

Assess, Evaluate and Communicate Student Learning

Assessment and evaluation

Assessment is the gathering of information about what students know and can do in order to make decisions that will improve teaching and learning. Assessment and evaluation are necessary and important elements of the instructional cycle.

Evaluation is a judgement regarding the quality, value or worth of a response, product or performance, based on established criteria and curriculum standards. Evaluation gives students a clear indication of how well they are performing based on the learner outcomes of the curriculum. The payoff of effective evaluation is that students learn how they can improve their performance. Assessment and evaluation always go together.²²

With information from assessment and evaluation, teachers can make decisions about *what* to focus on in the curriculum and *when* to focus on it. Assessment identifies who needs extra support, who needs greater challenge, who needs extra practise and who is ready to move on. The primary goal of assessment is to provide ongoing feedback to teachers, students and parents, in order to enhance teaching and learning.

Principles of assessment

Assessing, evaluating and communicating student achievement and growth are integral parts of schooling. They should be positive experiences for students, should support continuous learning and growth, and should be congruent with the following principles.²³

- Assessment, evaluation and communication of student growth are based on the curriculum and are in line with the school's philosophy and programming principles.
- Information about methods of assessment and results of evaluation is available to students, parents and the community.
- Student growth is assessed, evaluated and communicated for all outcomes.
- Evaluation and communication of student growth are ongoing and are used to plan effective programming.
- Student growth is demonstrated through a variety of performances evaluated by teachers.
- Student growth is enhanced when students participate in the assessment, evaluation and communication processes.
- Student growth is enhanced when students view assessment, evaluation and communication positively.
- Methods of communicating student growth vary depending on audience and purpose.

- Methods of assessment and evaluation of student growth are developmentally appropriate and vary depending on student learning patterns.

These principles represent a shared commitment to quality assessment among the members of the Alberta Assessment Consortium.

Assessment strategies

There are many potential sources of information about student growth and achievement within the health and life skills program. Different assessment strategies can provide different kinds of information about student achievement. The most accurate profile of student growth is based on the findings gathered from assessing student performance in a variety of ways. The key is to match the specific learner outcomes with appropriate assessment tasks. Teachers need to use a wide range of assessment strategies and tools to get a balanced view of student achievement.

Observation

Observing students as they solve problems, model skills to others, think aloud during a sequence of activities or interact with peers in different learning situations provides insight into student learning and growth. The teacher finds out under what conditions success is most likely, what individual students do when they encounter difficulty, how interaction with others affects their learning and concentration, and what students need to learn next. Observations may be informal or highly structured, and incidental or scheduled over different periods of time in different learning contexts.

Use the following tips to gather assessment information through observation.

- Determine specific outcomes to observe and assess.
- Decide what to look for. Write down criteria or evidence that indicates the student is demonstrating the outcome.
- Ensure students know and understand what the criteria are.
- Target your observation by selecting four to five students per class and one or two specific outcomes to observe.
- Develop a data gathering system, such as a clipboard for anecdotal notes, a checklist or rubric, or a video or audio recorder.
- Collect observations over a number of classes during a reporting period and look for patterns of performance.
- Date all observations.
- Share observations with students, both individually and in a group. Make the observations specific and describe how this demonstrates or promotes thinking and learning. For example; “Eric, you contributed several ideas to your group’s *Top Ten* list. You really helped your group finish their task within the time limit.”
- Use the information gathered from observation to enhance or modify future instruction.

Self-reflection and self-assessment

Many students are unsure how they are performing in different academic areas. They often lack the language to reflect on and communicate information in a clear and concise manner. These students need frameworks that outline goals and encourage self-reflection and self-assessment. These frameworks include sentence starters and rating scales, such as the following samples.

What I believe about volunteering	
Volunteerism means _____	_____
The personal skills I have that would make me a good volunteer are: _____	_____
Three volunteer opportunities in my community that I'd like to try are:	_____
These would be a good match for my skills and interests because: _____	_____
Providing service to others in the community is important because: _____	_____

(See *Student activity master 42: What I believe about volunteering* on page 43 of Appendix C.)

