
QAHS NEWS BULLETIN

Volume 1, Issue 11

November 16, 2009

CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP Assessing Student Learning

There is not one among us who would consider getting on a train or bus without knowing where we are going. Yet, when it comes to planning instruction, we do not always have an idea of where we want to end up.

The Professional Teaching Standards provides five key elements that address Assessing Student Learning:

1. Establishing and communicating learning goals for all students.
2. Collecting and using multiple sources of information to assess student learning.
3. Involving and guiding all students in assessing their own learning.
4. Using the results of assessments to guide instruction.
5. Communicating with students, families, and other audiences about student progress.

Key element **one** states *establishing and communicating learning goals for all students*. When planning for students, teachers must use the state standards, along with other resources as a guide to develop learning goals for each student. These goals need to be reviewed with students on a regular basis and revised as part of the ongoing feedback teachers provide students. Likewise, student goals must reflect subject concepts and skills to be mastered and take into consideration the needs of special groups such as special education and ELL. In addition, student learning goals and assessment tools should be established that promote student learning.

Think about key element **two** *collecting and using multiple sources of information to assess student learning*. A number of teachers use a variety of assessments, tests, quizzes, essays, projects and homework to assess students' performance. When grading students, teachers often use multiple sources of information for a final grade. Looking at student assessment, it is important to make sure that the assessment tools are truly assessing the skills we want to assess so that we obtain accurate data about student's performance. Likewise, it is critical that teachers collect evidence of student learning and reflect upon that evidence to ensure that the assessments are supporting students' learning. Lastly, diverse assessment strategies are essential to implement and monitor students with IEPs and ELL needs.

Involving and guiding all students in assessing their own learning is key element **three**. Assessment should not be separate from the learning process as this should be built in

as a fundamental part of the learning process. Students should understand the grading guidelines and be familiar with the tools used to assess their own work. Students should use rubrics to grade themselves as well as take part in peer review to discuss their work and learn from their peers. Establishing goals with students is an excellent start for them to take responsibility for their learning and this should be expanded to include skills in self-reflection.

Key element **four** calls for *using the results of assessments to guide instruction*. Assessment should be used to guide instructional planning. For example, two teachers on the Inquiry Team designed a diagnostic tool which was given to all the students in the "inquiry group." They then conducted an item analysis which provided specific data about the topics students did not perform well on. Now, as part of the Inquiry Team's discussion, we have spoken about what skills the teachers should focus upon and some of the strategies to be used to address students' deficits. As teachers carry on through this process, they continue to use assessments to adjust their instruction while teaching and planning for effective ways to teach subject content. Most importantly, teachers can use this assessment data to help them plan instruction to support student's individual goals.

Key element **five** is significant. *Communicating with students, families, and other audiences* about student progress is necessary as we need parent and student involvement to communicate student progress and goals. Students need to know what they are learning and how to make improvements in the learning if they are to make progress. As I indicated during the last two learning walks, students must be able to explain why they are working on an assignment, the relevance of the task, and how it can be used in real-life applications. Having students create their learning goals is a good beginning, but we must involve families so they feel as if they are part of the process. Parental involvement can take many forms and it has been shown that parental engagement is a powerful tool to student's success. Let's continue to develop the teacher/parent/student connection.

Please note the word evaluation was not used in place of assessment in this article. While the two words have been used interchangeably, and I have been guilty of doing so, assessment and evaluation should be looked at differently. Assessment is ongoing formative process whereas, evaluation often refers to a summative process. **Questions,**

SIDEBAR

We will continue our professional discussion on Understanding by Design UbD at the extended department meeting on Monday, **November 16th** in Flushing. Please bring your completed template to the meeting.

The week of **November 16th is Spirit Week for the Flushing Campus, Tuesday through Friday. See calendar for each day's events. Thanks Dan.** Let's show our support and be a part of this school activity.

Regents Predictive Exams for English Regents, Algebra Regents Prep, and Geometry will take place on Tuesday, **November 17th** during the Regents classes.

The next Notebook Check is scheduled for Tuesday, **November 17th**.

November 18th – HIV Lesson 2 is due period 3
The next Inquiry Team meeting is scheduled for Thursday, **November 19th** at the Jamaica Campus at 3:30 p.m.

November 19th - College and Career Night at the Jamaica Campus

MID-TERM EXAMS BEGIN ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19th.

November 19th – English and math

November 20th – English

November 23rd - social studies and science

November 24th – social studies

November 25th – foreign language, art, and health

Case Conferences are scheduled for **November 23rd**.

The purpose of these conferences is to have professional discussions about students resulting in an educational action plan to address the academic issues of the student. The case conference team will create a student action plan with goals and specific timelines to measure progress and growth..

We are moving the next Learningwalk to after Thanksgiving since the week of the 23rd is short and mid-term exams are taking place. Teachers will join us for this walk.

Portfolio Conferences –It is important to give students feedback frequently so they know what needs to be done to make improvements in their work. As I speak with students, there are quite a few who have not had conferences, please reach out to these students.

IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED TO PRINT THE BULLETIN TWICE A MONTH. THEREFORE, THE NEXT ISSUE WILL BE AVAILABLE DECEMBER 7TH. UPCOMING EVENTS WILL BE POSTED IN THE CALENDAR.

Answers, and Suggestions

• **When will differentiated teaching styles be accepted as differentiated instruction?**

This question appeared in last week's bulletin and it may have been misinterpreted. After rereading the question, the writer may have been asking about respecting the differences in teaching styles. There is no one way to teach or learn. Just as students learn using different strategies and techniques, teachers teach using a style that best suits them. What is most important is that the teacher's teaching style meets students' individual needs and achieves the desired outcomes.

• **How do we improve Regents scores?**

Regents exams are mostly used as a summative type of assessment to determine if the student has mastered the material; and therefore, demonstrated basic competency in a subject area. While understanding the content is key it is also not possible to teach students all of the content in the relatively short time we have with them. If we go back to the workshop on Understanding by Design, one highlight was the importance of clarifying content priorities. Since there is a tremendous amount of content knowledge to master, teachers must be selective and focus on the "Big Ideas and Enduring Understandings" as well as deciding upon what is "Important to Know."

As I read your assessments on the UbD workshop, a number of you indicated that you already use a backwards design to planning. This is certainly a good start. But if we expect students to thoroughly "understand" then planning must be done to include the *transfer of knowledge so that...*

This weekend I reread "Understanding as Transferability." There were several poignant points that must be incorporated into teaching practices if we want students to comprehend content material so we can improve Regents scores:

*Developing the ability to transfer one's learning is key to a good education ... so we need to help them (students) **transfer their inherently limited learning to many other settings, issues, and problems.***

*Transfer is the essence of what **Bloom** and his colleagues meant by **application**. The challenge is not to "plug in" what was learned, from memory, but **modify, adjust and adapt** (inherently general) idea to the particulars of a situation.*

*Knowledge and skill, then are necessary elements of understanding, but not sufficient in themselves. Understanding requires more: the ability to thoughtfully and actively "do" the work with discernment, as well as the **ability to self-assess, justify, and critique such "doings."** Transfer involves figuring out which knowledge and skill matters here and often adapting what we know to address the challenge at hand.*

When students are given the opportunity to practice and apply critical-thinking to a range of situations, it is more likely that understanding will be transferred. However, it is incumbent upon the teacher to plan and provide opportunities for the student so it can happen.