



Indicator: All teachers systematically report to parents the student’s mastery of specific standards-based objectives. (4440)

Explanation: We live in a world of standards in education, and it is important that parents understand what standards mean and how their children are doing relative to standards. For each subject, and at each grade level, teachers address standards-based objectives in their instruction. Teachers maintain records of each student’s progress in meeting those standards. Routinely reporting to parents the students’ progress relative to standards-based objectives serves to inform parents about the meaning of standards and keep them abreast of their students’ progress. Schools typically provide a format for this reporting—often as part of report cards or through internet-based services.

Questions: How do your teachers record their students’ progress toward standards-based objectives appropriate to their subjects and grade levels? Is this information reported to parents? How? How often? Does the school provide a common format and schedule for this reporting? Do parents have an opportunity to respond with comments and questions? Is this information discussed at parent-teacher conferences?

The information below goes beyond the meaning of this specific indicator and provides additional support and ideas for home-school communication. For more on *family and community engagement*, see: Redding, S., Murphy, M., & Sheley, P. (2011). Handbook on family and community engagement. Academic Development Institute: Lincoln, IL. Retrieved from www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org

Students do not arrive at a school or in a classroom as a blank slate. No matter what grade is taught, the students who show up already have personalities, levels of learning and understanding, biases, experience, and knowledge about all kinds of subjects. Up until the time they reach school age, students are taught by parents, caregivers, relatives, and a whole cast of characters who have moved in and out of their lives in their churches, neighborhoods, and families. To ignore what the student brings to the classroom and the knowledge that his or her family has about the student is to handicap yourself from the first day.

Parental/Family engagement is a relationship: It isn’t something the school “does” to the parent(s)/family. Parents need an opportunity to talk with the teacher about the rich history of their family and their student, and the teacher needs the opportunity to include the parent(s) in the learning world of the classroom. Hattie (2012) writes that parents want to be involved in the education of their child; they may not know how to be a support for their child. This is the opportunity for the teacher to educate the parent(s) on what Hattie terms the “language of learning” (p. 188). Teaching parents the language of schooling, how to speak with teachers and other school personnel, how to help their child learn, and what criteria the teacher expects for success allows the parent to feel like an active and valued member of the student’s educational “team.”

It is hard to ignore years of research which establishes the connection between student success and involving parents. Children benefit from communication between their parents and their teachers that flows in both directions. Students do best when parents and teachers understand each other's expectations and stay in touch with one another regarding the child's learning habits, attitudes toward school, social interactions, and academic progress. The school, through the leadership of its administration and the school's policies and programs, can create an atmosphere conducive to communication and provide convenient opportunities for communication. Teachers are most inclined to initiate communication with parents when they perceive that administrators value such communication, their colleagues are supportive of parental involvement, and the parents seem appreciative of the outreach. Communication between the school and the home is most effective when it flows in both directions, and schools should distinguish between efforts to inform parents and opportunities to communicate with parents.

Regular and consistent communication with parents about what is expected of the student, the goals the teacher and student have set for the student, and how the student is progressing towards those goals will allow parents to support the student at home and reinforce the importance of learning to the student.

For Special Education

With a high-quality assessment system in place, schools can develop fair and accurate procedures for assessing and reporting on the achievement of exceptional learners. The following five-step model for assessing and grading exceptional learners provides a framework for accomplishing that goal. It also provides an excellent tool for educators and families as they prepare for individualized education plans (IEPs), 504 plans, and ELL meetings.

Step 1. Ask whether the standard is an appropriate expectation without adaptations.

For each reporting standard, the key question is, Can we expect the student to achieve this standard without special support or changes to the standard? If the answer is yes, then no change in the grading process is needed, and the teacher grades the student with the same "ruler" he or she would use with any other student in the class. Some exceptional learners, however, may

not achieve certain grade-level standards without special services and supports. For example, an IEP team may decide that a high school student who has a learning disability in the area of written expression needs extra supports to reach standards that depend on this skill. When an instructional team determines that the student will not be able to achieve a particular standard without special support, they move to step 2.

Step 2. If the standard is not appropriate, determine what type of adaptation the standard needs. For each standard that will require support, the instructional team asks, Which is needed—accommodation or modification?

Accommodation means that the content of the standard remains the same, but the method for demonstrating mastery of that content may be adjusted. For example, to meet science standards, a student may require an audiotape of lectures in science class because of difficulty in taking notes. In addition, he or she might need to take a social studies end-of-unit assessment orally. Although the format for answering questions would be different, the content of the questions would remain the same, and the student would be judged, like all other students, on the content of his or her responses.

