



## Assessment Practices

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*“Canon Law has clearly stated that Catholic schools must ensure academic excellence: “Directors of Catholic schools are to take care under the watchfulness of the local ordinary that the instruction which is given in them is at least as academically distinguished as that in other schools of the area. Studies have affirmed that Catholic schools offer more effective academic instruction and also form more civic-minded and justice-oriented citizens. Undeniably, our schools work for students, for democracy, and for the Church. Given these demonstrated successes, some might suggest that we simply continue to do what we already do so well. We suggest that to do so would be to miss both a challenge and an opportunity. The emphasis on public school reform and innovation leading to effective magnet and charter schools and the increased popularity of home schooling encourage focused attention on our part to strengthen the academic quality of Catholic schools. The emergence of new thinking in research-based curriculum and instruction offers an important opportunity to improve our schools.” (Notre Dame Task Force on Catholic Education)*

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### **Ongoing Authentic Assessment**

Authentic, performance-based assessments are conducted within typical activities in inclusive environments for the purpose of identifying students’ learning and communication styles, preferences and interests, academic strengths and weaknesses, and need for support.

### **Performance Based and Alternate Assessment**

**Personalized Performance Demonstrations:** The ways that most students in a class demonstrate learning – by speaking or writing – may not accurately assess what a student with a disability can do. Therefore some students sometimes need different options for “showing what they know.” Examples of Personalized Performance Demonstrations include:

- While most student in a class are writing short paragraphs about plant classification systems such as kingdom, phylum, class, order, etc., Stephen uses an augmentative communication device to put photos of various types of plants into those groups.
- While some students must use 10 bibliographic sources for a report, Brandon is required to use 3 sources of information on the topic, including audiotapes, interviews with experts, and pictures from a web page on the Internet.
- While most students are asked to give an oral report after visiting the Boston Aquarium, Lindsay uses a switch to advance a slide show of the various exhibits taken while on the trip, answering questions about each using her augmentative communication system.
- Instead of writing a lab report, Joshua takes photos of the steps of the experiment and draws from a word bank to label the lab equipment, the step in the experiment, or the part of the cell seen through the microscope.
- To enable Matt to participate and succeed in physical education class, he is expected to run a shorter distance in a longer period of time than other students in the class, but his improvement is charted and assessed to arrive at his grade.

**Unique Evaluation and Grading Plans:** There are a variety of assessment methods and sources of evidence to **evaluate student learning** including:

- Observations of students in structured and unstructured settings
- Surveys of parents or teachers regarding their assessment of whether skills are generalized at home
- Collections of student work, including written, models, audio, video, performance events and tasks
- Self- or peer-evaluation classmates
- Review of written records
- Report cards or progress reports

### **Educational and Related Services Assessments (Specialized Assessments)**

With the informed consent of a parent, a school board, regional authority or designated special education private school makes a referral for specialized assessment when it has insufficient or conflicting information regarding a student to enable the board, regional authority or designated special education private school to develop effective programming, determine diagnosis or eligibility, or to make a placement decision for the student.

#### **Guidelines around Referral for a Cognitive Assessment**

Grade K-1: Generally, if a kindergarten student is struggling early in the school year, it may be appropriate to allow the student time to become familiar with the school routine and to monitor the student's progress. Typically, if a grade one student is struggling early in the year, the teacher gathers information and provides intensive support.

One concern around using standardized tests at the 5-6 year age range is the difficulty in determining actual strengths and weaknesses since the testing occurs at the age limits of the test. There will, however, be some situations when requests for formal assessment are appropriate at these grade levels.

Grades 2-6: When a student fails to make the academic progress expected, cognitive assessment may provide information regarding the student's strengths and weaknesses to assist with program planning. Unless the validity of a score is in doubt, a second assessment would likely be unnecessary during this period.

Grades 7-9: During these years, planning for transition to high school is underway. Recent cognitive and academic assessment should support a referral for learning assistance intervention or Knowledge and Employability courses at the high school level. If a cognitive assessment dates from grade 2 or 3, or if the validity of a more recent assessment is questioned, then a cognitive assessment should be requested.

Grades 10-12: If it is anticipated that a student will need assessment to access post-secondary programs and supports, such assessment should be completed early in the student's grade 11 year. Most post-secondary institutions consider assessment within the past two years as sufficiently current. Assessment

early in Grade 11 will support both programming at the high school level and transition to post-secondary programs.

## ***Referral and Assessment Processes***

The referral process begins with the classroom teacher requesting support for a student who is experiencing difficulty. The referral may be initiated by a concern on the part of the parent, the student, or the classroom teacher. The referring teacher requests consultation with the learning services facilitator in order to problem-solve and develop an intervention plan for the student. This request for consultation might be accompanied by a Referral Form which provides a structure for collecting and sharing pertinent information regarding the student's strengths and weaknesses. The student services facilitator often helps to collect the necessary background information through the use of a variety of observation and assessment techniques.

