

FIX 1**Don't include student behaviors (effort, participation, adherence to class rules, etc.) in grades; include only achievement.**

Reports on student . . . achievement should contain . . . information that indicates academic progress and achievement . . . separate from . . . punctuality, attitude, behavior, effort, attendance, and work habits.

—*Manitoba Education and Training, 1997, p. 13*

Grades are broken when they do not accurately communicate achievement. The fix for this is to make grades as pure a measure as possible of student achievement; that is, make them reflect only student performance in mastering the public, published learning goals of the state/province/district/school. This is the only way that grades can act as clear communication. Everyone who has a need to know about a student's performance in school certainly can be told that she or he is "a nice student who tries hard," but they also have a right to know the specific level of her or his knowledge in a particular subject at a given point in time.

We know that the grading practices of some teachers have contributed to grade inflation for some students by including desired behaviors unrelated to achievement, while other students who achieve at a high level have received deflated grades because of their failure to exhibit these same behaviors. For example, consider this evidence from two Canadian provinces:

Girls consistently outperform boys in high school classrooms across Ontario, and the explanation for the gender gap is a systematic bias against boys, the Fraser Institute says. According to six years of Grade 12 "grades" in advanced-level courses, girls get better grades more than 90% of the time in Language arts and about 60% of the time in Math. "Factors such as promptness in coming to class, willingness to cooperate, and what might be considered [good] work habits are distorting the marks," says Peter Cowley, the report's lead researcher. In other provinces where the institute's ratings have become an annual event, researchers have found girls receive better grades overall than boys even when their exam marks are lower. In B.C., "girls receive higher grades on school-based assessments in subjects regardless of their relative performance on the provincial examinations." (In British Columbia final year high school grades are determined partly from school based teacher assessment and partly from external provincial examinations.) (*National Post*, 18 April 2001, p. F3)

Similar evidence can be found in the United States from the Commonwealth of Virginia:

Many students . . . get passing grades by working hard in class but (their) academic weaknesses are pinpointed by the SOL's [Virginia's Standards of Learning exit tests]. (Joyce O. Jones, director of guidance at Gar-Field High School in Prince William County, VA, quoted in Helderman, 2004, p. B01)

Teachers combine achievement and other variables, such as behavior, into grades for several reasons. One is the belief that this practice appropriately rewards students who are well behaved and punishes those who do not behave as expected. When thus combined, grades become extrinsic motivators to control student behavior. As noted previously, this does not work for all students. A second reason, particu-

larly prevalent at the high school level, is that teachers have had no way to communicate separately about the behaviors they think are important, and so have blended them together with achievement. The solution for this faulty communication is to use standards-based expanded format report cards where the desirable behaviors are listed and rated. This has become increasingly common at the elementary level, but is not yet a widespread practice in middle and high school reporting. This is somewhat ironic because at the high school level grades serve high-stakes purposes (rank in class, program and/or scholarship eligibility, college admissions, etc.) and thus should depict achievement as accurately as possible to ensure good decisions.

One of the best examples of this type of reporting is the Provincial High School report card in Ontario (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/forms/report/sec/not1e.pdf>). Another excellent example is the Grade 7 and 8 report card used by the Winnipeg School Division in Manitoba (Figure 2-1). This district reports on six aspects of behavior for all students in each subject and the rubric for four levels of performance appears on the report card.

Reporting achievement separately from behaviors means that everyone can know as accurately as possible what a grade means in achievement terms. Another benefit of expanded format reporting is that it enables a school/community to show very clearly and forcefully which behaviors it values in students. Some states and many schools have articulated such statements. For example, the state of Hawaii has identified six General Learner Outcomes (GLO's) and reports on these for all students. See Figure 2-2 for an example of how teachers could record evidence for evaluating students on the basis of each GLO.

As you read and think about Fixes 2 through 6, keep in mind that they are subsets of the larger issue of separating behaviors from achievement. They each address specific behaviors that lead to inflated or reduced student grades, both inaccurate measures of achievement.

Student Involvement

Students benefit from frequent opportunities to identify both the behaviors that help and those that hinder their achievement. They also can self-assess their achievement and behaviors and set goals for both. In furtherance of this, teachers can identify the components of desired behaviors and help students to develop specific goals. For example, students often hear that they “need to improve their effort,” but *effort* may seem a vague concept. To help clarify this concept for students, teachers can identify the components of good effort, such as persistence, striving for accuracy, time on task, and trying alternate methods, which students then focus on to identify their relative strengths and weaknesses.

