Peel's *Growing Success*
Parent Monograph Series:
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Provincial Policy

The primary purpose of assessment and evaluation is to improve student learning.

The Seven Fundamental Principles

To ensure that assessment, evaluation, and reporting are valid and reliable, and that they lead to the improvement of learning for all students, teachers use practices and procedures that:

- ❖ are fair, transparent, and equitable for all students;
- ❖ support all students, including those with special education needs, those who are learning the language of instruction (English or French), and those who are First Nation, Métis, or Inuit;
- ❖ are carefully planned to relate to the curriculum expectations and learning goals and, as much as possible, to the interests, learning styles and preferences, needs, and experiences of all students;
- ❖ are communicated clearly to students and parents at the beginning of the school year or course and at other appropriate points throughout the school year or course;
- ❖ are ongoing, varied in nature, and administered over a period of time to provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate the full range of their learning;
- ❖ provide ongoing descriptive feedback that is clear, specific, meaningful, and timely to support improved learning and achievement;
- ❖ develop students' self-assessment skills to enable them to assess their own learning, set specific goals, and plan next steps for their learning. (*Growing Success*, p. 6.)

Context

We know that parents have an important role to play in supporting student learning. Studies show that students perform better in school if their parents or guardians are involved in their education. This is the basis for the principle that students and parents should be kept fully informed about the student's progress. It is essential that schools have procedures in place to ensure that parents are aware of the expectations for their child in the various grades. Principals play a key role in developing these procedures, which should be designed to create the conditions for student success by ensuring that parents have the information they need to interpret their child's report card and to work with teachers to improve their child's learning. (*Growing Success*, p. 8.)

What exactly is *Growing Success*?

Growing Success is Ontario's assessment, evaluation and reporting policy document which became effective September 2010. It impacts all assessment, evaluation and reporting practices and procedures in grades 1-12. *Growing Success* consolidates, updates and replaces previous government policy on assessment, evaluation and reporting (Policy to Practice 2000). This First Edition of the document is expected to be updated with a final version which will address Kindergarten. The policy builds on previous ministry policy and updates it with international/local research findings since 1998.

How Long Did it Take to Develop the Policy?

Consultations on the policy took about four years and involved input from many stakeholder groups including teachers, students, principals, parents, superintendents, federations, faculties of education, government policy makers, consultants and others.

Why Become Familiar with the Policy?

When parents have a common and informed understanding of provincial policy, they have more productive and supportive conversations with teachers and principals. Parents understand the context/framework or 'rules' wherein educators work to support all students in grades 1-12. In addition, they learn about the research on the impact of assessment *for* learning classroom practices on student achievement, which can effectively double the amount of student learning and raise achievement for all students, especially for students with the greatest needs. Parents come to understand that the thinking and practices behind *Growing Success* will help students participate in the kind of education that will help prepare them for the demands of the 21st century.

How Do Assessment/Evaluation Practices Inspire *Success*, *Confidence* and *Hope*?

Since the **primary purpose of assessment and evaluation is to improve student learning**, practices like assessment *for* learning have an important role in building student confidence as well as in raising student achievement. When students experience some success in learning, they are motivated to try harder, become more engaged in tasks and actively seek feedback for improvement. They come to believe in their eventual success as learners and develop learning skills and work habits that will last a lifetime. This process builds student confidence because they see that they are becoming more effective as learners and are able to handle new and diverse challenges as they learn. In the assessment *for* learning framework, teachers ask themselves key questions in order to help all students to learn to their maximum capacity:

- Who are the learners? (what are their needs, interests, profile as learners?)
- Where are learners now?
- Where do learners need to go next?
- How best to get there?

As learning becomes more visible/transparent in the classroom, students eventually learn to ask themselves key questions like:

- Who am I as a learner? (what are my strengths, needs, interests, profile as a learner?)
- What am I going to learn?
- Where am I now (in relation to the learning goal)?
- How am I going to learn? Where to next?

What Does Student Assessment/Evaluation Focus on Today? (for Tomorrow…)

- Closing the gap in student achievement for all students in the classroom (moral, economic imperatives)
- Students are not measured against each other but rather are measured against provincial standards (Content/Performance)
- Use of **learning goals**, **success criteria** and **descriptive feedback** to make learning transparent, visible to all learners
- Role of peers as classroom resources, peer and self-assessment and personal goal setting
- Increased importance of developing learning skills and work habits and other 21st century skills as predictors of success
- Student evidence of learning can come from multiple sources over time (observation, conversation, student product)
- Student involvement in the assessment process (student choice, voice and differentiation)
- Both surface knowledge and deep understanding of the curriculum/big ideas
- Elimination of non-learning factors in determining students' grades to attain accuracy in grading
- Most consistent achievement over time, making allowances for more recent evidence
- Use of both mathematical calculations and professional judgement in determining students' grades
- Increasing ownership over learning
- Continuation of thoughtful and strategic use of instructional technology to enhance the learning/assessment process

What is Assessment *for* Learning?

