning Behaviours are the qualities which lead to student success. Sometimes, in the past, these behaviours have been assessed as part of the subject mark. This practice can distort the picture of the student's actual competence in the subject. Marks allotted for effort, bonus marks or marks deducted for late work can misrepresent what a student actually knows, understands or can do in a particular subject. Now, such behaviours as participation, cooperation, responsibility, etc... will be reported separately.

What if a student is late turning in an assignment?

As outcome-based reporting focuses on the achievement of outcomes, it is important not to include behaviours, such as late assignments, in the assigned grade. This behaviour should be communicated to parents through the Learning Behaviours section of the report card. Students who are late turning in assignments may need supports put in place to assist them with this behaviour. These students may require flexible timelines, assistance, or losing the privilege of free, unstructured time until the assignment is completed. Supports will depend on the needs of each individual student.

What if a student does not put forth any effort and does not participate in class? Should that student receive the same mark as a student who works hard and participates?

The level of achievement is the only thing reported for an outcome on an Outcome-based report card. Effort is recorded in the Learning Behaviours section of the report card or communicated to the stakeholders (students, parents, etc.) in a different way - through a portfolio, conference, phone call, email, etc.

Can I include homework in my final outcome grade if the homework during the unit is focused on the outcome?

Homework is intended for students to “practice” the outcome so should not be included in the final grade. Evidence used in the final grade should come from various assessments.

How can I reward students who put forth extra effort and do more work than expected? Why can't I give them bonus points and increase their grade on a report card?

Increasing a student’s grade for extra effort or work, does not reflect the achievement level of the student in relation to the outcome. In order for students to receive a higher grade, evidence must be provided, “...that demonstrates a higher level of achievement (O’Connor, 2007, p. 31).” Simply putting forth more effort and completing more work does not necessarily result in deeper understanding. “Students should, of course, be able to provide additional evidence of their understanding, knowledge, and/or skill. However, this additional evidence must reveal new or deeper learning - and should be considered along with the previous evidence to determine the student’s level of achievement (O’Connor, 2007, p. 32).

What if a student copies another’s work? Should a student’s grade not be reduced to reflect this behaviour?

Cheating is a serious behaviour and must be addressed. However, it is not addressed through a grade when reporting on outcomes. A reduced grade is not a consequence for cheating. The level of achievement must still be determined. Students can redo assignments or complete alternate assignments to demonstrate their understanding and what they are able to do.

I have a student who misses at least one in every four classes? How do I take this into account when grading?

Ken O’Connor (2007), in his book *A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades*, states, “Grades are broken when they are directly or indirectly related to a student’s attendance record. The simple fix requires absences be reported separately from grades, and that grades be determined only from evidence of achievement (p. 43).” Student attendance, therefore, should not be included in grades. Rather, students are provided with opportunities to complete the work needed to show evidence of student learning.

I have a great culminating activity at the end of my unit. Students work on a group project to demonstrate their learning. Can I use this project as evidence of student learning when reporting on outcomes?

Group scores should not be used when determining achievement levels of individual students because, "... the group scores may not accurately reflect the achievement of each student and therefore would be unfair for some members of the group (O'Connor, 2007, p. 48)." An appropriate assessment for this type of activity would involve students individually demonstrating their understanding and/or ability to perform the outcomes as a follow-up to this group activity.

Why can't I use a zero in the calculation of a grade?

Giving students a zero does not accurately reflect their level of achievement in relation to an outcome. When students are given a zero for a missing assignment, the resulting grade does not accurately measure their level of achievement. Consider other evidence of learning or if lack of evidence use O'Connor's (2007) advice, "The best alternative to the use of zeros is the use of an "IE" for Insufficient Evidence. When desired evidence of student achievement is missing, teachers decide whether they have sufficient evidence to determine a grade and if they do not, assign an "IE" (p. 87)."

What about the student who is consistently late for class? How can I take this into account when grading?

Similar to students who have frequent absences, grades for outcomes should not be reduced for students who are continually late for class.

Why shouldn't I use formative assessment information to determine a final grade?

The purpose of formative assessment is to determine what students know at a particular point of time to help students improve and to inform instruction. Grades that include performance on formative assessment measures will not accurately reflect a student's learning at the end of a unit of study. Formative assessment measures are used as assessment for learning while summative assessment measures are used as assessment of learning.

What if students do not do well on their final summative assessment?

A final grade is not determined by only one task or piece of evidence. Teachers triangulate their summative assessment findings by considering evidence from conversations, observations, and products. If students do not do well on one piece of assessment, teachers determine if they have enough evidence from other sources. Everyone is capable of having a ‘bad’ day. If a summative assessment does not ‘fit’ with other evidence and teachers do not feel they have enough evidence to give a grade for an outcome, an alternate performance task should be given to the student so they have an opportunity to demonstrate their learning.

Levels of Achievement

Report Card Level of Achievement	Assessment Rubric	Descriptor
Exceeding	Extensive Evidence	The student independently demonstrates an in-depth understanding of the outcome, and consistently applies this knowledge to new situations.
Meeting	Sufficient Evidence	The student consistently demonstrates an understanding of the outcome or has achieved the outcome.
Approaching	Partial Evidence	The student is developing an understanding of the outcome.
Beginning	Little Evidence	The student is having difficulty demonstrating an understanding of the outcome, even with assistance.
Insufficient Evidence	N/A	The student has not demonstrated enough evidence for reporting purpose. A list of work to be completed or an explanation accompanies the progress report.
Not Evaluated	N/A	Outcome was not evaluated this reporting period.

Glossary

Achievement

Ken O'Connor (2007) defines achievement as "... performance measured against accepted published standards and learning outcomes (p. 8)."

Assessment

Assessment is "... the act of gathering information on an ongoing basis in order to understand individual student's learning and needs (Saskatchewan Education, 2010, p. 16)."

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is given during a lesson or unit to gather information about student learning. The information is used to track student progress and make changes to instruction.

Grade

"A grade is the symbol (number or letter) reported at the end of a period of time as a summary statement of student performance (O'Connor, 2007, p. 7)."

Outcome

An outcome is what students should be able to demonstrate with deep understanding as defined by the Saskatchewan curriculum.

Mark

"A mark or score is the number (or letter) given to any student test or performance that may contribute to the later determinations of a grade (O'Connor, 2007, p. 7)."

Summative Assessment

Summative assessment is given at the end of a lesson or unit of study to show what students have learned.

Resources

Print Resources

Davies, A. 2011. *Making Classroom Assessment Work: Third Edition*. Courtenay, BC: Connections Publishing.

O'Connor, K. 2007. *A Repair Kit For Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Wiggins, G. & J. McTighe. 2005. *Understanding by Design: Expanded 2nd Edition*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Online Resources

Alberta Education, 2009. [The Alberta Student Assessment Study: Final Report](#).

Manitoba Education, 2006. [Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind](#).

Manitoba Education, 2010. [Provincial Assessment Policy Kindergarten to Grade 12: Academic Honesty, Health and Promotion/Retention](#).

Regina Pub

Saskatchewan Education, 2010. [Renewed Curricula: Understanding Outcomes](#).