Self-assessment			
How am I working on my own?			
<i>Colour the appropriate star as the teacher reads each question.</i>			
Today—			
	Yes	Sometimes	No
1. I listened carefully.	☆	☆	☆
2. I followed directions.	☆	☆	☆
3. I asked myself, "What do I need to do?"	☆	☆	☆
4. I got started right away.	☆	☆	☆
5. I tried my best.	☆	☆	☆
6. I worked on each task until it was finished.	☆	☆	☆
7. I checked over my finished work.	☆	☆	☆
8. I told myself, "Good job."	☆	☆	☆

Adapted from Curriculum Support Branch, Alberta Education, *Social Studies, Grades 1-3: Teacher Resource Manual* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education, 1989), p. 102.

(See *Student activity master 21: Self-assessment: How am I working on my own?* on page 22 of Appendix C.)

Assessing their own thinking and learning provides students with valuable training in self-monitoring. They can record their learning by completing sentence stems such as the following.

- This piece of work demonstrates that I can ...
- I can improve my work by ...
- After reviewing this assessment, I would like to set a new goal to ...
- I would like to do this because ...

Response journals, learning logs, end-of-the-class drawings and partner talk are other ways for students to reflect on their learning in the health and life skills classroom.

Self-assessments have the most impact on learning when teachers follow through on student reflections by using this data to help individual students set goals, or to compare and discuss teacher observations.

This kind of authentic student–teacher interaction during the assessment process encourages students to honestly and thoughtfully evaluate their own work and take ownership of their own learning.

Tools, such as response journals and learning logs, can become even more effective when accompanied by the use of probes or specific questions. In *Assessing Student Outcomes*, Marzano, Pickering and McTighe offer journal writing probes that help students reflect on their own learning.

- *Probe for reflecting on content*
Describe the extent to which you understand the information discussed in class. What are you confident about? What are you confused about? What do you find particularly interesting and thought provoking?
- *Probe for reflecting on information processing*
Describe how effective you were in gathering information for your project.
- *Probe for reflecting on communication*
Describe how effective you were in communicating your conclusions to your discussion group.
- *Probe for reflecting on collaboration and cooperation*
Describe how well you worked with your group throughout your project.

Students can assume more responsibility in the learning process by evaluating their own assignments or projects prior to teacher or peer evaluations. Students can also write their own progress report comments and summary-of-learning letters to teachers and parents.

The *Pause and Think* strategy is another way to help students self-reflect. This structured activity, adapted from *How to Develop and Use Performance Assessments in the Classroom*, has students pause and think about their work and what they learned. Students record their reflections in a response journal, share with a partner or discuss in a small group. During each short *Pause and Think* time, teachers direct students to use a specific prompt, such as the ones below.

Pause, think and share. Turn to a partner and describe what you learned.

Look for proof. Select and comment on a work sample that demonstrates an aspect of your learning.

Connect to criteria. Revisit the criteria or rubric and explain how your work is meeting the criteria.

Relate the learning. Connect current concepts to past learning or find examples of the concept in other contexts.²⁴

Rubrics, checklists or rating scales are also effective tools for self-reflection. Students highlight the descriptors they believe describe their product or performance. The teacher uses a different colour to indicate his or her assessment.

Assessments that directly involve students help them learn important skills that they will be able to use as lifelong learners. They learn to be reflective and responsive, to think about their own efforts, to be constructive in self-assessment and peer assessment, and to provide specific information that makes a difference.

By integrating self-reflection activities, time for goal setting and peer evaluations into routine classroom activities, assessment shifts from the teacher as judge and evaluator, to the teacher as coach and facilitator.

To increase student involvement in the assessment process:

- explain scoring criteria for performance-based tests prior to the tests
- show exemplars of what excellent work looks like whenever possible
- use language students understand
- develop rubrics collaboratively with students
- involve students in the learning conference
- develop self-monitoring and self-reflection tools for different tasks and assignments
- use goal setting
- use home response journals or weekly reports.

Checklists

To assess content-rich items, curriculum checklists are helpful. Attach a curriculum checklist to a student's assignment to highlight outcomes students successfully demonstrate. Checklists outline criteria for specific performance tasks or identify specific behaviours related to a skill or skill area. Generally, checklists have only two points—*yes* and *not yet*. There is a template for developing this kind of assessment tool in *Teacher planning tool 9: Checklist* on page 11 of Appendix A.

