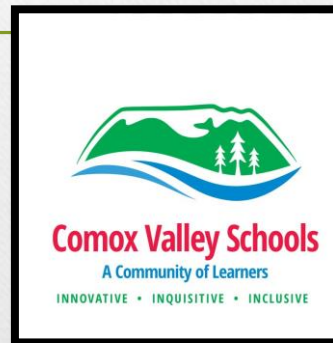


# Assessment Program Review



“Research has shown us that what we need to accomplish – deep student and organizational learning – isn’t possible unless **assessment for learning** is the key focus for our work.” Anne Davies, Sandra Herbst & Beth Parrott Reynolds





# Assessment Review Intentions

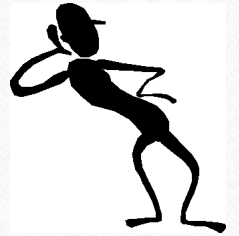
To examine our assessment practices by considering the research, our history and current reality at the elementary, secondary and provincial levels and to inform the board.



In consultation with various groups at the elementary and secondary level, including CSTs, Teacher-Librarians, teachers and administrators, and in consideration of the research, we were able to create a picture of current assessment practices district wide.



# The following themes emerged:



1. That a system wide assessment framework emphasizing inquiry and Assessment for Learning (AFL) at the center, across roles and levels, is essential;
2. That consistency in understanding and demonstrating AFL strategies and the guiding parameters for Communicating Student Learning (CSL) in connection to our new curriculum is a need at the elementary level;
3. That shifting assessment practices at the secondary level, that builds and utilizes insights gained on the elementary learning journey of CSL, would support next steps;
4. That shifting assessment practices at the secondary level is critical and needs to include further understanding of trends, and networking at the post-secondary level;
5. That a better understanding of how to support students' self-assessment of the Core Competencies is necessary at elementary and secondary;
6. That support through professional collaboration, coaching, mentorship and shared leadership, that includes networks across roles, levels, and schools is critical;
7. That a solid research base makes alignment and coherence in shifting our assessment practices a moral imperative.



# 1. What does the research tell us?

## Classroom Assessment Practices

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Black and Wiliam (1998) highlighted a “poverty of practice” in more traditional assessment approaches for three general reasons:

