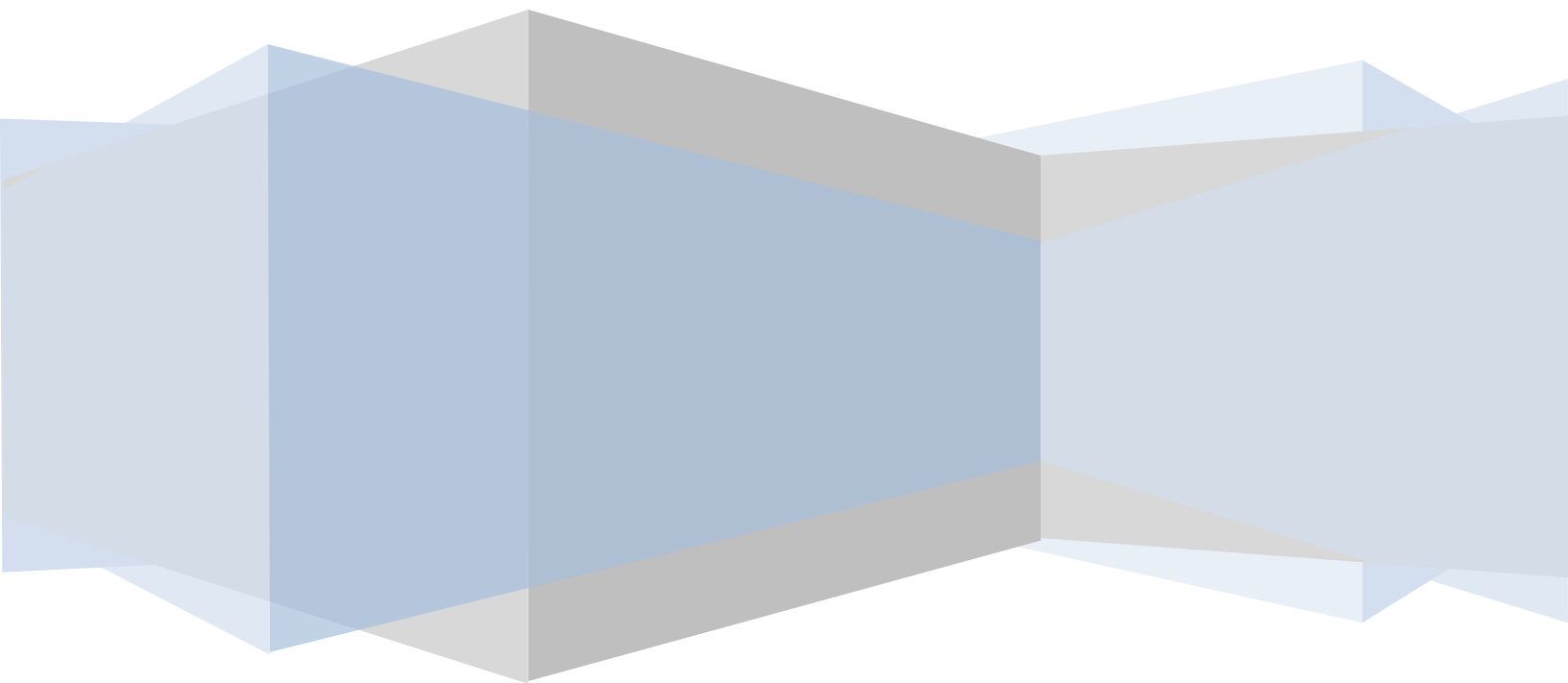


High Prairie School Division #48

Handbook of Fair Assessment and Reporting Practices



Summary of the Big Ideas

1. Include only achievement.
2. Don't reduce marks on work submitted late.
3. Don't give points for extra credit or use bonus points.
4. Don't punish academic dishonesty with reduced grades.
5. Don't include attendance in grade determination.
6. Use only individual achievement evidence.
7. Organize and report evidence by student learning outcomes.
8. Provide clear descriptions of achievement expectations.
9. Compare each student's performance to preset learning outcomes.
10. Rely on quality assessments.
11. Summarize information to determine final grade.
12. Consider the measures of central tendency and use professional judgment.
13. Don't include zeroes.
14. Student work is assessed frequently.
15. Consider the reason for a final exam.
16. Emphasize more recent achievement.
17. Involve students.
18. Use a variety of assessments.