Sample checklist		
Grade 4		
LL-3: <i>The student will demonstrate effective decision making, focusing on careful information gathering.</i>		
Finding and using information		
_____ can:	Yes	Not yet
• recall information from past learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• identify why information is needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• select types of information needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• identify the scope of information gathering appropriate to the situation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• organize information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• assess the quality of information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• assess sufficiency of information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• select information that meets purposes and needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• evaluate process used to gather and assess information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• apply selected information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Rating scales

Teachers can use rating scales to record observations and students can use scales as self-assessment tools. Teaching students to use descriptive words, such as *always*, *usually*, *sometimes* and *never* helps them pinpoint specific strengths and needs. Rating scales also give students information for setting goals and improving performance. In a rating scale, the descriptive word is more important than the related number. The more precise and descriptive the words for each scale point, the more reliable the tool.

Effective rating scales use descriptors with clearly understood measures, such as frequency. Scales that rely on subjective descriptors of quality, such as *fair*, *good* or *excellent*, are less effective because the single adjective does not contain enough information on what criteria are indicated at each of these points on the scale. There is a template for developing this type of assessment tool in *Teacher planning tool 10: Rating scale* on page 12 of Appendix A.

Sample rating scale

Grade 2 R-6 *The student will develop strategies to show respect for others.*
Grade 3 R-8 *The student will develop skills to work cooperatively in a group.*
Grade 5 R-9 *The student will explore respectful communication strategies that foster team/group development.*

I encourage others:

	1 never	2 sometimes	3 usually	4 always
• by smiling	●	●	●	●
• by looking at them	●	●	●	●
• by sitting quietly	●	●	●	●
• by nodding	●	●	●	●
• by saying words like, "Good idea."	●	●	●	●
• by asking them questions	●	●	●	●
• by saying thank you.	●	●	●	●

Added value

Increase the assessment value of a checklist or rating scale by adding two or three additional steps that give students an opportunity to identify skills they would like to improve or the skill they feel is most important.

For example:

- put a star beside the skill you think is the most important for encouraging others
- circle the skill you would most like to improve
- underline the skill that is the most challenging for you.

Rubrics

A rubric is a chart of criteria, of “what counts,” arranged according to a measure of quality. The criteria describe what a successfully completed piece of work looks like. In essence, it is a scoring guide. While rubrics can be simple in appearance, they can provide concise information for both students and teacher. Depending on the contexts for which they are used, rubrics can be detailed and content-specific or generic and holistic, as illustrated in the examples below.

Sample content-specific rubric

Assignment: Cause and effect chart

Grade 6 Wellness

W-6.9: *The student will evaluate the impact of personal behaviour on the safety of self and others.*

4 Excellent	3 Proficient	2 Acceptable	1 Limited
provides detailed and interesting examples that illustrate understanding of the ways positive behaviours are part of risk management; makes the link between positive behaviours as a way of dealing with risks for self and others	provides detailed examples that illustrate understanding of the relationship between positive behaviours and the safety of self and others	provides basic examples of positive behaviours and shows how they can affect the safety of self and others	provides general examples of positive behaviours with little attempt to show how these can affect the safety of self and others

Sample holistic rubric

Role-play rubric

4 Excellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrates purposeful, detailed and insightful portrayal of the issue demonstrates gestures, facial expressions, body language and words that enhance the communication of the intention of the role-play totally engages audience's interest and attention audience gains new understanding of issue
3 Proficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrates an accurate portrayal of the issue demonstrates some gestures, facial expressions, body language and words that communicate the intention of the role-play engages audience's interest and attention audience's understanding of issue is reinforced
2 Acceptable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrates a basic portrayal of the issue beginning to demonstrate gestures, facial expressions, body language and words that match the intention of the role-play attempts to engage audience's interest audience receives basic outline of issue
1 Limited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> portrayal is inaccurate uses limited or no gestures, facial expressions or body language to communicate the intention of the role-play demonstrates limited attempts to communicate with audience audience's understanding of issue is sketchy or confused
Insufficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no score is earned because there is insufficient evidence of student performance based on the requirements of the assessment task.

