

**Minutes of the OCASC Secondary School Committee  
Thursday, June 14, 2012  
Fisher Park PS**

The objectives of the Secondary School Committee are to:

1. Increase parent knowledge of and involvement in secondary school education in Ottawa-Carleton;
2. Promote the development of school councils and parent associations to represent parents of students in each Ottawa-Carleton secondary school;
3. Sponsor and encourage research into and study of education issues and concerns in Ottawa-Carleton secondary schools;
4. Formulate recommendations regarding secondary school education in Ottawa-Carleton, and to assist in implementing such recommendations.

**Participants:**

Sue Carswell (South Carleton), Nadine Clarke (Canterbury) (Chair), Joanna Rzewuski (Colonel By), Carolyn Eckersley, (Sir Robert Borden), Donna Williams (Earl of March), Anne Teutsch (Merivale), Rong Sun (Lisgar),

Over 13 additional parents participated representing Lisgar, Earl of March, Colonel By and Canterbury

**Presentation: Numeracy Committee recommendations and Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting** Pino Buffone, Superintendent of Curriculum and Barry Bickerton, System Principal, Secondary, Curriculum Services

Key Terms: **Assessment** is a continuous process of gathering information about student learning and performance using a variety of sources over time. **Evaluation** is the process of judging the quality of student work in the assessments, on the basis of established criteria, and the assigning of a value to represent that quality. **Reporting** is the communication of a student's progress over time with parents/guardians, educators and students.

On a global perspective, Ontario is ranked in the top 5, moving from great to excellent, demonstrating significant, sustained improvement in student outcomes, taking into account infrastructure, policies, procedures and practices, continuous improvement, collaboration amongst educators, peer accountability, student wellbeing and the importance of creativity and innovation. This analysis and thinking is based on international educational research: Black and Wiliam, Guskey, Stiggins, Cooper, Earl, Reeves and O'Connor. Black and Wiliams, known for 'inside the black box' started the shift from comparing students to one another to comparing them to criteria based judging. Some observations of kindergarten children are still based on norm referenced assessment; are they on a normal learning path? Most other system-wide assessments are criterion-referenced, across the district. After high school, universities use norm-referenced assessment to compare students for acceptance in specialty programs like neurosurgery. The thinking is shifting from norm-referenced to criteria-referenced but still have and always will need both in the world.

Provincial Perspective

In July 2011, The Ministry of Education reviewed the progress and areas of growth for student achievement as a province. Math was considered an area of concern as it had not improved the way literacy had. To see a difference, programs need to be sustained. Across the province and over 10 years, there had been a sustained development in literacy. "All teachers are teachers of literacy". The same professional development and commitment in numeracy has not been provided but that is changing. Growing Success was implemented in 2010. It was the result of research and consultation with school boards, administrators, federations, education faculties, communities, parents and students. The basic tenets of Assessment and Evaluation reform are:

- 1) Assessing and evaluating through the achievement chart categories; knowledge and understanding, thinking, communication and application
- 2) More focus on assessment than evaluation. A coaching model with timely descriptive feedback to get ready for the game. More collaborative and team coaching.
- 3) Respecting teacher professional judgment instead of grading and averaging everything. The teacher collects the evidence, places a judgment value and able to defend the result.
- 4) Separation of behaviour (learning skills and work habits) and academic achievement. This is difficult for teachers.
- 5) Using criterion-referenced, standards-based A&E practices instead of traditional norm-referenced, ranking style grading practices. Assessment is more frequent in order to gauge learning along the way. Less emphasis on the final. Pino used the example of a flight school graduate with 88.9% but who had only 30% on landings and asked if we would fly with that pilot.

What does Assessment OF/FOR/AS Learning mean?

Assessment OF learning occurs after teaching and measures a student's achievement in relation to curriculum expectations.

Assessment FOR learning occurs before and during teaching, identifies student needs and informs the student of his/her progress, as well as planning and teaching decisions for staff.

Assessment AS learning is a meta-cognitive process that occurs during learning and involves students thinking about their learning.

Is extra time on tests unfair? Time is a low impact factor on achievement. Lifting time pressures allow some students to relax and breathe, and to be successful, show what they know and can do.

We need to shift the responsibility of learning to the student and away from the teacher. They need to feel in control of their own success. They should understand the results (feedback), know what to do next time to improve, feel that they can do it, and persevere.

