

Goals, Grades, and Growth: Refining our Approach to Measuring Progress

Brian Walker, Telos Academy

Benchmarks are standard points of reference to which things can be compared or assessed.

Targets are goals for performance.

Milestones mark distance or achievement on a set path towards a specific destination. Milestones are often noted at critical or regular intervals. Milestones generally represent gains which are rarely if ever taken away.

A **process** is best described as an attempt to combine different elements and regulating conditions to promote a structural change or metamorphosis of the original components.

We evaluate **functional effectiveness** by assessing if vital systems are continuing at steady levels. When such is not the case, we are alerted to present problems that may be influenced by interventions.

Output simply measures the amount of something generated. Often we balance output or product against the required effort invested into an activity.

Effort vs Achievement

- Effort = the energy we put into life, the actions we take, the attitude we give
- Achievement = what is actually accomplished by our efforts (can be tangible or intangible)

Distance vs Displacement

- Distance is the amount of ground that was covered (total steps taken)
 - Displacement is the measurement between a starting position and ending position (Point A to Point B)
-

Benchmark Cautions

- Choose your benchmarks with intention. They will help you justify your practice.
- Effective benchmarks are very static (meaning that they change very little).
- If you need to create your own specialized benchmarks, use as large of a sample size as you can to generate a 'norm.'

Milestone Tips

- Milestones are generally linear in sequence. They are most useful to compare displacement and movement toward a *specific* end goal that remains static.
- "Don't move the goal posts."
- Time is often the most compared variable within milestones. "How long did it take you to...." Reframing this sentiment back to covered distance is the ideal. On a set path, everyone travels the same distance. Speed is not the critical achievement; rather just a secondary measure.

Process Tips

- Most useful when you cannot easily observe outwardly manifestations of an internal change
- Precision is key for replication of effective interventions
- Control the conditions and "trust the process"
- Be hyperaware of the components you start with when screening which process will work

Critical Questions to Examine

- How does our organization measure learning, behavior change and progress?
 - What are the core metrics that we want to hold ourselves to? What do we want to hold our students to?
 - What measures represent critical areas of growth we expect from our students?
 - What specific quantifiable outputs can we track?
 - What conditions should we supervise and seek to maintain? How often do we need to check these conditions?
 - What benchmark(s) will we score against? How did we arrive at that determination?
 - Are there achievements attained in our work that never go away? Are there revolving achievements that needed to be earned on a regular basis?
-

Key Grading Principles

- Grading is not essential to the learning process; checking is essential to the learning process.
- Grades can serve a variety of purposes in your academic model. Be intentional on what purpose you use them for.
- A combination of multiple grading and communication methods is generally more effective in enhancing instruction and academic reporting
- Report cards and transcripts are just one way of communication with parents. Explore a variety of modes.
- Grades should be given in reference learning criteria, not ‘on the curve.’

“Years of quantitative studies of the composition of K-12 report card grades demonstrate that teacher-assigned grades represent both the cognitive knowledge measured in standardized assessment scores and, to a smaller extent, non-cognitive factors such as substantive engagement, persistence, and positive school behaviors. Grades are useful in predicting and identifying students who may face challenges in either the academic component of schooling or in the socio-behavioral domain.

The conclusion is that grades typically represent a mixture of multiple factors that teachers value. Teachers recognize the important role of effort in achievement and motivation. They differentiate academic enablers like effort, ability, improvement, work habits, attention, and participation, which they endorse as relevant to grading, from other student characteristics like gender, socioeconomic status, or personality, which they do not endorse as relevant to grading.”
(Guskey, et al. 2016)