Big Idea #1

Include only achievement.

Don't include student behaviors in grades
(effort, participation, attendance, adherence to class rules, etc.).

Research

- ❖ "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... How effective is such a communication system? The problem transcends individual teachers. 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 and McTighe, 2006, p. 133).
- ❖ Including behaviors in marks can cause grade inflation or deflation. Many believe we should reward well behaved students and punish others; this uses grades as extrinsic motivators to control student behavior.
- ❖ They are often combined because teachers have no way to communicate separately about behaviors.

Recommended Practice

- ❖ Grades should reflect only student performance in mastering the public, published student learning outcomes of the province/school.
- ❖ Use standards-based expanded format report card where the desirable behaviors are listed and rated separate from achievement. It enables schools to show very clearly which behaviors it values in students.
- ❖ This means everyone can know what a grade means in achievement terms.

Student Involvement

- ❖ Allow students to self-assess their achievement as well as their behaviors and set goals for both.
- ❖ Students benefit from frequent opportunities to identify both the behaviors that help and those that hinder their achievement.

Big Idea #2

Don't reduce marks on work submitted late.

Provide support for the learner.

Research

- ❖ Lates should be reported in another manner (on separate behavior portion of report card).
- ❖ There are problems with the practice of reducing marks on work submitted late:
 - They distort the grade's representation of the student's true achievement.
 - They can motivate exactly the opposite behavior than that intended.
 - Having absolute deadlines (and penalties) for everything does not prepare students for the world beyond school. In the 'real world' timelines are frequently negotiated or adjusted to circumstances; deadlines range from fixed to considerably flexible. If unable to meet a deadline we communicate and arrange a new mutually agreeable timeline, and then work to meet it.
 - Our world is full of redo's; students should be permitted redo's, within reason. The work should be submitted within a common predetermined due date" (Wormeli, 2006, p. 148).

Recommended Practice

- ❖ Penalties that effect grades do not work because they do not change behavior.
- ❖ Set up support systems and interventions at the school level that reduce or eliminate the problem of late work.
- ❖ Teachers should not ignore lates; they should keep records and note it on the expanded format report cards.
- ❖ Teachers can also assign consequences as they would for any other unacceptable classroom behavior.
- ❖ The fix for late student work should be a positive, supportive approach that directly affects student behavior.
- ❖ Leave the scores and grades as pure measures of achievement.

Student Involvement

- ❖ Input builds ownership.
- ❖ Students should have input into decisions about timelines for required assessment evidence.
- ❖ Students should also have input into developing the provisions for support and/or consequences.

Big Idea #3

Don't give points for extra credit or use bonus points.

Seek only evidence that more work has resulted
in a higher level of achievement.

Research

- ❖ If students want to get higher grades, teachers may require 'extra' evidence that demonstrates a higher level of achievement.
- ❖ The basic problem is distorted achievement; it emphasizes that quantity is key –more being better – rather than about achieving higher levels of learning.

Recommended Practice

- ❖ Eliminate extra credit and bonus points that do not relate to achievement.
- ❖ Communicate clearly to students and parents that better grades come from evidence of higher levels of performance, not just from more work.

Student Involvement

- ❖ Through self-assessment and teacher communication, students can acquire a clear sense of their level of achievement.
- ❖ If it is less proficient or lower than they accept, teachers can offer students opportunities to provide additional evidence.
- ❖ It must be clear that this will not result merely in points being added to a total – if students are able to show that they know, understand, or can perform at a higher level, their grade must reflect this.

Big Idea #4

Don't punish academic dishonesty with reduced grades.

Apply other consequences and reassess to determine actual level of achievement.

Research

- ❖ This uses the assessment/grading policy as a tool to discipline students for inappropriate behavior, thus distorting student achievement.
- ❖ Some believe that severe punishment will deter cheating.
- ❖ Academic dishonesty needs appropriate alternatives.
- ❖ It is important that teachers should not assume that students understand what they mean by the terms plagiarism or cheating, but fully explain them.

Recommended Practice

- ❖ Do not use grading to assign a consequence to students who cheat.
- ❖ Have an academic honesty policy that clearly describes inappropriate practices and the consequences for breaches and that students must redo any assessment that involved academic dishonesty.
- ❖ Require students to redo the test or assignment without cheating or plagiarizing, to establish an accurate achievement record for grading.