### District Perspective

The original AE&R policy was issued in June 2000. Policy P.083 and Procedure PR.584 were revised and approved in September 2010.

The Board improvement plan for student achievement, 2011-2012, includes strategies to improve student achievement through a focus on;

- a) creative, innovative and critical thinking and problem solving
- b) ongoing assessment and feedback

A slide from page 9 of the School Effectiveness Framework, showed the alignment of initiatives; the Province is responsible for policies, procedures and educational legislation, the Director of Education and the superintendents are responsible for programs and services, the Principals and Vice-Principals are responsible for school effectiveness and the teachers are responsible for the curriculum.

### Marks and Grades

Marks are based on the four achievement categories (knowledge and understanding, thinking, communication and application) and levels of achievement (1- 4) as described in Ministry policy. "In determining a term grade, professional judgment will be used based on the student's most consistent level of achievement with special consideration given to more recent evidence of overall expectations". In assessing student learning, teachers ensure a balance with respect to the four categories and consider achievement of expectations within the appropriate categories. All categories of achievement are important and need to be part of instruction, learning, assessment and evaluation but balance recognizes that the relative importance of each category may vary for different subjects and courses. For example, all questions should have thinking involved but in English, written work may be weighted more for communication than other categories.

### Reporting

The teacher (along with principal, vice-principals(s)) will:

- gather data about learning skills on an ongoing basis and provide students with feedback to improve.
- monitor students' progress and communicate with parents when there are concerns
- provide ongoing evidence of student achievement to students, parents/guardians prior to the formal reporting period

### AE&R and Numeracy

To achieve gains in student achievement in math, the ministry has funded instructional coaches in grades 7 – 10. The themes for math networks are: student engagement, assessment FOR learning, differentiated instruction, questioning, critical thinking, feedback and collaborative learning. Collaborative learning networks are in place for math heads and for over 300 math teachers, as well as lesson study models in inquiry-based learning. In the continuum of grades 7 – 9, the achievement gap is closing.

The district-wide action plan for numeracy emphasizes a balanced program in mathematics, where both operational and problem-solving skills are acquired. It incorporates the ‘big ideas’ of math and mathematical processes throughout the curriculum and across the grades and involves professional learning and research-based opportunities. A numeracy committee was established to develop a parents’ guide to numeracy.

### Questions

Prior to the meeting, a list of questions prepared by the secondary school committee was sent to Pino and Barry for response. During the meeting there were numerous questions from the floor.

What are we evaluating and for what purpose? How reliable and valid is the testing? Are we actually assessing what we intend to assess?

*Where reliability is in question, look to the test construction. Where validity is question, ask if the test was more difficult this year than last year. Psychometricians measure the validity, reliability, and fairness and are involved in creating tests for large-scale assessments. Tests are built with the best intentions, although not perfect. The rubric is co-constructed to bring consistency, but there is still some subjectivity. Sometimes rubrics are c-created with students. Rubrics tell students how they will be evaluated. There is no one perfect answer. Think about the notion of a second opinion from a doctor. Two or three doctors may be presented with the exact same report on a patient, but have a different set of recommendations regarding next steps for the patient.*

Many questions in the list and from the floor related to levels of achievement.

*It is board policy to teach expectations and curriculum, not to teach to levels.*

*Levels are based on criteria in the curriculum and reflect the quality of the student’s performance. Questions are not levelled, students’ answers are levelled.*

*Try not to assess every individual question but group them to better evaluate students’ work.*

*Questions are not designed for one specific category.*

1. Some parents feel that there is inconsistency among teachers in how they convert level marks to percentages. Where a level 4 might be a 90% for one teacher it might be a 95% for another. We are interested in your comments on this observation.

*The conversion charts have a range of % for levels. For example Level 4+ is 95-100%. Is it 96 or 98%. We no longer peg marks at 83%, 88%, 96%. There will always be friction points even if we used a scale of 1000. It is of great concern in grade 12 as there are questions about how universities select students.*

2. Some parents feel that there is a lot of subjectivity in the grading of students’ work in the level system. Where a piece of work might earn a level 4 with one teacher, it might earn a level 3 with another, even if the same rubric is applied. We are interested in your comments on this observation.

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a) is the evaluation method consistent across schools or do the math departments and teachers choose the evaluation method?

3. It is sometimes difficult for parents or students to understand how a report card (or other) mark has been arrived at. Is it required that teachers show parents or students how marks are arrived at, if requested?

