Grading Practices

Overview

Medford Township Public Schools

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Acknowledgements

It is with our deepest gratitude and appreciation that we thank the members of the Professional Development Leadership Team (PDLT) for their dedication, insight and diligence in the research and completion of this project.

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Formative and Summative Assessment

A variety of assessments is evidence that provides a clear picture of a student’s performance. Formative assessment should be used primarily to give meaningful feedback to students and teachers during the learning process and to make instructional decisions. Summative assessment is used to make judgments about student learning and therefore is included in the determination of grades. It is important that teachers and students understand the purpose of each assessment and whether it is “for” learning—(formative) or “of” learning—(summative).

Formative – Assessment designed to provide direction for improvement and/or adjustment to a program for individual students or for a whole class. In almost all cases, formative assessment should not be used to determine an overall Achievement Grade.

Summative – Assessment/evaluation designed to provide information to be used in making judgments about a student’s achievement at the end of a period of instruction. Summative assessments will be used to determine an overall Achievement Grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Formative Assessment</th>
<th>Summative Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time of assessment</td>
<td>During learning within a unit</td>
<td>The end of a unit or topic of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of assessment techniques</td>
<td>-Informal observation -Exit slip -Pre-assessment -Do Now -Conferring with student -Self-assessment -Q &amp; A -Group work -Class discussion -Class work</td>
<td>-Test/exam -Quiz -Written response -Project -Output -Lab response -Performance assessment -Essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of assessment information</td>
<td>To improve student performance while mastery is developing</td>
<td>To judge student performance and assign an Achievement Grade</td>
</tr>
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Quality Summative Assessments

Assessments need to be carefully constructed to align with the outlined unit/lesson goals. Assessments should be targeted to determine the level of mastery for big ideas and essential understandings. Items of skills and knowledge play an essential role as long as they are linked to the big ideas. The content of the assessment needs to be reflective of the content taught in the class. How to assess this knowledge is essential. Well-written tasks and items with an avoidance of bias will comprise the assessment. The
students will be informed of the grading criteria and aware of the targeted benchmarks as well as the assessment method that will be utilized to determine their grades. Knowing the format and method to ascertain this information in a manner that will best set students up for success needs to be strategically planned.

**Student Performance = Achievement + Accountability**

In defining a grading system, the goal is to effectively communicate a student’s performance in the learning process to parents, teachers, as well as the student. Stakeholders need accurate information to be informed of the student’s mastery of content (achievement) as well as the student’s work ethic and habits (accountability). In order to best communicate these areas, at the middle school level the grades will be separated and reported into two different categories: achievement and accountability. The overall student performance will be more accurately conveyed when reported as two separate grades.

The achievement category will be utilized to provide a clear and concise method to illustrate to parents, students and teachers how well a student is meeting content objectives. It will focus on communicating each student’s mastery of essential knowledge, skills and understandings. The academic achievement grade is based upon a student’s ability to demonstrate mastery of assessed learning goals within each content area. The achievement category will include but not be limited to tests, quizzes, class work, projects, constructed responses, writing prompts and other assessments that would illustrate student understanding. O’Connor (2002) states that “Achievement demonstrates knowledge, skills, and behaviors that are stated as learning goals for a course or unit of instruction.” Therefore, student grades should reflect actual mastery of content material, not behavioral characteristics and/or non-academic behaviors which, if included, dilute the accuracy of the grade. The Achievement grade will be utilized in determining placements and recommendations for future classes.

However, as educators, promoting accountability is essential to preparing students for higher levels of formal education, workplace habits and establishing productive work habits. O’Connor (2011) states that “Students benefit from frequent opportunities to identify both the behaviors that help and those that hinder their achievement.” The accountability grade can include but is not limited to homework, participation, following directions and preparation for class. The accountability grade can serve to encourage active participation in the learning process. Effort and work habits can facilitate the success of future academic and societal endeavors.