Student Involvement

- ❖ Develop criteria with students.
- ❖ Use peer and self-assessment protocols for improved learning.
- ❖ Develop accountability strategies for groups other than those that affect grades.

Big Idea #5

Don't include attendance in grade determination.

Report absences separately.

Research

- ❖ Because standards-based learning is not about seat time, it is about what students know, understand and can do – grades should be accurate reflections of achievement and achievement alone.

Recommended Practice

- ❖ Record attendance separately.
- ❖ Have attendance policies that address ways to offer another opportunity, consider personal issues, and provide support.
- ❖ School sets up support systems that reduce or eliminate the problem of continuous absences.

Student Involvement

- ❖ Have school wide attendance procedures that focus on assistance not punishment.
- ❖ Develop contracts with students that directly support attendance and learning.

Big Idea #6

Use only individual achievement evidence.

Don't include group scores in grades.

Research

- ❖ Cooperative learning is powerful learning when used as designed. It involves 5 key characteristics of academic and social learning:
 - Positive Interdependence - Individual Accountability - Processing - Face to Face Interaction - Social Skills
- ❖ Spencer Kagan notes 7 reasons for opposing group scores/grades:
 - 1) Are not fair (student is receiving credit for something he/she didn't do)
 - 2) Debase report cards
 - 3) Undermine motivation
 - 4) Convey the wrong message
 - 5) Violate individual accountability
 - 6) Are responsible for resistance to cooperative learning
 - 7) May be challenged in court

Recommended Practice

- ❖ No group scores.
- ❖ Understand that cooperative learning is a learning activity, not an assessment tool.
- ❖ Assess students individually after a class has experienced cooperative learning.

Student Involvement

- ❖ Develop criteria with students.
- ❖ Use peer and self-assessment protocols for improved learning.
- ❖ Develop accountability strategies for groups other than those that affect grades.

Big Idea #7

Organize and report evidence by student learning outcomes.

Don't organize information in grading books/records by assessment methods or simply summarize into a single grade.

Research

- ❖ Don't blend evidence of learning from multiple sources into a single grade.
- ❖ Grades are inaccurate when they are not directly based on outcomes and do not give information about achievement of outcomes. Fixing this requires reporting student learning outcomes.

Recommended Practice

- ❖ Base grades on published school/provincial learning outcomes.
- ❖ Report grades for each outcome to create a more complete profile of individual student strengths and weaknesses. This requires curriculum, instruction, assessment, grading and reporting all to be organized and aligned around the student learning outcomes.
- ❖ Record this evidence by outcomes, dedicating columns or blocks of space in grade books to each learning goal. This can be done using most grading software, by setting the categories to be outcomes as opposed to tests, projects, etc.

Student Involvement

- ❖ Develop and share assessment and evaluation protocols with students before they are assessed.
- ❖ Students should know what is/isn't graded.
- ❖ Students should know how grades are determined before they are assessed.
- ❖ Help them develop work that hits the outcome target.
- ❖ Students and parents should have open access to student learning outcomes and their work as evaluated to reach the outcome.
- ❖ Students should track, record & report their learning (of outcomes).

Big Idea #8

Provide clear descriptions of achievement expectations/student learning outcomes.

Don't assign grades using inappropriate or unclear performance student learning outcomes.

Research

- ❖ Grades are inaccurate when they are determined using poorly defined student learning outcomes, such as letter-number relationships, that have traditionally masqueraded as performance standards.
- ❖ Use clearly defined and agreed upon student learning outcomes in understandable student and parent friendly versions, made available before and during instruction.

Recommended Practice

- ❖ Use clear student learning outcomes with clear descriptions communicated to students up front.
- ❖ The challenge is to create clear descriptors of curriculum to judge students achievement so we can identify student achievement as competent or for a certain grade.
- ❖ Have professional dialogues about student learning outcomes among teachers, so they develop shared understanding, apply standards consistently and establish shared levels of proficiency.
- ❖ Homework - Don't grade homework. Quiz or check items directly from the homework at another time.

Student Involvement

- ❖ Students have a better chance of hitting the target if it is clearly defined for all to see.
- ❖ Exemplars of student work make various levels of proficiency clear.
- ❖ Post user-friendly worded learning outcomes.

Big Idea #9

Compare each student's performance to preset student learning outcomes.

Don't assign grades based on student's achievement compared to other students.

