

ASSESSMENT

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

Holyoke High School uses various standards-based tests to evaluate the teaching and learning process within the school. Teachers and guidance staff administer the state-mandated MCAS tests to all 10th graders in the areas of English, Math, and Science. The results are used to measure the school's progress in meeting state and federal educational goals, as well as to determine whether or not individual students are academically prepared to graduate from high school. The computer-based Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test is now used for 9th and 10th graders to diagnose academic weaknesses in both Mathematics and Reading, and for placement in READ 180 and RAMP-UP remedial classes. The Guidance Department coordinates the administration of the PSAT and the SAT examinations, which are open to all students who are considering applying to college, as well as the Advanced Placement exams, which are highly recommended for those students who have taken Advanced Placement courses.

A variety of evaluation tools are used to assess and report student progress in achieving the school-wide expectations throughout the school year. Teachers issue letter grades, which indicate the level of achievement, at both mid-quarter (five weeks) and the close of each quarter (ten weeks). In addition to these school-wide notifications, parents may request Weekly Progress Reports from the student's guidance counselor to monitor weekly student achievement.

Holyoke serves a high number of Spanish-speaking minority students, and the Holyoke Public Schools employ several language assessment tools both to determine

class placement and to measure progress in speaking, reading, and writing English. All newly enrolled students at Holyoke High School are screened using the Home Language Survey and, if needed, they are assessed for English proficiency using the Bilingual Syntax Measure (BSM II), the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI), and their writing samples. The results of these assessments are used to determine placement in the English Language Learners (ELL) program. Progress in English acquisition is then measured annually using the MELA-O for speaking and listening skills, and the MEPA-R/W exam for reading and writing skills. Results are reported to parents and are used by the ELL and Guidance Departments to monitor progress and to schedule appropriate courses.

The faculty at Holyoke High School uses a variety of criteria to assess student academic achievement depending on the course needs; some examples are: subjective and objective written tests, oral testing, written reports, portfolios, journals, observation of student skills, cooperative learning techniques, varied homework assignments, class participation, projects, and laboratory assignments. Semester examinations are also required in all courses. In order to measure and improve writing ability, specifically, over the course of the year, all teachers assign monthly Open Response Questions, and English teachers administer the District-Wide Writing Prompt during the fall and winter. Students are given many opportunities to demonstrate learning, which allows ample opportunities for teachers to evaluate their progress.

Holyoke High School has two stated social expectations and two stated civic expectations. The school's social expectations are: (a) to embrace diversity and demonstrate open-mindedness for successful social interaction, and (b) to exhibit a positive self-image, a strong sense of personal conviction, and respectful and responsible

behavior. The school's civic expectations are: (a) to have the opportunity and be encouraged to participate in school and community activities, and (b) to understand their civil rights and responsibilities and advocate for positive changes in the environment.

Holyoke High School offers a number of co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for students in the form of organized clubs and interscholastic athletic teams. Students are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities through newspaper notices, mailings from school, in-school announcements, and verbal suggestions from faculty, staff, administration, and peers. A recent survey showed that approximately 45% of the student body actively participates in one or more co-curricular and/or extra-curricular activities. Solid figures for all clubs need to be recorded in a central data base so that the information is easily updated and accessible. Holyoke High School also needs to provide a yearly updated course selection guide for distribution to the school community.

The participants in Holyoke High School's academic and athletic organizations mirror the school's diverse population. In the self-study survey results of all academic (i.e. National Honor Society, Renaissance Program, et al) and athletic teams, 73% reported a "very" diverse participant population; 18% reported a "somewhat" diverse participant population, and 9% reported a "none" diverse participant population. All participants in each organization are encouraged to embrace and exhibit diversity through their performance of daily activities in both the school and the community.

Holyoke High School also promotes open-mindedness among students, faculty members, and administrators so that students may freely express their opinions to

enhance the school's social environment. For example, student representatives speak on the student body's behalf during School Committee meetings at the district level.

Students cannot be expected to meet civic and social expectations without excellent attendance and appropriate behavior in school. To assess the social expectations of Holyoke High School students, records of attendance, detentions, suspensions, and dropout rates are kept by the school. Although Holyoke High School continuously strives to promote high civic expectations for students, measures to accurately assess each student's civic achievements are currently being implemented.