*Feedback is very important to the A&E process*

a) Some teachers are not scoring test questions nor identifying questions and evaluating answers by achievement level. An overall level of achievement is assigned without a mark for answers to questions.

b) Do teachers use the overall test grades to calculate the final mark or do they use the marks earned on each skill category?

c) What is the numerical or statistical justification for obtaining averages from achievement levels which are qualitative categories?

d) Do achievement levels equate to skill categories in math tests? For example do Level 1 & 2 math questions assess knowledge and understanding, Level 3 questions application and Level 4 questions thinking and inquiry? If Students do not answer all questions will they not be evaluated on all four skill categories.

*From Procedure PR.584.CUR, section 2.0 DEFINITIONS (2.1):*

*Assessment is a continuous process of gathering information about student learning and performance, using a variety of sources over time (assessment for learning, e.g., early drafts, first tries and practice assignments).*

*From Procedure PR.584.CUR, section 2.0 DEFINITIONS (2.2):*

*Evaluation is the process of judging the quality of student work on the basis of established criteria, and the assigning of a value to represent that quality (assessment OF learning).*

*Levels are used to determine the quality of each student's performance with respect to their achievement of the overall expectation(s) **not** the difficulty of the questions.*

*Neither Ministry of Education policy nor Procedure PR.584.CUR differentiates between subject disciplines in terms of assessment, evaluation and reporting (AER) practices.*

e) If a failing grade is from 0% to 49%, how is an assessment "below Level 1" defined and translated into a final percentage?

*Procedure PR.584.CUR allows for report card grades to range from 0% to 100%. Using professional judgment, teachers determine report card grades – including grades below 50% - based on each student's most consistent level of achievement with special consideration to more recent evidence of overall expectations.*

f) is there a guideline that can be shared with parents on how math tests are evaluated?

*Yes, rubrics and school assessment and evaluation policies can be shared with parents.*

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g) Some teachers record one set of marks on a test for the 4 skill categories then re-weight the scores to create a different set for calculating the final course grades. The change and explanation is not given to the student.

*Effective AER practices are transparent and fair.  
See Procedure PR.584.CUR 4.3 (i) and (o).*

4. Some teachers do not hand tests back to students after they have been marked. For a number of reasons, it would be advantageous for students and/or parents to have access to the tests. Is there a policy on this?

*Teachers are expected to return tasks, including tests, to students including an overall level of achievement along with descriptive feedback identifying strengths and next steps for learning.*

5. Do students get marks for participation in class, and if so, are there quantifiable identifiers for these marks?

*No.*

6. Students and parents need a clear understanding of expectations and evaluation methods being used. Is this need being addressed at Board level, school level, class level? Note the number of questions in point 3 about scoring, calculations and what is being tested.

*Yes. In addition to Procedure PR.584.CUR, all secondary schools have developed and distributed clear and concise school AER policies. The school policies are fully aligned with Procedure PR.584.CUR and Growing Success (2010)*

7. For parents who are uncertain of the value of the new assessment and evaluation policy can you share with us the research behind moving in this direction? Since the OCDSB has started using this new style of evaluation in math, can you tell us what you have seen as either positive or negative outcomes?

a) Was there a pilot program for introducing the level questions method for assessing math tests?

*See response to 3 (d) above (i.e., Levels are used to determine the quality of each student's performance with respect to their achievement of the overall expectation(s) **not** the difficulty of the questions.)*

b) Is there a plan for assessing the effectiveness of this method?

*Levels are used to determine the quality of each student's performance. Levels are not used to determine the difficulty of the questions. Consultation with central staff, school staff, school community members and external experts occurred over the course of the 2011-2012 school year.*

c) Are there contingencies if the new method is not accomplishing its goals?

*The new method referred to does not align with Growing Success or Procedure PR.584.CUR.*

d) Who monitors the effectiveness and decides whether a board or school is in compliance?

*AER practices are monitored internally and externally. Internal monitoring takes place through the roles and responsibilities of the Director, Associate Director, Superintendents of Instruction, Superintendent of Curriculum, Principals, Vice Principals, Department Heads, and teachers. Externally, the Ministry of Education monitors AER practices.*

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8. Some teachers seem to tell students that level 4 questions are not practiced in class because the point of level 4 questions is to see if they can reach beyond what is taught in class. Is this true? Is it the right way to go? If so, can you explain the logic behind this to us?

