

## **Provide Several Assessment Opportunities**

This guideline acknowledges individual differences in many aspects of education, especially in planning teaching/learning strategies, and recognizes that

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life is full of second chances. The practical application of these principles is that, as much as possible, we must offer students varied assessment opportunities to support learning and encourage student success.

### ***Individual Differences***

Students learn at different rates and are able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in different ways and at different speeds. This is part of our acknowledgment of individual differences, which encompass learning styles and multiple intelligences, as well as a more general understanding that students are different in many ways. As we acknowledge differences in learning, it is logical—and

critical—that we provide varied opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

### ***Second Chances***

In the real world, very little of consequence, including writing this book, depends on a single opportunity for performance. Most performances are practiced several times before they become real—think about writing, theater, and film, to name a few. In each of these fields, and many others, there is a great deal of assessment and redoing before a final product is released. Also, individuals are not evaluated on one piece of writing or one film; judgment of their quality as a performer is made over a body of work. This is also true in sports; individuals get many chances within each game to improve their performance, and teams have multiple opportunities to improve their performance because they play many games over the course of a season. The idea of second chances is taken even further in learning to be a surgeon or a pilot; aspiring surgeons practice on cadavers, while those learning to fly practice for hours in simulators before practicing in a real plane.

As life provides second (and more) chances, so should school.

As life provides second (and more) chances, so should school. There are many reasons why students do not perform at their best on the day designated by a teacher for a test or performance. These may relate to learning, physical, or emotional factors. The objective of teachers is to identify the most consistent level of performance of students. To do this, teachers need to vary assessment in many ways, including the number of opportunities, time available, and the methods used.

Guskey (2003) puts it this way:

To become an integral part of the instructional process, assessments cannot be a one-shot, do-or-die experience for students. Instead, assessments must be part of an ongoing effort to help students learn. And if teachers follow assessments with helpful corrective instruction, then students should have a second chance to demonstrate their new level of competence and understanding. This second chance helps determine the effectiveness of the corrective instruction and offers students another opportunity to experience success in learning. (p. 10)

Assessing the same concepts and skills using different questions and/or tasks can provide a number of opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement. One potential problem, however, is unreasonable extra work for teachers; to avoid this, teachers may use computers to collect banks of items and tasks. This can be done at the school, district, and/or state level.

Baron and Boschee (1995) go as far as to say that

students failing to successfully complete all secured tasks (i.e., assessment of individual student's work under controlled conditions) during the course of the academic year should be provided with an opportunity to demonstrate an acceptable level on each unsuccessful task prior to the end of the year. (p. 78)

This approach might be logistically difficult, but teachers need to consider its implications for so-called final examinations.

Busick and Stiggins (1997) present an interesting variation of this idea. They describe a school district whose policy required that “incompletes” be given before students failed so that students had extended opportunities to complete missing work. The policy, however, created some problems, which Busick and Stiggins examine in a case study format (pp. 103–104).

As schools move to provide second—or more—opportunities for students to demonstrate competency, limitations are often put on these opportunities. It is important to state clearly that these opportunities must be available to *all* students and there must be no limitation on the contribution that the reassessment makes to the student’s grade. Nolen and Christopher, as quoted in Wormeli (2006), state the case for the latter very clearly:

“The consequence for a student who fails to meet a standard is not a low grade but rather the opportunity—indeed, the requirement—to resubmit his or her work!”  
—Reeves, 2000, p. 11

Policies that give only partial credit for revisions are little better than no-revision policies—why should the student spend time and effort revising if the best they can hope for is a slight improvement in the grade, despite the fact that he now understands the work. (p. 115)

#### Think About This . . .

“I truly believe that math is developmental. I don’t think that all kids learn math at the same pace, or at the same time in their life. I think some kids need more practice, more time with a concept, more one-on-one conversations. If I believe that, how can I possibly think that they are all going to be ready for the same test at the same time? That is also why I give full credit for retests. I think that a student’s grade should reflect what they know at the time of the report card, and if a student has mastered the concepts we have covered—no matter when, as long as it was during the reporting period—I think that should be reflected in his final grade.”

—Kelly, middle school math teacher, as quoted in Wormeli, 2006, p. 135

### Practical Considerations

Having provided a number of suggestions for how students can be provided with flexible assessments, it is now time for a qualifier. Second or multiple assessments do not mean an endless set of opportunities for students. This would be unrealistic and would place far too great a burden on teachers. As Ebert (1992) says, “Second chances do not just appear, nor do they naturally work out without some evidence [of students] using past mistakes to enhance future success. Therefore, reassessment is the opportunity and students learn the responsibility” (p. 32).