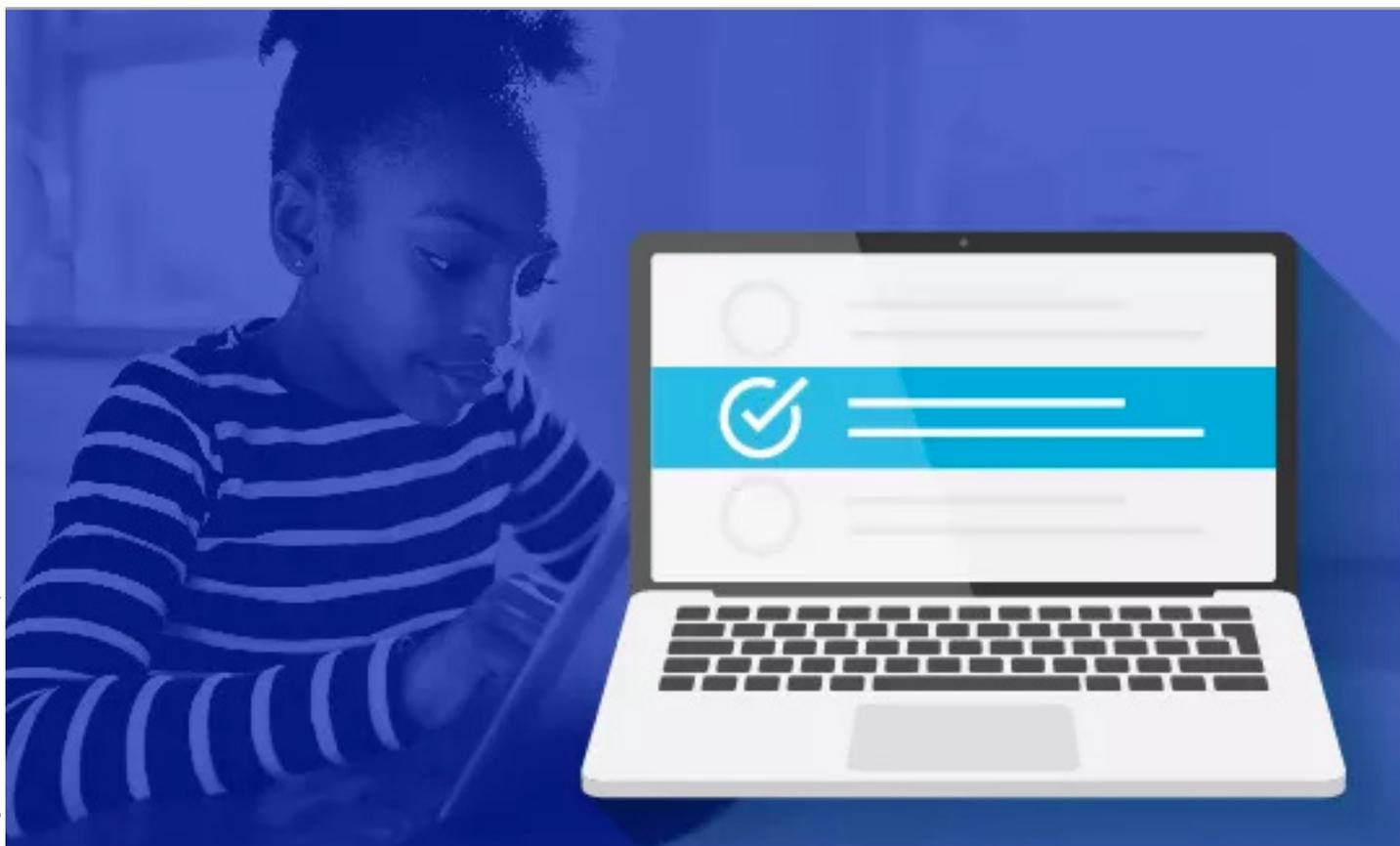


SPOTLIGHT



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ASSESSMENT

EDITOR'S NOTE

Measuring student learning amid school closures has proved challenging for educators. In this Spotlight, discover how teachers are grading students during the coronavirus crisis, consider the most effective ways to assess group work, and learn how the digital divide is affecting student exams in a remote era.

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Published on April 1, 2020, in Education Week

Grading Students During the Coronavirus Crisis: What's the Right Call?

By Stephen Sawchuk

As the nation's schools lurch into an unprecedented experiment with distance learning, with all of the hiccups and false starts that entails, teachers and administrators alike are starting to wrestle with a question deeply at the heart of the learning enterprise: How are they supposed to assign grades?

It's a tough call. Districts must balance what's fair for students, considering that many don't—or won't—have full access to their teachers. There's also an art to the messaging—they don't want to communicate that they're blowing off the rest of the school year.

The Mountain Empire district in California stretches more than 660 square miles, includes students from three Native American reservations, and serves a half dozen distinct communities. Internet access ranges from decent to nonexistent. The district will be offering instruction both online and, for families who lack sufficient access, photocopied work packets.

That hasn't stopped the district from trying to put together ambitious learning plans for its 1,700 students, like an interdisciplinary project for them to explore a topic of interest over several days.

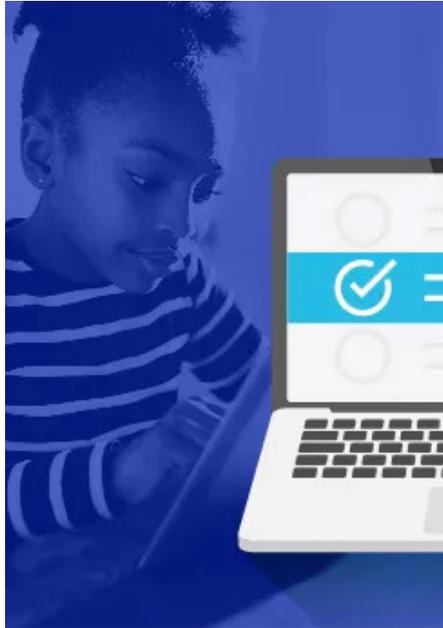
But it does mean that students will have varying types and intensity of interaction with their teachers.

Given those disparities, the district plans to recommend that, as long as students participate, teachers should revert to their previous progress grades. Students could potentially improve those scores, but they wouldn't be penalized.

"I don't want to give everyone an A because we're just trying to be nice," said Patrick Keeley, the principal of the district's single high school. "But we don't want to ruin people's chances in the future, either," especially when it's due to factors outside of their control.

Contrast Mountain Empire's context with that of the Salem City district in Virginia, near Roanoke.

The district serves a small, fairly compact city. Every student in grades 3



—DigitalVision Vectors and iStock/Getty

through 12 has a Chromebook through its one-to-one program. Salem has about 200 "hot spots" for WiFi connectivity, and a cable company has agreed to provide free internet access for students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunches.

So when its spring break ends on April 13, the district plans to make a legitimate go at covering the most essential of its remaining state standards via online learning—and to continue issuing letter grades for students' work.

"We realize that if we tell kids today, 'Hey, your grade can't be any lower than it is now,' or if we tell them we're not going to grade them for the rest of the year, we're going to have a big chunk of kids check out," said Curtis Hicks, the district's assistant superintendent. "And that's not healthy for them for the short run, and it's not healthy for the long term, if students are underprepared for what comes next."

Those two anecdotes outline the different tension points surrounding grading, but there's also potentially a larger conversation to be had.

Grading has been on the backburner as educators have focused on other measures

“

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CURTIS HICKS

ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT, SALEM CITY DISTRICT, VIRGINIA

of student progress, like graduation rates and standardized tests scores, but the coronavirus is prompting new questions about how it should work.

It comes down to this: What is the point of grading, anyway? And how might it need to evolve in the age of the coronavirus?

