

What is outcome based assessment?

Outcome based assessment measures student progress towards specific learning outcomes. Underlying this system is a belief that each student is unique and may experience success in different ways or on a different timeline compared to others. Emphasis is placed on learning as a process, with students receiving and acting on feedback in order to improve.

How is this different from the way students were graded in the past?

“Traditional” grading schemes tend to focus on a more rigid and time restrictive system that does not account for the unique nature and circumstances of each student. Marks are seen with more “finality” as opposed to an opportunity to learn from mistakes and grow as learners. Quite often, more emphasis is placed on high stakes events such as exams.

Why bother changing what works?

For many students, past and present, the “traditional” way of grading was not working. Receiving a grade on an assignment was seen as final, and sometimes had unintended negative effects. By having a clear target, making their progress visible and letting them know what their next steps are, students now have the opportunity to improve on what they know and move towards mastery of a topic or idea.

What's so bad about getting a grade?

Some research has shown that once a grade is assigned to a piece of work, students feel that the learning is over. Policies that impose deadlines on both learning and assessing help to promote this inhibitive way of thinking. By focusing on feedback and learning from mistakes, we hope to create a generation of learners that see mistakes as an opportunity to learn and grow, not a judgement on their effort, intelligence or ability level.

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What about Powerschool and report cards?

By shifting the focus away from learning events to the learning process, we hope to emphasize the progress the student is making towards mastery of the outcomes in the course. We know that it is impossible to accurately summarize a student's learning in one number. Report cards will still be used but they serve as a snapshot of learning. We encourage you to have meaningful conversations with your students about their progress, and not only on the mark that appears on their report card.

What about university / college / real life?

Applying for post-secondary still involves the institution looking at the final grades of a select few classes. Schools and teachers still have deadlines to meet to submit these final grades, its only the process to create these grades that is shifting.

In "real life" we are constantly getting feedback on our actions and decisions. We hope that the in-school experience mirrors what students will see when they leave the building.

Is this more work for the student?

Possibly. It may also just be "different" work. We hope to decrease the reliance on "cramming" information and increase engagement in the learning process. We want students to be thoughtful about what they are turning in as their best work and how it relates to the outcome(s) they are working on. As a result, we hope we are creating engaged and thoughtful learners for life.

Final thoughts ...

We know that changing the idea of what school and grading looks like is a monumental task and that this will take time. We know that this may look slightly different depending on the teacher and the subject area. We know that there are going to be bumps in the road. But we also know that we are up for the challenge!

Having teachers and parents on the same page is vitally important. If you ever have any questions on grading and assessment, please contact your student's teacher.

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