Rubrics are a user-friendly way for teachers and students to identify characteristics of student work. They are particularly helpful in assessing skill development, such as communication skills or participation in group work. They provide clear directions and give students a framework for more thoughtful judgement of their own work. Also, by providing an explicit statement of what quality looks like, rubrics allow two or more evaluators to view the performance in a similar way, increasing rating reliability.

Developing and evaluating rubrics

To develop a rubric, consider the following.

- What are the specific health curriculum outcomes in the task?
- Do the students have some experience with this or a similar task?
- What does an excellent performance look like? What are the qualities that distinguish an excellent response from other levels?
- What do other responses along the performance quality continuum look like?
- Is each description qualitatively different from the others? Are there an equal number of descriptors at each level of quality? Are the differences clear and understandable to students and others?

Begin by developing criteria to describe the Acceptable level. Then use Bloom's taxonomy to identify differentiating criteria as you move up the scale. The criteria should not go beyond the original performance task, but reflect higher thinking skills that students could demonstrate within the parameters of the initial task.

When developing the scoring criteria and quality levels of a rubric, consider the following guidelines.²⁵

- Level 4 is the *Standard of excellence* level (or A, 80–100%). Descriptions should indicate that all aspects of work exceed grade level expectations and show exemplary performance or understanding. This is a “Wow!”
- Level 3 is the *Approaching standard of excellence* or *Proficient* level (or B, 65–79%). Descriptions should indicate some aspects of work that exceed grade level expectations and demonstrate solid performance or understanding. This is a “Yes!”
- Level 2 is the *Meets grade level expectations* or *Adequate* level (or C, 50–64%). This level should indicate minimal competencies acceptable to meet grade level expectations. Performance and understanding are emerging or developing but there are some errors and mastery is not thorough. This is a “On the right track, but ...”.
- Level 1 *Does not meet grade level standards*. This level indicates what is not adequate for grade level expectations and indicates that the student has serious errors, omissions or misconceptions. This is a “No, but ...”. The teacher needs to make decisions about appropriate intervention to help the student improve.

Teachers may evaluate rubrics by asking these questions.

- Is it clear? Is the language easily understood by students who will use it?
- Does it have an even number of levels of performance? (Four levels work well and prevents the tendency to mark in the middle.)
- Is it consistent in the number of descriptors across the levels of quality?
- Is it based on curriculum outcomes at grade level?
- Does it ensure success for students?
- Does it provide challenge for students?

Creating rubrics with students

Learning increases when students are actively involved in the assessment process. Students do better when they know the goal, see models and know how their performance compares to learner outcomes.

Learner outcomes are clarified when students assist in describing the criteria used to evaluate performance. Use brainstorming and discussion to help students analyze what *acceptable*, *proficient* and *excellent* look like. Use student-friendly language and encourage students to identify descriptors that are meaningful to them. For example, a Grade 4 class might describe levels of quality with phrases such as the following.

- Super!
- Going beyond
- Meets the mark
- Needs more work.

Use work samples to help students practise and analyze specific criteria for developing a critical elements list. They can also use samples to practise assigning performance levels and compare criteria from level to level.

For examples of rubrics for health and life skills curriculum outcomes, see the Alberta Assessment Consortium Web site at <http://www.aac.ab.ca>. See *Teacher planning tool 11: Rubric* on page 13 of Appendix A for a template for developing rubrics.

Portfolio work samples

Portfolios are collections of student work that provide a visual representation of students' learning. The samples of work in a portfolio record growth and achievement in one or more subjects over a period of time.²⁶ A portfolio may be a systematic collection of work across subject areas or may target a specific subject area, topic or learning goal. In divisions three and four, portfolios are often focused on career exploration and planning.

An effective portfolio:²⁷

- is a planned, organized collection of student work
- tells detailed stories about a variety of student outcomes that would otherwise be difficult to document
- includes self-reflections that describe the student as both a learner and an individual
- serves as a guide for future learning by illustrating a student's present level of achievement
- includes a selection of items that are representative of curriculum outcomes, and what the student knows and can do
- includes the criteria against which the student work was evaluated
- supports the assessment, evaluation and communication of student learning
- documents learning in a variety of ways—process, product, growth and achievement.

Work samples not only provide reliable information about student achievement of the curriculum, but also provide students with context for assessing their own work and setting meaningful goals for learning. Displaying concrete samples of student work and sharing assessments that illustrate grade level expectations of the curriculum are key to winning the confidence and support of parents.