### **INFORMING PARENTS AND OBTAINING PARENTAL CONSENT**

The school should obtain informed consent from the parents/guardians prior to referral for assessment. When a request for assessment is initiated by the school, the individual putting forward the request (learning services facilitator, classroom teacher or principal) is required to contact the parent, provide information regarding the nature and purpose of the assessment, and obtain parental consent. This consent will be considered valid for one school year.

### **INFORMATION GATHERING**

When a classroom teacher requests support for a student who is experiencing difficulty; the first step is to gather information about the student in order to determine the areas of difficulty and the degree of difficulty. Information is obtained from many sources which may include: the student's cumulative record, observation of the student in a variety of settings, anecdotal reports, work samples, conferences with the student, parents, other teachers, and perhaps other agencies, informal tests and checklists, and standardized assessments. The classroom teacher may begin to collect information using the Referral Form as a guide. Following consultation, the student services facilitator may provide additional observation or assessment and in some cases the student may be referred to Learning Services at Board Office for further testing.

#### Information Gathering: Overview and Examples

##### Observations, Anecdotal Reports, and Work Samples

- structured observations
- teacher observations and notes of daily work
- portfolios
- work samples
- reading/writing logs
- other

##### Conferences

- student/teacher conferences
- 3-way conferences (student/parent/teacher)
- parent/teacher conferences

- team meetings (all personnel involved with student)
- incidental meetings
- other

#### Information from Community Agencies

- Child and Youth Services
- Medical Doctors
- SLP, OT, etc.
- FSCD
- other agencies who are involved (McMan, Next Step, CORE...etc.)

#### Informal Tests and Checklists

- student inventories (e.g. interest, self-concept, reading/writing, etc.)
- checklists (e.g. basic skills, content areas, social skills behavior)
- running records
- teacher made tests (unit - content - concept tests)
- indicators of mastery (e.g. sight words, number facts)
- cloze tests
- sociograms
- others



## ***Standardized Assessments***

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### **Ability Tests**

Following are some of the standardized assessments used in our school division. The school must obtain informed consent from the parents/guardian prior to referral for ability or cognitive testing.

#### Individual Ability Tests

- Weschler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WIPPSI)
- Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-III)
- Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS)
- Weschler Memory Scale
- Woodcock Johnson - Revised Test of Cognitive Skills
- Kaufman Assessment Battery
- Stanford Binet-IV

#### Group Ability Tests

- Canadian Cognitive Skills

### **Achievement Tests**

The school must obtain informed consent from the parents/guardian prior to conducting individual achievement tests with students.

#### Individual Achievement Tests

- Woodcock Reading Mastery Test - Revised
- Alberta Diagnostic Reading Program
- Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT)
- Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement
- Weschler Individual Achievement Test
- Key Math - Revised
- Test of Phonological Awareness
- others

#### Group Achievement Tests

- Canadian Test of Basic Skills
- Canadian Achievement Test (CAT-3)



## ***Functional/Behavioural Assessments***

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The FBA is a process for gathering information that can be used to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of behavioural support. The process of gathering broad and specific information gives team members insight into the reasons why a student may engage in challenging behaviours. The two primary methods for gathering this information are interviews and direct observation. The primary purpose of a functional assessment is to highly individualize and structure the student's learning environment in order to support them in meeting their educational goals.

Functional Behavioural Assessment aims to:

- describe and verify the seriousness of the problem
- refine the definition of the problem behaviour
- collect information on possible functions of the problem behaviour
- analyze using data "triangulation" (synthesizing data from multiple sources) and/or problem pathway analysis
- generate a hypothesis statement regarding the probable function of the problem behaviour

Developing the IPP following assessment aims to:

- test the hypothesis statement regarding the function of the problem behaviour by identifying goals and strategies to support and remediate these behaviours
- develop and implement an IPP that clearly focuses on strategies to address these behaviours
- monitor the implementation of the plan
- evaluate effectiveness of the plan
- modify the plan as needed

Traditionally, teachers have dealt with student behaviour that interferes with classroom instruction by using various kinds of consequences e.g. verbal reprimands, time-out, and suspension. The goal, of course, has been to reduce, if not eliminate the immediate problem. However, experience has shown that these usually are not the most effective or efficient means to eliminate problem behaviour. "Reactive" approaches that follow inappropriate behaviour, such as punishment, are not only time

consuming, but they fail to teach the student acceptable replacement behaviours and also may serve to reinforce the inappropriate behaviour e.g. suspension for reasons of non-attendance reinforces the non-attendance.

The success of an intervention hinges on:

- understanding why the student behaves in a certain way
- replacing inappropriate behaviour with a more socially acceptable behaviour
- recognizing the links between academic and behavioural learning
- working in partnership with community agencies when appropriate

Students requiring a FBA will likely have an IPP or a behaviour support plan which reflects the need for support due to social, emotional, behavioural and/or mental health challenges. These students may also need a Safety Management Plan.