

Standards-Based Assessment

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Standards-based education reform is the modern trend in education. The standards-based learning movement is bringing forth a movement for standards-based assessment — an approach that compares students' performances to the standards, rather than comparing them with other students. Standards-based assessment movement also encourages linking assessment to curriculum and incorporates new forms of assessment (Education Commission, 2002).

This paper is designed to be a reflection of this author's thoughts on standards-based assessment. There will be a section discussing grading criteria, reporting tools, and reporting forms. This will be followed by ways to improve this author's current practices and a brief conclusion.

Grading Criteria

With standards-based assessment, the students are graded on how well they learned and achieved the standards. This is different from traditional assessments that compare students to how they performed compared to other students.

Standards-based assessments should continually evaluate the tests (and their grading criteria) based on the desired levels of student achievement. Sample assessment questions need to be made available to teachers, students, and parents. There should also be samples of student work that demonstrates the standards made available.

Grades should be based on the depth and breadth that the student achieved relative to the standard. The various levels of depth and breadth can be reflected in the letter grade. A rubric for each standard should be provided to make this measurement a uniform measurement across the state.

Reporting Tools

Most states have standardized tests that students have to take to measure achievement of the standards. According to the American Federation of Teachers (2003), there is a need to:

Design assessment systems that can yield information about the strengths and weaknesses of students in particular content and skill areas and ensure that this information is provided to teachers, schools and districts in a timely, useful and comprehensible manner so that they may evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their instructional program, improve professional development and target interventions and resources more effectively.

There should be a reporting tool that makes the results of the standardized tests useful and relevant. Seeing specifically where the students failed, would be helpful for improving the curriculum.

Reporting Forms

Standards-based report cards are the next step in standards-based assessment. According to Muir (2005),

With the increased focus on standards-based education, more and more states, districts and school are becoming interested in standards-based grading and report cards. Hawaii, for example, is a state that is working hard on its “Standards Implementation Design” (SID), including standards-based report cards.

With the current grade reporting system, there is a lot of latitude for teachers grading policies. The students’ grades do not necessarily reflect the student’s achievement of the

standards. With a uniform report card that is based on the measurable learning standards, grades can be correlated to achievement of the standards.

Improvements to Current Practices and Conclusion

This author currently works in a home school environment. The primary curriculum used is not a formal standards-based curriculum. However, according to state law, all students within the state of Virginia (even home schooled students) need to learn the state-mandated standards. Therefore, an appropriate assessment of how well the home schooled students are achieving the standards would be a standards-based assessment.

According to the Education Commission of the States (2002):

Six desirable features of assessments are:

- Assessment tasks should involve activities that are valued in their own right, engaging students in “real-world” problems rather than artificial tasks.
- Assessments should model curriculum reform.
- Assessment activities should focus on objectives consistent with the goals of instructional activities, thus contributing to instructional improvement.
- Assessments should provide a mechanism for staff development.
- Assessments should lead to improved learning by engaging students in meaningful activities that are intrinsically motivating.
- Assessments should lead to greater and more appropriate accountability.

Currently, this author’s assessment activities meet these criteria. Many of the assessment activities are alternative assessments, and not the traditional paper-based “standardized test” type of assessment. When creating assessment activities this author could stand for improvement in the area of modeling the standards. Assessment activities should be

created for each standard and measure the depth and breadth that the student learned the standard.

In conclusion, when using a standards-based curriculum, it is important to use standards-based assessments and reporting. A standards-based assessment correlates a grade to the depth and breadth of achievement of the standards. This author can improve her assessments by correlating assessments more closely with the standards, and grading based on the level of achievement of the standard.

References

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