

Why do we need a new reporting system?

An integral goal of Regina Catholic Schools and the mandate of the Ministry of Education is improved student achievement. Research best practices throughout the province and the country to support this goal has transformed our instructional and assessment practices to be more timely, accurate and informative. It is now necessary to implement changes in the reporting process to align with these instructional practices.

Beginning in approximately 2010, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education directed that the learning expected of students be defined at each grade level by learning outcomes as evidenced by various indicators. This change moved curricula away from numerous and vague objectives with relatively few outcomes towards outcomes that are specific as to what a student needs to know, to understand and be able to demonstrate. Consequently, this has impacted the way curriculum instruction and assessment are conducted in classrooms. As a result of this change, many school divisions in Saskatchewan have started transitioning to outcomes- based report cards that better reflect and align with the provincial curricula.

What is involved in the Assessment Process?

Assessing student learning is an on-going cycle of gathering, interpreting and responding to student work. Assessment is used to inform the next steps in learning and to evaluate student knowledge and understanding in relationship to the learning. Daily, ongoing assessment and report cards are not separate. They inform each other; both are based on outcomes from the curriculum and inform next steps for learners and teachers. Formative assessment supports learning, while summative assessment verifies learning. The grading process and the report card summarize learning at a particular point in time, but this is only one piece of the reporting process.

Assessment consists of a variety of conversations, observations, and learning products to determine a student's level of learning. These multiple forms of assessment determine the extent to which a student has demonstrated learner outcomes.

Schools and teachers have a responsibility to communicate effectively and continuously with parents by providing them with meaningful information. This can be through formal communication, such as student-involved conferencing, student work, report cards, as well, as through informal communication tools such as agenda books, phone calls, newsletters, blogs, etc. The intention is to work towards more effective communication regarding a student's progress.

What is the purpose of a Report Card?

It is important to bear in mind that the Report Card is one piece of a comprehensive reporting process that is intended to report student progress in terms of achievement and growth. The goal is to give students feedback and inform parents what a student knows and is able to do.

The purpose of a report card is not to compare a child's achievement to the achievement of other students in the class or grade, rather students will be assessed on their personal performance based on the curricular outcomes. The Report Card is intended to provide clear and accurate information about a student's performance and achievement including information on what a student can do well and where further improvements are needed.

Why Outcomes-Based Reporting?

Outcomes-Based reporting is becoming more common in school divisions across North America. Overall, outcomes-based reporting provides a more comprehensive picture of students' academic progress and has the potential to increase student engagement. However, as is true with any change process, a challenge with transitioning to this new method is making the shift from one system to the other. Typically, people are generally more comfortable with what they are used to, therefore, a paradigm shift and a level of understanding needs to be realized by all stakeholders as we continue with this transition.

In an outcomes-based reporting system, parents, students and teachers have a clear understanding of learning expectations when outcomes are used. Students are able to set personal learning goals and connect the evidence of their learning to the curricular outcomes. Students will be better equipped to address those areas identified for improvement through ongoing feedback from his/her teacher and opportunities to demonstrate progress. All assessment and evaluation of student achievement is based on the outcomes in the provincial curriculum and the reporting of student achievement is based on the achievement of the curriculum outcomes. Outcomes describe the specific knowledge, skill and understanding that students are expected to reach by the end of a particular unit study, course or grade level.

What is an outcome?

Outcomes define what a student is expected to know and be able to do at the end of a unit of study or course. Through conversations, observations and products, the teacher and the student determine the extent to which the student has met the criteria for attaining a particular outcome.

What is meant by "strands" for each subject?

A strand is a group of outcomes related to one area of the curriculum for each specific subject. Most subjects have no more than 4 strands. For example, English Language Arts has 4 Strands, Reading, Writing, Listening/Speaking and Viewing/Representing. This allows for the grouping of outcomes into consistent and basic areas across all grade levels.

What are the performance levels that are used?

Student progress will be reported using levels of achievement as follows:

Not Yet Meeting	Beginning to Meet	Meeting	Enriched Understanding
Not Yet Meeting The student does not yet meet grade level learning outcomes. There is no evidence of grade level learning	The student is beginning to show progress toward grade level learning outcomes. There is some evidence of grade level learning.	The students is showing proficiency with grade level learning outcomes. There is evidence that learning outcomes have been met.	The student is showing an in depth understanding of the learning outcomes. There is evidence that the student is engage in enrichment opportunities.

What does it mean if there is no level indicated beside a strand?