Assessment *for* learning describes a framework of powerful research-based strategies that help students to improve their own learning and eventually become independent and autonomous learners. The teacher operates like a coach where all students are provided with adequate time to learn and multiple opportunities to practice in order to grow and develop enabling knowledge and skills and apply specific, descriptive feedback to improve their own academic performance. It is based on the belief that all students can become smarter and more proficient over time, given enough time and the right kind of assistance. Assessment *for* learning develops through a healthy, collaborative relationship between teacher and student.
Teachers maintain high achievement expectations for all students but offer them different levels of support and assistance to help them to meet established learning goals (**tiered approach**).

In an assessment *for* learning context, each task or challenge that students are asked to complete, requires that teachers take time to share and clarify with students what is to be learned (**learning goals**) to ensure common understanding. Teachers also share or co-construct what successful learning looks like (**success criteria**). They also provide students with a purpose, context and connections to prior learning (**relevance**). Teachers also outline to students how they are going to learn (i.e., **instruction, processes, steps, strategies, plan**).

Throughout the learning process, teachers adapt their instruction to meet students' needs and check for understanding. To help students close the gap between where they are now in their learning and where they need to be, teachers provide students with specific, next steps (**descriptive feedback**) that helps them move forward in their learning. **Descriptive feedback** offers students insightful next steps that help learners to meet established learning goals. Teachers gradually release more responsibility for learning to students when students are ready. By doing this, students gradually become more independent and autonomous learners.

What is Assessment *as* Learning?

Simply stated, assessment *as* learning is learning how to learn (meta-cognition) at ever increasing levels of effectiveness. It includes **personal goal setting**, **self-regulation**, and **continuous growth** and **improvement** as a **learner**, **thinker** and **problem-solver**.

What is Assessment *of* Learning?

Assessment *of* learning is otherwise known as **evaluation** and occurs at the end of a sequence of learning/instruction. It is used to approximate how much learning has taken place up to a certain point, to determine students' grades and to report to parents. In assessment *of* learning, students are expected to turn in assigned work to meet deadlines established by the teacher and act in a responsible manner. When student work is not submitted on time or is missing, teachers consider mitigating factors that help them to work out a resolution with the student/parent. In assessment *of* learning, students, parents and teachers work together continually for the common good of improving student learning, and in inspiring eventual success, hope, and confidence.

What Should Students Learn by the End of the Year/Course?

Students are responsible for learning the Overall Ontario curriculum expectations for a grade or course. They do this by learning about ideas, concepts, processes and skills outlined in related Specific Ontario curriculum expectations.

Which Standards Are Students Measured Against?

Students are measured in two ways. First, they are measured against the content standards in the Ontario curriculum and second, against the performance standards in the provincial achievement chart. The achievement chart sets out four broad categories of learning including **Knowledge and Understanding**, **Thinking**, **Application** and **Communication** and **four levels of achievement (Levels 1 to 4)**. **Level 3** is the **provincial standard**. **Level 4** exceeds the provincial standard (but is still within grade level work). **Level 2** approaches the provincial standard. **Level 1** falls below the provincial standard. Overall, teachers use a **balanced approach** to assessment and evaluation by considering and integrating all four achievement categories when they assess and evaluate student work (over the stretch of a grade/year or semester). *Growing Success* includes a chart which equates levels of achievement with letter grades/percentages.

How Do Learning Skills and Work Habits Support Student Learning?

In a 21st century context, students development of learning skills and work habits is absolutely critical. These skills along with other 21st century skills, will be relevant to students long after graduation in helping them transform into critically thoughtful, responsible and productive citizens. Parents and guardians can support their children by learning more about and reinforcing these skills which include: **Responsibility, Organization, Independent Work, Collaboration, Initiative, and Self-regulation**. Parents should pay close attention to report card ratings and comments/feedback related to learning skills and work habits as they are important markers for success.

How Do Teachers Determine Students' Grades?

Teachers (and students) gather evidence of their learning over time from **observations**, **conversations** and **student products**. They then look at the **most consistent level of achievement** or performance as measured against the **curriculum expectations** and the **achievement chart**. Teachers can also include **more recent evidence/gains** made in learning into account. **Teachers do not simply calculate averages** in an electronic grading program or spreadsheet. **They use both mathematical calculations and professional judgment to determine student's grades**. In reporting, students' achievement in learning skills and work habits are separated from student achievement in curricular subjects (unless specifically allowed by the curriculum). Teachers then distill all the evidence of learning into a letter grade (grades 1-6) or percentage grade (grades 7-12) for provincial report cards. Grades should be accurate. Report card comments that accompany students' grades identify specific student strengths and criteria yet to be met, include classroom examples/evidence and offer next steps for improvement. Teachers can also communicate with parents in many other effective ways.