**Grade Reporting**

**Achievement Grade**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
<th>RANGE of VALUE by %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Assessments</td>
<td>Test, essay, performance task, written response, project</td>
<td>50-75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Assessments</td>
<td>Quiz, graded assignment, journal</td>
<td>25-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classwork</td>
<td>Lab, output, portfolio entry, quick check</td>
<td>15-30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Accountability Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
<th>RANGE of VALUE by %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>Completion of worksheet, math problems, rough draft, reading</td>
<td>0-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Following directions, timely completion of assignments, supplies for class, organization, binder quiz</td>
<td>0-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation/Effort/Citizenship</td>
<td>Groupwork, contributions to class, cooperation with the teacher/students</td>
<td>0-50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement Grade</th>
<th>Accountability Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-90 A</td>
<td>100-90 A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89-80 B</td>
<td>89-80 B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79-70 C</td>
<td>79-70 C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69-60 D</td>
<td>69-60 D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59-50 F</td>
<td>59-0 F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extra Credit

The purpose of extra credit is to provide additional academic work in order to enhance the learning of course standards. The following are examples of this type of extra credit:

- Viewing a play studied in class and writing a critical review
- Challenge questions at the end of a chapter review

Non-academic work shall not count for extra credit. The following are examples of work that will not count for extra credit:

- bringing in materials
- merely attending extra-curricular events
- signed permission slips
- covering books
- participating in school fundraising or service project
A teacher is not required to offer extra credit. In any class in which extra credit is offered, all students in that class must be eligible to earn the extra credit. Extra credit should encourage learning as opposed to last-minute effort to raise a marking period grade.

**Missing /Late Assignments**

In order to establish accurate academic achievement levels, students will be held accountable for submitting missing/late work. Work that is late due to student’s error or choice, may be penalized in the accountability grade. Lack of completion of assignments will be reported in both the accountability and achievement grades but in a different way and for a different purpose.

Effort should be made to set reasonable timelines for completion of missing/late work. Upon submission, this work shall be graded and scored with the fullest amount of credit granted with the Achievement grade category. The timeline for completion shall be established by the teacher and communicated with student/parent. However, work completion cannot exceed the marking period in which work was assigned unless administrative permission was granted for exceptional circumstances.

Missing or late work will be recorded in the grade book as “Incomplete” or “Absent” until assigned work is completed. If work is not completed or student has failed to meet established deadline, a grade of “50%” and a “missing work” notation will be recorded. Once the assignment is completed and submitted by the student it will be graded for academic achievement and the “place holding” grade will be replaced. Zeros will not be factored into the mathematical averages of achievement grades.

Students missing work due to absence will be given at least 1 day for each missed day to complete the assignments. However, time can be lengthened at teacher’s discretion. The student’s handbook reflects these timelines.

**Medical- i.e. Concussion, Mental Health, Physical Disability**

Students providing medical documentation of a specified condition will be assessed and graded based upon work completed within parameters of medical condition. The nature of these circumstances requires the need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis. In general there are two scenarios of Medical adaptations:

- **Medical- no grade will be given** in situations when completion is medically prohibited. (ex. Gym)

- **Medical- grade is reflective of work that was able to be completed**.

In these individual circumstances, work (and assessments) may be modified, exempted or postponed based on the student’s anticipated length of time impacted and type of learning experiences missed. Incomplete marking period grades may be another option utilized in consultation with guidance and administration.
Re-do/Re-take Assessments

Students shall be permitted to re-do or re-take assessments in order to extend the amount of time and practice necessary to allow a student to demonstrate adequate command of the content. The purpose of re-takes is not to ensure that all students achieve an “A” but rather accommodate students so that they may learn at a different rate, reflect on their progress, make adjustments to their preparation strategies and ultimately acquire the targeted information.

Grades that do not reflect satisfactory content acquisition shall be permitted additional opportunities to demonstrate growth in the previously assessed area. The teacher may determine the timeline (when re-assessment occurs), preparation (additional work that may be done by the student) and type of re-do (same assessment, different assessment). It is at the teacher’s discretion as to which students may be offered this option when there are additional factors to contemplate.