Cross Purposes?

In the United States, grading is almost exclusively a local prerogative, with rules set by its more than 14,000 school districts.

To try to give some shape to this far-flung, locally developed system, states and other public and private bodies have built a variety of policies around grades to force them, imperfectly, into a common currency.

Every state sets credit hour requirements for graduation, for example. Grade point averages are used for college admissions, scholarship programs, and even eligibility for participation in extracurricular activities and sports.

Some states use grades to determine whether students are eligible for special

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programs, like magnets or gifted education; a handful use them as part of their 3rd-grade reading laws to determine whether students should progress to 4th grade.

The coronavirus pandemic is forcing states and districts to give some serious reconsideration to nearly all of those policies.

Most states are attending to the most pressing needs first—those of high school seniors set to graduate. To date, the states of Arizona, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Ohio, Oregon, Mississippi, Virginia, and Wisconsin have all waived various graduation requirements, including certain mandated courses, end-of-course examinations, and minimum attendance hours. Many of them are now allowing districts to decide whether students have met the requirements for graduation.

The broader question of grades, though, is complicated by the fact that the purpose of grading has become a bit of a muddle, said Jack Schneider, an assistant professor of education at the University of Massachusetts Lowell who is co-writing a book on the history of grading.

Sometimes grades are meant as motivation, to help spur students to do better. Sometimes they're supposed to communicate mastery of content to parents. And sometimes, in their most weighty function, they're used to compare students to one another, as when colleges and universities look at transcripts.

Most of the time, the A-to-F grading system is pressed into supporting all those goals even though some of them arguably work at cross-purposes, Schneider noted. And that effectively makes it harder for districts to tease out what to do with grades during an extraordinary disruption—like the school closures wrought by the coronavirus.

“People will begin to realize they do want feedback, for instance, from their student’s teachers on how their kids are doing,” he noted. “But unless the playing field is equal or they’re getting the same type of supports they usually get, they don’t want that kind of communicative effort to end up living forever on a student transcript.”

Equity Concerns

Most of the districts interviewed by Education Week still want teachers to be providing lots of feedback to students on the assignments they complete. But they're less certain about the other functions of grades.

Many districts cite equity concerns for wanting to take a pause from traditional



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JACK SCHNEIDER

AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL

grading schemes, pointing to ways in which grades could penalize students who are low-income, lack access to a device and the internet, or who cannot rely on parents to help with home-based learning.

“Already our achievement scores are reflective of poverty in Ohio,” noted Michelle Novak, a school board member for the 6,400-student Middletown City district, in Middletown, Ohio. Her district serves many students in poverty who come from single-parent households, and the opioid epidemic hit the area hard. It estimates that 1-in-5 students don’t have access to both a device and the internet.

“If we want to give our kids grades during this time, we’re really going to be grading what their home life looks like,” she said. “And I don’t think it’s fair to do that to anyone.”

The Mountain Empire district, for now, says it wants teachers to focus their feedback on students’ progress towards standards, rather than assessing simply to build a grade. As for the end of the term, “[i]f they have an A and are participating, then they’ll have grade maintenance. ... If there are kids sitting there that want to try to improve their grade, we’ll allow for them to try to build that grade up,” Keeley said.

Part of the decision, he added, is because admissions to the University of California and California State University systems are based on “A-G” subject requirements, and it’s not clear how the new distance learning will impact that structured sequence, he said. (Other states, like Texas, have similar college-entrance systems that depend on students’ GPAs or class rankings, which means that any decisions about grading will have to be squared with those systems.)

For their part, many colleges nationwide appear to be favoring a pass-fail, or pass-no credit system for work completed this quarter or semester, and some K-12 districts are inclined to follow them.

The Highline school district, in Burien, Wash., will assign scores of pass or no credit for work completed during its period of remote learning—the idea being that those students who don’t initially earn credit could get opportunities to do so later in the summer or beyond.

“I think the whole grading issue is one where we’ve just got to wait and see,” said Susan Enfield, the superintendent of Highline who also sits on the board of the nonprofit that publishes Education Week.

One of her rationales behind the temporary grade freeze is that there are

over 100 languages spoken in her district. While the district has done a swift job translating learning materials into the top five mostly widely spoken, serving English-learners who speak other native languages will be much more challenging in a distance-learning environment.

A Question of Pedagogy

Teachers who have made the often-rocky leap to distance learning are advocating for a cautious approach, too.

Bobson Wong, a math teacher at a Queens high school in New York City, has noticed that his lessons are taking longer to deliver remotely. Partly that's because it is much more difficult to check for students' understanding and make teaching adjustments in an asynchronous learning environment.

He's focused on trying to get students through the remainder of the curriculum before the system's spring break, which begins April 9, and wants students to be motivated to finish—not frustrated.

"I feel like the most important thing I want to accomplish right now is to establish a routine in this environment and a sense of order and progress that we are actually moving forward, and this is not just 13 days of busywork," he said. "I have no idea how you could give a numerical grade for anything here."

But at the same time, Wong said there's some value in determining which students appear to have mastered the content, and which students will need more help in the future.

"You need something to differentiate a kid who is clearly doing a lot of work and walks away with some kind of knowledge, and a kid for whatever reason just hasn't—their parents may be sick, or they may lack internet access," he said. "Grades aren't a judgment of character."

And he agrees that a larger conversation about grading could ultimately benefit students.

"Perhaps we emphasize them too much, or we use them in ways we shouldn't be using them," he said. "Maybe we should look at why we give grades in the first place, and what we should be doing with them."

Students are getting in on the action, too. In Georgia, more than 70,000 had signed a petition on Change.org calling on the state to void fourth-quarter GPAs.

"Without the proper help from teachers or having the ability to actively question teachers and receiving rapid responses, students are not truly learning, but rather

grabbing the information temporarily," its organizer, Ellison Gonzalez, wrote.

'You're Going to Make Mistakes'

As a testament to how fraught the issue of grading is, the nation's two largest school districts, both of which have begun their remote-learning plans, are keeping things open on how they'll determine grades.

The guidelines in the Los Angeles district say teachers should "continue to grade and give timely feedback to students," with opportunities for those who cannot access instruction to make up missed assignments. But it doesn't say what will ultimately appear on students' transcripts. A spokeswoman declined an interview, saying the district would issue more guidance in future weeks.

New York City expects that teachers should continue to assign and grade remote work, but says it will give them the flexibility to adapt if students don't have the same access to devices or outside learning supports.

Some states are offering guidance where they can, though they are aware that districts must make the final calls on their own.

In Virginia, the second state to close school buildings and in-person instruction for the remainder of the school year, the Virginia School Boards Association and Virginia Association of School Superintendents recommended some practices for districts to consider if they move to pass-fail systems. They might choose to institute pass-fail only for certain courses rather than instituting a blanket policy, for example.

Though the Salem City, Va., district is holding to traditional grades for now, it wants to give students a fair shot. Teachers will stagger the days they're instructing so students aren't slammed with assignments for seven courses every day. They're being told to boil down the state standards to the most essential ones.

The district also plans to establish safeguards: If at the end of the school year students feel that their grade is not consistent with their academic history, or negatively impacted them, they could lobby to have that grade counted as pass-fail and drop it from their GPA calculation.

The flexibility is intentional, Hicks said.

"If you try to make decisions too fast, you make mistakes. If you try to make decisions that are projecting well into the future, you're going to make mistakes," he said. "We don't want to paint ourselves into the corner." ■



I feel like the most important thing I want to accomplish right now is to establish a routine in this environment and a sense of order and progress that we are actually moving forward, and this is not just 13 days of busywork."