The faculty at Holyoke High School provides students with course-specific learning goals through the use of course syllabi and/or course synopses. While the school is still in the process of implementing newly created school-wide rubrics, the existing course-specific learning goals outlined by the faculty generally follow and reinforce the academic expectations measured in these school-wide rubrics. On May 12, 2006, the faculty ratified all school-wide rubrics. A system is being developed to link the existing rubrics used to include specific components of the school-wide rubrics. The faculty will continue to explain the goals of each assignment to their students, as outlined in all district-mandated Understanding by Design Unit Plans. As of September 2006, the system is in place.

Based on the Fall 2005 NEASC self-study survey results, 76.1% of students know in advance what they have to do in order to receive a particular grade, while 84.5% of parents stated that their children clearly understand criteria for grades.

At Holyoke High School, the use of rubrics to assess student work is apparent. While teachers use a variety of measures to assess student work, rubrics, which reinforce

the course- specific learning goals as outlined in course syllabi, are frequently used. Also, rubrics which model the Massachusetts Department of Education's MCAS Open Response Question (ORQ) format are universally used as a component of the required monthly ORQ assignments that each and every teacher must assign and assess.

While the school is still in the process of implementing its newly created school-wide rubrics, the existing course-specific rubrics will be used to assess student learning. The rubrics currently used generally coincide with the expectations measured in these preliminary school-wide rubrics. Once the school-wide rubrics are implemented by the faculty, it is believed that all teachers will base their assessment strategies in full support of the school's academic expectations and tailor their existing rubrics as needed. .

Teachers at Holyoke High School utilize a variety of formative and summative assessments. In order for students to achieve the established vision, it is necessary to prove that student learning has taken place. Demonstration of higher order thinking, learning, and interpretation of that learning occurs in a variety of ways. The assessment methods used are not only important for individual student accountability, but are also a useful tool for future student achievement. Assessment data becomes important because after an assessment tool has been used, it can then be interpreted to utilize data to modify instruction.

All teachers regularly use on-going formal and informal methods of assessment. Assessment can occur at any time during an activity. Checking for understanding throughout a lesson and listening to group discussions help teachers gauge learning on a daily basis.

At Holyoke High School, rubrics have become an integral part of assessments. Each department has departmental rubrics, and teachers are trained and encouraged to devise their own rubrics. The student work provided illustrates that teachers use written tests, journals, portfolios, open response questions, research projects and various other means of assessment. Written responses and essays are central to student assessment in all subjects. Multimedia presentations are common, and such presentations are often seen throughout all departments.

All of these methods are intricate pieces of the mosaic of assessment in which each piece is valuable on its own as well as how it contributes to the bigger picture. Each assessment strategy is made for the specific task to be measured, or in some cases, for a particular individual (SPED). Teachers are well aware of IEP/504 plans for individual students and make necessary accommodations for each student's needs. These necessary accommodations are administered both instructionally and during assessment when required. School policy mandates that assessments are used to insure that curriculum is followed by teachers instructing the same course. Departmental and course midterm and final examinations account for 20% of student grades. Within these assessments, teachers are encouraged to include multiple choice, short answer, and open-response questions. During the fall and winter, the English Department administers a district-wide writing prompt which assesses student progress over time.

Assessing student growth over time is done through course-wide and school-wide testing. Formally, the school administers MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) testing in Mathematics and Reading to grade 9 and grade 10 students. This web-based test is administered at three different times over the school year: October, January, and June.

Test results are shared with the course-specific teacher of each student. Both the administrators and teachers look for an increase in scores from September to June. Additionally, this test breaks down learning strands and identifies students' strengths and weaknesses. The teachers will then modify the class lessons to address students' weaknesses. In addition, ELL students are assessed by MEPA (Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment), and MELA-O (Massachusetts English Language Assessment Oral).

Various departments use professional development as a more formal atmosphere for discussions of student assessment. For example, P.I.M. (Performance Improvement Mapping), a process in which individual learning goals are fine-tuned to better meet the needs of students, has been done on professional development days.

In the assessment committee survey conducted as part of the self study, 73.9% of students responded that teachers use a variety of assessment strategies. Additionally, 92.9% of the staff responded that they vary their strategies.

Assessment techniques used at Holyoke High School are anecdotal records, brainstorming, unit and chapter tests, with a variety of questions, charts, checklists, demonstrations, dialogue, class discussions, first drafts, final drafts, graphic organizers, inquiry, journals, and cooperative group monitoring. Other techniques employed by teachers are multimedia presentations, observations, open response questions both written and oral, and long and short responses, oral presentations, peer evaluations, portfolios, posters, quizzes, research projects, rubrics, and running records (See Appendix A).

