



Activity 10.1

Using School/District Policies to Support Quality Assessment

Learning Target for the Activity

- Understand how assessment literacy can serve as a guide in the development or revision of school or district policy.

Purpose

This activity extends the policy review process introduced in Chapter 10. In the examples that follow some context is missing without the implementation procedures that usually accompany board policies, but the main concepts and priorities are still apparent. The intention of the activity is not to entirely perfect each policy but rather to practice reviewing policies with quality assessment as the filter.

Time

60 minutes

Materials Needed

- Optional: policies from your school or district

Suggested Room Setup

Tables and chairs

Directions

Read each of the four policies in this activity, taking one at a time to process. After reading each, pause and consider the following three questions with your team. Do this with the remainder of the sample policies in this activity. If desired, you can add other criteria you may have developed for policy review or those that have been offered in Chapter 10 for a deeper review. For each policy scenario there are multiple points of discussion (and possible disagreement), which is in part the purpose of the activity. Still, there are some elements in each policy that are contrary to quality assessment. Our purpose here is not to create a comprehensive list of all the possible points of discussion in terms of pros, cons, and possible policy amendments but to alert the reader to the main pitfalls of each policy from an assessment literacy perspective.

1. From an assessment literacy perspective, what are the strong points of the policy the way it is currently written? How does it support quality assessment?
2. What are the weak areas of the policy relative to student assessment? For instance, does the policy contain any assessment practices deemed to be unsound?
3. What language could be omitted and what language might be added to make it more supportive of sound assessment?

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Policy #1: Lesson Plans

To ensure proper planning and continuity of instruction, the board requires that each teacher prepare lesson plans for daily instruction. To facilitate more effective instruction, lesson plans must be prepared in advance of the actual class presentation. The format for the lesson plan will be specified by the building principal and shall be reviewed on a regular basis. The plan book must be readily available when a substitute teacher is needed.

Policy #2: Homework

The board believes that homework is a constructive tool in the teaching/learning process when geared to the age, health, abilities, and needs of students. Purposeful assignments not only enhance student achievement but also develop self-discipline and associated good working habits. Because homework is viewed as an extension of the classroom, students are expected to complete all assigned work. Homework must be planned and organized, must be viewed as purposeful to the students, and must be returned to the student in a timely manner with appropriate feedback.

Make-up work, due to illness, is not to be considered as homework, as is work begun in the classroom that carries over beyond the school day. Students shall be given the opportunity to make up assignments missed during excused absences.

Policy #3: Communication About Student Achievement

_____ School District is a standards-driven district with the goal of communicating effectively about student achievement. It is the intent of the district to provide timely, understandable, and meaningful information about student progress toward clearly articulated achievement standards to students, parents, and education professionals. Grades and report cards represent only one of a number of ways to communicate student progress toward standards. All communications home from schools or the district about student achievement should, when appropriate, strive to

- communicate to parents/guardians in ways that describe student progress toward district standards and provide an accurate description of learning;
- provide information students can use for self-evaluation and improvement;
- provide data for the selection, identification, or grouping of students for certain educational paths or programs; and
- provide information for evaluation of the effectiveness of instructional programs.

Policy #4: Classroom Formative Assessment

In each class students will complete a daily formative assessment to demonstrate their learning for that day. Teachers are to make sure that the formative assessments

- assess the learning target;
- are valid and appropriate demonstrations of what students should know and be able to do;
- provide data to drive future instruction;
- provide meaningful feedback to students, including opportunities to reflect, self-evaluate, set goals, and strengthen their performance; and
- are a part of the regular learning process, with separate activities used only when embedded ones are not feasible.

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Teachers will make adjustments in instruction to meet student learning needs as a result of daily formative assessments.

Closure

Below are just a few of the points of conversation that might arise during this activity, as well as a few of the pitfalls to be aware of in each policy review.

Policy #1: Lesson Plans

- The board's aim for "continuity of instruction" isn't just ensured by daily lesson plans. Longer-term planning is needed for students not to see one class period after another unconnected to a bigger picture. Daily learning targets are part of a larger system of learning goals.
- The fact that the building principal specifies the format of the lesson plan is problematic on multiple levels, one being that commonly accepted elements of effective lesson planning (clear and appropriate learning goals, monitoring of student progress and understanding, aligned assessment strategies, etc.) may be omitted.
- The policy makes no mention of state standards or district learning goals as the primary source of instructional planning and assessment.

Policy #2: Homework

- Properly structured, homework can also be a part of the classroom assessment process, including formative assessment, in which case the homework would not be graded if it is still part of an ongoing learning process.
- There is less correlation between amount of homework and student achievement in elementary grade levels than in the upper grade levels. Purposes of homework, therefore, should differ depending on grade level.

Policy #3: Communication About Student Achievement

- Although the policy acknowledges that there are other communication methods beyond grades and report cards, it fails to help promote different communication strategies that could include student portfolios, the use of rubrics, parent engagement, progress reports, student-led conferences, and so on.
- No mention is made in the policy of the difference between summative and formative information, the various purposes of assessment, or the use of results.

Policy #4: Classroom Formative Assessment

- The first paragraph twice suggests that formative assessment is a tool, administered like a test.
- The purposes of formative assessment are at odds with the requirement that the teacher conduct a formative assessment at the end of the day to see what students know and can do.
- The policy in effect mandates that teachers will use formative assessment, ensuring that it is done through a daily requirement. Is that the best way? Are there other ways to ensure this requirement is met?
- The goals or the desired characteristics of formative assessment in the bulleted list are far more complex and comprehensive than can be achieved in a daily assessment. There is only partial understanding that formative assessment is less an event than a process.

Source: Adapted from Chappuis et al. (2017).