BOBSON WONG

A MATH TEACHER, QUEENS HIGH SCHOOL
NEW YORK CITY



—Getty

Published on February 4, 2020, in *Education Week's Teaching Now Blog*

When Teachers Are Tough Graders, Students Learn More, Study Says

By Madeline Will

A new study finds that students perform better on end-of-year standardized tests when their teachers are tough graders—and argues that the “mindset that says ‘everybody gets a gold star’ does more damage than good.”

The report, published today by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a conservative think tank that focuses on school choice and high expectations for students, found that this effect holds true for students across racial and ethnic groups, gender, socioeconomic makeup, and previous academic background. The study also found evidence of longer-term learning gains for students.

Author Seth Gershenson, an associate professor at American University, studied a decade of 8th and 9th grade Algebra 1 course grades and end-of-course test scores in North Carolina public schools (the data was from 2006 to 2016). He compared students of teachers with higher grading standards—meaning they assign lower grades than expected, given students’ scores on standardized tests—to their peers who have teachers with lower grading standards, meaning they assign good grades to students who perform relatively poorly on the end-of-course test.

He found that teachers with the highest grading standards increase their students’ end-of-course scores on standardized tests by 16.9 percent of a standard deviation over teachers with the lowest grading standards. Even teachers who are in the middle with their grading standards are more effective than those with the lowest standards, the study found.

And the students of teachers with the highest grading standards performed significantly better a year later in geometry (by 7.3 percent of a standard deviation) and two years later in Algebra II (by 8.6 percent of a standard deviation).

Fordham staff also interviewed middle and high school teachers across the country about their views on grading, and found that many teachers said they felt pressure from administrators, parents, or the students themselves to award higher grades.

“In the short run, that makes people’s lives easier,” Gershenson said. “In the long run, that really hurts students. It gives them a false sense of security; it sets them up for failure or at least lower performance down the road.”

Rethinking Traditional Letter Grades

Gershenson said this study is focused on the A-C range of grades, and “the ero-

sion of what it means to have an A.” In interviews with teachers, some said that “a B is almost like the new average,” and that an A “means that [students] probably turned everything in.”

In recent years, many educators have been rethinking how they assign grades. Some have shifted to standards-based grading, in which the teacher gives detailed feedback for each assignment and students’ performance is measured against specific course standards for mastery of the content. There’s also competency-based learning, which allows students to progress at different rates based on how well they’ve mastered a set of standards or competencies.

Some schools have “no zero” policies that say the lowest score a student can receive on an assignment is a 50, at times even when a student fails to turn anything in. (The idea there is that a zero can tank a student’s chances of passing the course.) And some teachers have even ditched the gradebook altogether, in favor of giving students detailed feedback on their performance throughout the year and working with students to jointly assign a final report card grade, when the school requires it.

Many of these educators say that the traditional A-F system doesn’t inspire students to learn for the sake of learning, and that letter grades are too heavily based on nonacademic factors, like punctuality and compliance. They say that grades can stress students out and cause others—particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds—to give up.

Even so, Gershenson said his study found “zero evidence” that high grading standards hurt students. There is no effect on high school graduation, although this might be because students who are taking Algebra 1 in 8th or 9th grade are already unlikely to drop out. The study also found some evidence that having a teacher with higher grading standards can slightly increase students’ intent to attend a four-year college or university, although this result is only marginally statistically significant.

“That contradicts the concern that kids are going to get discouraged by having a realistic grade,” Gershenson said.

And his study did not find any significant differences between students’ backgrounds: “No matter how you slice it, everybody benefits” from high grading standards, he said.

He also found that grading standards tend to be higher in suburban schools and schools serving more affluent stu-

dents. In the study, Gershenson wrote that this points to what President George W. Bush once called “soft bigotry of low expectations.”

“Assigning good grades for mediocre work signals to students that excellent work is beyond their reach,” he wrote. “When students who have not mastered the material receive passing marks anyway, they can become compacent and fail to reach their full potential.”

Recommendation for More Training

The study found that teachers who attended selective colleges, hold graduate degrees, and have more experience tend to have higher grading standards. Teachers with graduate degrees have grading standards that are about 19 percent of a standard deviation stricter than teachers without higher degrees—possibly because they experienced a more challenging academic environment.

Also, new teachers have grading standards that are 29 percent of a stan-

dard deviation lower than average, while veteran teachers are tougher than average.

Gershenson said these findings indicate that there’s an opportunity for teacher-preparation programs and district-led professional development trainings to focus on grade assignment. That’s typically an area that’s overlooked, he said—yet teachers need support.

He also recommends that school leaders share with teachers how their grading standards compare to the standards of their peers teaching the same subjects and at the same grade level. The transparency, he said, might encourage educators to aim higher.

“I think school leaders can certainly look and see how much variation in grading standards there is, and if there’s a lot of variation, that suggests that some teachers are doing it right, and some teachers are doing it wrong,” he said. “Are there kids whose grades would essentially change from an A to a B depending on who their teacher is? That’s the kind of thing we want to eliminate.” ■



Assigning good grades for mediocre work signals to students that excellent work is beyond their reach. When students who have not mastered the material receive passing marks anyway, they can become compacent and fail to reach their full potential.”

SETH GERSHENSON

AUTHOR, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Published on February 5, 2019, in Education Week’s Special Report: Projects, Portfolios, and Performance Assessments

How to Assess Group Projects: It’s About Content and Teamwork

By Sarah D. Sparks

Group work is a time-tested strategy in many classrooms, but educators are starting to rethink how to evaluate these projects not just on the content students learn, but the skills they hone to work in teams as adults.

Collaborative problem-solving—the ability to work with others on new and complex problems—is one of the most highly sought-after skills by employers. It’s required under both the common-core math and reading standards and the Next Generation Science Standards. But it’s also notoriously tricky to pull off a project that builds both students’ cognitive and social skills as they meet content standards.

“As teachers, we assume students know how to collaborate,” said Diana

Lowe, a curriculum director for math and science in the Texarkana, Ark., school district, which adopted project-based learning as part of its own shift to the Common Core State Standards.

In practice, though, Texarkana educators found group projects often floundered—not because students didn’t understand the content, but because they couldn’t work together successfully. The district has been working with the Buck Institute for Education, a nonprofit which provides teacher training on implementing project-based learning, to integrate both content and teamwork skills into assessing their group projects.

“Part of what makes it risky to launch collaborative problem-solving projects for a teacher is there’s a lack of research on how to set up contexts for problems,” said



—Getty

Art Graesser, a psychology professor at the University of Memphis in Tennessee who studies collaborative learning and problem-solving. “Emotions can be involved; the kids might fight over who gets to do what and ... have conflict because part of the construct is to try to get different people’s perspectives.”

Breaking Down Skills

In 2017, the Program for International Student Assessment released the first worldwide test of students’ collaborative problem-solving skills. U.S. 15-year-olds

scored in the top 15 of the 52 participating countries, but fewer than 10 percent had strong collaboration skills. On average, U.S. students knew how to volunteer information or ask for clarification in a group, but they were less likely to be able to handle complex problems, mediate group conflicts, or evaluate the quality of their teammates' work.

"Employers are asking us for specific things that kids can do ... to be able to solve problems on the road, to communicate well with each other," said William Brazier, the professional-learning supervisor for the Loudoun County, Va., district, which launched a districtwide project-based and group-learning initiative in 2014. "Previously, the question was, 'What information do I need to know for a test?' Now that question is, 'What work do I have to produce that will actually have an application in the world that makes collaboration much more important?'"

More-typical group projects, such as science labs, don't necessarily boost students' collaboration skills. In fact, students who spent the most time doing practical experiments in science class performed 31 points lower on average on PISA's collaborative problem-solving test than students who rarely did so.

That may be because group projects in which the answer is already known can make it easier for individual students to slack off, according to Graesser.