As educators, our beliefs and practices about motivation will have great impact on students. Students who have a sense of control because they know they are free to choose, and who receive frequent descriptive feedback instead of rewards and punishment linked to their behaviors, are much more likely to exhibit the desired behaviors and to value the separation of achievement and behavior.

Figure 2-1 Winnipeg (MB) Schools Grade 7-8 Report Card

The Winnipeg School Division				
Student Effort & Behaviour Report				
Grade 7-8				
Home Room Teacher:		Student Name:		
Grade: 07				
KEY TO TERMS	Excellent 4	Good 3	Needs Improvement 2	Unacceptable 1
Organizational Skills	Consistently sets goals. Collects and organizes information and uses time effectively.	Usually sets goals, collects and organizes information and uses time effectively.	Frequently needs assistance in setting goals, organizing information and using time effectively.	Rarely sets goals, information disorganized and frequently wastes time.
Homework	Consistently completes homework.	Usually completes homework.	Frequently does not complete homework.	Rarely completes homework.
Assignments	Consistently brings materials and completes assignments.	Usually brings materials and completes assignments.	Frequently needs to be reminded to complete assignments.	Rarely brings materials and completes assignments.
Citizenship	Consistently respects the rights of others.	Usually respects the rights of others.	Frequently needs teacher guidance in appropriate behaviour.	Rarely demonstrates respectful behaviour.
Teamwork	Consistently participates well in class/group activities.	Usually participates well in class/group activities.	Sometimes participates well in class/group activities.	Rarely participates in class/group activities.
Interpersonal Skills	Consistently resolves conflict in constructive manner.	Usually resolves conflict in constructive manner.	Frequently needs reminder on how to resolve conflict.	Rarely resolves conflict appropriately.

ART 5 Nixon, C Term 1 2 3 4 Organizational Skills 3 Homework 4 Assignments 4 Citizenship 3 Teamwork 3 Interpersonal Skills 3	ENGLISH 7 Palermo, U Term 1 2 3 4 Organizational Skills 3 Homework 3 Assignments 3 Citizenship 3 Teamwork 3 Interpersonal Skills 3	MATH 7 Nixon, C Term 1 2 3 4 Organizational Skills 3 Homework 3 Assignments 3 Citizenship 4 Teamwork 4 Interpersonal Skills 3	MUSIC 7 Drumstone, G Term 1 2 3 4 Organizational Skills 3 Homework 3 Assignments 3 Citizenship 3 Teamwork 3 Interpersonal Skills 3
PHYS ED 7 Pauls, T Term 1 2 3 4 Organizational Skills 3 Homework 3 Assignments 3 Citizenship 3 Teamwork 4 Interpersonal Skills 3	PRACT ARTS 7 Practical Arts Churchill Term 1 2 3 4 Organizational Skills 3 Homework 3 Assignments 3 Citizenship 3 Teamwork 3 Interpersonal Skills 3	SCIENCE 7 Nixon, C Term 1 2 3 4 Organizational Skills 3 Homework 3 Assignments 3 Citizenship 3 Teamwork 3 Interpersonal Skills 3	SOCIAL STUDY 7 Pauls, T Term 1 2 3 4 Organizational Skills 4 Homework 4 Assignments 4 Citizenship 3 Teamwork 4 Interpersonal Skills 4

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■ Figure 2-2 State of Hawaii General Learner Outcomes

Student:

Assessments → GLO's ↓	Achievement Evidence										Summary
Self-Directed Learner											
Community Contributor											
Complex Thinker											
Quality Producer											
Effective Communicator											
Effective and Ethical User of Technology											
Comments:											

Note: A complete rubric for the General Learning Outcomes appears at http://doe.k12.hi.us/standards/GLO_rubric.htm

Summary

Grades are broken when they mix achievement and non-achievement elements. The fix is to report variables such as behaviors separately from achievement, thereby ensuring that the grades reflect student achievement as accurately as possible.

A grade should give as clear a measure as possible of the best a student can do. Too often, grades reflect an unknown mixture of multiple factors. . . . How effective is such a communication system? The problem transcends individual teachers. Unless teachers throughout a school or district completely agree on the elements and factor them into their grading in consistent ways, the meaning of grades will vary from classroom to classroom, school to school.

—Tomlinson and McTighe, 2006, p. 133