Research

- ❖ Grading students by comparing their performance to one another distorts individual achievement. We need absolute student learning outcomes as opposed to relative student learning outcomes.
- ❖ One of the main problems in assigning grades based on student-to-student comparisons is, "what should be the reference group?" Should an individual student be compared to others in their particular class at that time? All who have taken that class over time? From their particular teacher or from all teachers?
- ❖ The rationale for creating a competitive grading environment in standards-driven schools is that it provides motivation for students and that highly motivational students learn more; however, the motivational effects are not beneficial for all students.

Recommended Practice

- ❖ Base grades on preset achievement student learning outcomes – to be criterion referenced, not norm referenced in assigning grades.

Student Involvement

- ❖ Students need to participate meaningfully in their own learning journey.
- ❖ Focuses on students' individual progress and achievement re: evidence of learning related to learning outcomes.
- ❖ Learning outcomes in student-friendly language.

Big Idea #10

Rely only on quality assessments.

Don't rely on evidence gathered using assessments that fail to meet standards of quality.

Research

- ❖ "Avoid bias that can distort results. There can be problems with the student, the assessment setting, the scoring process, or the assessment itself that can cause the score to misrepresent student achievement. Problems that can occur with the student include lack of reading skill, emotional upset, poor health, lack of testwiseness, and evaluation anxiety. Problems within the setting that can distract student attention include heat, noise, and lack of light. Problems in scoring include inter-rater disagreement on criteria. Problems that can occur with the assessment include insufficient time for all students to complete the assessment" (O'Connor, 2007, p. 77).
- ❖ "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" (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and You, 2006, p. 1).

Recommended Practice

- ❖ Teachers should work together to address:
 - Poor-quality assessments reveal evidence that is not accurate; therefore, check every assessment for quality – clear purpose, clear learning goals, sound design and avoidance of bias.
 - "The teacher can articulate standards of quality, and can show evidence of consideration of these standards in his/her classroom assessments:
 - clear and appropriate learning outcomes
 - clear and appropriate users and uses
 - choosing the best assessment method
 - writing clear, unambiguous questions
 - good sampling
 - "avoiding potential sources of bias and mismeasurement" (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005, p. 224).

Student Involvement

N/A

Big Idea #11

Summarizing information and determining final grade.

Grades should reflect achievement of Program of Studies outcomes.

Research

- ❖ "Final grades are criterion referenced, not norm referenced. They are based on preset standards with clear descriptions of what each symbol means. These descriptions go beyond A = 90-100% and B = 80-89%; they describe what A, B, etc. performance looks like.
- ❖ Final grades for special needs students are criterion referenced, and indicate level of attainment of the learning goals as specified in the IEP. The targets on which grades are based are clear to all parties.
- ❖ The teacher understands various measures of central tendency (average, median, mode) and understands when each is the most appropriate one to use to accurately describe student learning" (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005, p. 223).

Recommended Practice

- ❖ "The gradebook may or may not have a mix of symbol types, but there is a sound explanation of how to combine them.
- ❖ Rubric scores are converted to a final grade using a decision rule that results in an accurate depiction of the level of student attainment of the learning targets" (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005, P. 223).
- ❖ The gradebook shows if/how students met learning outcomes.

Student Involvement

- ❖ Students know processes to be used.

Big Idea #12

Consider the measures of central tendency and use professional judgment.

Don't rely on the mean.

Research

- ❖ Grades may mislead when they are based on simply calculating the mean (average) of a series of scores, due to the effect of outlier scores.
- ❖ "Averaging falls far short of providing an accurate description of what students have learned... If the purpose of grading and reporting is to provide an accurate description of what students have learned, then averaging must be considered inadequate and inappropriate" (Guskey, 1996a, p. 21).

Recommended Practice

- ❖ Do not average grades together. The averaged grade does not reflect the student's achievement of targeted outcomes.
- ❖ Do not use the mean as 'the measure'.
- ❖ Consider other measures of central tendency and use professional judgment and discussion with all teachers.
- ❖ Think and talk about not only the calculation, but the determination of grades.
- ❖ Recognize that grading should not be merely a numerical, mechanical exercise.
- ❖ "Assessments are modified for special needs students in ways that match instructional modifications described in IEPs. Such modifications result in generating accurate information on student achievement" (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005, p. 224).