He recommended teachers instead set up problems in which students with different skill sets must come together to solve a new problem and produce something. "It's very visible when you create something. Each person has to do their part or else it doesn't work," Graesser said.

The Loudoun district now requires its teachers to explicitly teach students collaboration skills as part of introducing project-based learning and has students develop "contracts" laying out roles and agreeing to rules to guide discussions, such as active listening.

"What we think is needed is not simply assessing the teamwork, but it is training, practice, and feedback," said Stephen Fiore, director of the Cognitive Sciences Laboratory and team cognition researcher at the University of Central Florida. Research has shown that people in teams taught how to distribute expertise and evaluate what they are discussing, such as the pros and cons of the solutions they develop have been found to produce the best work, Fiore said.

For teachers, that means the process of assessing group projects should include

What Is Teamwork? PISA Parses Out the Skills

The Program for International Student Assessment, or PISA, evaluates a dozen different aspects of collaboration for 15-year-olds across the globe. U.S. students have proven more adept at such group problem-solving than the international average, but girls outperformed boys in every country.

Here's a breakdown of what that involves:

1. Understanding roles to solve the problem
2. Monitoring and repairing the shared understanding
3. Discovering the type of collaborative interaction to solve the problem, along with goals
4. Identifying and describing tasks to be repeated
5. Monitoring results of actions and evaluating success in solving the problem
6. Enacting plans
7. Discovering perspectives and abilities of team members
8. Building a shared representation and negotiating the meaning of the problem
9. Describing roles and team organization
10. Following rules of engagement
11. Communicating with team members about the actions to be/being performed
12. Monitoring, providing feedback, and adapting the team organization and roles

Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

"explicitly quizzing [students] on whether they know what their team members are doing," Fiore said. "When we look at the kinds of teamwork processes, we would break it down into: How well are they sharing information? How well do they recognize the roles the team members are taking on? Are they trying to meet the goals that the team has identified? How well are they addressing any conflict?"

Building Trust

Teachers in the Texarkana district mapped out both individual benchmarks for content in each project and a "soft-skills rubric," which they use to monitor students'

communication, creativity, and teamwork over the course of group projects.

"Even though you're still measuring students' individual progress toward the content standards, those soft-skill rubrics do give you a way to look at a team assessment that is not based on the student's content knowledge," said Rachel Scott, the director of the magnet program for the Texarkana district.

Teachers build up students' skills in areas like listening, assigning roles, and monitoring each others' work in short, low-stakes group activities before moving to major group projects, Texarkana's Lowe said.

"It's important as a teacher to estab-

lish a [collaborative] culture ... so that students develop some trust and appreciation for each other's abilities and skill sets," Lowe said. "It sets the tone for them being able to do more with their projects and teams."

Renee Dooly, a 1st grade teacher at Chico Country Day School, a project-based charter school in Chico, Calif., said she builds in time for class reflections after group projects.

"Kids will be very honest," Dooly said. "This year's class ... they do have a hard time working together, but they are very

good about saying, 'Oh, this went well because we all had a turn to talk,' or 'This didn't go well because so-and-so wouldn't participate.'"

Emerging technology may also make it easier for teachers to assess students' collaboration skills, by allowing teachers to track students' participation in online planning discussions or edits to group projects.

Dooly said group projects allow students who struggle on traditional tests to show their academic strengths while also getting more support from their part-

ners. For example, in an internal study of eight charter schools in Minnesota and Wisconsin, the EdVisions school network found students' stronger scores on an assessment of collaboration skills were associated with better math and reading performance.

"You're also going to have some kids who may not be able to perform at the 1st grade [level] work, but they really are putting the most effort into some part of the group project," Dooly said. "Group work [becomes] a strength area for them." ■



—iStock/Getty

Published on April 23, 2020, in *Education Week*

8th Graders Don't Know Much About History, National Exam Shows

By Stephen Sawchuk and Sarah D. Sparks

Eighth graders' grasp of key topics in history have plummeted, national test scores released this morning show—an alarming result at a time of deep political polarization, economic uncertainty, and public upheaval in the United States.

Except for the very top-performing students, scores fell among nearly all grade 8 students in history on the National As-

essment of Educational Progress, also called the Nation's Report Card, since the last history administration, in 2014.

The decline of four points overall erased fully half of the overall gains made in the subject since 1994, the first year the exam was given. Federal officials described themselves as "disappointed" and the results as "pervasive" and "disturbing."

Scores fell in geography, too. In that subject, the overall decline of three points since 2014 was largely due to a downturn in the performance of the lowest-performing students—those at the

25th percentile and below.

Only in civics, the third subject tested, did students' scores remain flat. Learning in that subject has historically proved difficult to budge: Since its first administration, in 1998, scores in that assessment have increased by only three points.

U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos called the results "stark and inexcusable."

"In the real world, this means students don't know what the Lincoln-Douglas debates were about, nor can they discuss the significance of the Bill of Rights, or point out basic locations on a map," she said.

National concern about the quality of young people's civic and historical preparation and knowledge of global events has been steadily growing over the last two years, with some states introducing new coursework and testing requirements. But the coronavirus pandemic has upended K-12 education, and it is unclear whether states will continue to pump the gas on those efforts.

A Consistent Pattern

On the other hand, the temporary suspension of the reading and math tests many blame for focusing schools too narrowly on those subjects provides an opportunity to seize the moment, noted Louise Dubé, the executive director of curriculum provider iCivics. She also helps lead a coalition of some 90 groups supporting civics and history education.

"Are we going to be able to focus on these integrative disciplines that have a great deal of connection with what's happening right now and feel a great deal more relevant in people's lives?" she asked. "I don't know, but it's all I can hope for."

The history, civics, and geography exams were given in early 2018 to a na-

tional sample of nearly 43,000 8th graders. It is also the first time these subjects have been assessed using digital devices as well as traditional paper-and-pencil forms. (There are no state-by-state results for the three subjects as there are for math and reading.)

Prior research has shown that switching to a new testing mode can depress scores, so NAEP officials used statistical methods to equate the digital results to prior years' paper-and-pencil scores.

The overall findings were distinctly subpar. In history, students scored lower on all four areas measured by the test—the evolution of American democracy; culture; economic and technical changes; and America's changing role in the world. The poor results were consistent across all racial and ethnic categories, too, with the exception of students identifying as Asian or Pacific Islander.

Across the three subjects, a quarter or more of students fell below the “basic” performance category, meaning they didn't have even the fundamental prerequisite skills to master the content. Thirty-four percent of students fell below the “basic” performance category in history, compared to 29 percent in 2014. In geography, 29 percent fell below that mark compared to 25 percent in 2014. There was no significant change in civics.

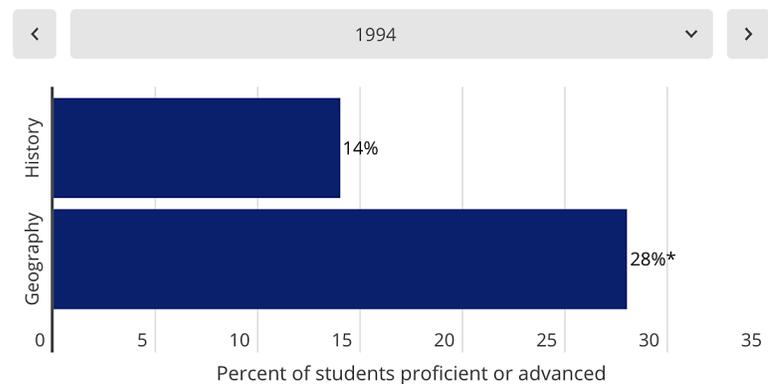
Tina Heafner, president of National Council of the Social Studies, said she was dismayed by the first decline in U.S. history and geography achievement in middle school. “One factor that also is really disturbing for me is just the general low level of proficiency: Less than a quarter of our students are proficient or above proficient level in the three subject areas, and we're talking only 15 percent in U.S. history.”