What Should All Students Expect in an Assessment *for* Learning Classroom?

- Safe, inviting, healthy, positive and inclusive classroom environment that includes getting to know the learners
- Differentiated instruction and assessment based on students needs, interests, profile
- Clear learning goals and success criteria
- Specific, descriptive feedback that moves them forward
- Multiple opportunities for practice, time to learn, time to apply the feedback, time for reflection about learning
- Peer and self-assessment
- Supportive stance from the teacher focused on cultivating student belief in eventual success, growth and confidence

What Are Student's Responsibilities in an Assessment *for* Learning Classroom?

- To make contributions to a safe, inviting, healthy, positive classroom climate and school community
- To develop learning skills and work habits, 21st century skills, Peel Character Attributes
- To turn in work (evidence of learning) on time to meet established deadlines set by the teacher
- To become actively engaged in their own learning (set and monitor personal learning goals, be open to and apply specific descriptive feedback to their work, self-assess their progress, obtain assistance as needed)
- To gradually increase personal ownership over their own learning
- Supportive and respectful stance towards the teacher and classmates focused on developing a community of learners

What Are Some Assessment Policy Considerations for English Language Learners? (ELLs)

- There is an explicit moral imperative involved in the assessment and evaluation of English language learners. "It is essential for all educators to understand the distinction between modifications and accommodations as well as the importance of providing either or both, as needed, to English language learners. These measures contribute to fairness and social justice for many students in an increasingly multicultural environment. (Growing Success, p. 77)

- **accommodations.** Special teaching and assessment strategies, human supports, and/or individualized equipment required to enable a student to learn and to demonstrate learning. The provincial curriculum expectations for the grade are not altered for a student receiving accommodations only (*Glossary*, Growing Success, p143).

- **Modifications** are changes made to the age-appropriate grade-level expectations for a subject in order to meet a student's learning needs. Modifications may be required to some or all of the subject expectations so that they are challenging but attainable for the learner at his or her present level of English proficiency, given the necessary support from the teacher (Supporting ELLs in Grades 1 to 8, p50).

- By virtue of the policy, all ELLs are guaranteed appropriate program adaptations in any subject area of the Ontario curriculum. Therefore, even early, beginner ELLs (Stage 1) are to be assessed and evaluated on their achievement. Evaluation should be based on *appropriately* adapted assessment tasks, using success criteria corresponding to the *adapted* **program**. In *some* cases, significant modifications are required for these students.

What Are Some Assessment Policy Considerations for Special Education Students?

- For students with special education needs **assessment and evaluation are key components of programming**, as the Education Act makes clear: "'Special education program' means in respect of an exceptional pupil, an educational program that is based on and modified by the results of **continuous assessment and evaluation** and that includes a plan containing **specific objectives** and an **outline of educational services** that meet the needs of the exceptional pupil"(Education Act, S.1(1). *Growing Success*, p. 70.

- **The primary purpose of assessment and evaluation for students with special education needs, as for all students, is to improve student learning**. To achieve this goal for students with special education needs – that is, to provide the most effective programming possible to support student achievement – it is especially important to **review and ensure the ongoing effectiveness of instructional strategies**. **Assessment** for students with special education needs should be an **ongoing and continuous process** that is an integral part of the **daily teaching and learning process**. (*Growing Success*, p. 71)

- According to *Growing Success*, in planning a program for a student with special educational needs, the teacher, with the support of an in-school team and/or a special education teacher, begins by considering the student`s **strengths and needs** and his or her **instructional level**. A student`s instructional level is usually determined on the basis of educational assessments conducted by teachers, taking into account other professional data, when such data are available and when it is appropriate to do so. *Growing Success*, p. 71. This assessment information helps to guide the development of a student's **Individual Education Plan** (IEP).

- **IEP:** Growing Success states, "a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) describes his or her educational program and any accommodations that may be required. The IEP specifies whether or not the student requires:
  - accommodations only
  - modified learning expectations, with the possibility of accommodations; or
  - an alternative program, not derived from the Ontario curriculum expectations for a subject/grade or a course

- Membership of an IEP team can and should vary according to the needs of the individual student. Members may include, for example, the student, the student's parents, the student's teachers, the guidance counselor, the principal, appropriate special education staff and support personnel, and staff from community agencies, as appropriate.(IEP Resource Guide, p. 16)

Additional Resources

- Growing Success, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010
- Peel Policy # 14, Peel District School Board, April 2011
- English language learners / ESL and ELD programs and services: Policies and procedures for Ontario elementary and secondary schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2007
- http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/guide/resource/iepresguid.pdf
- Supporting English Language Learners, Grades 1-8