



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Reporting

Q1 Grades motivate students to be better learners, so why would we want to get rid of them?

A My first response would be...try a grading system at home with your children. Give them letter grades on how they are as children and see if this motivates them. Better yet, have your children grade you as parents, grandparents, etc., and see if that motivates you to be a better parent. Time after time, research has shown that giving grades is negatively correlated with learning and motivation.

Q2 Won't grades better prepare students for future studies in high school?

A If grades have been shown to be detrimental to learning and motivation, I can't see how that "prepares" students for their future learning. In addition, many secondary schools in our district, including Burnaby Central (our main feeder school), will also be moving away from letter grades in favour of proficiency scales. This will be in place for all grade 8 & 9 students next year, so moving to proficiency scales now will better prepare them for their immediate future.

Q3 What about preparing them for university?

A First off, we're getting a little ahead of ourselves here, but it is a big consideration when students are entering grades 10 and up. Most universities now are taking a much more holistic approach to admissions. Academics (whether proficiency scales, percentages or grades) have become one of many factors considered before admissions will even consider students. Things such as community involvement, volunteering, athletic endeavours, musical ability, work experience, etc., are seen as just as important. Even when you reach the pinnacle of university, Masters & Doctorate programs have moved to simply pass/fail. Even illustrious medical schools such as Harvard, Stanford, Oxford, and Johns Hopkins have moved away from grades. However, right now, local universities still look to grades until the province clarifies Proficiency Scales (which is expected in 2020), but when I spoke to SFU, they can make exceptions to this.

Q4 Why would you get rid of letter grades when the “real” world is so competitive?

A *First off, I believe that even now, most people work in a career or job that requires much more cooperation than competition, where you need to work as a team to complete tasks. I don't know of anyone that works in a position where they are “graded” or given a percentage on how well they work. If your performance is reviewed, you are likely given descriptive feedback on what you're doing well, and what you need to work on...exactly the direction we are moving with proficiency scales and descriptive feedback. For jobs of the future, one of the most important skills that constantly comes up is the ability to collaborate and communicate; you will not find “competitive” on a list of skills for jobs of the future. In addition, do we really want students associating “learning” with competition? I'm all for Math competitions, Odyssey of the Mind competitions, & writing competitions, but when it comes to everyday learning at school, we need to focus on the 4 C's (Communication, Critical Thinking, Creativity, & Collaboration) to prepare them for the “real” world.*

Q5 Why would you want students to be invited to participate in assessing themselves? Isn't that cruel and doesn't it put the student between a rock and a hard place?

A *When students first foray into self-assessment, many don't know what to do. Should they give themselves a positive assessment because that's what they want? Should they be hard on themselves at the risk of getting a poor assessment? However, what they quickly learn is not anything to do with giving themselves a grade or a rating, they learn to more accurately “assess” their ability regarding various aspects of the assignments and are able to compare their assessments with those of others. Without this step, many students have very little idea of their ability and how that's demonstrated. Some feel their work is fantastic because they've never had to look at it from an assessment standpoint. Alternatively, you have students that constantly think their never good enough until they start taking a look through an assessment lens. However, the instant you add a “grade” to that, things start to change in a negative way.*

Q6 Can't I just ask for both letter grades AND proficiency scale?

A *The short answer is yes, but my response will be WHY? Knowing what we know about the effect of letter grades and how they have been shown over and over again to detract from learning, we feel it is somewhat derelict of duty for us to provide letter grades as educators as they undermine some of our fundamental beliefs. As we've mentioned at sessions with parents, providing proficiency scales and descriptive feedback is more work for us, but we know it will pay off. However, in Burnaby we know that change can be difficult, and we know that we are asking many of you to “trust” us, but if you still have strong feelings against the switch to proficiency scales, then please speak to Mr. Gurney directly. Simply email (kurt.gurney@burnabyschools.ca) to set up a time to talk...I promise it won't be painful.*