The history and geography findings add to growing evidence of a broad-based widening of learning gaps between top performers and the most struggling students. In 2019, NAEP's 4th and 8th grade reading and math scores and the Program for International Student Assessment of 15-year-olds in the same subjects showed that the highest-achieving 10 percent of students held steady or improved, while the lowest 10 percent to 20 percent of students declined over the same time.

“The bottom of the distribution is dropping at a faster rate,” said Peggy Carr, the associate commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, which administers the NAEP. “These results are not designed to point to why this is also happening, but we clearly see

Faltering Knowledge of Civics, Geography, and History

New results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress show fewer students reached proficiency in civics, geography, or history in 2018 than in 2014. In fact, civics and history achievement was no better in the most recent test than it was when they were first administered. Geography knowledge is worse than it was when first tested in 1994.



History Progress Sinks for All but Top Students

Note: *Statistically significant difference from 2018 scores. The 2001 bridge study connected achievement before and after accommodations were allowed for students with disabilities.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics

a correlation here that's disturbing.”

Different groups of 8th graders took NAEP's 8th grade reading and its civics, geography, and history tests, but Carr surmised that students who struggle to read would likely face an uphill fight with the social studies subjects. At least a third of the questions require that when writing in response to texts students must “be clear about their answers and justify their answers,” she noted.

Widening gaps between low- and high-performing students “are really concerning,” said Emily Swafford, the director of academic and professional affairs at the American Historical Association.

“And the reason I think they're concerning is because I've seen that history is good preparation for success in your future, whatever you do, whatever course of study you have and then whatever job that you have after that.

“But we have seen trends that history, rather than being a gateway to success in college is a barrier for our students, for [low-income] Pell grant students, for African-American students, Native American students, Latinx students, and first-generation students. That's worrying and something that we're actively trying to change,” she added.

Those trends ought to be concerning

in the context of the coronavirus, as the nation shifts to an unprecedented experiment with distance learning. At least 37 states, comprising more than 55 million students, have closed school buildings and moved to remote learning in response to the pandemic. Researchers and educators alike point out that the digital divide and other disparities are likely to exacerbate opportunity and learning gaps among students.

Data from the NAEP's background questionnaires, meanwhile, suggest that differential access to learning and course quality also might have contributed to the patterns. About half of students in the top quarter of performance said that they regularly were asked to "compare and evaluate different points of view about the past," compared to less than a third of those students in the bottom quarter of performance.

In civics, just 22 percent of students had teachers whose primary responsibility was teaching that subject—and those students scored, on average, six points higher than students whose teachers said civics was not their primary responsibility.

While these data do not conclusively explain the results, they do bolster what some social studies experts have called a "civics gap"—the idea some groups of students are less likely to receive high-quality programming in civics and history.

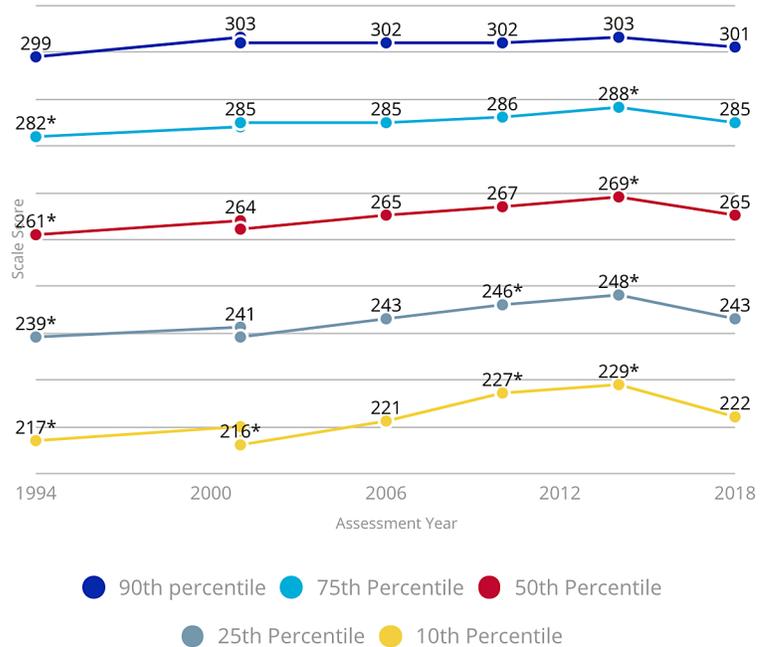
"You know, your high-achieving students are more likely to be in your higher level classes, perhaps AP classes or honors-level classes," Haefner said. "And so it would raise the question of, what's the quality of instruction that's occurring depending on the type of class a student takes?"

"So then this test becomes a measure, a cumulative measure of what content knowledge they been exposed to this message, as much a measure of exposure and access as it is anything," she said.

It's possible, too, that classroom teaching has changed in ways that could affect scores. Swafford said more high schools have emphasized "historical thinking" over content memorization. The NAEP exam covers historical content from 1607 onwards, as well as asking students to analyze various sources.

"What I care about in history education is this sense of, are you learning about what the value of studying history is, and how historians know what they know and how history can help you in your career and adult lives," Swafford said, "and that's not easily measured in

In 8th grade U.S. history, as in other subjects, results showed widening gaps between the lowest- and highest-performing students.



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics

In Geography, Students Struggle to Locate Cities

Drag and drop the names of the following cities to the correct locations on the map.

Los Angeles
Tokyo
London
Mumbai

✓
Complete: Labels four cities correctly
26%

Note: *Statistically significant difference from 2018 scores.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics

6 Reasons to consider



Measuring Mastery of State Standards on a Proven Platform

Grades and Subjects of Assessments:

- 3-8 and HS ELA
- 3-8 and HS Math
- K-2 ELA
- K-2 Math
- Grades 5, 8, and 11 Science

Grades and Subjects of Items for Creating Tests:

- K-HS ELA
- K-HS Math
- 3-HS Science

ClearSight

1 Rigorous Assessment Content

- *ClearSight* items have gone through a rigorous development and review process like state summative assessment items.
- Assessments include technology-enhanced item types such as equation response, evidence-based, grid/hot spot, grid/plotting, multi-select, and simulations.
- *ClearSight* has writing essay items that are scored automatically using artificial intelligence.
- *ClearSight* is aligned to grade-level state standards by trained assessment experts.

2 Recognizable and Efficient Technology

- *ClearSight* uses the same Cambium Assessment platform used in more than 25 states. Students and teachers see the same user interface, tools, functionality, and accommodations.
- Classroom administration can use a downloadable secure browser that locks the student desktop.
- Remote, browser-based administration allows students to use their own tablets, laptops, or computers and participate at school or home.
- Online administration has a small footprint, requires minimal bandwidth, and is compatible with many devices.

3 Authoring All-in-One

- *ClearSight* has Interim and Checkpoint Assessments that are ready to use.
 - ▶ Interim Assessments are adaptive, measure mastery across the grade-level standard and provide tracking toward standards mastery.
 - ▶ Checkpoint Assessments focus on a set of standards on a topic and can be used for instructional planning.
- Item bank for creating tests includes K to High School ELA and Math and 3 to High School Science.
- Educators can author and share their own items, including technology-enhanced items.
- Educators can create and share their own assessments.

4 Immediate Results for All

- *ClearSight* Assessments are automatically machine-scored when students submit their tests.
- Assessment results are available for teachers, principals, and other district educators based on user-defined roles.
- Automatic scoring gives time back to teachers and provides immediate information for classroom use.

5 Extensive Accommodation and Accessibility Features

- *ClearSight* includes accessibility features available for all students and additional accommodations for students who need them, including the ability to use the accessibility tools used in the classroom.
- Features include text-to-speech, line reader, masking, notes, highlighter, zoom, strike-through, calculator, color masking, and others.

