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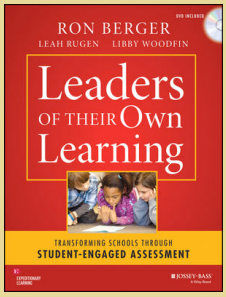

File: Assessment

Leaders of Their Own Learning:
Transforming Schools Through Student-Engaged Assessment
By Ron Berger, Leah Rugen, and Libby Wooden (Jossey-Bass, 2014)

S.O.S. (A Summary of the Summary)

The main ideas of the book:

~ This book presents a novel approach to assessment in which students are actively involved in understanding and monitoring their own growth and learning.
~ By increasing student motivation and engagement, this comprehensive student-centered system of assessment helps students meet Common Core State Standards and raise their achievement.

Why I chose this book:
One key foundational shift can create a powerful ripple effect throughout a school, beyond what anyone imagined.

I think that changing your school's assessment approach to a more student-centered one has the power to lead to this type of transformative change. This is not an easy change to make—it involves changing mindsets as well as practices, but it's worth it. The ideas in this book follow in the tradition of Rick Stiggins and others who argue that assessment should *improve* learning, not just measure it. Plus, the authors have seen the results (from improved test scores to higher quality student work) to back that up.

This is a good book for principals looking for a PD focus for the upcoming year because it ties together teaching, learning, and assessing in a student-centered way. Take a look at the eight practices that comprise the student-engaged assessment approach, and you will be able to imagine creating a school-wide focus on these practices that will improve your school.

Student-Engaged Assessment: THE EIGHT PRACTICES

Below are the EIGHT practices that comprise student-engaged assessment:

1. Learning Targets
2. Checking for Understanding
3. Using Data with Students
4. Using Models, Critique, and Descriptive Feedback
5. Student-Led Conferences
6. Celebrations of Learning
7. Passage Presentations with Portfolios
8. Standards-Based Grading

Introduction

The authors of the book present a novel approach to assessment in which students are at the center of the process and also take the lead. They reframe the idea of assessment so that it becomes a tool to inspire students to learn. Below is their definition of "student-engaged assessment":

Student-engaged assessment changes the primary role of assessment from evaluating and ranking students to motivating them to learn. It builds the independence, critical thinking skills, perseverance, and self-reflective understanding students need for college and careers that is required by the Common Core State Standards.

Unfortunately, the most important assessments currently taking place in schools everywhere are seen by no one—these are the assessments that occur in each student's head throughout the day. Students constantly assess how much they care, how hard they work, when their work is "good enough," and how much they learn. Most teachers don't know how to access and make use of these types of assessments. What teachers and students really need are tools to tap into and improve these internalized assessments.

This is why the authors have designed a system of **eight practices** that encompass a more student-engaged approach to assessment. By involving students in the process of assessing their own learning, they better understand their growth and therefore become more independent learners. These practices include students understanding their learning targets, monitoring their understanding, using data themselves to improve learning, leading conferences with their families, documenting and communicating their learning, and more.

These new types of assessment practices provide numerous benefits. The most important is that they increase student motivation without which academic success is just not possible. This approach also changes the mindsets of both teachers and students so rather than assuming intelligence is fixed, they can clearly see the connection between effort and achievement. When students learn to monitor their progress, use feedback, and engage in these new assessment practices, they begin to feel more ownership for their learning. This type of assessment approach also greatly improves the classroom climate as students come to feel the trust and care their teachers need to exhibit to carry out these new practices.

While the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) do not dictate instructional practices, it is understood that teachers need to transform the teaching and learning in their classrooms in order to meet these new standards. The CCSS clearly require continual checks for understanding as well as student involvement in reflecting, self-assessing, using feedback, and setting goals to improve their skills. Students can no longer be passive recipients of grades, but need to be actively involved in monitoring their own growth.

Chapter 1 – Learning Targets

8 Practices That Support Student-Engaged Assessment			
1. Learning Targets	3. Using Data with Students	5. Student-Led Conferences	7. Passage Presentations with Portfolios
2. Checking for Understanding	4. Models, Critique, & Descriptive Feedback	6. Celebrations of Learning	8. Standards-Based Grading

While teachers are the ones who take responsibility for students reaching learning *objectives*, learning *targets*, in contrast, are written in student-friendly language and shift the ownership to *students* for meeting those goals. The book begins with learning targets because this is the first step in helping students become full partners in their own learning. Learning targets begin with the words, "I can" and show students specifically what they are aiming for in a lesson. When students truly understand where they are going with a lesson, they begin to see these goals as within their reach and this increases their motivation. Furthermore, when teachers break down Common Core standards into the concrete skills and content students must learn, this deepens their understanding of these standards.

<u>To Make Learning Targets Effective</u>

Create Learning Targets Aligned to the CCSS, Yet Specific to the Context

Teachers should not use an entire standard as a learning target. Instead, they should start small by choosing one manageable and assessable part of the standard to create a target. This target should be specific to the content they are studying. For example, for the CC reading standard, *RI.9-10.8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient*, the teacher might create the following smaller, context-specific target: "I can describe historical events that affected the Sacco and Vanzetti case using a primary source text." Below are a few examples:

Learning Targets for Younger Students	Learning Targets for Older Students
• I can describe the differences between living and nonliving things. • I can explain my reasons for sorting and classifying insects. • I can write words that send a message.	• I can show two-variable data on a scatter plot. • I can describe how photosynthesis and cellular respiration help an ecosystem maintain homeostasis.

Check for Understanding

Even the best-written learning target won't help students unless they actively *use* the target to assess their own learning. To begin, teachers need to ensure that students understand the target itself. In one video from the DVD that accompanies the book, middle

schoolers discuss the learning target and any unclear vocabulary as a regular practice in their class. This helps students *internalize* the target. Furthermore, during the class, teachers need to provide time for students to assess their progress toward the target. For example, if students have the following target, "I can write a haiku poem that creates a vivid picture," teachers need to ensure that they provide students with the *time* to assess their progress against this target *and* the criteria for students to judge whether their language is "vivid." Teachers must build in regular checkpoints throughout the class for students to assess their understanding. These might include hand signals, verbal checks (like a class go-around), or "clicker" technology. These will be explored in the next chapter.

