

**EXPLORING
THE ROLE OF REPORT
CARD GRADES IN
STANDARDS-DRIVEN
SCHOOLS**

**WERA CONFERENCE
SEATAC, MARCH 2007**

REPORT CARD GRADE:

**A LETTER OR NUMBER
THAT SUMMARIZES A
STUDENT'S ACHIEVEMENT
AT A POINT IN TIME**

**SOCIETY'S CONVENTIONAL
ASSESSMENT WISDOM:**

- **ACCOUNTABILITY MAXIMIZES
SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS**
 - STUDENTS GET QUARTERLY GRADES
 - TEACHERS GET ANNUAL TEST SCORES
 - **BOTH GRADES AND SCORES HAD
BETTER BE HIGH...**
- HOW SOCIETY HOPES TO DRIVE
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT...**

**LET'S COMPARE THIS
ASSESSMENT
PERSPECTIVE WITH
REALITY...**

**REMEMBER, SOCIETY CHANGED
THE MISSION OF SCHOOLS:**

FROM: LEAVE LOTS BEHIND

TO: LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND

**ACCOUNTABILITY? ASSURE THE
LEARNING; NOT JUST THE
OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN...**

NEW MISSION:

- **ALL STUDENTS ARE TO MEET
ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS**
- **CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS**
- **HELP ALL STUDENTS
BECOME LIFELONG
LEARNERS**

**IN FACT,
WE ASSESS TO:**

- **INFORM A WIDE VARIETY OF INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS, &**
- **ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO TRY TO LEARN**

**EXPLORING GRADING
PURPOSE #1 :
EXACTLY WHAT IS THE
ROLE OF GRADES IN
INFORMING
INSTRUCTIONAL
DECISIONS?**

**IN ANY ASSESSMENT
CONTEXT, SUCCESS
HINGES ON KNOWING:**

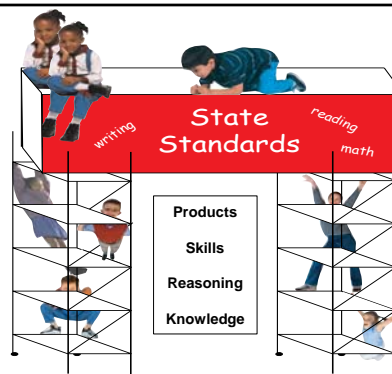
- **What decisions?**
- **Who's making them?**
- **What information will be helpful to them?**

**ASSESS TO MEET
WHOSE INFO NEEDS?**

- **Classroom Level Users**
- **Program Level Users**
- **Institutional/Policy Users**

CLASSROOM USER NEEDS:

- **DECISION?**
- **WHO?**
- **HELPFUL INFO?**
- **WHAT COMES NEXT IN THE LEARNING?**
- **STUDENT, TEACHER, & PARENTS**
- **CONTINUOUS INFO ON EACH STUDENT'S PROGRESS TOWARD EACH STANDARD**



**CONSIDER TABLE 1, LEVEL 1,
“CLASSROOM USERS”:
STUDENTS, TEACHERS, &
PARENTS**

**PLEASE REVIEW KEY
QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED
FOR EACH. WHICH OF THE INFO
NEEDS SPECIFIED IN COLUMN 2
ARE MET BY REPORT CARD
GRADES?**

PROGRAM INFO NEEDS:

- **DECISION?** • **STANDARDS MASTERED?
PROGRAMS WORKING?**
- **WHO?** • **TEACHERS (IN TEAMS),
PRINCIPAL, CURRIC DIR**
- **HELPFUL
INFO?** • **PERIODIC BUT FREQUENT
EVIDENCE AGGREGATED
OVER STUDENTS
INDICATING STANDARDS
MASTERED OR NOT**

**CONSIDER TABLE 1, LEVEL 2,
“PROGRAM USERS”:
TEACHER TEAMS,
PRINCIPALS, & CURRIC DIR:**

**PLEASE REVIEW KEY
QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED
BY/FOR EACH. WHICH OF THE
INFO NEEDS SPECIFIED IN
COLUMN 2 ARE MET BY REPORT
CARD GRADES?**

INSTITUTIONAL INFO NEEDS:

- **DECISION?** • **ARE ENOUGH
STUDENTS MEETING
STANDARDS?**
- **WHO?** • **SCHOOL, DISTRICT, &
COMMUNITY LEADERS**
- **HELPFUL
INFO?** • **ANNUAL SCORES
AGGREGATED OVER
STUDENTS REFLECTING
% MEETING STANDARDS**