6 Platform Performance Reliability

The platform where *ClearSight* lives is a proven environment:

- **26** state programs are delivered on this platform
- More than **60 million** online tests delivered in the 2018-2019 school year
- Over **861,000** students tested simultaneously
- **1 in 3 students** in grades 3-8 have taken an assessment on our platform



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Worried about Learning Loss this Fall?

ClearSight can help!

Students across grade levels lost instructional time during spring 2020 and current assessment data may not be available this fall. In only a few class periods, **ClearSight** can fill the missing data gap and help teachers gauge where to begin instruction. With both classroom and remote administration, **ClearSight's** adaptive Interim and topic-focused Checkpoint Assessments together can provide a solid starting point for fall.

ClearSight

Measuring Mastery of State Standards
on a Proven Platform

VOYAGER SOPRIS
LEARNING®

Step 1:

Use **ClearSight** Interim Assessments from the Previous Grade

Teachers can administer the previous year's **ClearSight** Interim Assessment in ELA and Math to incoming students to gauge their learning with respect to the previous year's state standards. If this assessment is given early in the fall, it can be used to establish a baseline from which instruction can begin.

Step 2:

Use **ClearSight** Interim Assessments from the Current Grade

Later in the fall, as instruction progresses, teachers can give the on-grade **ClearSight** Interim Assessment to measure student learning of grade-level standards. A second administration of the on-grade Interim before the state summative assessment in the spring can help teachers gauge student readiness for the state test.

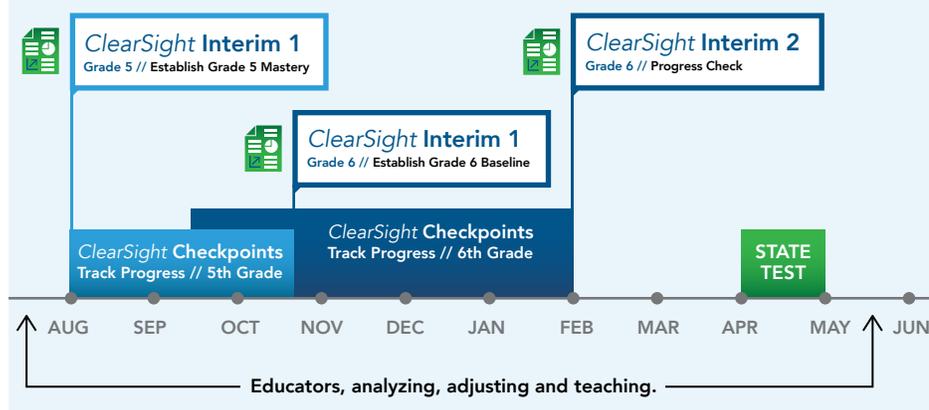
Step 3:

Use **ClearSight** Checkpoint Assessments

Using **ClearSight** Checkpoint Assessments can provide additional information about specific areas such as informational texts for ELA, or number and operations in Mathematics. Using the results of the Interim Assessments, teachers can administer Checkpoint Assessments from the previous grade early in the fall to identify gaps in student learning. Once instruction has begun to address on-grade topics, **ClearSight** Checkpoint Assessments from the current grade can be used to track student progress toward grade-level standards.

ClearSight Assessing the Gap

2020–2021 School Year / 6th Grade



Reporting

ClearSight provides longitudinal reports to help track student growth across multiple related assessments or across multiple test opportunities of a single assessment. Teachers can see how performance improved for a student or group of students across grades or within a grade. These reports are available immediately after testing is completed. Teachers can use prior-grade assessments to determine student's entry point and on-grade assessments to track progress during instruction.

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Technology-Enhanced Items

Moving Beyond Multiple-Choice



Assessment in K-12 has long relied on multiple-choice items. As assessments have moved online, tests have incorporated technology-enhanced items (TEIs) that can better engage and motivate students, improve assessment validity, capture higher-order cognitive skills, and provide for greater accessibility for students with disabilities.

TEI Research

Educational research supports this shift toward incorporating TEIs. These items use formats requiring responses that differ from conventional multiple-choice and short-answer questions—e.g., drag and drop, hot spot, simulation, table input, and extended response. School districts are seeking machine-scorable TEIs that are more authentic, engaging, and demanding by providing more authentic assessment activities, encouraging use of problem-solving abilities and higher-order thinking skills, and providing novel tasks.

TEIs also provide for greater accessibility. Research indicates that computer-based assessments have the capacity to improve access for students with disabilities, through incorporation of assistive technologies, alternative assessment strategies when needed, and evidence-based and universal design during assessment development.

Assessing Writing

Research also supports including open-response essay items in computer-based systems to assess writing. Recent advances in scoring writing assessments

have the potential to significantly improve writing outcomes. More essay questions on assessments shifts instructional practice toward a focus on extended writing. Research confirms that automated essay scoring provides reliable and valid scores on essays, with high correlation between machine scoring and human scoring of essays.

ClearSight Alignment with Research

ClearSight takes advantage of these technologies to provide periodic assessments that incorporate a variety of engaging, meaningful item types with reporting that helps educators discern what students know and can do throughout the depth and breadth of standards. With assessment items created using an evidence-based design process, ClearSight provides strong, valid evidence of student learning.

ClearSight includes an array of TEIs, including drag and drop, hot spot, hot text, editing tasks, table input, math equation, and other interactive, machine-scored response types, ClearSight TEIs engage students in active problem solving and can address difficult-to-measure learning.

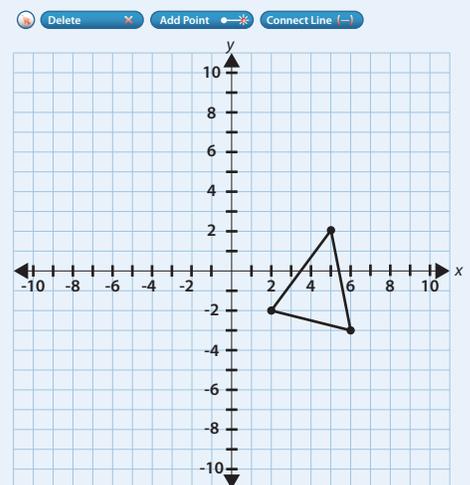
ClearSight assesses writing through automated scoring of essays that uses artificial intelligence to reliably model how human raters would assign scores to essays and provides informative feedback on important aspects of writing.

ClearSight also provides extensive accommodation and accessibility features. Some are available to all students, while additional accommodation tools are available to students with special needs. ■

A triangle is shown on the coordinate grid.

Use the Connect Line tool to draw the triangle after a transformation following the rule $(x, y) \rightarrow (x - 4, y + 3)$.

Here, students use a tool to draw a triangle to show their understanding of transformation.



DOWNLOAD THE COMPLETE WHITE PAPER:
voyagersopris.com/resources/clearsight-white-paper



Students are participating in civics every day. They're wearing masks if they go to the grocery store. They're standing six feet apart from each other. It's important to understand why that is practicing civics, and that participating in it means something."

ANDRES PEREZ

11TH GRADE HUMANITIES TEACHER, HIGH TECH HIGH SCHOOL, CHULA VISTA, CALIFORNIA

the assessment tool that NAEP has."

A Call to Action

Through 2018 and 2019, many states and districts had been bolstering their social-science curricula by adding new course requirements, assessments, and hands-on projects. Voting rates among young people, too, had been increasing, thanks to surging youth activism following the devastating school shootings and warnings about climate change.

It's not at all clear in the middle of the coronavirus whether states will continue to push forward on those policies, given skyrocketing unemployment and mounting financial concerns.

