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Anchorage School District

NEW ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING SYSTEM IS SHIFT IN PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE

Standards-based assessment and reporting allows ASD educators to focus on the instructional process, how instruction occurs and how it can be affirmed for the student, according to **Enid Silverstein**, executive director of the ASD Curriculum and Instructional Support Department.

"Students are participants and collaborators with their own learning progress," said Silverstein.

Mardell Kiesel, ASD Language Arts curriculum coordinator, said "The SBAR pilot's assessing and reporting system guides instruction for the teacher, motivates the student, and better informs the parent."

Standards-based assessment and reporting argues for formative assessment rather than the traditional summative assessment, where a unit is presented, students turn in assignments and take tests, their scores are placed on a bell-curve and each student is given a letter grade based on a percentage figure.

"Formative assessment is continuous," Kiesel said. "On-going or 'dollops' of feedback encourage the learner; rubrics provide the goals, and instruction targets specific skills that are necessary for increased achievement."

According to **Dr. Robert Marzano**, a renowned education expert who has consulted with the ASD in developing its new assessment and reporting system, "classroom assessment is inherently formative."

Averaging assessment scores makes sense from a summative perspective, Marzano notes, but the "driving force behind averaging as a way of estimating an individual's true score" assumes that the score for a student stays constant from assessment to assessment.

"That's not how students learn," Silverstein said. She noted that formative assessment is also more culturally responsive. Individual variances in learning can and do change over time and are affected by a family's culture, life-events, and socio-economic status.

Keeping the standards constant ensures the same curriculum and objectives are being taught to every child, no matter where he or she lives or attends school. The state and district standards, also known as Grade Level Expectations, objectively define what a child is supposed to be learning.

“There’s a common understanding among the parents, students and teachers, that transforms communications with families,” Silverstein said. “The whole process becomes much less subjective, which actually reduces stress on the teacher.”

The SBAR pilot leaders, **Ruth Mount, Vickie Blakeney, Trish Herminghaus** and Kiesel, have worked closely with the ASD Assessment and Evaluation Department to create a secure application for pilot teachers that provides a technology interface for recording assessments. A standards-based report is generated quarterly and represents benchmarking aligned with the state standards.



Fast Facts



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ASD STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING TIMELINE

- The Anchorage School District has been developing its standards-based assessment and reporting system since 2004 when an investigative committee was formed. The committee sought out models for the new system and also examined the district's current grading system and how it aligned with the state and district's Grade Level Expectations (GLEs).
- ASD Curriculum and Instructional Support Department Executive Director Enid Silverstein said the committee found discrepancies between how student performance was being reported in relation to the GLEs and looked for methods to more accurately portray student achievement of the standards. To facilitate a transition to a new reporting system, the committee started working on technology-based assessment tools in 2005.
- The next year, **Dr. Robert Marzano**, a leading educational expert whose work has focused on turning research and theory into instructional tools, began consulting with the district. He met with teacher teams in language arts, math, science, social studies, physical education and social and emotional learning to deconstruct the GLEs, organize them under content-area measurement topics and develop corresponding assessment rubrics.
- The district's pilot project was initiated in 2007-08 with about 75 teachers and expanded this school year to include 200 teachers. The subjects of math, language arts, science and social-emotional learning are being piloted. Silverstein said the objective of the pilot program is to gather feedback from practitioners, parents and administrators to improve the reporting process through face-to-face and online collaboration.
- Dr. Marzano has continued to work with teacher teams in social studies, music, physical education and world languages this school year.
- Comprehensive training and communication plans designed to raise the level of understanding about standard-based reporting among elementary division staff have been offered twice a year since the 2006-07 school year.



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Standards-based Assessment and Reporting: Frequently Asked Questions

People are familiar with letter grades- the A,B,C,D, and F. Those grades measure how well students do in comparison with their classmates. The key distinction in Standard-Based Assessment and Reporting is that it measures how well an individual student is performing according to the expectations for his or her grade level, not the work of the other students. There is no “grading on a curve” with SBAR.

1. What is standards-based assessment and reporting?

Standards-based assessment and reporting more accurately measures how a student is progressing toward meeting state and district education standards. The measurements of the individual child are then reported to parents.