An essential requirement of portfolios is that students include written reflections that explain why each sample was selected. As Kay Burke says in *How to Assess Authentic Learning*, “A portfolio without reflections is a notebook of stuff.” The power of the portfolio is derived from the descriptions, reactions and metacognitive reflections that help students achieve their goals. Conferencing with parents, peers and/or teachers helps synthesize learning and celebrate successes.²⁸ Some students become adept at writing descriptions and reflections of their work without any prompts. There are some students, however, who have difficulty deciding what to write. Statement stems can get them started. The following samples are adapted from Kay Burke's *How to Assess Authentic Learning*.²⁹

- This piece shows I really understand the content because ...
- This piece showcases my _____ intelligence because ...
- If I could show this piece to anyone—living or dead—I would show it to _____ because ...
- People who knew me last year would never believe this piece because ...
- This piece was my greatest challenge because ...
- My (parents, friend, teacher) liked this piece because ...
- One thing I learned about myself is ...

The accompanying information should indicate whether the product was the result of a specifically designed performance task or regular learning activity. The level of assistance is also relevant—did the student complete the work independently, with a partner, with

intermittent guidance from the teacher or at home with parent support? Dating the sample, providing a brief context and indicating whether the work is in draft or completed form is also essential.

One characteristic that sets portfolios apart from more traditional writing folders is that they contain a variety of works that reflects different forms and different ways of learning and knowing. Students should have more than worksheets or homework assignments in their portfolios. They should collect audiotapes, videotapes, photos, graphic organizers, first drafts, journals, artwork, computer discs and assignments that feature work from all the multiple intelligences.

Work samples from the health and life skills program can be part of an annual cross-curricular portfolio, a career planning portfolio or a stand-alone health portfolio. Portfolios can be discussed with parents at learning conferences, submitted to administrators for curriculum alignment checks or used to gather data for progress reports. Portfolios may be passed on to receiving teachers as students move through the grades.

For more ideas on using portfolios in the classroom, see *Instructional Strategies*, pages 76–80 of this guide.

Peer feedback

Providing feedback to peers is another way students can be meaningfully involved in the assessment process. In *Brain-based Learning with Class*, Politano and Paquin provide two frameworks students can use to give others constructive feedback. *Two Hurrahs and a Hint* and *Two Stars and a Wish* encourage students to identify two strengths in a performance or assignment and offer one piece of constructive criticism.³⁰

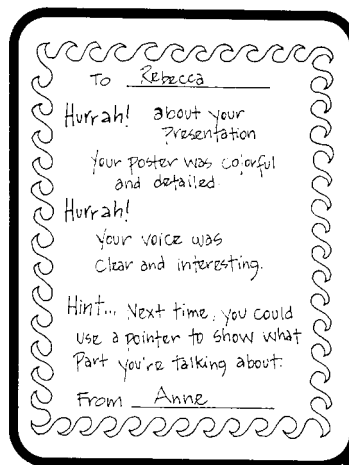


Figure 13.

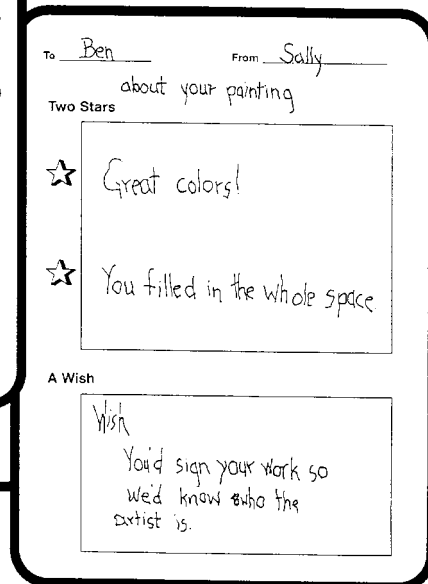


Figure 14.

Criteria for evaluating assessment³¹

Use the following chart to reflect on current assessment strategies, consider new tools for possible use and develop new tools.