It is entirely possible that some strands will not be assess in a particular term. Teachers group the outcomes in the curriculum as units of study. In Math, for example, students might not have worked on any outcomes from the Statistics and Probability strand in a particular term because they have been working on patterns, or measurement. In Science, students might have been working on Life Science, and not yet discussed Physical or Earth and Space Science. In those cases, the Statistics and Probability, physical Science and Earth and Space Science strands would be left blank until students will have taken up those outcomes.

Why the change from percentages to levels of achievement?

When we assess by percentages, we use a point system. A certain number of points are assigned to an assessment, or to a question. In scoring, teachers have in mind an ideal response, that is, the type of response that indicates total understanding or demonstration of a skill. If the student's response does not match the idea, the teacher assigns partial points according to a system. Rarely do people question whether percentages scores truly represent students' learning. They simply assume the scores are an accurate reflection of students' understanding and performance.

What tells you more about a child's progress?

Traditional Grade Book			
Name	Homework Average	Quiz 1	Chapter 1 Test
John	90	65	70
Bill	50	75	78
Susan	110	50	62
Felicia	10	90	85
Amanda	95	100	90
Outcomes-Based Grade Book			
Name	Outcome: Write an alternate ending for a story	Outcome: Identify the elements of a story	Outcome: Compare and contrast two stories
John	Beginning to Meet	Meeting	Beginning to Meet
Bill	Meeting	Meeting	Beginning to Meet
Susan	Beginning to Meet	Beginning to Meet	Beginning to Meet
Felicia	Exceeding	Meeting	Meeting
Amanda	Beginning to Meet	Exceeding	Meeting

In our personal lives as adults, there are similar examples, such as in the work world, where pretty much everything we do as employees is a performance assessment. If adults on the job make poor decisions or cannot determine the quality of their own work, the results may not be favorable. Quality matters, and the ability to measure the quality of one's own work is a learned skill needed for fulfilling many areas of our lives.

Outcomes-Based Assessment provides us with the opportunity to teach this skill to our students. In our schools, we must create an environment where outcomes can and must be met; where all students are required to "meet" the required level of performance. No longer should we be satisfied with students not meeting the required outcomes for school success. Both the RCS SMART goals and the education sector plan within the Ministry of Education are examples of the standards we have for public education.

What are the benefits of Outcomes-Based Reporting?

Within the Outcomes-Based Reporting the emphasis is placed on learning and not on working to achieve a "mark". Students can focus on acquiring skills and knowledge rather than on earning points. Research over the years, indicates that all assessments and evaluation are subjective to some degree and in many cases, no assessment or evaluation technique is capable of offering an absolute truth (Jeroski, 1989 and Sutton, 1997).

To help us be more accurate in the assessment process, it becomes important student learning from a variety of sources, products, conversations and observations (triangulation) as evidence of learning in relation to the outcomes. When we look at these multiple measures of students' performance, these three perspectives help us find an "approximation of reality." (Sutton 1997).

It is also recognized that children learn at different rates. Just because a student has not reached the desired level for an outcome in a particular time period does not mean that he or she will not acquire the knowledge or skill. What is important is that the student will continue to be supported in his or her learning. As a result, students are given opportunities to practice skills, concepts and receive feedback from the teacher so they can progress and meet the required outcome.

The process of instructing, assessing and reporting is changing from a teacher-directed approach to a collaborative on-going process designed to support and enhance student learning. As teachers, the job is one of facilitator to help students learn- learning is the process of changing behavior.

How will this make a difference for students?

Outcomes-based reporting provides a more comprehensive picture of students' academic progress by identifying specific areas of strength, as well as areas where additional work may be needed. Research has found that outcomes-referenced reporting has the potential to increase student engagement. Students are able to set personal learning goals and connect the evidence of their learning to the outcomes – which leads to increased student engagement while also making students more accountable for their learning.

How will students be motivated to improve if they do not receive a grade?

There is evidence which indicates that grades affect motivation and effort students put forth (Cameron and Pierce, 1996, cited in Guskey 2011) and that students view high grades as a recognition of their success (Haladyna, 1999, cited in Guskey, 2011). Our culture has conditioned students to measure their success using grades. However, it has been suggested that students who are highly motivated are already intrinsically motivated and have a success identity (Glasser, 1999; Pink 2001)

This is not the case for struggling students. As Thomas Guskey says, "No research supports the idea that low grades prompt students to try harder. More often, low grades prompt students to withdraw from learning" (Guskey, 2011). Research on grading, dating back to the 1930's has also demonstrated the negative effects of grades, where it diminishes students' interest in what they are learning; creates a preference for the easiest possible task and tends to reduce the quality of students' thinking. (Kohn 2011)

Students are motivated to improve when they are successful, when the subject matter is engaging and when they are involved in decisions around their learning (Cossett-let, 2010).