Connect Daily Targets to Long-Term Targets
In creating daily learning targets, teachers need guidance from their schools—sometimes through a standards-based curriculum map—so they know which standards they should prioritize throughout the year. Once teachers know the key state or Common Core standards to focus on, they can create more specific learning targets that align to these prioritized standards.

Integrate Character Learning Targets with Academic Targets
In addition to creating *academic* learning targets, teachers can create *character* learning targets for the habits the school hopes to instill in its students. If your school has not yet outlined these habits, a good place to look is in the school mission. Here is an example of one school's character learning targets (note that each needs to be broken down into more specific daily learning targets):

Responsibility: I can begin to advocate for myself. I can maintain focus. I can complete quality work on time.
Revision: I can use critical feedback to improve my work.
Perspective Taking: I can consider multiple perspectives and their implications in terms of justice, freedom, and human rights.
Collaboration and Leadership: I can engage positively with others to learn and create deeper work than I could create on my own.

Ensure Targets Aim for a Sufficient Level of Rigor
Composing learning targets provides an excellent opportunity for teachers to ramp up the rigor of their instruction. Overall, teachers need to be *aware* of the challenge level of each learning target so they can plan learning tasks and allocate class time accordingly. One way to understand the rigor of a learning target is to isolate the *knowledge, skill,* and *reasoning* required of the target and then consider the rigor of the task needed (based on Bloom's Taxonomy) for students to learn the target. The chart below breaks down this process:

Knowledge	Skill	Reasoning
Information to be learned outright or through reference materials. Sample verbs: explain, identify, describe, name, define, match.	Use of knowledge to perform an action. Sample verbs: observe, listen, read, speak, write, demonstrate, measure.	Thinking proficiencies—using knowledge to make a decision, problem solve, plan, etc. Sample verbs: analyze, compare, synthesize, infer.

Chapter 2 – Checking for Understanding During Daily Lessons

8 Practices That Support Student-Engaged Assessment			
1. Learning Targets	3. Using Data with Students	5. Student-Led Conferences	7. Passage Presentations with Portfolios
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Checking for understanding includes all of the oral, written, and visual techniques teachers use to monitor whether students are learning. Rather than waiting for the unit test, these techniques occur *during* the lesson to allow teachers to adjust instruction and plan next steps based on how much students understand. We all know that just because we teach something, it doesn't necessarily mean that all students have learned it. These in-the-moment checks might include questioning students, quick checks, and debriefing with students. Furthermore, when taken a step further and *students* themselves monitor their own progress toward the learning target, they become more engaged with their learning. More than simply helping students to "get it right," by teaching them to understand where they are and where they are going, we can help students learn valuable self-assessment skills they can use for the rest of their lives.

Different Techniques to Check for Understanding (CFU)
The checking for understanding techniques fall into five categories: (1) writing and reflection, (2) student discussion protocols, (3) quick checks, (4) strategic observation and listening, and (5) debriefs. These all occur *during* the lesson and quickly provide the teacher with insight into student understanding. Below are a few examples (there are more in the book on pp. 67-75):

Category of CFU	Specific CFU Technique	Description of the Specific CFU Technique
1. Writing and Reflection Techniques	Read-write-pair-share	Students read or watch something, share this with a partner, and the teacher circulates to look for misunderstanding.
	Summary writing	At the end of an activity or class, students summarize what they learned so teachers can see what they understand.
	Admission and exit tickets	At the beginning or end of class students reflect on what they have learned or answer a question. Teacher collects this work to check for understanding to shape upcoming lessons.
2. Student Discussion Protocols	Carousel brainstorm	In small groups, students answer different questions on newsprint at different stations around the room. Each group uses a different color, then rotates to the next station to brainstorm and write more.
	Think-pair-share	Teacher gives a question or prompt, students think about their response individually, and then share with a partner. Partners then share with the whole group.

3. Quick Checks	Whiteboards (factual checks)	Teacher asks a question and all students simultaneously write their answers on mini-whiteboards and hold them up as teacher checks for correct answers.
	Fist-to-five (monitoring confusion)	Teacher asks students to assess their own understanding, readiness, or comfort with a learning target and students hold up a continuum of fingers (fist = disagree, 5 fingers completely agree).
	Table tags (monitoring confusion)	Teacher places table tents in three colors (e.g., red = completely lost, yellow = some confusion, and green = completely understand) in different parts of the room and students move to the appropriate area.
4. Observation and Listening	Checklist	While students work, teacher circulates to observe and listen for learning, with a simple checklist with each student's name and a column to note whether the student is on track or needs support.
	Cold call	After asking the class a question, rather than calling on students with hands raised, the teacher chooses a name from a hat and calls on that student to randomly check for understanding.
5. Debriefs	End-of-class debrief	Teacher returns to the learning target and have students reflect, provide evidence of their progress, and either celebrate success or identify further goals for improvement.

To Make Checking for Understanding Effective

In order to effectively implement checks for understanding, teachers need to ensure certain key elements are in place:

Build a Classroom Culture of Trust—For students to communicate honestly about what they have and have *not* learned, the teacher needs to create a classroom culture in which students feel safe. This involves getting to know students, treating them with respect, and creating norms in which everyone regularly gives and receives feedback and can be honest about their struggles and mistakes.

Preplan Strategic Questions—Rather than simply asking questions off the cuff, teachers need to plan the types of questions that will help them assess student understanding. All teachers should certainly start by ensuring that students understand the *learning target*. They also need to include questions that go from basic to complex so they can see where student understanding breaks down. Further, they should ask questions about the assignment and task itself. Below are some examples:

Design questions about the **learning target**. Sample target: "I can mentally find ten more for any two-digit number."	Sample questions: • What does it mean to do something mentally? • Give an example of a two-digit number. • How will you know if you found 10 more?
Design questions that go from **basic to complex**. Sample target: "I can describe the characteristics of living and nonliving things."	Sample questions: • What is a living thing and how do you know? • How are characteristics of living things different from nonliving? • Is this bouquet of flowers living or nonliving and what's your evidence?
Design questions to **clarify expectations** of the task or target. Sample target: "I can conduct research to prove or disprove my hypothesis."	Sample questions: • What will *collaborative* research look like today as we search for sources? • What would a good report on the water cycle include? • What could you improve to better meet the criteria on the rubric?