Assessment task _____

Think about the following questions. To what extent does the task or strategy address each specific concern?

		not at all	partially	fully
1	Does it focus on high-priority specific outcomes?			
2	Does it establish a meaningful context based on issues or themes that are authentic?			
3	Does it require a range of thinking skills?			
4	Does it contain grade-appropriate activities that are sufficiently challenging?			
5	Does it provide for students of varying ability levels to complete tasks?			
6	Does it elicit responses that reveal levels of performance (rather than simply correct or incorrect answers)?			
7	Does it allow for ease of implementation in the classroom?			
8	Does it establish clear criteria for assessing student learning (related to specific learner outcomes)?			
9	Does it provide students with criteria and opportunities to reflect on, self-evaluate and improve their performance?			
10	Does it provide opportunity for student revision based on feedback?			
11	Does it provide for purposeful integration of subject areas?			
12	Does it allow for a variety of products or performances?			
13	Does it require a demonstration/application of learning outcome(s) in more than one way?			
14	Does it provide clear directions for students?			
15	Does it engage students so their interest and enthusiasm will be sustained?			
16	Does it merit the time and energy required to complete it?			

Calculating achievement marks

In *The Mindful School: How to Grade for Learning*, Ken O'Connor makes the following suggestions on how to produce meaningful achievement marks in any subject area.

- Begin marking plans with specific outcomes and then develop appropriate assessment strategies for each.
- Base the mark on individual achievements, not on group projects.
- Use the most recent results rather than early results or first attempts. Students need opportunities to learn and practise new skills before they are evaluated.
- Use summative evaluation in the achievement mark. Formative assessment should be used and reported in other ways.
- Relate grades directly to learning goals. Although skills and activities beyond the curriculum may be part of class learning, only specific curriculum outcomes should be reflected in the achievement mark.
- Use quality assessment strategies or tools that are based on criterion-referenced standards that have been thoroughly discussed with and understood by students.
- If necessary, do careful number crunching. O'Connor suggests using medians rather than averages, considering carefully how scores and learning goals should be weighted and looking for ways to include rubrics in the achievement mark. He also cautions against overweighting single assignments, especially by awarding zeros for incomplete assignments.

What to consider including in achievement marks³²

There are a number of researchers who suggest that participation and effort should not be factored into achievement marks. Marks need to directly reflect mastery of specific learner outcomes, which may or may not include elements related to effort, participation or attitude. Although hard work (*effort*), frequent responses to teacher questions and intense involvement in class activities (*participation*), and a positive, encouraging, friendly and happy demeanor (*attitude*), are all highly valued attributes, they should not be included directly in achievement marks because they are difficult to define and even more difficult to measure.

Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to reliably quantify these behaviours and skills, they can be observed and described. O'Connor suggests that they should be reported separately through comments on progress reports, checklists, rubrics and self-reflection in portfolios, and through informal discussions and more formal conferences.

Definitions of effort vary greatly from teacher to teacher and so are an unreliable source of data for an objective achievement mark. As well, participation is often a personality issue—some students are naturally more assertive while others are naturally quiet. This is often related to gender and/or ethnicity, and so teachers run the risk of these biases if

they include effort and participation in grades. Another problem is that factoring effort into the achievement mark may send the wrong message to students. In real life, just trying hard to do a good job is virtually never enough. If people don't deliver relevant, practical results, they will not be deemed successful, regardless of how hard they try.

To a considerable extent, personal and social characteristics, including a positive attitude, do contribute to achievement, but including a mark for attitude as part of a mark for a product may blur the assessment of the product and affect the validity and meaning of the achievement mark. Also, including a mark for effort or any of these characteristics can mean a double benefit for successful students and double jeopardy for less successful students.

Framework for achievement mark

A rubric outlining criteria for overall learning can provide a useful framework for assessing the level of student achievement in health and life skills. The following rubric is adapted from O'Connor.³³ It could be used alone to generate a term achievement mark or be used in combination with a numerical marking scheme.

Sample descriptive criteria for achievement mark in health

A

- Demonstrates interesting and creative ways to show learning.
- Enjoys the challenge of and successfully completes open-ended tasks with high-quality work.
- Test scores indicate a high level of understanding of concepts and skills.
- Assignments are complete, of high quality, well-organized and show a high level of commitment.
- Almost all the learning goals are fully or consistently met and extended.