Examples of these factors in consideration may include:

- a habitual pattern of reoccurrence that is not based on a cognitive deficiency
- the level of current achievement can be categorized as satisfactory
- previous “re-do” attempt already made
- obligations of the re-take contract not followed

It is recommended that when planning a re-take, a conference is held with the student to provide feedback on the areas of concern and a plan of adjustment (timeline, extra practice, etc.).

When determining a formal grade after multiple attempts have occurred on an assignment, it is recommended that the emphasis is on the most recent data allowing the student the greatest opportunity for overall success in the class.

Zeros in Grading

The purpose of grades is to communicate a student’s academic achievement. Therefore, students need to complete academic work to develop content knowledge and complete assessments to demonstrate their level of mastery of the content. A grade of zero does not accurately reflect a student’s performance or mastery of material. If there is enough evidence to determine a student’s mastery of the content, including a zero in an achievement grade would only serve as a disciplinary measure and not a reflection of understanding.

Thus, it is optimal that zeros are not used to reflect a lack of achievement or to punish students. Zeros are ineffective in creating student responsibility.

Zeros involve inappropriate mathematics because they give a numerical value to a task which has never been assessed and therefore is not reflective of student performance. Proportionately, there is a significant difference between grades based on a ten-point range and grades based on a much larger
range. For example, a “B” is given for a grade of 80-89, a ten-point range. Meanwhile, an “F” is traditionally assigned a 59-point range. This gap is much wider than the gap for other letter grades and creates a situation which decimates a student’s grade. A zero de-motivates students and makes grades a weapon. In addition, a zero has a profound effect when combined with the practice of averaging. Students receiving a single zero have little chance of recovering as such an extreme score skews their average.

“A zero has an undeserved and devastating influence, so much so that no matter what the student does, the grade distorts the final grade as a true indicator of mastery. Mathematically and ethically this is unacceptable.” (Wormeli, 2006 “Fair Isn’t Always Equal; Assessing and Grading in the Differentiated Classroom”, pgs. 137-8)

For the purposes of grading, in the Achievement Grade, the lowest grade recorded will be a 50. This equalizes the range of possible points within each distinguishable letter grade. Within the Accountability Grade, a grade of 0 may be used to reflect noncompletion of a requirement or academic behavior. For further guidance, please refer to the guidelines set forth for missing or late work.

**Homework**

Homework is an essential part of the learning process. Assignments will vary in accordance with the needs of the class and will relate to classroom instruction. Homework assignments are intended to reinforce and extend classroom learning and serve as a tool for students to assess their understanding of classroom instruction and to prepare for classroom activities. It is not a measure of achievement, but an opportunity to prepare for or reinforce skills learned in the classroom. Therefore, homework will be included as part of the Accountability grade. Completion of routine homework can motivate students to develop good work habits, while increasing the opportunity for individual initiative and responsibility. Homework can also stimulate creativity, critical thinking and awareness that learning can take place outside of the classroom.

The purpose of homework should provide a risk free chance to practice new skills. Homework should require students to apply what they have learned so they find out what they really do understand and can return to class to ask questions about what was not understood (Carr &Farr, 2000). It is given so students can practice, reinforce, elaborate, prepare, and extend their understanding of the content (Wormeli, 2006).

While it is understood that the time it takes to complete homework assignments may vary with each child, middle school students may have approximately one to two hours of homework per night. If a student is having difficulty on a consistent basis completing assignments within the time frame established, the teacher can be contacted for assistance. Teachers are aware of grade specific or school-wide evening commitments for students and adjust homework accordingly. Studying for quizzes/tests and work on long-term projects will be figured into the time guidelines.
Resources

O'Connor, K. 2010 “A Repair Kit for Grading; 15 Fixes for Broken Grades.”


Wormell, R. 2006 “Fair Isn’t Always Equal; Assessing and Grading in the Differentiated Classroom”