

Student Achievement, Grading, Assessment, and Second-Chance Learning

As an educational institution, Carroll County Public Schools (CCPS) places a high value on student learning and achievement. Grades are the primary method of communicating measures of student achievement. Board Policy IKAB: Grading, Homework, and Communicating Student Achievement states that “interim and report card grades shall be as pure a measure as possible of student achievement in mastering content standards and course outcomes.”

To ensure that grades reflect a measure of student learning of the content standards and course outcomes, CCPS teachers do not consider attendance, effort, and other student compliance behaviors when calculating grades. While feedback to students and parents on these behaviors is important, research on grading suggests that this feedback should be kept separate from the grades assigned for academic achievement (Marzano, 2000). As such, CCPS teachers use interim and report card comments, written and verbal communications with parents, and their school’s discipline procedures to address student behaviors.

Any teacher will tell you that each student is unique, and individual students learn at different rates and in different ways. Teachers are trained to deal with these differences by studying and applying, among many theories, the principles of learning styles, mastery learning (Bloom, 1971), multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993), differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 1995), the six facets of understanding (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998), and Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 1998). Unfortunately, traditional practices in assessment and grading do not recognize or honor student differences. As Starratt (2005) points out, these assessment and grading practices force learning into a uniform time-frame for all learners to learn a specific skill or understanding. “Learning is equated with speed; how fast can one accumulate sufficient information within the allotted class time in order to organize that information into right answers to the test questions within the limited time-frame of the test itself” (p. 402). Wormeli (2011, p.23) sums it up: “The goal is that *all* students learn the content, not just the ones who can learn on the uniform time line. Curriculum goals don’t require that every individual reach the same level of proficiency on the same day, only that every student achieves the goal.”

A far more effective instructional model that honors student learning differences includes the use of formative assignments, summative assignments, and second-chance learning opportunities. In this model, formative assignments (designed to provide practice and guide next-step instruction) are given after initial instruction. Teachers use those results to determine what students have learned well to that point and what they need to learn better. Following a cycle of instruction, formative assignments, interventions, and extensions, a summative assignment is administered (designed to evaluate student learning). According to Board Policy IKAB, when calculating student grades, more weight shall be given to summative assignments than to formative assignments. This practice aligns to CCPS philosophy that grades measure student achievement and summative assignments evaluate student learning.

As educators acknowledge differences in learning, it is logical and appropriate that they provide varied opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning. As a result, teachers can and should vary their assessments in many ways, including the number of opportunities, time available, and methods (O'Connor, 2009). Guskey (2003) writes:

To become an integral part of the instructional process, assessments cannot be a one-shot, do-or-die experience for students. Instead, assessments must be part of an ongoing effort to help students learn. And if teachers follow assessments with helpful corrective instruction, then students should have a second chance to demonstrate their new level of competence and understanding. This second chance helps to determine the effectiveness of the corrective instruction and offers students another opportunity to experience success in learning. (p. 10)

Board Policy IKAB encourages CCPS teachers to provide second-chance learning opportunities for all students. Second-chance learning is an instructional strategy designed to advance student learning. Second-chance learning may include reteaching, extra practice, tutoring, and the opportunity to demonstrate learning on another assessment. Research is clear that, in order to be effective, second-chance learning cannot consist solely of a retest. Cognitive gains result from a combination of remediation and retesting, not retesting alone (Davis & Sorrell, 1995). CCPS believes that learning the essential content is the best preparation students can have for the world beyond school.

Second-chance learning does not mean an endless set of opportunities for students (O'Connor, 2009). The demands of second-chance learning must be shared by the teacher and the student; that is, teachers provide the opportunity, and students take on the responsibility of completing some correctives and demonstrating their learning. To help manage second-chance learning opportunities, the following tips are provided for teacher consideration. These tips have been compiled from the work of O'Connor (2009) and Wormeli (2011), as well as from CCPS teachers who provide second-chance learning opportunities.

- Second-chance learning is permitted at teacher discretion and is done at a time convenient for the teacher. Reasonable time frames should be set. Teachers should define their approach to second-chance learning in their syllabus.
- Require students to develop a plan of relearning and to provide evidence that they have completed some correctives before they are allowed a reassessment opportunity.
- Unless an assessment is complex and interwoven, allow students to redo just the portions on which they performed poorly, not the entire assessment.
- Give alternative versions of the assessment if you think students will simply memorize correct answers.
- Push hard for students to redo anything associated with the most important curriculum standards and less so with work associated with less important standards.
- Allow students who get Cs and Bs to redo work just as much as students who earn Ds and Fs.
- Replace the previous grade or mark with the most recent one; don't average the two attempts.
- Use FLEX, SET, and academic development periods for second-chance learning.

References

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