B

- Exhibits standard way to show learning.
- Enjoys open-ended tasks, but needs support in dealing with ambiguity.
- Test scores indicate a good grasp of concepts and skills.
- Assignments are generally complete, thorough and organized.
- Most of the learning goals are fully or consistently met.

C

- Needs some encouragement to show learning.
- Needs support to complete open-ended tasks.
- Test scores indicate satisfactory acquisition of skills and concepts.
- Assignments are generally complete, but quality, thoroughness and organization vary.
- More than half of the learning goals are fully or consistently met.

D

- Shows learning only with considerable encouragement.
- Needs support to begin and complete open-ended tasks.
- Test scores indicate weak acquisition of skills and concepts.
- Assignments are inconsistent in quality, thoroughness and organization.
- Only a few of the learning goals are fully or consistently met.

Breakdown of marks

A mark breakdown could help teachers determine a fair achievement mark by matching specific learner outcomes with appropriate assessment tasks. For example, weighting for a term achievement mark in health for a Grade 3 program, focusing on the first general outcome, might look like:

Term 1: <i>Making smart choices for a healthy life</i>	
Unit test	30%
(one test item per outcome)	
Learn-at-home project	10%*
<i>(What to do in an emergency fridge magnet)</i>	
Role-play performance	10%*
<i>(Ways to say “no”)</i>	
Poster	10%*
<i>(Be Safe)</i>	
Log book	10%*
(record of own eating and drinking for one week, comparison graphs and statements)	
Advertisement	10%*
(Ad encouraging children to choose a range of daily physical activities to keep healthy and have fun)	
Timeline	10%*
<i>(How I’ve changed)</i>	
Top 10 list	<u>10%*</u>
<i>(About my body)</i>	
	100%

(* class-developed or teacher-made rubric for these tasks)

Know the purpose of each assessment

When choosing assessment tools and strategies to determine an achievement mark in the health and life skills program, it is important to decide what the *purpose* of each assessment is. For example, if students work in pairs on an activity identifying nutritious foods, the assessment strategy should focus on how well students identify foods rather than the quality of partner work.

Some assessment activities are diagnostic in nature and used to find out what students know and can do in order to plan instruction to best meet students’ needs. These activities do not need to be used in the calculation of the achievement mark.

Formative assessment is similar to diagnostic assessment but differs in that it provides ongoing feedback to teachers about the effectiveness of instruction. Once students have adequate practice with new skills and concepts, summative assessment tasks can provide feedback about progress and achievement to both students and parents. Summative assessment provides a snapshot of student achievement at a given moment in a specific context. Some assessment tasks may do double duty as both formative and summative.

Communicating student learning

Communicating information about assessment and evaluation is an essential step in the instructional process. The purpose of assessment—gathering information so that wise decisions about further teaching and learning can be made—requires that information be communicated to others.

Effective communication informs students, parents and others what has been accomplished and what the next steps are in the learning process. The communication process involves teachers, parents and students. The greater the role students are given in this process, the richer the information that is shared and the greater the impact on further student learning.³⁴

It is essential to use a variety of communication strategies to provide the whole achievement story. A percentage mark on its own does not provide enough data. Additional information needs to be shared: curriculum information, portfolio products and student exemplars of what acceptable and excellent work looks like.³⁴

Communication of student learning should:

- be based on specific outcomes and identified criteria
- focus on the positive and promote student feelings of success and self-worth
- enhance the home and school partnership
- involve a variety of strategies
- reflect the school's philosophy about learning.

There are numerous ways to communicate student learning in health and life skills, including:

- telephone calls
- e-mail messages
- notes from teachers
- home response journals
- newsletters
- work samples and student portfolios
- student self-reflections
- goal setting
- open houses and demonstrations of learning
- homework assignments
- progress report marks and comments
- learning conferences.

Progress reports

Progress reports provide parents with information about their children's learning and growth in school, and are the primary source for formal communication with parents and students.

Quality progress reports should:

- reflect what students know and can do relative to provincial curriculum outcomes
- represent, through a number, letter or comment, how well the student has performed, based on the prescribed outcomes
- use clearly defined criteria when assessing effort, attitude, behaviour, participation and attendance
- communicate performance in relation to course expectations.