Target Specific Gaps in Understanding

It's not enough for teachers to simply check for understanding. They must use this information to adjust their instruction in response to what they've learned. The response usually involves some type of differentiation. Below are a few possible scenarios:

- Exit tickets show that there is a *large gap* between three groups of students: those who firmly grasp the material, those who barely grasp it, and those in the middle. For the next day's lesson, the teacher decides to place students in homogeneous groups and circulate to provide assistance during work time.
- From using CFU techniques, the teacher finds that the class is split evenly between one group that clearly understands and one group that still does not. In the middle of class, the teacher immediately creates groups of 4 with two students from the accomplished group and two from the beginning group and provides discussion prompts to bring the lower level up to speed.
- After reviewing student writing, a teacher finds that many students struggle with organization and descriptive detail so he plans to give two mini-lessons on these topics.

Chapter 3 – Using Data with Students

8 Practices That Support Student-Engaged Assessment			
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When you ask students how they are doing in a class, you often get answers like, "I'm an okay math student," usually based on the test scores from that class. However, by involving students in using data to analyze their performance in class, students begin to have a much better sense of their specific strengths and challenges. Then students give much more nuanced answers such as, "I am good at understanding ratios and percentages, but I still make computational errors sometimes in percentage work." In most schools, only teachers and school leaders examine student data. When students dive into data analysis, it becomes a much more powerful tools, as the students themselves become the primary stakeholders in whether or not they can and will learn. Rather than sugarcoating reality, sharing data with students lets them know exactly where they are in their learning and allows them to set concrete next steps. This also helps them nail down what they need to achieve. Rather than, "I need to work harder," a student might aim to "Increase my reading level by 1.5 years." Also, by tracking their progress, students come to see the connection between effort and improvement.

To Effectively Use Data with Students

Explicitly Teach Students About Data

First, share examples of data use in popular culture with students—anything from the sports page of a newspaper to retailers' analysis of data on sales to determine marketing strategies. Second, students need to know that although you may first focus on data that is easy to count (quantitative data), like mistakes in math assignments or numbers of minutes spent reading independently, they can also look at qualitative data to chart their growth. This might include analyzing rubrics, journals, or exit tickets that reveal something about deeper student thinking. It will also help to show students how looking at data is part of a larger data-inquiry cycle that involves analyzing data, identifying strengths and weaknesses, setting goals, applying new skills and knowledge, and then taking another assessment and starting the cycle again.

Develop Systems to Support Data Use with Students

For data analysis to become an integral part of any classroom, teachers need to create a system to collect, store, and analyze data. In addition, for any system to flourish, teachers need to set aside the time for students to engage in data analysis. Below are two examples of forms for tracking that students can use to help them collect data and reflect on their progress.

MATH TEST ERROR SELF ANALYSIS

Name Date Test Topic

Type A: Careless error (a stupid mistake; you know the facts and operations)
Type B: Graphic error (copied the problem wrong, read the writing wrong, lined up columns poorly, etc.)
Type C: Confused by how to do the operation
Type D: Wrong operation used
Type E: Clueless (no idea how to start or what operation to use)

List each problem number you got wrong and assign an error code letter (from above) to each:

Total errors of each type: **A**: _____ **B**: _____ **C**: _____ **D**: _____ **E**: _____
What patterns do you notice? What does this test show you?

I can identify the lower case letters

Name Damien

Letters	Progress check in date: 9/11/14	Progress check in date:	Progress check in date:	Progress check in date:	Progress check in date:
a					
b					
c					
Etc.					

Sample Learning Target Tracker
Course Learning Tracker #3: I can construct quadratic models and solve problems.

Sub-Learning Targets	Assessment Dates	Assessment Names	Assessment Scores
I can distinguish a parabola from other equations and graphs.			
I can write vertex form or factored form from the graph of a parabola.			
I can find the zeroes of a quadratic function by applying the quadratic formula.			
Etc.			

In addition to the forms listed above, teachers can have students collect their work in folders and portfolios. Periodically, students sort and resort work to look for patterns of growth and use evidence from the folders to show they have mastered different learning targets. Some teachers may want to have their students use an Excel spreadsheet to track progress. Students can chart their growth weekly in columns and compare their progress to the progress a typical fifth grade student, for example, would make in that time period.

Help Students Set SMART Goals

In addition to using tools like those above to regularly chart their progress, students should also set goals for themselves based on areas of need illuminated by the data. Because students may set goals that are too high or too low for themselves, teachers should serve as coaches in this goal-setting process. A sample student goal might be, "I've mastered 70 percent of the math standards but I think my mastery can increase to 85 percent or more by the end of the year." The goal could also focus on deeper thinking skills by, for example, analyzing all exit tickets for a month and looking for evidence of applying prior knowledge to new learning. To help them write effective goals, teachers may want to introduce SMART goals to their students. A SMART goal is:

S = specific M = measurable A = attainable R = realistic T = timely

Furthermore, teachers can help students focus on their goals by creating some type of weekly check-in. At one school they use a weekly reflection sheet which reminds them of their target and asks them to answer:

A goal I have around this target is…

I think I have made little/some/great progress toward my goal because…

Chapter 4 – Models, Critique, and Descriptive Feedback

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No matter how many directions or rubrics we use to describe quality work, sometimes our students just don't know how to produce quality work until they see and analyze a *model of strong work* and receive feedback. In fact, almost every profession—from ballet to medicine—relies on the use of models, critique, and feedback to improve performance. Dancers watch thousands of dance performances and doctors in training receive plenty of feedback. While teachers do provide grades and test scores, these are often too distant from the moment of learning or too vague to be of assistance to students. Students need a combination of models of good work to show them what they are aiming for, along with group critique lessons of those models to build a common understanding of what is expected. They also need individualized descriptive feedback on their own particular pieces of work. Imagine a teacher assigning a historical essay. She might first present a model of an exemplary historical essay, then lead the class through a group critique of what makes the introduction effective, and then produce a list of attributes that make essay introductions strong. Then, once the students have produced a first draft and the teacher has provided descriptive feedback, the students can examine this draft against the list of attributes the class already brainstormed and the need for revision becomes clear.

