

[Education Week's blogs](#) > [Assessing the Assessments](#)

Mimic the Classroom

By Invited Contributor Listed Below on April 8, 2014 12:00 AM | [No comments](#)

Today's guest contributor is **Jeff Charbonneau**, the 2013 Teacher of the Year; physics teacher at Zillah High School, Zillah, Washington.

Imagine for a moment that you are a student in my high school physics class. The class is demanding. The content and challenge high enough that the course counts for college credit, even though it is taught in high school.

On the first day of class you learn about the grading scheme. There are three options:

1. No homework. No quizzes. No Labs. In fact the only grade that counts is the final exam.
2. No tests. Not one. Your grade will be determined by daily homework assignments only.
3. Your grade will be a combination of homework assignments, labs, quizzes, chapter tests, and a final exam.

Which one do you want? Which one would you choose for your child to be evaluated upon?

If we used option 1, I am fairly certain that I would have parents seeking a meeting with the principal, if not the school board, for inappropriate grading practices. There would be arguments that the stakes were too high, the stress too great, and the evaluation based on their child having a good or bad day at school.

If we used option 2, I am fairly certain that I would lose the agreement I have made with the regional four-year university to offer my course for college credit. With no culminating examination, no equivalent to the on campus/university experience, how could they ensure that the rigor and expectations of the course were being met? If the course no longer counts for college credit, how many students do you see lining up to take such a challenging class?

And then there is option 3. Students are allowed to showcase their knowledge through multiple pathways - from essays to projects to problems, they create a wealth of evidence chronicling their learning over time. As a teacher I use these multiple assessment strategies to modify instruction and meet their needs in a timely fashion. But I also give formal assessments. The exams serve as culminating confirmations of learning. The exams evaluate an aspect of learning that the projects cannot. Just as the projects do the same. The final grade is a combination of all forms of assessment. It is very possible to have low test scores, but do well on all other parts of the class and still receive a passing grade. But to receive the best grades, you must perform well in all areas.

The secret? Option 3 works.

We know that using multiple measures and techniques to evaluate learning works. We have known this for a very long time.

So my question is: If we know that multiple measures works best in the classroom, why don't we mimic the classroom?

Susan Fuhrman suggests in her blog "[Varied Measures for Varied Purposes](#)" that:

"Student performance should be regularly tracked by teachers, who are positioned to be the best assessors of student learning, through in class tests, midterms, finals, and grades for homework and classwork. "

I could not agree more!

On the other hand, state-wide testing does fill a need. It can be used to help find holes in district-wide curriculum, inequities between districts that are not otherwise realized, and identify schools that have successful programs; and can therefore be a great wealth of information. These tests have the most use at the district and state levels, where sample sizes are large enough to see trends.

However, the issue is that state testing should be *PART* of a larger picture that is used to evaluate large scale learning.

State-wide testing does not tell me anything about the quality of a district's music program, after school programs, anti-bullying strategies, and gives only very limited information on support for students with special needs. The list goes on. As a parent I want to know so much more about my child's school than test scores.

We already know what it takes to create a good evaluation of learning. So let's start there. Let's start by mimicking a good classroom.

Let's create a system that looks at the entirety of the student experience. One that uses tests as a small fraction of the whole, and does a much better job at showing what it is really like to be educated in our public schools.

Jeff Charbonneau

Zillah High School, Zillah, Washington

Categories: [Validity](#) [High-stakes testing](#) [School accountability](#) [International assessments](#) [Test use](#)

Tags: [High-stakes testing](#) [International assessments](#) [School accountability](#) [Test use](#) [Validity](#)