When developing comments, consider how to:

- identify curriculum outcomes addressed in that reporting period
- reflect student efforts and responsibilities
- identify units of study, and if required provide information about the context in which learning took place
- identify the student's achievement based on specific outcomes and criteria
- identify plans for continued learning and suggest actions that can be taken by partners in learning—students, parents and teachers.

Quality comments can be clearly understood by students and parents. Quality comments *encourage* rather than *discourage* learners. They reflect school beliefs and practice, and promote the belief that all students can learn and be successful.

Learning conferences

Learning conferences improve communication among students, parents and teachers. Conferencing provides insight into teacher evaluations, student progress and the grade level achieved. Conferencing also gives parents an opportunity to share their perspectives on their children's performances, needs, interests and concerns.

Formal conferences need to be planned and organized so there are no surprises for any of the participants. The most effective conferences actively involve students.

Students need opportunities to practise conferencing during classroom activities so they are prepared to participate and demonstrate specific learnings. Students may choose work samples from the health and life skills program, talk about a class display or demonstrate a specific skill to show their parents what and how well they are learning.

Parents must also know what is expected of them during the conferencing process and have opportunities to ask questions. Through conferencing, the parental role in the educational process becomes more clearly defined, making parents more likely to value the process as a means of finding out what their children know and can do.

Effective conferences:³⁵

- include students as active participants
- use student products to demonstrate achievement and growth
- focus clearly on individual student learning and include specific strategies for improvement
- expand upon information provided in report cards
- engage all participants in discussing achievement and setting goals
- include a discussion of the successes and difficulties students are experiencing
- provide opportunities for open and relevant sharing of information among participants
- establish an atmosphere in which everyone feels welcome to participate
- provide information about curriculum
- include an action plan that is supportive of student learning
- end on a positive note.

Endnotes

22. Used with permission from Alberta Assessment Consortium, *How to Develop and Use Performance Assessments in the Classroom* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Assessment Consortium, 2000), p. 4. Written and developed by the Alberta Assessment Consortium (AAC), *Everyday Assessment Tools for Teachers*, 780-447-9420.
23. Used with permission from Alberta Assessment Consortium, *A Framework for Student Assessment* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Assessment Consortium, 1997), p. 14. Written and developed by the Alberta Assessment Consortium (AAC), *Everyday Assessment Tools for Teachers*, 780-447-9420.
24. Used with permission from Alberta Assessment Consortium, *How to Develop and Use Performance Assessments in the Classroom* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Assessment Consortium, 2000), p. 32. Written and developed by the Alberta Assessment Consortium (AAC), *Everyday Assessment Tools for Teachers*, 780-447-9420.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
26. Adapted with permission from Alberta Assessment Consortium, *A Framework for Communicating Student Learning* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Assessment Consortium, 1999), p. 24. Written and developed by the Alberta Assessment Consortium (AAC), *Everyday Assessment Tools for Teachers*, 780-447-9420.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
28. Adapted from Kay Burke, *The Mindful School: How to Assess Authentic Learning*, 3rd ed. (Arlington Heights, IL: Skylight Professional Development, 1999), p. 70. Adapted with permission from Skylight Professional Development.

29. Ibid., p. 68.
30. From *Brain-based Learning with Class* (p. 64) by Colleen Politano & Joy Paquin © 2000 Portage & Main Press (1-800-667-9673). Used with permission.
31. Adapted with permission from the Maryland Assessment Consortium, “Performance Task Rubric,” (Linthicum, MD: Maryland Assessment Consortium, 1994).
32. Adapted from Ken O’Connor, *The Mindful School: How to Grade for Learning* (Arlington Heights, IL: Skylight Professional Development, 1999), pp. 47, 48, 49. Adapted with permission from Skylight Professional Development.
33. Ibid., p. 151
34. Adapted with permission from Alberta Assessment Consortium, *A Framework for Student Assessment* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Assessment Consortium, 1997), p. 17. Written and developed by the Alberta Assessment Consortium (AAC), Everyday Assessment Tools for Teachers, 780-447-9420.
35. Adapted with permission from Alberta Assessment Consortium, *A Framework for Communicating Student Learning* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Assessment Consortium, 1999), p. 23. Written and developed by the Alberta Assessment Consortium (AAC), Everyday Assessment Tools for Teachers, 780-447-9420.

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