

Regina Catholic Schools – Student Opportunity for Assignment Recovery Days and High School Grading and Assessment Guidelines.

This particular practice was first introduced at one high school and eventually expanded to another as a lunch hour homework club called “OAR” – the Outstanding Assignment Recovery program; later renamed the Opportunity for Assignment Recovery. Driven by the Student Support Team (administration, counsellors, learning resource teacher and student support personnel – the Aboriginal liaison and the community school coordinator) teachers emailed a form letter to parents informing them of missing assignments and stipulating that the student would need to complete the work during OAR (lunch hour) the following week. Supervised by one or more teachers (typically at least one of which was a math teacher) and the student support team (one administrator, one or more student services personnel), the assignments were given to students who were supported by other teachers and/or their classroom teacher to complete the assessment. This was originally designed as a “transitions’ project targeting grade 9 and 10 students with the hope of reinforcing the importance of homework completion and appropriate exam preparation. In addition, students who put in an hour at OAR were able to earn back class absences to comply with the division attendance practice. The result was a drastic reduction in failure rates for grade 9 and 10 students. However, there were significant challenges.

The man power required to manage this on a daily basis was overwhelming and it became apparent that subject area support was needed, particularly in the areas of math and language arts courses. Eventually, the program was scaled back to two or three days a week, then once a week in order to be manageable for both students and teachers. There was an effort to rotate staff support as an extra-curricular commitment that would provide support within the subject areas as needed. The other challenge was the short work period – lunch hours are 15 minutes shorter than a regular class and students still needed to eat and have break time. These challenges were somewhat mitigated by accessing the nutrition programs to feed the students during the working lunch and/or to offer sessions after school, but It was still quite cumbersome and it did not provide the quality block of time needed to focus students. It was finally decided to use non-instructional days 2 to 3 times a semester to support those students with large projects that were outstanding with weekly lunch hour or afterschool sessions to support minor assignments or missed tests. The management piece still required communication between classroom teachers to parents and students as well as the OAR team who needed copies of the assessments. The goal was to “take something off the plate” of the classroom teacher while providing opportunities for students, but there were still concerns.

Teachers were reluctant to grade students’ assessments that had already been taken up in class or were really just daily homework or practice, worth little overall. This led to some negotiation – homework was done for homework’s sake but major assessments worth 3% of more of the grade were graded. In addition, there were concerns about other staff “teaching” their students, but discussion around a tutorial approach helped to alleviate this, as did accessing more teachers to be involved with the activity as an “extra-curricular” commitment. In addition, it meant teachers had to abandon such traditional practices as late mark deductions which they felt kept students motivated to get work in on time. Work had to be done to shift paradigms.

Eventually, there was enough interest in the potential of the program to initiate a common practice at all RCSD high schools commencing in fall of 2016. Education leaders and administrators from all four schools, along with curriculum consultants and senior administration, contributed to the construction of a handbook which summarized a set of beliefs around best practice assessment and established common

guidelines for grading and practices and recovery. The program utilizes school wide “Recovery Days” scheduled as mandatory attendance days for students with outstanding assignments on non-instructional days (teacher professional days, in-service days) with OAR sessions accessed on a weekly basis. The target group remains transition students in grades 9 and 10, but also includes students at risk to fall behind with on-time credit targets. Much work needed to be done with teachers on best practices for assessment and grading. The research and consultation that resulted in the creation of the system handbook “RCSD High School Grading and Assessment Guidelines” was shared and Curriculum and Instruction worked with administrators and education leaders to in-service teachers on the work of Cooper, Schmoker, O’Connor, Reeves, Davies, Herbst, et. al.

The success of this document and the “Recovery” days and practices is dependent on the adoption of the four criteria for student success and four criteria effective teacher assessment. In otherwords, both students and teacher have a commitment and role to play.

Student Keys to Success: We believe that all of our students will be able to achieve their full academic potential if they adhere to these four criteria for success:

1. Regular and punctual attendance. RCSD has a Common Attendance Practice which states that a student must attend a minimum of 85% of classes. This means a student has 15 days each semester to accommodate appointments, illness, vacations and/or pressing personal concerns. All absences must be excused by a parent/guardian. Exemptions for extenuating circumstances may be granted.
2. A positive and willing attitude each and every day when arriving to class, prepared to learn.
3. The completion of **all** assignments; this includes diagnostic, formative and summative assessments.
4. Preparation for all assessments – this involves not just reviewing the material, but arriving to class with the appropriate materials and taking responsibility for all material missed due to absence.

Teacher Keys to Quality Assessment: RCSD subscribes to the four essential criteria of effective assessment (Reeves, 2011 & O’Connor, 2007) which provide the foundation for our common assessment guidelines and practices. We believe that assessment should be:

1. **Consistent** – assessment must be the same from classroom to classroom.
 - Performance standards around curricular outcomes should be the same for all teachers of like subject and grade levels.
 - Course finals should have a common construction and common weighting within a school and similar to like courses within the system.
2. **Accurate** – grades must report around the criteria and indicators of curricular outcomes.
 - Although student behaviours (effort, individual and group participation, attendance, attitude, adherence to class rules, etc.), have an impact on student success, grades should only be assigned according to curricular outcomes.
 - Some courses have curricular outcomes explicitly outlining participation as an indicator (e.g. Physical Science 20 – PS20 – CE1 - participate in physical science vocational

experiences). In these instances, it is appropriate to assign grades for participation based upon clear pre-established behaviour criteria.

3. **Meaningful** – grades need to be specific to skills.

- Assessments should be of high quality rather than quantity with clear criteria that are linked directly to the outcomes – what a student should know, understand or be able to do.
- Task/assessment descriptors should reflect outcomes and learning targets (eg. – “Unit test” does not provide meaningful information for the learner about the learning outcome).

4. **Timely and supportive to learning** – grades must be timely and about quality not quantity.

- Formative assessments are to inform instruction and gage learning. They should not be used to determine the grades but to build capacity towards summative assessments which are evaluative to determine grades.
- Spreadsheets and gradebooks are marks calculations tools, but teachers assign grades utilizing their professional judgement based on the evidence of learning collected through quality and timely assessments.
- Assessments should be graded and submitted in a timely manner in order to inform students about their learning (about one week for most assessments).

Conclusions:

We are currently tracking the number of students who have accessed Recovery Days during the first semester (2016-2017) and will compare our failure rates to previous year's data. It is the hope that by completing more of the term work students will not only acquire the credit but have a stronger foundation of knowledge that will lead to greater success in higher level related courses.

Support from parent communities has been positive. They support the message that students cannot “opt” out of work and appreciate the opportunity for make-up. Teachers at first skeptical are now reporting that more students who were willing to hand things in late or “take the zero” for some assignments are getting them in to avoid having to give up a day off from school, although there is still a concern regarding grading these “late” assessments in a timely matter outside of the class set. There is also great benefit in the “consistent” approach of teachers which has reduced tensions between parents/students and the school and between professional colleagues.

The management piece of the full day recovery opportunities is still challenging – non-contact days are professional development days which require teachers to volunteer to take on a session that involves recovery or administration teams to supervise. One work around was to hire subs on in-service days to work with the students which was effective but created an additional cost burden to already stretched school budgets.