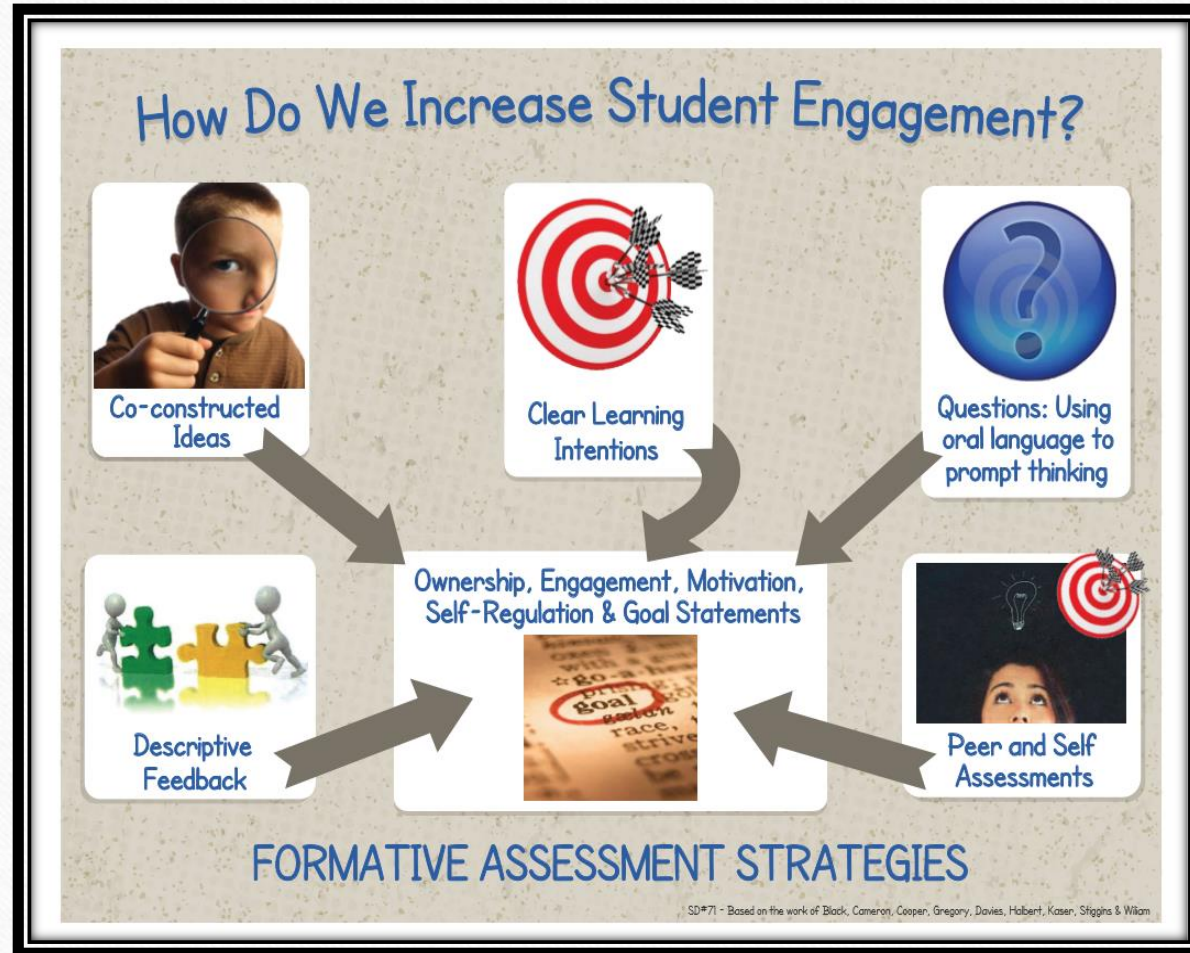
- 1) There is a tendency to focus more on rote learning and superficial understanding;
- 2) A negative impact on student learning results where giving marks and comparing students is overemphasized;
- 3) The managerial role of traditional assessments is a barrier to focusing on the specific learning needs of individuals.

Significant gains in student learning occur when Assessment for Learning (AFL) strategies are stressed in the classroom:

- 1) Learners need to be in charge of their learning;
- 2) Learners need clarity regarding the specific learning intentions and be able to articulate them in their own language;
- 3) Learners are given or co-construct criteria for success, thus providing understanding of quality and how to attain it;
- 4) Learners are given regular individualized, descriptive feedback that focuses on ways they can improve;
- 5) Learners are accustomed to sharing their thinking as evidence of their learning in response to thoughtful teacher initiated questions;
- 6) Learners work consistently with partners to teach and assess, thereby fully internalizing quality criteria for continued success.

Linda Kaser & Judy Halbert

In summary, based on the research, AFL strategies in the classroom are critical:



- Assessment and AFL go beyond the issue of reporting or communicating student learning.
- They are a set of instructional strategies used in the classroom on a minute by minute, day by day basis.
- Learner engagement is a by-products of effective AFL use.
- As a result, the classroom culture shifts to one focused on growth-mindedness and learner engagement.

*Research has shown that involving students in classroom assessment results in considerable gains in achievement, “amongst the largest ever reported for educational interventions.”*

*Black and Wiliam*



## 2. What does the research tell us?

### Assessment Practices Beyond the Classroom

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- AFL is more than a handful of strategies but significantly contributes to engagement and growth mindedness, regardless of our role in the system.
- “As teachers redesign their classroom structures and practices to better reflect...assessment for learning, so do school districts need to reconsider and align their practices, policies, protocols and procedures with these same ideas. To expect only classroom teachers to shift in their work in the absence of systemic realignment is to separate the interdependent parts of the whole.” Anne Davies & Sandra Herbst
- “A well-conceived assessment design includes a search for consistency, congruence, and integrity in the surrounding conditions and climate that directly influence each unit.” Costa & Kallick
- Current promising practices in our system: co-constructing knowledge through program review engagement, mentorship, School Learning Frameworks, CST work, principal and vice-principal appraisal processes.