Using Models

Choose powerful models of student work and build an archive of good models to illustrate different features. Teachers can keep samples of student work, create exemplary models themselves, or use examples from the professional world. Teachers can also share examples of weak student work so students can identify what to *avoid.*

Critique Lessons

A *critique lesson* begins with a clear learning target. Then the teacher shares a piece of exemplary work to show students what meeting that target looks like. Rather than having the teacher lecture about the model, this is an opportunity for students to actively engage in analyzing the work. The goal is not for the students to conclude that the work is "good," but rather for the class to generate a clear list of the specific qualities or strategies that make the piece strong. Specificity here is key. The features that students come up with can be used to create a rubric. For example, after analyzing a research paper, the class would have a list of "features of a good research paper" that could be used in the creation of a rubric.

While ensuring that the critique of the model work is student-centered, the role of the teacher in this process is essential. To begin, the teacher needs to create the type of class culture in which students feel safe giving and receiving feedback. Norms or rules must be explicit and reinforced. For example, these three norms go a long way: *be kind, specific,* and *helpful*. The teacher must model and ensure that comments are not vague ("I like it") and push for specificity ("Including the graph makes it clearer for me.") In addition, the teacher should have a clear idea of the features in the model she would like to highlight. If students do not discover these features, she should be prepared with probing questions ("Did anyone notice…" "Can someone give me an example of…")

Note that a *critique lesson* may have one of two formats. Either the teacher projects a single piece of work in the front of the classroom (or copies it for each student) and students work to uncover strengths and weaknesses *or* the class can do a *gallery walk*. In a gallery walk, all of the students post their own work on the wall and everyone looks for one particular feature (e.g., use of evidence or problem solving). Afterwards, the teacher leads a discussion in which students share what works in the example piece, citing specific evidence to illustrate their points.

Descriptive Feedback to Individual Students

While a *critique lesson* is designed to provide feedback to an entire class, *descriptive feedback* is the individualized feedback a teacher gives to a student (or a peer to a peer). It is not a public learning experience for the whole class. While teachers have been giving feedback to students for years, this feedback is not always received well or used to improve the work. To make sure that their feedback is effective, teachers should take into consideration the following:

Tone: Feedback should be positive and constructive with suggestions for improvement. It helps to convey the notion that you have high expectations and you know the student can reach them.

Clarity: Feedback should be specific, clear, and framed in language that students understand.

Quantity: Rather than giving feedback on everything, focus on the learning targets.

Mode: *Oral* feedback is often the most effective and efficient because it can be given to students on the spot while they are working. Individual conferences are a great way to give more in-depth feedback. When feedback is *written*, it helps to focus on specific targets or to use a rubric or criteria sheet.

Feedback should be incorporated into lessons on a *daily* basis. There are a number of structures teachers can put into place to make sure this happens, such as individual conferences, circulating, self-assessment structures, and peer-assessment opportunities. Research shows that peer-to-peer feedback is one of the most common feedback structures used by teachers, and yet it is one of the *least* effective, because teachers do not provide enough guidance. It's hard enough for teachers to give effective feedback to students. If they want their students to provide useful feedback, they need to not only model giving effective feedback, but they need to have students practice giving feedback on *one* skill or learning target, giving feedback that is *specific and clear*, and following the class norms for giving feedback (*be kind, specific, and helpful*). Without this, students resort to vague comments ("nice job") and copyediting (fixing spelling or grammar), and often end up off task during peer-to-peer feedback sessions.

Chapter 5 – Student-Led Conferences

8 Practices That Support Student-Engaged Assessment			
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When one of the book's authors visited a first grade class to observe some student-led conferences, he was struck by the composure and thoughtfulness of the students. One student turned to him and said, "Mr. Berger, I will be sharing my learning targets with my mother and you today and I will show you which ones I have reached. I hope you will see evidence in my work that I have succeeded." This student led the adults through a twenty-minute conference, explaining each learning target, sharing and analyzing her work and assessment, and showing her progress as well as her continued challenges and future goals.

Student-led conferences are a perfect way to put students in charge and give them ownership over their progress. In addition, these conferences give students an authentic purpose for honing their speaking skills—essential to meeting Common Core standards. Furthermore, student-led conferences bring in families as partners in a different way than traditional conferences, in which teachers speak *at* parents. With this practice, teachers become accountable for preparing all students to become articulate, informed speakers.

Structures of Student-Led Conferences
Schools must decide on the structure that their particular student-led conferences will take. Clearly the structure will be different for an elementary school, where the teacher takes responsibility for preparing students, versus a secondary school, where an advisor or homeroom teacher might take on this role. Below are other questions to consider in designing these conferences for your school:

- How many times a year will student-led conferences occur?
- Will they occur at the end of a marking period or in the middle to report on progress?
- How long should each conference last? (A typical range is 20 minutes for younger students and 45 for older students.)
- What will the content of the conference include—which subjects? Will character skills or scholarship habits be addressed?
- How will teachers address issues that can't be discussed with students? (Set aside 5 minutes when students leave?)

Agendas—To provide structure and ensure the conference goes well, create and stick to an agenda. Below are some suggestions:

Elementary School Conference Agenda (20 minutes)	Secondary School Conference Agenda (30 minutes)
1. Teacher welcomes families, invites them in, and explains the process.	1. Teacher welcomes families and explains the format of the conference.
2. Students bring families on a tour of work on display that represents specific learning targets and evidence.	2. Student shows family the progress report comments, grades, and habits of scholarship grades and discusses strongest and weakest subjects.
3. 10 minutes for student-led conference. Students share learning targets and evidence of progress (assessments, daily work, projects)	3. Student presents portfolio with learning targets, evidence in student work, goals, and action plan to improve.
4. Parents and teacher ask questions (see below) and give feedback.	4. Parents ask questions. Make needed changes to goals and action plan.