Modification, in contrast, means changing the standard itself. A 3rd grade English language learner, for example, may have strong oral communication skills, but may not be ready to work on the grade-level standards for writing. For this student, the instructional team may decide to provide additional support in the area of writing and to expect the student to master 1st grade writing standards.

To determine whether a particular type of support is an accommodation or a modification, the instructional team must consider the circumstances of its use. An accommodation in one subject area might actually be a modification in another subject area. For example, consider extended time on assessments, one of the most common adaptations. If the purpose of the assessment is to measure the student's knowledge and understanding of particular concepts, then extended time is an accommodation. But if the assessment is designed to measure the student's speed in problem solving, as is sometimes the case with certain math assessments, then the provision of extra time would likely be considered a modifica-

tion. If the instructional team determines that a student needs only accommodations to reach a particular standard, then no change in the grading process is required. But if modifications are deemed necessary, the team goes through the remaining three steps of the model for this standard.

Step 3. If the standard needs modification, determine the appropriate standard. The appropriate standard is what the instructional team believes the student could reasonably achieve by the end of the academic year with special supports. The team records these modified standards as goals on the student's IEP, 504 plan, or ELL plan, along with other goals the student may need to achieve in order to function in daily classroom routines. A student with cognitive impairment, for example, may not be ready to work on 4th grade science standards in mineral identification. The IEP team may choose to develop science standards on the skill of sorting and classifying that are fundamentally related to the 4th grade science standards but are also developmentally appropriate for this student. Similarly, a 9th grade English language learner's plan may call for 7th grade vocabulary standards rather than 9th grade standards. Or a physically injured student may have a goal on a 504 plan that requires her to demonstrate an understanding of the rules of a particular sport orally or in writing, but not through actual participation.

Step 4. Base grades on the modified standard, not the grade-level standard. It would be futile to grade a student on an academic standard everyone agrees the student will probably not meet. Take, for example, the student who has cognitive impairment and who is working on sorting and classifying objects by simple characteristics rather than working on the grade-level expectation of mineral identification. There is no need to report a failing grade in science based on the student's inability to identify minerals. Nor would it be fair or meaningful to simply add points for effort or behavior.

Instead, the teacher should grade the student on the standard the team determined was appropriate (for example, *Student will sort objects in science by size, shape, and color with 80 percent accuracy*). The same is true for the English language learner who is working to build 7th grade vocabulary in a 9th grade class. Rather than adding points for homework or promptness in turning in assignments, the teacher should grade the student using the same "ruler," but on the 7th grade vocabulary standards

that the instructional team deemed appropriate.

Step 5. Communicate the meaning of the grade. Finally, teachers need to provide additional information for modified standards, communicating what was actually measured. The report card should include a special notation, such as a superscript number or an asterisk, beside grades that reflect achievement on modified standards. The accompanying footnote might be worded, "based on modified standards." The report card should direct families to a supplemental document, such as a progress report, that lists the modified standards on which any grade was based and a narrative of progress on each. This lets everyone know, as federal legislation requires, how the student performed on appropriately challenging learning tasks.

Source: *Grading Exceptional Learners*. Lee Ann Jung and Thomas R. Guskey. Educational Leadership. 67, February 2010.

For English Language Learners

Schools must make it a priority to engage families and communities as partners in the education of English language learners in appropriate, relevant, and culturally responsive ways. Finders and Lewis (1994) explain that if educators convey to parents of ELLs that they value their culture, language, and knowledge about their children and their community, then parents will be more inclined to participate in a reciprocal relationship with the school, which will benefit ELL students.

According to Waterman and Harry (2008), communication between parents of ELLs and schools must be sent home on a regular basis in the native language of the parents. They suggest that a variety of parents of ELLs be solicited to read written translations, ensuring that the parents are able to translate, and provide feedback to ensure that the communication is clear and culturally relevant. They also recommend using phone calls as a means to contact parents to provide alternate modes of communication. Finally, they suggest that teachers provide regular reports about student progress, which can be instrumental for encouraging parental involvement and support for academic progress. Also, educators need to explain to parents of ELLs the process for how to follow-up with teachers, and they need to create easy methods for how parents can ask questions and raise concerns. Teachers should only assign homework to ELL

students that they can complete independently without parental assistance.

References and Resources

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