Student Involvement

- ❖ Ensure students understand procedures.

Big Idea #13

Don't include zeros in grade determination when evidence is missing or as punishment.

Zero does not show evidence of learning. Use alternatives, such as reassessing to determine real achievement or use "I" for incomplete or insufficient evidence. Give opportunity to replace an incomplete with a score without penalty.

Research

- ❖ A zero skews a student's average to the point that it no longer reflects what a student knows and can do.
- ❖ Rather than use a zero, the piece of work should be considered lack of evidence.
- ❖ When combined with other evidence, using zeros affects marks so the resulting grade does not accurately reflect student achievement.
- ❖ There are fundamental problems with zeros (Wormeli, 2006 p. 137).
- ❖ Zeros give a numerical value to something that has never been assessed and that therefore has no basis in reality.
- ❖ They can have counterproductive effects on student motivation. Once a student has more than one zero, they have little chance of recovery, increasing the inappropriate mathematics.
- ❖ "A zero has an undeserved and devastating influence, so much so that no matter what the student does, the grade distorts the final grade as a true indicator of mastery. Mathematically and ethically this is unacceptable."

Recommended Practice

- ❖ Use evidence, or equal difference scales or a 'floor' score that makes a percentage scale an equal difference scale, (O'Connor, 2007, p. 85).
- ❖ Schools/districts develop policies regarding these alternatives, then indicate to their teachers which alternative(s) they can or should use in their classroom.

Student Involvement

- ❖ When students understand the impact of not submitting required assessment evidence, and know what alternatives are in place in their school, they are better able to decide about submitting needed academic evidence and/or making up an Incomplete.
- ❖ Students can also be involved in determining the consequences for failure to submit required assessment evidence.

Big Idea #14

Student work is assessed frequently (formative assessment) and graded occasionally (summative evaluations).

Use only summative evidence; don't use information from practice and formative assessments to determine grades.

Research

- ❖ Teachers distinguish clearly between teaching activities through which students learn and practice, and summative evaluations in which students 'perform' and show what they know, understand and can do.
- ❖ The key components of formative assessment for learning (AFL) are:
 - Share the learning target with students from the beginning of the learning.
 - Make adjustments in teaching as a result of formative assessment.
 - Provide descriptive feedback to students from assessment.
 - Provide opportunities for student to self and peer assess so that they understand their strengths and what they need to do to improve.

Recommended Practice

- ❖ Don't grade practice.
- ❖ Don't grade everything – if everything is graded, there's no time for students to practice, try again, improve or recover.
- ❖ "Scores' on formative assessments and other practice work (e.g., homework) are used descriptively as feedback to inform teachers and students of what has been learned and the next steps in learning.
- ❖ Grades are based only on summative assessments" (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005, p. 222).
- ❖ "Grades are broken if scores for everything students do find their way into report card grades. The fix is to include, in all but specific, limited cases, only evidence from summative evaluations intended to document learning that is designed to serve as assessments of learning" (O'Connor, 2007,p.95).
- ❖ The primary purpose of grades is to communicate a summary of student achievement at a particular point in time; that is, what students know, understand, and can do as a result of their learning.

Student Involvement

- ❖ Strategies that teachers can use to involve students include:
 - Engage students in reviewing strong and weak samples in order to determine attributes of a good performance or product.
 - Students practice using criteria to evaluate anonymous strong and weak work.
 - Students work in pairs to revise anonymous weak work samples they have just evaluated.
 - Students help design assessment and learning episodes. (Stiggins and Chappuis (2005))

Big Idea #15

Consider the reason for a final exam.

Use a proper assessment method for the context.

Research

- ❖ What is the purpose of the final exam?
- ❖ Exams are only one way for students to demonstrate understanding for a culminating assessment activity. Other examples include projects, demonstrations, talks, shows, and performance assessments.

Recommended Practice

- ❖ What is the purpose of the final exam?
- ❖ "Use a proper assessment method for the context; that is, a method that will effectively and efficiently gather the needed evidence of student achievement. The proper method depends on the nature of the learning goals (O'Connor, 2007, p. 76).

Student Involvement

- ❖ No surprises.
- ❖ Understand how they will be assessed.
- ❖ Feel prepared and confident.

Big Idea #16

Emphasize more recent achievement.

"Most recent evidence completely replaces out-of-date evidence when it is reasonable to do so.