Sometimes parents don't know what to ask during these conferences. It is useful for teachers to prepare a set of sample questions to distribute to parents, such as: *Can you tell me why this piece of work is important to you? What were you thinking about when you chose this piece of work for the portfolio? What did you learn from that assignment? Is there anything you might have changed?*

Preparing Students—Preparing students is key to ensuring the success of student-led conferences. Preparation should not be done at the last minute with hurried reflections about student learning. Teachers need to make sure that reflection after learning is an ongoing process throughout the year so students will be prepared to choose work that illustrates their growth. Second, teachers must have students organize and keep their work—in a portfolio for example—because this work will provide the evidence and paint the story of student growth. Students should not keep everything—just those pieces of work that reflect learning on selected learning targets.

Furthermore, in order to develop their skills as presenters, students need time to practice before the actual conference. Teachers can set up fishbowls and critique sessions that provide students with practice in identifying learning targets and providing the evidence in their work to show their progress. Students might benefit from sentence starters such as the following to help them:

- I would like to start by telling you about _____ class. The project for this class was about _____. One learning target I met for this class is _____.
- This learning assignment is a good example of the learning target because I had to _____.
- This is what I will do academically next trimester. In order to improve, I will _____.

One idea is to evaluate the student-led conference as if it were an assessment. This helps to set high expectations for this practice. Below are some of the learning targets (both academic as well as habits of scholarship) students must meet to perform well:

Habits of Scholarship	Content and Skills
• I can speak clearly, audibly, and at an appropriate pace. • I can answer questions directly and honestly. • I can communicate ideas in an organized and coherent manner. • I can explain how and why I have improved. • I can take ownership of my failure and mistakes. • I can create and share a plan for improvement.	• I can explain the learning targets I met. • I can share evidence of my progress from specific assignments. • I can use notes and outlines to help me present. • I can conclude my presentation by reviewing my main points. • I can persuade my audience by substantiating claims with evidence. • I can use grammatically correct sentences when speaking.

Chapter 6 – Celebrations of Learning

8 Practices That Support Student-Engaged Assessment			
1. Learning Targets	3. Using Data with Students	5. Student-Led Conferences	7. Passage Presentations with Portfolios
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It is common for students to showcase their talents in front of their communities for special occasions. However, these occasions usually take one of two forms—a performance (a play or concert) or a sporting event. When this happens, we see students practice, prepare, and push themselves to improve so they can do their best. For whatever reason, schools have not taken advantage of this type of motivating event to get students to push themselves *academically*. "Celebrations of learning" do just this. These are culminating events in which students present high-quality academic work and explain the learning they've accomplished to either the school or surrounding community. Although the events are called "celebrations," the authors clarify that these events are *not* like cast parties after school plays. Instead, they are more like the play itself. They serve as public displays of student learning. Not only do students present an academic piece of work, but they also reflect on what they have learned: "These are the standards I met, here's the work I did that proves I met them, and here's how I did it."

There are many benefits to having celebrations of learning. Not only do students exhibit tremendous pride in publicly sharing their work, but they develop important skills in preparing for these events. They revise their work, meet deadlines, take responsibility for their learning, and practice the important presentation skills—speaking and listening—required in the Common Core standards.

Characteristics of Celebrations of Learning

The first key component of celebrations of learning is the centerpiece—the **high-quality work**. Traditional school assignments—like writing a report on an aspect of the Civil War—do not necessarily motivate students to produce high-quality work. Instead, if students are tasked with researching local sites connected to the Civil War and preparing professional brochures to teach the community about these sites, this energizes students to create higher-quality work. The second key component of these celebrations is that they involve a more **authentic audience**. In the Civil War example, rather than creating an essay only for a teacher's eyes, the brochure would be made public for a wider and more authentic audience. The audience may simply be other students, teachers, parents, or community members, but it is motivating to move beyond the teacher. Another important aspect of celebrations of learning is the student's **reflection** on his or her own learning. It is important that when students present their work, they explain the learning *process,* including their strengths and weaknesses, rather than simply describing the work product itself. Journals are one way students can document their learning journey.

Structures

Celebrations of learning serve as culminating events but can take various forms depending on the grade level, content area, and school context. They may occur at the end of a unit, the year, a long-term project, or at certain designated times during the year (e.g., before spring break). It is important to first decide on the *purpose* of the celebration and then choose an appropriate format. For example, if tenth grade students are studying scientists in the community and sharing museum-like displays of the work of those scientists, it might be appropriate to choose a *grade-level* celebration of learning and to conduct it onsite at a local science museum. While it might be easier to hold an event at your school, the more formal the setting (a museum, a public building), the more important the event will feel. However, if the purpose is to showcase the arts across the curriculum, then you might choose a year-end event that takes place within the school building for the school community and students' families. When students at one middle school studied ways to reduce the carbon footprint of their school, they invited school board members and other professionals to the celebration of learning. Their experience not only exhibited student learning, but served as a pitch to local officials as well!

Preparing for Celebrations of Learning

It is essential that students understand the *purpose* of the celebration of learning as well as the *format* it will take. They must know which standards they are expected to master that are connected to their work. To help students develop a clear awareness of the expectations for their work, teachers should provide rubrics, descriptions of the project, and exemplars of high-quality work. Below are some questions to consider in preparing for celebrations of learning:

- When and where will celebrations of learning occur throughout the year?
- What can be done to ensure high levels of attendance from families and community members?
- What can be done to help the audience actively participate?
- How will teachers ensure that students demonstrate mastery of standards at the celebration of learning?
- What exactly will be shared at the celebration of learning (drafts of work, learning targets, rubrics, habits of scholarship, etc.)?
- What steps need to be taken to prepare students?
- How can teachers be supported in creating powerful celebrations of learning?