In other words, the standards tell teachers, parents and students what the students are supposed to be learning, and standards-based assessment and reporting tracks how well the student is achieving those skills.

Standards-based assessment is used to help every student understand where he or she is in relation to meeting standards so they can improve. It is based on the belief that every child can learn given the right support and opportunity.

2. What is the purpose of the standards-based report?

The purpose of the standards-based report is to provide more detailed feedback to parents about their children’s progress. The report allows parents and students to understand more clearly what is expected of students and how to help them be successful academically, socially and emotionally.

3. Why is this happening now?

About 200 teachers in the Anchorage School District are participating in the 2008-2009 pilot program to “try on” the new reporting system. This has been a grass-roots effort in the ASD, with teachers providing the momentum. According to the Six-Year Plan this is the way the ASD will eventually be measuring student success in grades K-8.

4. Why do we need to change?

The No Child Left Behind Act and Alaska Standards-Based Assessments have set targets for learning that all students must achieve. The new reporting system is designed to provide parents, teachers and students with more feedback regarding instruction and student achievement in relation to those standards.

5. What will the new report card look like?

The grading marks will no longer be A, B, C, D or F. The new report will use a 4-0 system to indicate proficiency levels on grade level expectations. The number 4 is advanced, 3 is proficient, 2 is making progress towards proficiency, 1 is making progress only with help, 0 is defined as even with help, no understanding or skill is demonstrated.

6. What will be included in each subject area as a standard?

Each subject has a fairly specific list of criteria. The same criteria are modified as students go from one grade level to the next, because more is expected of them. When specific problems arise, the standards will show parents, students and teachers just where a student may need extra help.

7. What does a standards-based classroom look like?

Communication: Clear expectations are communicated to the teachers, students, and parents.

Clarity: Grades are meaningful for students and parents. Academic achievement is in relation to academic expectations. Assessment comes from a variety of measures over time.

Consistency: Grading practices are consistent within the school.

Congruence: Grades are aligned districtwide with curriculum and assessment. Standards and curriculum alignment are promoted vertically and horizontally.

8. How will teachers find the time to assess all content areas with rubrics?

Assessment and instruction are more alike than different. Multiple assessments occur before, during and after instruction and each provides feedback. The technology interface provided for SBAR will actually lessen time spent on clerical tasks and allow for more focused attention to the needs of individual students.



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MAKING THE SWITCH

Getting Started With Standards-Based Assessment

By Lynne Jessup Michael

The students' response was amazing. What they liked best about the system was that a try was worth something, since the only way to get a "0" was to make no effort at all.

Once they realized this, students began completing all their assignments. The collaboration in small groups improved, and because they shared the same learning challenge, the problem of having one student in the group who knows all the answers and dominates the lesson was eliminated.

In the process of making sure my assessments are standards-based, I have seen that assessment can be a tool for teaching and learning rather than a method to separate students and judge them. It is a kinder, gentler way to teach and gives students a great deal of control over their learning.

Lynne Jessup Michael is Chair of the English Department at Rota High School in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Rethinking Report Cards

By Kate Steinheimer, GreatSchools.net

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Diane Mead, a teacher on special assignment in the Beverly Hills Unified School District in California believes students are the biggest winners when standards-based report cards are used. These report cards give students specific information about how they're doing and pinpoint where they need to improve.

This approach can carry over to classroom assignments, too, as the report card influences the way teachers assess student learning throughout the year. In the first two years of using a standards-based report card in Beverly Hills, teachers worked together to describe clearly what student work that meets the standards looks like.

Teachers share these expectations with students, often posting them on the classroom wall. Now when students get an assignment they know exactly what they have to do to be proficient or advanced. That's a big change from the way assignments used to be given and graded.

"If you get a 90 percent, it doesn't tell you much about where to go from there," said Mead.

According to Hoover Liddell, special assistant to the superintendent in the San Francisco Unified School District in California who leads a standards-based report card pilot project in San Francisco, the new report card is part of an effort to close the gap in achievement among different groups of students.

Because concrete skills and knowledge are listed on the report card, it is one way to help monitor whether all students are being exposed to the same curriculum and learning the skills they should learn in each grade. The new report cards also make the standards very clear to parents, noted Liddell.

"Parents should know exactly what their students should be able to do," he said.

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