The decline in history scores mark a bitter irony given present circumstances. The coronavirus has sent historians, public health officials, educators, and armchair pundits alike to interrogate the past—like the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic, the polio scare of the early 1950s, and the HIV/AIDS tragedy of the 1980s and 1990s—in search of clues on how to handle the current crisis. In that sense, the motto of the U.S. Archives, which

houses the nation's most important historical documents, feels especially relevant: What's past is prologue.

Similarly, geography does much to explain how the virus spread around the world from one province in China. And as for civics, Congress is now immersed in debating and rolling out legislation aimed at minimizing the effects of the virus.

Some teachers say they're committed to history and civics learning even as they move to remote learning. Indeed, they view it as a wake-up call.

Andres Perez, an 11th grade humanities teacher at High Tech High School Chula Vista, in California, often has his students produce authentic work products as part of their civics and history learning. They've submitted policy memos at city council and school board meetings, written op-eds, and are currently taking photographs for a local museum contest.

In May, he'll begin a unit focused on some big civic questions raised by the pandemic on the nation's economic safety net, health-care infrastructure, and disaster preparedness: Why are lines for food banks so long? Why are policymakers concerned about a shortage of hospital beds? Was the United States as prepared for the pandemic as other countries?

The point is to get students thinking about their civic choices and convictions, he said.

"Students are participating in civics every day. They're wearing masks if they go to the grocery store. They're standing six feet apart from each other," Perez said. "It's important to understand why that is practicing civics, and that participating in it means something.

"All citizens should be aware of what the government is asking them to do—and why the government really is, more so than usual, expecting extra behaviors of its citizens."

Whether most U.S. schools are poised to do the same is unclear, but social studies advocates pleaded with them not to lose sight of the topic in their distance learning plans.

"Learning comes alive when students can experience what's happening in the real world and see it in action. And it's not just about writing letters to your congressman. It's being prepared for this world—a world of complex systems," Dubé said. "And to only focus on reading and math is really disappointing." ■

OPINION

*Published on May 29, 2020,
in Education Week*

I Am an AP Teacher. The College Board Failed the COVID-19 Test This Year

Students were saddled with the logistical demands of the online format

By Mariusz Galczynski

When I made the decision last fall to return to teaching high school after a decade working in higher education, I could not have foreseen that a big part of my job this year would be preparing students for the first-ever online Advanced Placement exams.

I teach three sections of the AP English Literature and Composition course at a public charter school in Miami's Little Havana neighborhood. I also study and write about large-scale assessments. So I feel invested in giving my students not only the subject-matter knowledge but also the testing savvy to ace their AP exams. And I've thought a lot about how the College Board's pioneering attempt went.

AP exams assess mastery of content and skills in approximately 35 different college-level courses taken by high school students. Both the curriculum and the exams in the courses are set by the nonprofit College Board, which derives a big chunk of its revenue from the AP Program.

In my view, the most valuable aspect of these standardized tests is that they can save students a lot of money on tuition by allowing them to test out of general education requisites at universities

and thus complete their degrees quicker. Or students can bypass some core courses, often taught by teaching assistants and with class sizes in the hundreds, in favor of more engaging electives. It's fair to note, too, that AP scores factor into the university admissions process, as students may choose to report their results as part of their college applications.

So the exams are important. Regardless of whether standardized tests measure what they purport to or whether they are fair to diverse kinds of test-takers, AP exams are used to reward some students and not others.

With makeup exams beginning this week for droves of students, including some of mine, it's a good time to grade the College Board for its performance this spring under admittedly challenging circumstances wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The College Board performed well in some ways. First, it decided early on that students would be able to take AP tests online at home, given that almost all schools were closing because of the coronavirus. This meant a switchover from pencil-and-paper tests to typed exams, saving test time for most students. Also, each exam was reduced from three hours to 45 minutes, which, in my opinion, rightly prioritized learning over endurance. The AP English Literature exam, for example, previously required students to slog through 55 multiple-choice questions followed by three separate essay prompts.

Finally, in an uncharacteristically transparent move for a testing agency, the College Board announced it would provide AP teachers with their students' responses, not only as a way to supplement gradebooks thinned out in the transition to virtual learning but also to offer insights for improving future instruction.

Where did the College Board go wrong? Mainly by saddling students with the logistical demands of the new online format. For instance, each subject's exam was taken on the same day at the same time worldwide to prevent students from conferring about answers. But since multiple versions of the exams were developed, why didn't the College Board discourage cheating by staggering exam versions? Then Hawaiian examinees would not have had to start at 6 in the morning while peers on the other side of the globe finished in the middle of the night.

And although the College Board paid lip service to confronting the digital di-



vide, it never made sense to encourage students to take exams on smartphones or tablets (rather than computers) as such devices are neither ideal for typing long texts nor navigating multiple windows, both of which the tests required. Yes, students could handwrite, photograph, and upload their work. But those who didn't do so could borrow a few precious minutes for the actual test from the five minutes allocated for submission.

Perhaps the College Board's biggest blunder was this five minute submission window. After two months of e-learning, any sensible educator, let alone an organization with the resources of the College Board, would have expected and prepared for a host of technical issues: intermittent internet connectivity, outdated web browsers, incompatible file formats. And all of these problems were exacerbated by an anxiety-inducing timer counting down the final minutes. Not submitting the test within the time limit meant the difference between passing and failing the entire exam.

After horror stories of unsubmitted responses circulated widely during the first of two weeks of AP testing, the College Board announced guidelines for a backup email-submission process effective May 18. But why wasn't the exam interface set up so that students could simply type their responses within a text box that autosaved their work—even though, ironically, they were required to do so as part of typing exercises to advance past preliminary security screens?

In my post-exam debriefings with students, I learned of issues specific to the English-literature exam. Students were frustrated that there was no tool available to highlight or annotate long passages of text. Some reported that they could copy and paste sections directly from the prompt; others could not.

And while setting the examination

period between May 11 and May 22 was well-intentioned and responded to the preference expressed by test-takers and their teachers for testing students while they were still in school, the responsible thing for the College Board to do would have been to postpone a bit longer. No one was ready.

In the days before exams commenced, students were inundated with last-minute updates and advice from the College Board. A 51-page testing guide. A practice demo that revealed that add-ons like Grammarly must be uninstalled. Exam-day checklists with 30 check boxes of helpful tasks to be completed by students for each exam taken. And for my specific AP course, a YouTube playlist of 33 videos totaling over 20 hours of viewing time. This was more than students could be expected to keep up with in the midst of a life-altering pandemic.

And, finally, why not simply offer some words of sympathy or—gasp!—an apology to the tens of thousands of examinees who will be retesting in June because of submission errors we all saw coming? Maybe because the College Board saw lawsuits charging negligence coming, too.

I know we can count on this generation of students to be resilient in the face of adversity, as evidenced by the internet humor about AP exams that recently proliferated across social-media platforms. I suppose that the ends of allowing students to earn college credits by testing really do justify the memes. But if online testing continues next year, it's no joke that the College Board will need to apply itself to make the grade. ■

Mariusz Galczy ski teaches English/language arts at the International Studies Charter School in Miami. He is also an independent researcher specializing in multicultural and international education, assessment and evaluation, and teacher training.

OPINION

Published on May 8, 2020, in Education Week's Classroom Q&A Blog

How to Assess Students' Math Skills Remotely

By Larry Ferlazzo

This article features commentaries by New York City high school math teachers Bobson Wong and Larisa Bukalov. They are the authors of *The Math Teacher's Toolbox* (Jossey-Bass, 2020) and recipients of the Math for America Master Teacher Fellowship.

What does math instruction look like in the age of the coronavirus?