Furthermore, in addition to helping students prepare their academic work, teachers must also explicitly teach and give students time to practice speaking and presentation skills. For example, the sixth-grade Common Core English language arts standard SL.6.4 asks students to *present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.* A teacher might translate this into a learning target stating, "I can present a summary of my research using effective speaking techniques." Students often find public speaking challenging and teachers will need to provide adequate time for students to develop these skills. They can provide rubrics with the qualities they are looking for in oral speaking and then give students the opportunity to practice and receive feedback.

The audience also needs to be prepared for the presentation. If families are coming, they might observe students and interview them about their work. If professionals are coming, they might assess students and give feedback. In either case, it helps to prepare with possible talking points, questions, or a checklist for the audience. Below is a sample list of questions and a checklist:

Sample questions for families and friends to ask the students:

1) Name the Colorado fish you learned about.
2) What is special about your Colorado fish?
3) Why does a fish needs its (fins, gills, tail, scales) to survive?
4) Where did you get your information as a scientist?

	1. Not at all	2. Somewhat	3. Fairly well	4. Completely
I can identify the learning targets of this project.				
I can identify the teaching tools that helped my child with this (charts, books, experts, etc.).				
I can see evidence that my child persevered.				
I can describe how my child used literacy skills (reading, writing).				

Chapter 7 – Passage Presentations with Portfolios

8 Practices That Support Student-Engaged Assessment			
1. Learning Targets	3. Using Data with Students	5. Student-Led Conferences	7. Passage Presentations with Portfolios
2. Checking for Understanding	4. Models, Critique, & Descriptive Feedback	6. Celebrations of Learning	8. Standards-Based Grading

In most schools, students come home at the end of year with piles and piles of papers and projects. But what does all of this work really say about what they have learned? Instead, when students thoughtfully organize carefully chosen pieces of their work into a student portfolio and reflect on that work, this provides real evidence of their learning. When they present their portfolios at pivotal transition years (e.g., the end of elementary, middle, and high school) to school, family, or community members, these are called "passage presentations." These presentations share much in common with the celebrations of learning outlined in the previous chapter.

Passage presentations can serve as an important rite of passage that students remember long after they move on. These presentations—like the other practices in this book—are a key part of engaging students by linking their learning and assessment and involving them in the process of learning. The presentations often bring together the people most meaningful in a student's life as audience—teachers, family, and other students—which adds to this significant experience. In fact, because of these presentations, students begin to care more about the quality of their work and take pride in it.

Planning for Passage Presentations

The key to creating strong passage presentations lies in creating strong portfolios. It would be best to create a *schoolwide* approach to portfolios. While portfolios are not new, what may be new is the *purpose* for creating them. Here, the goal is to use the portfolios to engage students in assessing their own growth. Leaders must clarify the purpose of portfolios and passage presentations at the outset. Particularly if passage presentations will be used to determine if students move up to the next level, leaders must make sure that the whole community understands how important these events are in building student commitment, strengthening oral presentation skills, assessing the knowledge and skills of students, and helping students to synthesize their own learning. Communicating the expectations and structure is so important that leaders should certainly send home a letter to families outlining this information (see p. 264 for a sample letter to families).

Below are some questions to help you make other key decisions about the structure of portfolios and presentations:

- Will each piece of work include a reflection, or will the work be discussed as part of a presentation?
- How will students select the work for their portfolios? Will they choose pieces that demonstrate mastery of certain standards? Will they choose only final products or early drafts and evidence of planning as well?
- How will students personalize the portfolio in order to help them take more ownership of it (e.g., a personal reflection letter, a resume, inclusion of extracurricular information)?
- In addition to academic work, will students include evidence of character growth or habits of scholarship?
- Will learning that occurs outside of school be included (e.g., jobs, sports, arts, hobbies, etc.)?
- Will the passage presentations be high stakes—i.e., does student promotion to the next level require that they pass?
- How frequently will portfolios be presented (at student-led conferences?), and when will passage presentations occur (at the end of elementary, middle, and high school, or every two to three years?)?

Furthermore, it is vital that teachers incorporate reflection throughout the year, not just at the last minute to cram for portfolios. Teachers should regularly structure time for students to reflect on their work with questions such as:

- What does the learning target mean?
- Describe the work and the steps you took to complete it (What and how did you learn? What and how did you practice?).

How will you, as a school, *assess* portfolios and passage presentations? Of course, teachers will assess whether students have mastered standards and learning targets, but some schools also involve other panelists—other teachers or community members—in assessing student skills as well. If schools wish to assess public speaking skills or habits of scholarship (like perseverance, respect, and revision), it helps to provide the audience with a rubric with criteria for these items. Note that schools must have a clear process in place for what happens if students do not pass. Below is an excerpt of a sample rubric one school gives its panelists to assess student portfolios:

Sample Excerpt of a Tenth-Grade Passage Portfolio Rubric				
	Rating: 4	Rating: 3	Rating: 2	Rating: 1
Letter of Reflection	Thoughtful, well-written, shows how student has grown and identifies future goals.	Etc.	Etc.	No evidence of student reflection on growth.
Up to 7 pieces of work revised to high quality	Each piece of work demonstrates mastery of a learning target, is well presented, and includes insightful reflection.	Etc.	Etc.	Missing pieces of work and lacks reflections about the work or why the work was chosen.
Up to 4 pieces of work that demonstrate habits of scholarship	Each piece of work demonstrates mastery of a learning target and has a clear connection to the chosen criteria.	Etc.	Etc.	Work and/or reflection is missing and may not clearly identify the learning target.
Resume	Well organized and includes support for all elements.	Etc.	Etc.	Resume is incomplete and does not follow format.

Chapter 8 – Standards-Based Grading

8 Practices That Support Student-Engaged Assessment			
1. Learning Targets	3. Using Data with Students	5. Student-Led Conferences	7. Passage Presentations with Portfolios
2. Checking for Understanding	4. Models, Critique, & Descriptive Feedback	6. Celebrations of Learning	8. Standards-Based Grading

Imagine if we received grades, as adults, for our professional and personal work. We might be reminded of how demotivating they can be. If we want an approach to assessment that engages and motivates students, we need to rethink how we give grades. Rather than giving grades to rank or even punish students, we need a new system of grading that accurately communicates where students are in their learning and helps to motivate them by showing exactly what they need to do to improve.