# The Elementary Context

## Current Reality

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- There have been significant shifts in assessment practices overall in elementary schools.
- With a reduction of CSTs, there is less of a focus on teacher use of AFL strategies.
- CSL and AFL go hand in hand, but these practices are not clearly understood by many educators.
- There is inconsistency in understanding of the guiding parameters for CSL across elementary schools.
- Educators generally have a lack of understanding regarding how to engage students in meaningful assessment of core competencies.
- Teachers no longer have structured collaboration time.



# The Elementary Context

## A Brief History

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Since more shifts in assessment practices have occurred at the elementary level, it was important to examine what were contributing factors:

- From 2007 to 2013, each elementary school benefitted from a school-based Curriculum Support Teacher (CST).
- With the support of Allan Douglas, the CSTs met regularly to understand assessment practices and brought these collectively understood approaches back to their schools. This increased the focus on AFL strategies and formative assessment at all elementary schools.
- Teacher teams also had the opportunity to participate in voluntary collaboration called “Professional Partnership Projects.”
- Those participating in PPs were encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to participate in the Network of Performance Based School (NPBS) inquiries (now know as the Network of Inquiry and Innovation). The NPBS approach emphasized AFL and, therefore, further influenced teacher use of these strategies.
- The more understanding teachers had of AFL, the more frustrated some teachers became with the reporting mismatch.
- This led to a team of teachers and administrators exploring other ways for reporting. Their work was influential and led to what we now call “Communicating Student Learning.”



# The Secondary Context

## Current Reality



- There is a disconnect between the current practices in assessment at the elementary and secondary levels. Students arriving at secondary from elementary are not accustomed to traditional assessment practices that dominate the high schools.
- There is a general lack of understanding affecting both parents and teacher embrace of a more responsive AFL approach.
- Some teachers attempting to implement AFL are limited by the current reporting systems.
- Some teachers believe readiness for post-secondary schools is a priority and test-taking skills is, therefore, necessary.
- Some teachers are more comfortable with a lecture style teaching approach.
- Self-Assessment and reporting of Core Competencies grades 8-9 is different across high schools.
- In grades 10 to 12, formal reports must include letter grades, percentages and general reporting comments.
- In grades 8-9 students can receive letter grades or defined by local district policy.
- Currently there is a lack of opportunity for focused collaboration time to support team work to shift assessment practices.



# The Provincial Context



- Currently the Ministry of Education (MOE) is developing the transformed curriculum for grades 10 – 12, with similarities to the K to 9 curriculum.
- The new curriculum emphasizes an evidence-centered design of assessment, which coincides with AFL strategies.
- The MOE is promoting “Assessment Literacy” as foundational, *the engine*, for ensuring the new curriculum gains momentum and engages learners.
- Post secondary institutions are beginning to collaborate with school districts to adjust their admission expectations and instructional approaches.
- For example, currently there is a project between Surry School District and Kwantlen University exploring the use of portfolios as part of admissions.
- In addition, the K-20 Collaborations Group of leaders from 10 school districts and Vancouver Island University have been meeting to identify ways to support incoming university students.



## In Summary - Gaps and Opportunities

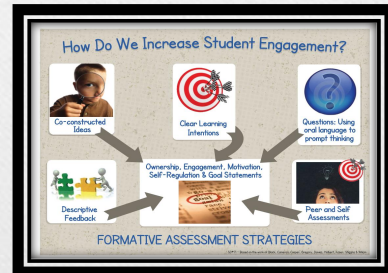
### There is a need for:

- a deep foundational understanding of AFL district wide to engage and empower our educators and students
- collaborative and networking opportunities among secondary educators to grow the work
- more alignment and coherence in practices that support student reflection of core competencies
- unified leadership networks on assessment practices
- understanding how to engage and to facilitate groups in challenging conversations and building shared decision making

### Opportunities:

- Teacher Librarians at all schools.
- Teacher mentorship program being developed.
- Many assessment champions passionate to contribute.
- We have a history of successful involvement in Professional Partnerships and NOII inquiry work.

**Are we poised to reach full capacity of hope,  
efficacy and achievement for all learners?**



**Assessment for Learning  
provides the way.**

Kjeryn Haughton, Wayne Kuhnert, David Merrick,  
Karma Taiji, Carol Walters, Lucinda Wolters