

Standards Based Assessment and Reporting: A Perspective

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For my entire life, education has been at the forefront of my world. As a student, then a teacher, and now as an administrator, I have felt the strong pull of education in two directions. In one direction is the incredibly important and noble responsibility we all share to educate our children. In the opposite direction is the sense of frustration because we are perpetuating an educational system with significant flaws.

Please don't misunderstand; as a student, I had wonderful teachers; as a teacher and administrator I had, and currently have, excellent colleagues. St. Croix Central School District has some of the finest, most dedicated educators I've worked with in my seventeen-year career. The flaw is not in our educators but in the system of school. As we attempt to be everything for everyone within the constraints and parameters set before us, we bang our heads against antiquated systems, structures, laws, philosophies, and funding; over which we have little control. On the flip-side, we maintain some ineffective systems out of a sense of tradition, fear of change, or simply because "it's always been that way".

The desire to do better for our children has brought us to the exploration of Standards-Based Assessment and Reporting (SBA/R). Having spent an extensive amount of time investigating, researching and developing models of what an SBA/R system could look like at the high school, I am confident this process is worth the effort. This could be the transformational change needed in our educational system.

Taking our current traditional grading system and adding a program, adjusting a schedule, or any myriad of other tweaks is like changing a stop-sign into a stop-light. They are different but ultimately the same; they are transactional. However, moving from a traditional grading system to an SBA/R philosophy is like moving from a stop-sign to a roundabout. It is not business as usual; it is truly transformational and the beneficiaries of this work will be our children and families.

There are five major areas in SBA/R that must be addressed before we can move forward with implementation. We refer to these areas as the "5 Buckets" of SBA/R. The "5 Buckets" include: 1) Essential Standards, 2) Assessments, 3) Rubrics, 4) Tracking (internal), and 5) Reporting (external). Working within the first three buckets is nothing new for our teachers. Teachers at every level have worked very hard to identify essential standards, develop effective assessments and create expectations (rubrics) to drive instruction and enhance learning for all children.

As I visit with people about SBA/R two responses come through loud and clear. First, nearly every person believes the philosophy and process (buckets 1 through 3) of SBA/R is logical and fosters learning for all. Second, the major source of concern at the high school level revolves around how this philosophy will impact the reporting of student results (bucket 5): transcripts, grade point, academic honors, and scholarships.

I believe we can create a truly transformational system that utilizes the philosophy and process of SBA/R (buckets 1 through 3) while maintaining the major features of traditional reporting (bucket 5). If we can do that we will develop an educational system that reverses the frustrations felt in the current system. Most importantly, we will create the type of educational experience our students and families deserve.