Traditionally, teachers take all of a student's grades from the quarter or semester and average them to arrive at a final grade. However, there are problems with this. Imagine if you are learning to ride a bike and finally master it. Should you receive a C because the teacher must average in those first few times you tried to ride and fell off? Or is the important thing that you finally mastered bicycle riding? Furthermore, consider two students who end up receiving a C in a class. One is a straight-A student who doesn't turn in work on time but understands the concepts. The other has excellent work habits but doesn't understand the material. Giving both students a C does not accurately portray where each student is in his or her learning. Note that of all the practices described in this book, standards-based grading may be the most difficult to implement because ideas about grading are so entrenched.

With this new approach to grading, grades for academic learning targets and grades for work habits are kept separate. Work habits (like timeliness, effort, and class participation) are important and should be graded, but these grades should *not* be combined with grades for academic achievement. Furthermore, teachers have historically believed that bad grades would motivate. But this has not been the case. By contrast, standards-based grading supports students because they understand the learning targets up front and monitor how they are performing on each one. This motivates students because they know precisely what they must do to improve. Below is a chart that compares the two approaches:

Traditional Grading	Standards-Based Grading
Final grades average a combination of *different* factors, such as performance, effort, homework completion, etc., and vary among teachers.	Final grades communicate a student's progress toward specific standards or learning targets. Work habit grades are reported separately.
An average is required to pass a class and students who have not mastered a large part of the learning may still pass the class.	To pass a class, students must meet criteria for every standard within the class.
Grades are viewed as rewards or punishments.	Grades are used as a tool to communicate student progress.
Teachers are the ones to grade students, and students don't understand the process well.	Students are actively involved in understanding learning targets and tracking their progress.

Create a Faculty Grading Guide

If your school is planning to adopt a standards-based approach to grading, it must be done *schoolwide*. One way schools begin this process is by forming a committee (perhaps a subcommittee of the leadership team) to create a "faculty grading guide" that lays out what needs to be done to implement standards-based grading. This type of document would guide teachers in the following areas:

• **Clear prioritized standards and learning targets**—Although schools may have separate curriculum maps, it is important to include in this guide a list of essential standards and the number of learning targets teachers are expected to teach for each term.

• **Clear definition of proficiency—**For consistency, the guide should outline what "proficiency" of a learning target means.

• **How to determine progress toward long-term targets**—Grades must be based on *multiple* measures, including both formative and summative assessments—and this body of evidence should be used to determine student progress toward long-term learning targets.

• **How to calculate grades—**The faculty grading guide should outline how grades are to be determined. In some schools, students must reach proficiency on *all* learning targets to pass, and in other schools, grades are based on an average of proficiency scores on learning targets, making it possible to pass a class without being proficient in a few learning targets.

• **Reporting work habits**—The guide should make it clear that work habits are to be graded separately, and should include a rubric for judging student proficiency of work habits so there will be schoolwide consistency.

• **Additional considerations**—The guide should also provide guidance on the school's policy for homework and makeup work.

• **Provide the structure of a standards-based report card**—Below is an excerpt of a standards-based report card. Teachers can use software like JumpRope or PowerSchool to create these. The faculty grading guide should outline the structure of the report card:

Progress Report for:	
Algebra 9	3.1
Academic Mastery	
• I can distinguish between independent and dependent variables.	3.9
• I can graph and find equations of direct and inverse variation functions.	3.9
Etc.	
Character Mastery	
• I can complete my work on time.	1.3
English 9	2.8
Academic Mastery	
• I can write well organized essays incorporating textual evidence.	3.5
• I can employ correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar in my writing.	2.3
Etc.	

Even with all of the guidance this faculty grading guide will provide, it is not enough for staff to fully understand and implement a new standards-based approach to grading. Many teachers were simply not graded this way themselves, so the new approach may seem daunting. You will need to provide sufficient professional development for teachers as well. This includes enough time to grapple with the ideas that underlie this new approach to grading, as well as time to set up gradebooks to reflect standards-based grading.

In addition to preparing the faculty for the switch to standards-based grades, the students will also need to be prepared. Teachers will need to take a more active role in helping students understand the learning targets, and provide them with tools to track their progress with those targets along the way. Tools such as goal-setting templates and student progress trackers are useful.

Sample Student Progress Tracker for Spanish Class				
Learning Targets	Evidence and Next Steps	Evidence and Next Steps	Evidence and Next Steps	Summative Assessment
I can use *-ar* verbs consistently and correctly in my writing.	Date: 9/13—I can identify the 6 conjugations of *-ar* verbs—I get them.	Date: 9/15—I got a 3 on *-ar* verbs quiz.	Date: 9/20—I wrote 4 sentences with 4 different subjects. Hagstrom ok'd them.	Quiz—got a 3.
I can use *-er* and *-ir* verbs…	Etc.	Etc.	Etc.	Etc.

Families will also be unfamiliar with this approach to grading. Make sure to communicate with parents so they know what to expect and the reasons why standards-based grading is more effective. Of all the student-engaged assessment practices in this book, this is the most complicated to implement, so it is especially important to keep all stakeholders informed and involved.

THE MAIN IDEA's PD suggestions for Student-Engaged Assessment

PART I. How well does your school currently implement the 8 student-engaged assessment practices?

Together with your leadership team or your teachers, determine which of the book's 8 student-engaged assessment practices you already implement well and which need to be strengthened.

1. Learning Targets
   - Do teachers discuss and unpack learning targets with students?
   - Do teachers refer to learning targets throughout the lesson?
   - Do teachers connect daily learning targets to long-term targets and the CCSS?

2. Checking for Understanding
   - Do teachers preplan the questions they will use to check for understanding throughout the lesson?
   - Do teachers use a variety of techniques to check for *whole-class* understanding and make adjustments during lessons?
   - Do teachers use a variety of techniques to check for *individual* understanding and make adjustments during lessons?