*No.*

*See response to 3 (d) above (i.e., Levels are used to determine the quality of each student's performance with respect to their achievement of the overall expectation(s) **not** the difficulty of the questions.).*

9. In terms of the levelled math tests, it appears that not all classes, teachers or schools use the new methods of testing. Looking forward, what is the plan? Will all classes use it eventually? Will it be compulsory for teachers to use this method?

*No.*

*See response to 3 (d) above. Levels are used to determine the quality of each student's performance. Levels are not used to determine the difficulty of the questions.*

a) Are students to complete all the questions on a test or only a portion of the test?

*All students are expected to attempt all questions on an assessment task by demonstrating skills and knowledge to the best of their ability.*

b) The OCDSB uses difference entry levels for different students while other schools do not. Why?

c) Are teachers required to identify the skill category for each math question?

*While teachers are not required to identify the Achievement Chart category for each question, there are times when the wording within the question itself (e.g., "Using your response from Part A above, **apply** this value to the following scenario...") demonstrates a link to a specific category or categories.*

d) What constitutes a Level 1, 2, 3, 4 question?

*See response to 3 (d) above. Levels are used to determine the quality of each student's performance. Levels are not used to determine the difficulty of the questions.*

10. There have been some questions about the validity of Board-wide tests. Are there any procedures in effect to ensure validity and reliability – ie. that the tests test what they are supposed to and that they give consistent results for students of equivalent ability?

*The district-wide assessments are constructed each school year by teams of secondary teachers within the district, under the direction and guidance of the Quality Assurance Division. With respect to validity and reliability, the assessment tasks are linked to overall expectations from The Ontario Curriculum to ensure that they target the expectations of that subject area and grade level, and, teachers involved with these assessments attend a 'conference marking' session each term once the assessments are completed to ensure there is consistency in marking across the district.*

11. a) It has been said that some mark compilation software has been known to create discrepancies in students' marks on report cards. How does it work in the OCDSB in terms of what software teachers use to record and compile marks? Is there an oversight at the Board level to ensure that student marks are accurate and to ensure data quality?

*Teachers may choose from a variety of tools, including MarkBook, to assist them in their AER practice.*

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*Report card grades are not determined by software programs. Teachers use professional judgment to determine report card grades based on each student's most consistent level of achievement with special consideration to more recent evidence of overall expectations.*

- i) Markbook software alters the marks in "blended mode". The most common mark, rather than the mean, is used to calculate the student's average. Teachers who know this so not use the program.

*See response to questions pertaining to MarkBook*

- b) are the comments all standard or can a teacher put specific comments on individual student report cards?

*Teachers may choose to develop personalized report card comments.*

12. It seems that many students need tutors in math these days. Is this becoming a standard requirement? Is it acceptable that so many students need outside help in math?

*No.*

### **Addendum** to the June Meeting minutes

#### MarkBook Software

Although not part of the June meeting or discussed in the preparation meeting in May, an interested parent sent an email to Pino and Barry with questions concerning MarkBook software which is used to record student marks. These questions were answered and are included as an addendum to these minutes as the answers touch on similar questions posed in the April meeting.

The board's grading software is calculating student grades by using their modes (the most common marks), rather than their mean (the average).

*Teachers determine report card grades using professional judgment based on each student's most consistent level of achievement with special consideration given to more recent evidence of achievement of the overall expectations.*

*MarkBook provides teachers with the ability to select different measures of central tendency (e.g., mean, median), including the use of the default setting of blended mode, to analyze evidence of student achievement.*

*The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board's (OCDSB) version of MarkBook defaults to blended mode each time the program is launched.*

*Teachers may choose to utilize another measure of central tendency in MarkBook at any time. Upon re-launching the program the default setting of blended mode will be restored.*

Would you comment on the following statements?

- 1) Blended Mode uses the most common mark for each skill category, not the mean.

*This is inaccurate.*



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*MarkBook uses the most common Level (i.e., the most consistent Level), not the most common mark. The most common Level is referred to as the mode. Mode is one of three common measures of central tendency, in addition to mean and median.*

- 2) None of the other marks, higher or lower, count towards the calculation of the final grade.