Teachers use a variety of strategies to improve curriculum based on assessment results. The most common is the departmental meeting in each subject that occurs on a monthly basis. Members of each department are given time to discuss informally the results of assessment and learning. At monthly departmental meetings, the review of student assessments often results in the understanding that more emphasis is needed in specific areas. More formal assessment analysis is done in the English and Mathematics Departments through the MAP testing. Items relating to standards-based testing are frequently discussed, and the results of those discussions are incorporated into daily teaching and course changes and additions.

On an informal basis, teachers meet in classrooms, hallways, faculty lounges, and lunch rooms to discuss how students are progressing. Many times the results of these informal gatherings become topics on the agenda for formal departmental meetings as well as faculty meetings.

At Holyoke High School, the Leadership Team is another forum for curriculum-related issues. Leadership representatives from every department are encouraged to express their concerns about any and all school issues. These representatives have the opportunity to share their own personal concerns as well as the concerns from the teachers in the departments they represent. Results of formalized testing are shared, and possible remedies for academic deficiencies are discussed both with the Leadership Team and with the entire faculty.

The results of the self-study survey show that 66% of the staff meet with colleagues to discuss and share student work in order to improve both the curriculum and teacher instruction.

Many changes in the curriculum and instructional practices have been made at Holyoke High School as a result of discussion of student performance and assessment. Through these discussions changes can be seen in the addition of new courses, tests that mirror the MCAS format, departmental rubrics, and more (See Appendix B). Other changes in instructional practices at Holyoke High School that have resulted from discussion of student performance and assessment are the use of MAP results, the creation of word walls, and MCAS Mondays (See Appendix C).

Formal district-wide professional development opportunities have been limited in the area of assessment at the high school level. Some of the professional development activities which have been offered have been geared towards the following: collecting, charting, and analyzing data, using observational tools, conferencing, giving strategic feedback, scoring the BSM, scoring prompts, creating and utilizing rubrics, and analyzing MCAS and MAP testing results.

District-wide professional development opportunities are infrequent for the majority of staff. At various times throughout the year, teachers meet for monthly department and faculty meetings. Even with this allotted time for meetings, it is difficult to cover assessment in detail due to other agenda items that also need to be addressed within the school. Due to this fact, many professional development opportunities and topics are usually not presented in detail (See Appendix D).

Of the professional development offered by the district, the following results have been tabulated with the additional information collected by staff after a second survey was handed out by the Assessment Committee:

- Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the staff did not take or were not offered professional development relevant to their subject matter.
- Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the staff took part in short-term professional development offerings which were utilized in the classroom.
- Forty-two percent (42%) of the staff took part in on-going professional development offerings which were utilized in the classroom.
- Of the short-term professional development offerings, 23% of the staff feels that the offerings were effective in the classroom; 46% feel the offerings were ineffective; and 31% were unsure of the effectiveness of the offerings.
- Of the on-going professional development offerings, 79% of the staff feels that the offerings were effective in the classroom, 0% feel the offerings were ineffective, and 21% were unsure of the effectiveness of the offerings.
- In addition, the areas of English, mathematics, and science had the most on-going offerings that were effective in the classroom.
- Based on the Fall 2005 NEASC survey results, 39% of staff believes that the school's professional development program provides opportunities for teachers to collaborate

in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies.

Holyoke High School's faculty and administration use the school's vision statement, the school-wide rubrics, departmental rubrics, and Massachusetts state standards and frameworks to assess individual student progress in achieving the school's academic expectations. The school's expectations for student learning are posted in each classroom and utilized in daily lesson plans and assessments to ensure emphasis on them.

Holyoke High School reports evidence of individual student progress in achieving the school-wide academic expectations in the vision statement, based on the school-wide rubrics, to the students and their families in a number of ways. At the beginning of the school year, an open house is held to inform parents of the school's expectations of the student as well as the course's expectations of the student. At the end of the first five-week period of each term, progress reports are distributed to students and families indicating the student's progress to that point in the course. At the close of each term, a ten-week period, report cards are issued indicating the student's level of success in his/her courses based upon the previously described expectations. In between report card periods, teachers and/or administrators and parents can communicate information about the student's progress through letters, phone calls, parent-teacher conferences, weekly report cards, or the school's outreach worker.