3. Using Data with Students
   - Do teachers provide the time for students to collect, store, and analyze data and reflect on their goals?
   - Do teachers have students use learning target trackers and use this data to understand their progress and growth?
   - Do teachers have students create SMART goals based on data?

4. Using Models, Critique, and Descriptive Feedback
   - Do teachers have a collection of exemplary student work to serve as models for their students?
   - Do teachers conduct group critique lessons so students can understand the characteristics of student work that meet learning standards?
   - Do teachers include time for descriptive feedback in their lessons?

5. Student-Led Conferences
   - Do teachers make reflection an ongoing part of lessons to prepare students to conduct student-led conferences?
   - Do teachers explicitly teach learning targets tied to the Common Core speaking and listening standards to prepare students?
   - Do teachers provide time for students to practice and debrief student-led conferences?

6. Celebrations of Learning
   - Do teachers plan adequately for celebrations of learning – choose the right structure, create a schedule, reach out to families, etc.?
   - Do teachers prepare students for celebrations of learning with time to practice and receive feedback?
   - Do teachers help prepare families to give feedback – with questionnaires, comment cards, etc.

7. Passage Presentations with Portfolios
   - Do teachers have a clear purpose for portfolios and passage presentations and engage students in understanding this purpose?
   - Do teachers clearly tie passage presentations to learning targets and develop criteria for successful presentations?
   - Do teachers think through all of the logistics of portfolios and passage presentations (How often? Where? Include work habits? Etc.)

8. Standards-Based Grading
   - Is the school developing a faculty grading guide to outline the expectations for standards-based grading?
   - Do teachers use a grade book based on learning targets not assignments?
   - Do teachers report grades for academic learning targets and work habits separately?

1st DISCUSS the questions above in small groups.

2nd INDIVIDUALLY RANK the 8 practices above from 'best implemented' to 'most need to be strengthened.'

3rd PRIORITIZE the three practices your school most needs to improve by having everyone post their rankings on the wall and then aiming for consensus or at least clarity on what the school's three priorities should be.

Once you have completed this, go on to PART II on the next page.

PART II. Develop workshops on those practices your school most needs to improve

This book is chock-full of information and it would be overwhelming to provide PD for it all. Instead, I will present a *general* format you can use to introduce each of the assessment practices. In addition, I will provide a model of PD ideas for the first chapter (the first assessment practice). To help encourage teacher leadership, you could ask teachers to volunteer to run a PD session on one of the following chapters after looking at the model PD for chapter 1. Here is the general format PD presenters can use for each chapter:

a) Help teachers understand what the assessment practice entails and what makes it a "student-engaged" assessment practice.
b) Have teachers practice this assessment approach and apply it to their own teaching.
c) Explore school-wide implications of this practice.

PD Ideas for Practice 1: Learning Targets

8 Practices That Supports Student-Engaged Assessment			
1. Learning Targets	3. Using Data with Students	5. Student-Led Conferences	7. Passage Presentations with Portfolios
2. Checking for Understanding	4. Models, Critique, & Descriptive Feedback	6. Celebrations of Learning	8. Standards-Based Grading

a) What are *Learning Targets* and what makes this a "student-engaged" assessment practice?
Discuss learning targets with your teachers. Make sure to clarify the difference between *objectives* (teachers are the ones to take responsibility for student learning) and learning *targets* (written in student-friendly terms, students take responsibility for meeting these aims). Furthermore, make sure teachers understand the importance of doing more than simply writing these on the board – instead they need to help students unpack and understand targets, check for student understanding of the target throughout the class, provide time for students to assess their own progress toward the target, and continually refer to the target during the lesson. Have teachers discuss how the use of learning targets is similar or different from the objectives they currently use.

Then have teachers look at the definition of "student-engaged assessment" and ask how the first practice, using learning targets, supports the definition:

DEFINITION: Student-engaged assessment changes the primary role of assessment from evaluating and ranking students to motivating them to learn. It builds the independence, critical thinking skills, perseverance, and self-reflective understanding students need for college and careers that is required by the Common Core State Standards.

b) Have teachers practice the new assessment approach
1. Provide the teachers with some examples of learning targets (you can use the examples in the chart below). Then have them take the CCSS they are currently working on and (1) Choose ONE part of the standard for a day's lesson and (2) Create an "I can" target based on what they are doing in class.

Learning Targets for Younger Students	Learning Targets for Older Students
• I can describe the differences between living and nonliving things. • I can explain my reasons for sorting and classifying insects. • I can write words that send a message.	• I can show two variable data on a scatter plot. • I can describe how photosynthesis and cellular respiration help an ecosystem maintain homeostasis.

2. Next, have teachers work on the rest of the lesson plan for the "I can" target they just created. Ask them to add in both the TIME and the CRITERIA to work with learning targets. For example, if students have the following target, "I can write a haiku poem that creates a vivid picture" teachers need to ensure that they provide students with the *time* to assess their progress against this target *and* the criteria for students to judge whether their language is "vivid."

c) How can we implement this practice school-wide?
In addition to making a school-wide commitment to writing learning targets in the form of "I can…" and ensuring that lesson plans include time for checking student understanding of the target and tracking progress toward it, your school can consider creating school-wide ***character*** learning targets.

Below are some sample scholarship and behavioral traits that a school might instill in its students along with learning targets:

Responsibility: I can begin to advocate for myself. I can maintain focus. I can complete quality work on time.
Revision: I can use critical feedback to improve my work.
Perspective Taking: I can consider multiple perspectives and their implications in terms of justice, freedom, and human rights.
Collaboration and Leadership: I can engage positively with others to learn and create deeper work than I could create on my own.

Pull out your school's mission and have teachers work in small groups to propose 4 to 6 character traits that the school might adopt. Have each group post their own list and have all teachers circulate to look at the lists of other groups and put up Post-It notes with comments. Afterwards, conduct a discussion and either come to a consensus or charge a smaller group of teachers to take the ideas from this discussion and return in a few weeks with a proposal for 4 to 6 school-wide character traits.