**CONSIDER TABLE 1, LEVEL 3,
“INSTITUTIONAL USERS”:
SCHOOL, DISTRICT &
COMMUNITY LEADERS:**

**PLEASE REVIEW KEY
QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED
FOR EACH. WHICH OF THE INFO
NEEDS SPECIFIED IN COLUMN 2
ARE MET BY REPORT CARD
GRADES?**

**CONCLUSION:
HOW USEFUL ARE REPORT
CARD GRADES IN INFORMING
THE INSTRUCTIONAL
DECISIONS THAT SUPPORT
LEARNING?**

**VISUALIZE YOURSELF
DRIVING A CAR
FORWARD...**

**NOW IMAGINE THAT THE
FRONT AND SIDE
WINDOWS ARE PAINTED
BLACK—YOU CAN ONLY
SEE BACKWARD...**

**TRADITIONALLY,
REPORT CARD
GRADES HAVE ONLY
LOOKED BACK...**

**EXPLORING GRADING
PURPOSE #2:
WHAT IS THE ROLE OF
GRADES IN
ENCOURAGING
STUDENTS TO TRY TO
LEARN?**

**GRADING/MOTIVATION
LEGACY:**

**Grades reward and punish,
driving some onward while
others give up in
hopelessness...**

RESULT? WINNERS/LOSERS

**“Failure or success
were not episodes, they
were trajectories—
tendencies, directions,
pathways.”**

Rosabeth Moss Kanter

**“As performance
starts to run on a
positive or a negative
path, the momentum
can be hard to stop.”**

Kanter

**SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS
(ON WINNING STREAKS
GETTING HIGH GRADES)**

- GROWING CONFIDENCE
- OPTIMISM RULES: EXPECT A POSITIVE RESULT...ALWAYS
- STRONG DESIRE
- HIGH LEVEL OF EFFORT
- RISK TRYING—STRETCH
“I can get this.”

**UNSUCCESSFUL STUDENTS
(ON LOSING STREAKS
GETTING FAILING GRADES):**

- INTENSE VULNERABILITY... NEVER SAFE
- PESSIMISM RULES: EXPECT TO FAIL
- FEELING A SENSE OF FUTILITY, HOPELESSNESS, FATALISM
- WANING EFFORT W/ SELF-CRITICISM
- DENIAL AND COVER UP
- DEFENSIVENESS: TRYING IS TOO RISKY

**ONCE A “LOSER,” IT’S
VERY HARD TO RECOVER:**

- MISSED PRERQUISITES FOR LATER SUCCESS
- EVERYTHING COUNTS (IS GRADED)--NEVER TIME TO PRACTICE AND IMPROVE

SO DO GRADES:

- MOTIVATE LEARNING?
- ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO TRY?
- ALL STUDENTS OR JUST SOME?

**HISTORICALLY, GRADES
HAVE ONLY ENCOURAGED
SOME STUDENTS TO TRY TO
LEARN—THEY HAVE
DISCOURAGED AS MANY,
CAUSING THEM TO GIVE UP
IN HOPELESSNESS**

**REMEMBER, SOCIETY CHANGED
THE MISSION OF SCHOOLS:
FROM: LEAVE LOTS BEHIND
TO: LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND
ACCOUNTABILITY? LEARNING**

NEW MISSION:

- ALL STUDENTS ARE TO MEET ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS
- CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS
- HELP ALL STUDENTS BECOME LIFELONG LEARNERS

IF ALL STUDENTS ARE TO MEET STANDARDS,

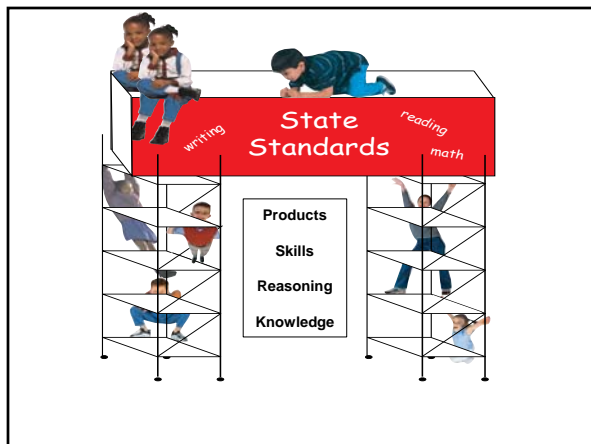
- ALL STUDENTS MUST BELIEVE THEY CAN, SO THEY WILL TRY
- FAILURE & HOPELESSNESS NO LONGER FIT OUR ASSIGNED MISSION

THE DYNAMICS OF WINNING?

