Report on Habits of Work Separately

Separating habits of work from academic proficiency ensures that a student’s good behavior or work habits cannot mask a lack of proficiency and that a student’s poor behavior or work habits cannot mask their attainment of proficiency.

Examples from the Field

Durango, one of Colorado’s rural K-12 systems, serves students from diverse backgrounds. They publicly commit to equitable, consistent, and transparent systems of grading and reporting. Regarding the separation of habits of work from academic grades, their Guiding Principles document includes the following: “Academic progress and achievement are monitored and reported separately from work habits, character traits, and behaviors such as attendance and class participation, which are also monitored and reported.” Durango’s policy of separating habits of work grades from academic grades helps teachers communicate clearly with both students and their families about the areas in which students are excelling, areas where they need more practice or support, and whether or not challenges stem from their habits of work.

Champlain Valley Union High School in Vermont has a long-standing and well-articulated commitment to equitable grading practices. In the school’s online guide, Standards-based Learning FAQ, they write: “While Habits of Learning are essential to the learning process, these habits do not provide evidence of what a student knows, understands, or can do with reference to the learning targets in a class. In a standards-based system, Habits of Learning are reported separately from academic grades, and students receive feedback on these habits throughout the year.” This distinction has enabled the school to provide more accurate reports of academic learning while also supporting student growth in the qualities that help one succeed in the world.

Foxcroft Academy in Dover-Foxcroft, Maine is a member of the League of Innovative Schools and one of Maine’s independent town academies; it provides a comprehensive program that serves all publicly-funded local students as well as a diverse and international student body. Foxcroft has developed a unique but time-tested approach: Each course at Foxcroft Academy includes between three and five subject-area standards. Each course also includes one standard called “academic initiative” that represents the student’s class participation and engagement, appropriate use of technology, homework completion, timely completion of extended assignments, and appropriate use of academic resources and supports as needed. All standards are graded and appear on the report card. Foxcroft Academy offers students a unique possibility for academic initiative remediation. The school monitors student performance in the quarter immediately following a failed academic initiative grade, and then grants retroactive credit when students demonstrate an improved pattern of academic behaviors. This practice has enabled the school to use the academic initiative grade as a way to motivate students to improve their habits of work.

In all of these schools, habits of work are prioritized and monitored while not allowing them to artificially inflate or deflate reports of students’ academic learning.
What We’ve Learned

Schools that find success work hard to ensure that the habits of work rubrics or criteria become a part of the culture and common language of the school, with teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, social workers and other support staff all referencing them in conversations with students.

- Habits of work must be explicitly taught
  Schools must commit to teaching habits of work more than simply deciding to grade them and add a new report card category. As with social studies, mathematics, or music, habits of work is an area of learning for students and it deserves instruction. Unlike these subject areas, however, teaching habits of work is an endeavor which must be undertaken by the school as a whole and done so with common performance expectations. All teachers and support staff must be committed to the idea that habits of work can be taught and the school should have a comprehensive, school-wide plan for supporting students’ growth.

- The list of “habits of work” should be short
  Most systems select three to six habits of work categories that they identify as critical to student success. Selecting a large number of scored habits of work attributes can result in more paperwork, less alignment of scoring, and less clarity. Casco Bay High School in Portland, Maine, for example, reports out on their “big three” (complete homework; meet deadlines; participate effectively - including attendance). In designing habits of work rubrics (such as this one [from Colorado’s Westminster Public Schools](#) or [this one from Maine’s A.R. Gould School](#)), focus on patterns of performance, and find ways to calibrate teachers’ reporting judgments regularly.

- Habits of work should matter
  HOW Honor Rolls, HOW-informed eligibility, and reporting on student’s Preparedness on official transcripts are often used as strategies for ensuring that students see Habits of Work as important. In some schools, HOW are not reported on the transcript, but they determine whether students can access re-dos and re-takes for assessments. When designing a system for Habits of Work, it is important to remember that some Habits of Work, while very important in terms of feedback and reflection, can be challenging to assess, and unconscious bias can affect this assessment. The only Habit of Work that should be included on a transcript is Work Completion or preparedness, because that is more clearly measurable than attributes like “Persistence” or “Engagement.”

Quotes from the Literature

“A far more effective consequence [than a zero] for assignments that are late, missing, or poorly done is the consistent requirement that students get the work done... often it will be during the school day, when the most meaningful consequence a student can experience - restrictions on time and the possibility to earn freedom on how to use time - can be used to get work done...”


Resources from the Great Schools Partnership

- [Habits of Work Grading and Reporting](#)
- [Verifying Proficiency: Scoring Criteria](#)