Holyoke High School reports the school's progress in achieving all school-wide expectations articulated in the vision statement to the school community. Press releases are sent often to television and print media about the school's academic progress. The Holyoke Public School System has a website that posts information regarding the high

school's academic progress, and a district-wide newsletter communicating academic progress is also sent to faculty, staff, and families of students. In addition, the Holyoke Public Schools operate a public access television station that informs the community about a variety of school initiatives, events, and progress. All of the above listed reporting methods disseminate information such as MCAS scores, honor rolls, and special projects or programs that the school is undertaking. A school report card is also published on the Department of Education website, as well as the Holyoke Public School's website, informing the public of the progress of the school.

During each year, Holyoke High School reports its progress in reaching identified targets for improved student performance on state standards-based tests. MCAS data drives these targets. Individual Student Success Plans (I.S.S.P.s), the Connections After School Program, and the Summer Success Academy are in place to improve student performance on state tests.

Holyoke High School reports student success in meeting the specific civic and social expectations articulated in the vision statement through the announcement of students qualifying for the honor roll, the National Honor Society, Rising Stars, and other honors. Class, club, and team members often perform community service projects which are reported in newspapers and the Connections newsletter. Other student and school performance data is distributed to the public through student representative reports at televised school committee meetings. Holyoke High School regularly promotes social diversity throughout the school year with assemblies (some planned by students) and the morning announcement series. Evidence of students failing to exhibit the expected social behavior is gathered in the form of discipline reports which are addressed by the principal

and assistant principals. Data from these discipline reports is collected and reported to the state Department of Education electronically three times a year (October, March, and June) in the Student Information Management System (SIMS) report. Also included in this report are the attendance statistics, truant information, and suspension rates. This information is also reported in school/district profiles and the school/district report card, both of which are published on the Department of Education Website.

HHS is acceptable in reporting the school-wide and individual student progress in achieving the academic, social, and civic expectations articulated in the vision. Reports of student progress in achieving those expectations are being assembled as implementation of the vision statement progresses. HHS is exemplary in identifying targets for improved student performance on state tests.

When the school's practices are compared to the Assessment Standard Rating Guide, Holyoke High School performs in the **ACCEPTABLE** category.

Adopted by the faculty on January 18, 2007

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Holyoke High School uses various standards-based tests to evaluate the teaching and learning process within the school. In addition, a variety of evaluation tools are used to assess and report student progress in achieving school-wide expectations throughout the school year. Because Holyoke serves a high number of Spanish-speaking minority students, Holyoke High School uses several language assessment tools to determine proper placement. Teachers are allowed ample access to assessment data tied to the school-wide rubrics, which assist in evaluating their students.

The lack of data indicates the school is not assessing civic and social expectations adequately. The school is in the process of implementing the assessment of these expectations.

All courses at Holyoke High provide students with a course syllabus and/or a course synopsis. The syllabi and/or synopses incorporate the specific learning goals for the class. Students are also provided with school-wide rubrics. The teachers reference rubrics in evaluating whether students have reached a specific learning goal. The 2005 NEASC Survey indicates that 76% of students and 85% of parents clearly understand the criteria for assessment.

School-wide rubrics have recently been developed and are now being implemented by the faculty in each subject area.

Teachers throughout the school use a variety of techniques to assess students' knowledge, skills, and competencies. The variety of assessments used in and out of the classroom affords teachers ample opportunity to determine an individual student's strengths and weaknesses. Overall, the faculty at HHS has concerns that our students are over-assessed by formal standards-

based testing.

Teachers at Holyoke High School meet regularly with the goal of improving instructional strategies. The various measurements to student progress afforded to educators are a constant catalyst for discussion and improvement of both curriculum and instructional strategies.

It is a recommendation to continue to focus school-wide efforts on providing formal and informal professional development in the area of assessment to ensure the use of a wide range of assessment strategies in the classroom. As a result, faculty members would learn, make use of, and develop a variety of assessment strategies that would evaluate different learning styles and provide relevant feedback to students that would increase student learning.

Holyoke High School utilizes a number of methods to communicate school-wide academic expectations and to report the school's progress in achieving these expectations to the school community throughout the year. Formal school-wide expectations have just been implemented at Holyoke High School, and the school is only beginning to measure its adherence to these expectations with the newly ratified rubrics.

When the school's practices are compared to the Assessment Standard Rating Guide, Holyoke High School performs in the **ACCEPTABLE** category.

ASSESSMENT STANDARD

STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

Strengths

- * Reporting of individual progress to teachers, students and parents
- * Variety of assessment which promotes student success
- * Clear academic and social expectations
- * Various ways of communicating the academic achievements of students to the community

Needs

- * Assess the civic and social expectations
- * Afford more professional development opportunities in assessment strategies
- * Determine how the over abundance of standardized testing affects students and time on learning