



Responsibility of the Outcomes/Grades/Common Assessment Committee

Purpose of the Committee

The purpose of this committee is to bring together voices of educators, elementary through high school, to answer the question "How do we know if our students are prepared for their future?" This conversation will involve coming to agreement on how we define "Proficiency". We will tackle age old beliefs about grading processes, letter grades and issues surrounding our time with the Outcome Based Decision Making Model. We will research practices, debate pros and cons of outcomes vs. grades, common assessments and requirements for higher level institutions of study. The goal will be to come to consensus on a K-12 system for the district that will lead to a common format for reporting and identify Tier One student achievement data that will be meaningful to students, faculty, parents, administrators and Oregon School Board Members.

This study committee will submit a written report to the Vision Steering Committee/Board of Education. The report will summarize research, draw conclusions from the research, identify specific recommendations for local Tier One indicators and provide summary recommendations for revisions to existing Board Policies 411-414. The committee will complete their work by June 1, 2009.

Background

In 1992, the Oregon Board of Education adopted an Outcome Based Decision Making Model that was designed to provide a K-12 aligned curriculum in all subject areas. The intent was to specifically identify instructional "outcomes" and the criterion tests that would be used to determine if each "outcome" had been passed and at what level. Teachers at all grade levels were involved in the process which included a detailed analysis of prerequisite skills, necessary vocabulary, concepts/skills, defined procedures and a suggested task analysis. The proficiency rating scale moved from a "Mastered/NonMastered" to a 1-5 rating scale that was revised again in 2005 by the Curriculum Coordinating Council (CCC). This scale identified each number as follows:

- "1" - Unable to demonstrate understanding of the outcome,
- "2" - Demonstrates some understanding but not adequate,
- "3" - Able to pass assessment but long term retention is not verifiable,
- "4" - Demonstrates understanding of the outcome at established rate of proficiency,
- "5" - Demonstrates understanding of the outcome beyond established proficiency level.

This information was to be collected at the end of the learning process, sometimes at the end of a unit, most often at the end of the semester or year. The scores have been collected in PowerSchool for several years. The value of this practice has been debated since the beginning. Along with this collection of information, the elementary schools developed a report card that included all Outcomes for each subject area and utilized a "9" which indicated "Work In Progress" for most of the outcomes until the final report. Rome Corners added a reporting system that gave Outcomes a "P" - Progressing, "B" - Beginning, "N" - Not Yet as indicators until that final outcome score. Middle School and High School always maintained letter grades for their report cards and submitted outcome scores into PowerSchool for district data purposes. Both Middle School and High School have long said that parents do not ask about outcome scores and value letter grades more.

Common assessments were developed in the beginning of the Outcome Based Decision Making process but were designed to be "Outcome" assessments. In other words, they were summative, end of unit measures only. Over time, the assessments were viewed as examples of potential assessments as opposed to common assessments that were to be used as the final analysis of learning. Discussions over the past two years indicate subjective use of the 1-5 scale, leading data teams to discount the validity of the local curriculum data.

Why It Matters

According to Accountability for Student Achievement in the Oregon School District - Board of Education Position Paper (2003), competency is the core of our 4 C's Model around which we define "success" and has the greatest ability for us to control. They also state that as a district, "we believe that a standards based curriculum aligned with mandated state curricular standards, is more appropriately suited to our continuous improvement model than an accountability model focused primarily on letter grades and test scores." The school board directive though continued by stating that the "fundamental expectation [is] that our professional staff will dedicate their efforts to enable all of our students to reach their fullest potential."

Oregon School Board - Visioning for the Future paper (2007) is the second paper authored by the Oregon School Board, states that "...our ultimate accountability goal is to measure whether students who leave Oregon High School with a diploma have achieved their educational goals and have been prepared in that context for their post-high school

journey." They indicate that they have "serious questions [about] whether our grading system on the whole accurately measures content mastery."

The Outcome Based Model was an attempt to determine mastery of curricula based on common assessments of final performance. The system eroded over time, in part, because many faculty members did not believe that one assessment could adequately measure mastery. Even those who believed in the system, have suggested, it lacked the communicative element needed to measure success throughout the process. This led to attempts to provide another form of information which turned into parent confusion (e.g. 9's say nothing prompting a need for multiple comments. "P", "B", and "N" say something but then are confusing when it gets converted into a 1-5). And the issue of letter grades is as it has always been. There is no K-12 consistency with what constitutes an "A", "B", "C", "D", or "F". So some students want to sign up for the "easy" teacher while others lose points for assignments that come in a day late. This situation has plagued true learning for long enough and it is confusing to students, faculty, parents, and policy makers. Even when curriculum is apparently identical, it is possible for one teacher to break up assignments and assessments into smaller units while another teacher teaches all elements and assesses everything at the end. The letter grades that come from these two experiences are vastly different where one student was given limited opportunities to show mastery while another student was given multiple opportunities.

Multiple research projects are entering the arena now with the onset of Response to Intervention and the recommendation from the Commission on Excellence in Special Education that early intervention and assessment practices need to be closely linked to instruction and "response to intervention" should be the cornerstone for determination of a learning disability. With these criteria, there is an expectation that schools implement high-quality; scientifically validated instructional practices based on learner needs, monitor student progress, and adjust instruction based on student response. (Bender, W.N., Shores, C. 2007).

According to Doug Reeves (2008), "if you wanted to make just one change that would immediately reduce student failure rates, then the most effective place to start would be to challenge prevailing grading practices." He goes on to state, "when grading policies improve, discipline and morale almost always follow."

Team Member Responsibilities

- Attend scheduled meetings prepared to participate in discussions and decisions
- Review all literature prior to each meeting
- Gather additional relevant research on topics
- Be open-minded and willing to listen to opposing perspectives
- Respect the views of all participants
- Maintain a K-12 view of the issues
- The Committee will be available for group presentation to the Vision Steering Committee/School Board upon completion of the project

Reporting and Work Product

By June 2009, this committee will summarize and share a written report documenting findings of research, discussions, and recommendations for the following:

A summation of best practice regarding student grading? Include the purpose of grading for students, parents, school districts, institutes of higher education and the world of work
Recommendations for district Tier One indicators for competency
Summary recommendations on advisory changes to School Board Policy 411 - Graduation, Grades, and Standing, 412 - Early Graduation, 413 - High School Equivalency Diploma, and 414 - Definition of Credit

Anticipated Meetings

To begin its work, the committee will meet before the end of September to set future dates. A determination about number of meetings will occur at that time with no fewer than two meetings per month face to face with potential additional assignments via Moodle for members to react to. Each meeting will be no longer than two hours beginning and ending on time. The most convenient time for all members will be determined at the September meeting.

Composition of the Team

Team membership will consist of 6-9 teachers, 6 administrators, and 2 School Board Members. Teachers will be chosen based on a mix of instructional levels and recommendations from administrators.

Jane Peschel & Leslie Bergstrom Co-Facilitators

Michelle Baltes

Dawna Wright

Jan Bonsett-Veal

Lynda Farrar

Jon Fishwild

Laura Hawley

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