Research

- ❖ Don't summarize evidence accumulated over time; learning is developmental and will grow with time and repeated opportunities.
- ❖ "Educators generally recognize learning as a progressing and incremental process. Most also agree that students should have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning. But is it fair to consider all these learning trials in determining students' grades? If at any time in the instructional process students demonstrate that they have learned the concepts well and mastered the intended learning goals, doesn't that make all previous information on their learning of those concepts inaccurate and invalid? Why then should such information be 'averaged in' when determining students' grades" (Guskey, 2002, pp. 777-8).

Recommended Practice

- ❖ For any developmental learning we must emphasize the more recent evidence and allow new evidence to replace, not simply be added to, previous evidence.
- ❖ By emphasizing the more recent information we acknowledge learning as a process. One of the most unfortunate effects of simply adding up all the scores is that many students will never be able to overcome the impact of early failures and very low scores.
- ❖ When it comes to what grade to record in the grade book, the higher or lower one, always choose the higher grade.
- ❖ Consider formative assessments as evidence of learning and/or practice, don't include in grade.

Student Involvement

- ❖ Encourage students to learn from assessments as part of their learning journey – not exclusively as final marks.
- ❖ Include students to establish procedures for resubmissions, improvements and do-over's.

Big Idea #17

Involve students.

The whole idea is to increase student's role as their own capabilities grow & reduce the teacher's role. (Marzano, 2008)

Research

- ❖ "One of the most powerful and straight forward ways a teacher can provide feedback that encourages learning, is to have students track their own progress." (Marzano, 2006, p.89)
- ❖ Classroom assessment is one form of feedback. Feedback is "the most powerful single modification that enhances achievement...give dollops of feedback" (Hattie & Timperley, 1992, p.9).

Recommended Practice

- ❖ Comments lead to learning gains. Grades and/or grades with comments do not improve learning (Page, 1958; Butler, 1987, 1988).
- ❖ Do learners have another chance to demonstrate what they can do better without penalty of previous effort?
- ❖ Use models, samples, exemplars.
- ❖ Teachers use feedback to assist students. In order to promote learning, feedback should be:
 - Not only social and managerial – but should help improve student learning.
 - Timely – at time of learning, not after.
 - Continuous; allows students to self-adjust, try again.
 - Specific – increased descriptive not evaluative.
 - Tell specifically: what they have done well, what needs improvement, and what they can do to improve.

Student Involvement

- ❖ Ensure that students understand from the outset what is/isn't graded and how grades are to be determined .
- ❖ Involve students in developing criteria and scoring tools that are used to provide feedback and/or scores.
- ❖ It is the teacher's responsibility to evaluate the summative evaluations, but students should be involved in peer and self-assessment of formative assessments.
- ❖ Students use graphs, charts and visuals to monitor their learning. Students track their knowledge growth over time.
- ❖ Students record their perception re: how they are progressing to meet learning outcomes.
- ❖ Students develop and score self and peers using check lists, rubrics, scoring scales...

Big Idea #18

Use a Variety of Assessments.

A variety of assessment methods are necessary to create a complete picture of student understanding and mastery.

Research

- ❖ No single method can paint the picture needed and thus no single assessment should be the 'one' that gives the mark.
- ❖ Incorporate upper level thinking, not just testing of single concepts. Students need to explore what concept is being tested and how they will apply their knowledge to problem solve.
- ❖ "Use a proper assessment method for the context; that is, a method that will effectively and efficiently gather the needed evidence of student achievement. The proper method depends on the nature of the learning goals. For example, to assess student mastery of content knowledge, we can rely on selected response or essay formats. But to assess mastery of performance skills or the ability to create products that meet certain standards of quality, we must turn to performance assessment" (O'Connor, 2007, p. 76).

Recommended Practice

- ❖ Provide students with options for how they will demonstrate their learning. Offer students a variety of tasks and chances to show their understanding – a menu of options.
- ❖ If the aim is to improve learning, then the tasks must portray real life situations.
- ❖ Match assessment purpose to appropriate assessment method.
- ❖ Use Bloom's Taxonomy to develop assessments that address a variety of levels of thinking. Use Stiggins Assessment Methods to choose what kind of assessment best suits the needs.

Student Involvement

- ❖ Students should learn to design criteria and assessments.
- ❖ Offer students a choice regarding variety of tasks, chances, and assessments to show their understanding.