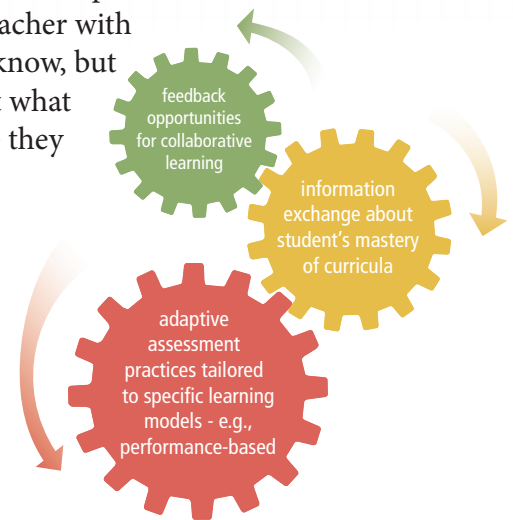


## ASSESSMENT

“You can’t just say, ‘Oh, you failed, let’s go onto the next unit.’ You have to come back and try again. There’s a level of frustration for the teachers, and there does have to be a cut-off point, but this is a more humane approach. Kids don’t come here to fail. They come here to succeed and you have to do everything in your power to help them.”

*Janet Grenier, Directrice, École Ste-Marguerite-Bourgeoys*

Kathy Muhlethaler says, “Assessment for learning strategies are effective for providing information to students about how they are doing. In classrooms that promote continual growth and mastery of learning, students complete assessments that provide the teacher with information on what students know, but also provide information about what students don’t know and where they need support and feedback.”



## What is the impact on students?

Assessment used as part of the learning process provides feedback about how to improve, and gives students a clear view of what is expected. Assessment that is collaborative – shared between the student and teacher – greatly benefits students.

Students become aware of areas they need to concentrate on, who to go to for assistance in that work, and how to get there, step-by-step. Deana Helton explains, “If a student has a failing mark, we need to ask why. Sometimes a student seems to understand a concept yet still has a failing mark, so maybe the teacher didn’t ask the question in the right way.”

Performance-based assessment requires students to demonstrate what they can do and what they know. Its place is solidly based in school-wide standards, where all students know, through rubrics, portfolio plans and other explicitly stated expectations that they will be assessed on work they produce.

“At our school,” Kathy Muhlethaler says, “we have focused on implementing a school-wide assessment plan. Students

know at the start of each unit what their learning outcomes are; they experience a variety of learning activities; they have opportunities to review their knowledge and understanding of the learning outcomes; and they have a variety of opportunities to demonstrate their learning of critical outcomes.”

Effective assessment that is part of the learning process builds student self-confidence, metacognition and self-directed learning. The impact is felt by students in a very real way. In addition, as Muhlethaler notes, “Students are more engaged as they continue to experience the changes in teaching and see the connections between the assessments for learning and the assessments of learning. ... Overall, our school-wide assessment plan has led to an improvement in course completion and high school completion. It has also meant that students are more persistent and are challenging higher level courses, as evident in the increase of diploma exam participation rates.”

## What is the impact on staff?

**H**ow and why we conduct assessment has an impact on how we teach. Michelle Blair relates how, “in the weight training unit of PE, the teacher has focused on reciprocal and discovery-based learning by having students partner up to experiment with both the cardio equipment and the weights. This has been a way of moving away from the teacher-as-lector type teaching.”

Kathy Muhlethaler says, “[Our] teachers have changed how marks are earned, reported and graded. We utilize targeted PD [through which] our staff have been introduced to, instructed in and given time to collaborate on research-based assessment practices ... Our teachers avoid practices that distort achievement, build clear, quality assessments, and calculate final course marks using their professional judgment. In the last few years, we have been able to move on from the topics of grading and summative assessment to the topic of formative assessment or assessment for learning. Our PD goal is that ‘assessment for learning is happening in every classroom for every student every day.’”

Using assessment as a way to probe students’ prior knowledge allows us to build from a relevant foundation. Wanda Gerard, Josina Nagtegaal and Debbie Terceros explain, “Staff are more focused on meeting students’ needs than ‘aiming for the middle.’ Assessment is focusing more on mastery of outcomes than measuring content acquisition. Teachers are accepting students redoing work for reassessment. There’s been an increase in project-based assessment. Teachers are seeing recovery as something that can be done within the semester timeline.”

“Understanding Anne Davies’ assessment for learning has been very important for our teachers. Have empathy. Be open-minded. Develop a good knowledge of brain development and how the brain makes connections. And put away old ideas – I mean really put them away.”

*Janet Grenier, Directrice, École Ste-Marguerite-Bourgeoys*

“If it’s about student learning, time should not be a factor in assessment; think timelines not deadlines. Establish a testing centre. Encourage students to assess their own mastery and provide tools for them to do so.”

*Wanda Gerard, Principal, Peace Wapiti Academy,  
with Josina Nagtegaal, Flex Coordinator,  
and Debbie Terceros, CONNECT Coordinator*

## When assessment is a focus:

- a variety of assessments are used, including portfolios, demonstrations of learning, applied projects, and performance assessments
- assessment is part of the learning process and is used to guide teachers in adjusting instruction, promoting learning, and assessing student mastery
- clear expectations about high standards foster a culture of continuous improvement
- students are given chances to replace earlier attempts and have opportunities to make up missed assignments
- fair, accurate and flexible grading practices are used, and teachers exercise their professional judgment when determining final course marks
- professional development assists teachers in understanding how to manage and use the data they gather.

SOURCES: Kathy Muhlethaler, Principal, ME LaZerte; Michelle Blair, Principal, Grande Prairie Composite School; Wanda Gerard, Principal, Peace Wapiti Academy, with Josina Nagtegaal, Flex Coordinator, and Debbie Terceros, CONNECT Coordinator; Deana Helton, Principal, Bishop McNally; Janet Grenier, Directrice, École Ste-Marguerite-Bourgeoys

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