- REGULAR SUCCESS AT LEARNING
- INFREQUENT FAILURE TO LEARN

KEYS TO SUCCESS?

- LOCATE STUDENT ON THE SCAFFOLDING
- ESTABLISH THE VALUE OF THE NEXT TARGET
- MAKE IT APPEAR REACHABLE (PROMOTE HOPE)
- SHOW STUDENTS THEMSELVES SUCCEEDING



GUIDING PRINCIPLES!

We must assess accurately & communicate effectively in order to make sure students react productively to the assessment results.

**THE STUDENT'S
EMOTIONAL REACTION
TO RESULTS WILL
DETERMINE WHAT
THAT STUDENT DOES
IN RESPONSE**

**PRODUCTIVE RESPONSE TO
ASSESSMENT RESULTS:**

- I UNDERSTAND THE RESULTS
- I KNOW WHAT TO DO NEXT
- I'M OK
- I CHOOSE TO KEEP TRYING

**THE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE
HOPELESS RESPONSE:**

- I DON'T UNDERSTAND
- I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TO DO
- I'M NO GOOD AT THIS, ANYWAY
- I GIVE UP

**WHILE THE LEARNING IS
UNDERWAY, MINIMIZE THE
JUDGEMENTS THAT ACCOMPANY
THE ASSIGNMENT OF GRADES—
USE DESCRIPTIVE FEEDBACK TO
ENCOURAGE...**

**ASSESSMENT AND
GRADING'S
TRADITIONAL
EMOTIONAL ROLE?
PERPETUATE A
CONSTANT STATE OF
FEAR...**

Mistaken Beliefs

- If I judge you to have failed (or threaten to do so), it will cause you to try harder.
- To maximize learning, maximize anxiety.
ONLY IF I FEEL IN CONTROL OF THE SUCCESS CONTINGENCIES

KEEP PERSPECTIVE

- **GRADES DON'T INFORM VERY MANY FORWARD-LOOKING INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS**
- **GRADES CAN GIVE RISE TO AS MUCH HOPELESSNESS AS HOPE...**

SO WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

- **HELP SOCIETY RECOGNIZE THE PROFOUND LIMITATIONS OF GRADES**
- **KEEP PERSPECTIVE OURSELVES**
- **USE FEEDBACK IN WAYS THAT HELP STUDENTS MEET ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS**
- **USE THE LEARNING SUCCESS THAT RESULTS TO MOTIVATE STUDENTS**

SO, IF STUDENTS ARE ASKING:

- **CAN I GET A GOOD GRADE OR AM I JUST TOO STUPID?**
- **IS THE GRADE WORTH THE ENERGY I HAVE TO EXPEND TO ATTAIN IT?**
- **IS TRYING WORTH THE RISK THAT I MIGHT FAIL...IN PUBLIC...AGAIN?**

PROMOTE THIS DYNAMIC:

- **I AM SUCCEEDING NOW, SO I CAN SUCCEED IN THE FUTURE**
- **IT IS WORTH THE ENERGY**
- **I AM WILLING TO RISK FAILURE WE CAN'T GET THERE WITH THREAT AND INTIMIDATION—WE MUST CONVINCE STUDENTS THAT PERSISTENCE YIELDS LEARNING SUCCESS**

ACCOMPLISH THIS WITH

- **QUALITY STANDARDS**
 - **DECONSTRUCTED INTO SCAFFOLDING**
 - **TRANSFORMED INTO STUDENT-FRIENDLY VERSIONS**
- **ACCURATE CLASSROOM ASSESSMENTS**
- **DESCRIPTIVE FEEDBACK**
- **STUDENT-INVOLVED ASSESSMENT, RECORD KEEPING & COMMUNICATON**

IN SUMMARY ABOUT GRADING:

- **INSTRUCTION BEGINS WITH CLEAR AND APPROPRIATE STANDARDS**
- **OFFER TIME TO LEARN BEFORE GRADING**
- **GRADES REFLECT EXTENT OF STUDENT MASTERY OF PRE-SET STANDARDS**
- **ACCOMPANY SUMMARY GRADES ON THE REPORT CARDS WITH LISTS OF STANDARDS MASTERED—ALWAYS!**

**ONLY THEN CAN WE KNOW
WHAT COMES NEXT IN THE
LEARNING...**

**ONLY THEN CAN WE
LET SUCCESS BECOME
ITS OWN REWARD...**