*This is inaccurate.*

*To determine the most consistent level of achievement, MarkBook takes all scores on individual assessments into account.*

*MarkBook does not determine report card grades. Teachers determine report card grades by using professional judgment based on each student's most consistent level of achievement with special consideration to more recent evidence of achievement of the overall expectations.*

- 3) Blended Mode is the default set by the board. The default cannot be changed. Teachers cannot use any other means of calculating final grades.

*This is inaccurate.*

*While the OCDSB version of MarkBook defaults to blended mode each time the program is launched, teachers who choose to use MarkBook have access to a range of measures of central tendency including blended mode, mean and median. For comparative purposes, teachers can view the results of all measures of central tendency on the 'Compare' screen in MarkBook's Class Report section.*

*Upon re-launching MarkBook the default setting of blended mode will be restored.*

- 4) Blended Mode does not emphasize a student's most recent achievement (unless it happens to be the most common mark), although this work, according to Board and ministry policy, should receive greater consideration towards the overall/final mark than earlier work.

*Teachers determine report card grades, using professional judgment based on each student's most consistent level of achievement with special consideration given to more recent evidence of achievement of the overall expectations (see OCDSB website: Procedure PR.584.CUR – Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting of Student Achievement (2010)).*

*District direction applies to all teachers whether or not they include the use of MarkBook in their teaching practice.*

- 5) Blended Mode does not count any work that is not submitted in the calculation of the final grade. Potentially, students could submit a single minor assignment, and nothing else, and have their grade for the entire course assessed solely on that piece of work.

*This is inaccurate.*

*All secondary schools have published assessment and evaluation policies which are fully-aligned with Procedure PR.584.CUR.*

*All students are expected to submit assignments within the timeframe specified by the teacher. To promote the timely submission of assignments, teachers use a range of proactive teaching strategies. When an assignment is late or missing, the student and parent are informed. The student will be provided with an additional opportunity to complete the original or alternate assignment if, in the*

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*teacher's professional judgment there is insufficient evidence of achievement of the overall expectation(s).*

*All teachers use professional judgment and consider the entire body of evidence of achievement of overall expectations based on most consistent level of achievement with special consideration given to more recent evidence of achievement of the overall expectations.*

- 6) It is impossible to receive 100% on a perfectly-answered exam when Blended Mode is used because Blended Mode takes the midpoint of a Level 4 (80%-100%), which is 90%.

*Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools (First Edition, Covering Grades 1 to 12), (2010), page 19:*

*"Ontario, like a number of other jurisdictions, has moved from norm-referenced to criterion-referenced assessment and evaluation. This means that teachers assess and evaluate student work with reference to established criteria for four levels of achievement that are standard across the province, rather by comparison with work done by other students, or through the ranking of student performance, or with reference to performance standards developed by individual teachers for their own classrooms. (There is no expectation that a certain percentage of students must be allocated to any one level of achievement)."*

*MarkBook does not determine report card grades. Teachers determine report card grades by using professional judgment based on each student's most consistent level of achievement with special consideration to more recent evidence of achievement of the overall expectations.*

*For reporting purposes in the OCDSB, students in grades 9 to 12 may receive report card grades ranging from 0% to 100%.*

- 7) Is there any standardized instruction provided to the teachers on how to use MarkBook?

*Explicit support documents are provided with MarkBook software in the Help file. Detailed instructions are available to teachers who choose to use MarkBook.*

- 8) Is there any evaluation given to teachers to ensure that they know how to use the grading software?

*MarkBook is one of many intuitive software programs. Teachers may elect to use this program to support their assessment, evaluation and reporting practice but teachers are not required to do so.*

*Teachers who choose to use MarkBook have access to the Help feature as well as the ability to request personalized support through Hotline in Business and Learning Technologies.*

*In all cases, teachers are required to align their teaching practice with Procedure PR.584.CUR*

- 9) Is there technical support department at the company?

*Teachers using MarkBook have access to the MarkBook Help file, Hotline and by emailing MarkBook at [support@markbook.com](mailto:support@markbook.com).*

- 10) Is there data management or oversight or audit provided by a data steward at the board?

*Student achievement data is monitored on an ongoing basis at school-levels and system-levels.*

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- 11) How do we know that the marks awarded to students by teachers using MarkBook are accurate?

*The primary purpose of assessment and evaluation practices is to improve classroom instruction, program delivery and student learning.*

*Schools report formally to parents at designated times throughout the year. For all students, report cards reflect each individual student's achievement, development of learning skills and attendance in accordance with Growing Success (2010) and Procedure PR.584.CUR.*