

## Improving Assessment & Reporting of Student Progress at ANCS

At ANCS, the assessment of student progress towards skill and content standards is guided by our belief in [the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools](#). A few specific sentences and phrases from the CES principles highlight elements of our approach:

- *The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary.*
- *Teaching and learning should be documented and assessed with tools based on student performance of real tasks. Students not yet at appropriate levels of competence should be provided intensive support and resources to assist them quickly to meet those standards. Multiple forms of evidence, ranging from ongoing observation of the learner to completion of specific projects, should be used to better understand the learner's strengths and needs, and to plan for further assistance.*

Although we are guided by these ideas, there has admittedly been, through the years, *inconsistency in the ways they are reflected in practice by different teachers and varying degrees of clarity in how student progress gets communicated to students and parents.* Feedback from many teachers and parents identified these two areas for improvement, and over the past year, our faculty and staff has started on a path towards addressing them.

Last year, we began this work with a yearlong focus on using a common language and approach to planning curriculum units. Based on the framework known as ["Understanding by Design"](#), our teachers now work more closely in teams to prepare for their teaching by "planning backwards": first articulating the standards of what students should know and be able to do at the end of a unit, then determining how they will assess those skills, knowledge, and understandings, and finally, mapping out the learning activities and practice that will support students towards those standards. We continue to refine our use of this outlining of units.

The next phase of our improvement has been centered on defining the common language and practices we aim to use across the school. A task force made up of teachers from K-8 worked over the summer to look at survey responses from teachers and parents, discuss similarities and differences in our current grading and assessment approaches in different classrooms, and to research current best practices in assessing student progress. One result of their work was the creation of a "Grading and Assessment at ANCS - Frequently Asked Questions" document. The document incorporated their thinking along with feedback from the full faculty/staff and a range of parents to serve as a starting point for explaining how students are assessed and practices we aspire to use consistently at both campuses.

As we continue to develop consistency in practices across the school, the next steps on our path towards improving our assessment system will focus on greater clarity in how we

communicate about student learning progress: (1) the terms we use to show where a student is at in relation to learning standards, and (2) the way we structure our forms of communicating with students and parents (rubrics, progress reports, etc.). Below is a timeline for next steps in this work:

***January 2015:***

- Grading task force presented draft of “best practices” in grading and assessment to faculty
- Review and discussion of how consistently these practices are currently used--individually and collectively

***Winter-Spring 2015:***

- Focus in grade level, content teams on exploring these “best practices” and discussion about how to use them more consistently as a team

***Summer 2015:***

- Faculty members engage in selected summer reading books focused on areas of rubrics and assessment (differentiated by need)

***July faculty retreat:***

- Discussion of summer reading texts
- Focused work on refining and agreeing to final version of K-8 best practices in grading and assessment

***September 2015:***

- Launch of progress reporting task force to review and recommend changes to progress reporting tools to (1) reflect agreed-upon best practices and (2) clarity in communicating information to parents (following decision on IB application for MYP)

***September-December 2015:***

- Task force works through process of arriving at recommendations with feedback on draft ideas solicited from focus groups of teachers and parents

***December 2015:***

- Task force presents faculty with recommendations for revision to progress reporting system

***January 2016:***

- Board presentation about revisions to progress reporting system