Outcomes-based reporting, provides students with much more information about their learning. For example, gifted and talented students can be truly challenged in an outcomes-based classroom because if they show early mastery of fundamental skills and concepts, they can concentrate on more challenging work that is at higher levels of thinking skills found in Bloom's taxonomy. For students who struggle, they

can continue to develop their skills when being able to self-reflect along with descriptive feedback which will help them achieve the outcome.

In the real world, many companies evaluate employees based on strengths and areas for improvement, as opposed to a grade or percentage. One need look, no further than our Regina Catholic Schools Committed to Professional Growth, where staff members are directed to reflect on their teaching practice in a number of areas.

As such, Outcomes-based reporting is a transparent method of uncovering characteristics of students, on which to build. Although some may fear that outcomes-based reporting sets up students for failure or fails to appropriately prepare them for high school, post-secondary or the workforce, research evidence indicates the opposite. In fact, many post-secondary institutions like the Nursing Education Programs Approval Board within the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta are including outcomes and competencies in their assessment practices.

How are the Life and Skills and Living our Faith determined?

The Life Skills and Living our Faith information are the qualities which lead to student success. In the past, they may have assessed as part of the subject mark. This practice can distort the picture of the student's actual competence in the subject. Marks allotted for effort, bonus marks or marks deducted for late work can misrepresent what a student actually knows, understand or can do in a particular unit of study or subject.

The Life Skills and Living our Faith will be reported separate and will be accompanied by a rubric with a written description of each of the skills.

LIFE SKILLS AND LIVING OUR FAITH			
1- Seldom	2- Sometimes	3 – Usually	4 – Consistently
Meets some expectations with continual guidance and frequent reminders.	Meets most expectations with some guidance and several reminders.	Meets all expectations with minimal guidance and occasional reminders.	Meets all expectations independently, provides a positive influence.

LIFE SKILLS AND LIVING OUR FAITH

	Term		
	1	2	3
Responsibility/Organization - All must test their own work; then that work rather than their neighbors work, becomes a cause for pride - Galatians 6:4			
I am prepared for class and manage my materials.			
I am accountable for my actions and decisions.			
I manage my tasks and am punctual with assignments.			
I engage with others with courtesy and respect.			
Collaboration/Community Building - Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you are a part of it - 1 Corinthians 12:27			
I am open to listening to the opinions of others.			
I work towards resolving conflict.			
I show self-control.			
I respect the property of others.			
I demonstrate Christ-like behaviours to contribute to a safe and caring Catholic school environment.			
Active Faith Learning (Confidence) - Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God - 1 Corinthians 10:31			
I demonstrate curiosity and a willingness to try new things.			
I fully participate in faith based activities.			
I understand my strengths and intentionally work on areas that need improvement.			
I persevere when tasks are difficult.			

What is the long term impact on education?

We recognize that educators and students are walking a different path from where the origins of education began. Over a hundred years ago, schools were established to address the problem of how to rank, sort and group children for their roles in the industrial world. Assessment became a large part of the solution. Now, even though the problems in society have changed, education continue to employ many of the traditional systems that have been in place for decades (Anne Davies 2011)

The mandate of Public Education is to ensure that all students are successful and our focus is clearly on placing the “Student First” as outlined in the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education – Educational Sectoral Plan.

For the benefit of society, we want each young person to leave his or her family, community, and school prepared to be an independent, self-directed life-long learner – a person who will likely have more than one career over a lifetime. Within Regina Catholic Schools the importance of each and every student is paramount and we believe that every learner is an irreplaceable and unique human person called into existence by a loving God launched on a journey back to the Creator (Administrative Application 1000)

Thomas Guskey (2011) suggests that today we know more than ever before about effective grading reporting and instructional practices in education. We have better information about what works and helps students and about what does not work and can be potentially harmful. The knowledge base offers a clear direction for change efforts and provides guidance for making improvements for the sake of our students.

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Regina Catholic Schools acknowledges the following School Divisions for sharing their insights and resources with us:

Northwest, Saskatchewan Rivers, Christ the Teacher and Prince Albert Catholic