Assessing and Grading Students

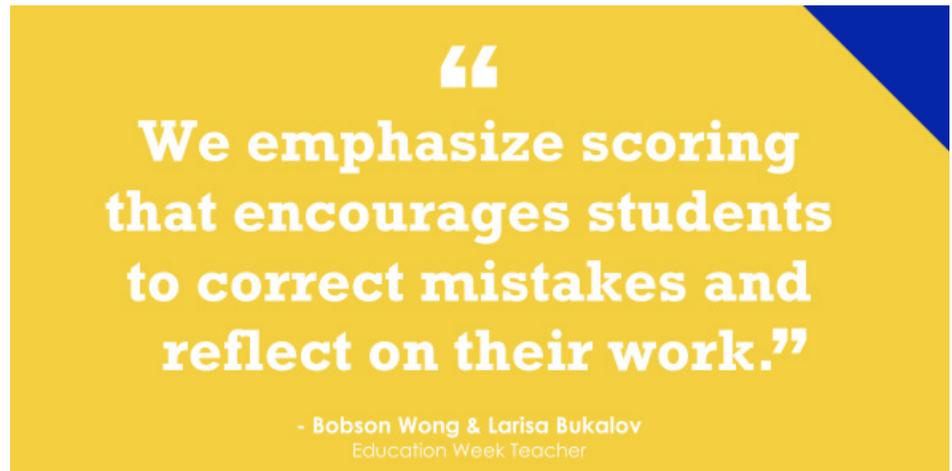
Assessments and grades are necessary parts of our instruction. Well-designed assessments hold students accountable for instruction and measure their skills. Effective grades clearly communicate student performance to parents, students, teachers, and administrators.

Assessing Students

Under normal circumstances, we don't limit ourselves to the traditional paper-and-pencil assessments. Trying to prevent cheating when students are working online from home—for example, by giving multiple versions of tests or forcing all students to take the test at the same time—raises everyone's stress level, provides an inaccurate picture of student learning, and fails to address the cause of their cheating. Here are some strategies that we use to make online assessments more meaningful.

First, we talk to students about ethics. We discuss the harm that cheating can cause and the values encouraged by our families. We reassure them that we are focused on improving their learning. These conversations are particularly important when students can use mobile apps like Photomath to answer math questions.

Nowadays, we use traditional test questions mostly to determine students' prior knowledge or to modify our instruction. Online summative assessments should emphasize synthesis and self-reflection instead of recall and calculation. Open-ended questions are less likely than repetitive worksheets to encourage



cheating. Students can assemble a portfolio that shows their growth over time. Projects enable students to showcase talents that they don't often use in class.

Assessing student thinking has become more difficult as we teach remotely. Many of our usual techniques, such as cooperative activities or reading students' body language, are difficult to do online. Instead, we allow students to reflect on their learning periodically by answering questions like:

- How would you rate your learning this week? Explain.
- Summarize your favorite lesson from this week. Explain why you liked it the most.
- How can I improve your online learning?

We assign these questions as homework or quizzes. However, we emphasize that we grade them based on the honesty and thoughtfulness of their response, not on what they think we want to hear.

Grading Students

Quantifying grades under normal circumstances is hard enough, but trying to do so under extraordinarily stressful circumstances is cruel.

In times like these, we believe that giving pass/incomplete grades is fairer than numerical or letter grades. We don't know if students aren't completing work because they don't understand the lesson, they lack a quiet place at home, or they have limited internet access. When possible, we

prefer to give students the benefit of the doubt. Of course, simply giving students more time won't address the inequity they face, but it allows us to reach out to families and see what we can do to help them.

We find that grading online generally requires more time than grading papers. Files take time to load onto our computers, and reading them on a small screen means more scrolling and zooming in. Thus, we budget more time for us to grade, which forces us to reduce our workloads in other areas.

To simplify grading, we emphasize scoring that encourages students to correct mistakes and reflect on their work. We review classwork questions in our online meetings so that students can see what they did wrong. We grade work using the scoring guidelines below:

In times like these, assigning the right grade is less important than providing meaningful feedback. Positive feedback that praises students' effort (“This is a clever solution”) can strengthen students' growth mindset by suggesting that hard work will help them improve.

No matter what grading system we use, we emphasize to students that their grades don't fully capture what we think about them or what they have learned. We acknowledge their humanity whenever we can by praising them when they make progress or encouraging them when they face setbacks. In times like these, such encounters make a more memorable impact on students than the grade we give them.

Caring for Others and Ourselves

Under normal circumstances, many teachers work alone—separated by classrooms from their peers. During a crisis, teachers can often feel even more isolated. Maintaining a sense of balance for us and connecting with the people around us can be especially challenging.

Helping Students

During this crisis, we've heard countless stories of grief from our students. They've told us about family members who have lost their jobs or lives, as well as their own feelings of depression. English-language learners and students with learning differences face even greater challenges since many of them lack the social-emotional and academic support that they received in school.

To help, we try to take some time each day to reach out to individual students. If appropriate, we give students more time or suggest alternatives. If necessary, we arrange online meetings with students so we can talk. These virtual connections can provide valuable support for everyone.

Helping Families

Parents and other caretakers can be just as overwhelmed as students. Like us, they have to work from home while managing their children's online learning, effectively turning them into home school teachers.

In times like these, we try to reach out to as many parents as we can, using whatever methods are available to us. We find that many of them are relieved to talk to another adult! For parents who don't understand English, we try to get translators to help us. An online translation tool like Google Translate can be a last resort.

We make a special effort to communicate with the parents of students who are not submitting work. We avoid using confrontational language that could be misinterpreted as accusatory or judgmental. Instead, we express concern for the student, offer positive comments, state our concerns, and suggest specific action.

Connecting with Other Educators

Normally, we collaborate frequently with teachers and other school staff. This collaboration can include sharing lesson plans, observing each other, or writing assessments or other assignments together. In times of crisis, most of us are cut off

“
In order to prevent our
work from consuming us,
we set limits on our
work.”

- Bobson Wong & Larisa Bukalov
Education Week Teacher

from daily interactions with colleagues, making collaboration much more difficult.

To stay connected with other educators, we communicate regularly with them using emails, phone calls, text messages, or online meetings. Staying in touch can help relieve stress and give us valuable ideas for teaching. In fact, most of the ideas that we discuss here came from talking to other teachers!

We also use social media to communicate with other educators. Online communities like the Math Twitter Blogosphere (#mtbos) and I Teach Math (#iteachmath) on Twitter include teachers, administrators, and professors from around the world.

In addition, many academic conferences that have been canceled due to the pandemic are experimenting with online sessions. For example, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics is hosting free webinars that would have been held at its Centennial Annual Meeting in Chicago. Other local, state, and national organizations have similar offerings online.

Taking Care of Ourselves

Most importantly, we constantly tell ourselves and others in times of crisis that teachers don't need to do everything to succeed. Setting emotional and physical boundaries is especially important when working from home since there we literally cannot get away from teaching.

In order to prevent our work from consuming us, we set limits on our work. We only respond to work-related calls and messages during certain hours, leaving nights and weekends for family and other personal matters. During workdays, we set up a schedule, setting aside at least 10 minutes per hour for breaks. After lunch, we take an extended break from our computer screens. If possible, we take a walk

to get our exercise. If we have family at home, we also plan time during the day to spend time with them.

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, we find ourselves overwhelmed by the loss of instructional time, personal freedom, social gatherings, and the health of loved ones. At these moments, we remind ourselves that the grief that we are experiencing can leave us exhausted and less focused. Recognizing that we can't do everything and taking time to pause and reflect can often be a source of strength. ■

Larry Ferlazzo is an award-winning English and Social Studies teacher at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, Calif. Larry is the author of Helping Students Motivate Themselves: Practical Answers To Classroom Challenges, The ESL/ELL Teacher's Survival Guide, and Building Parent Engagement In Schools.

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