

Portfolios

In order to meet the needs of students, the desires of parents, and the mandates of our society, we must be able to document and evaluate our curriculum. We will do this in two ways this year. First, we will be examining performance indicators (set by state and national standards). We will try to find ways to ensure students who leave FBCS that they are taught the skills necessary to move to another school within the state or nation. Second, we will gather data to evaluate students and curricula. One way in which we will do this is through the use—school wide—of portfolios.

First, let's briefly review what we mean when we talk about a student portfolio.

*Portfolios are a **limited** collection of work that indicates student growth over time. Limited is a key word for us, since FBCS plans that the students' portfolios will follow them from grade-to-grade.*

Thus, we are not talking about a collection of all of the student's work during the year, or a scrapbook, nor a dumping ground of all work—but a section of work that shows where the student began and where the student is at the end of the year.

This means that at the end of the first semester and the second semester, teachers must carefully guide students to choose the pieces that most represent academic and spiritual growth.

Last year we talked a little about portfolio assessment, and some of you began to gather artifacts from students.

We have not yet begun a formal assessment of student portfolios. It is important, however, to know how portfolios may be assessed. We need to keep the following in mind.

Portfolio Assessment . . .

- is a systematic attempt to show progress over time*
- instills in students a sense of ownership*
- transfers responsibility of learning to the student*

- *promotes improved self-image or self-esteem*
- *provides a means where instruction and assessment can be woven together*
- *allows for real-world experiences*
- *provides a relief from test anxiety*
- *allows for a child-centered classroom - one size does not fit all -- There are not standard kids, why should we assume that our evaluation of them should be standardized?*
- *is a vehicle to provide communication between school and parents*

A systematic attempt to show progress over time

It is important that students have examples of work at the beginning of the year. Teachers must help them choose pieces within the first two to three weeks to put in the portfolio. Please keep in mind that some of these pieces may not be included in the portfolio at the end of the year.

Instills in students a sense of ownership

Students should be told within the first days of school that they will be keeping a portfolio of their work during the year. The importance of the portfolio should be explained as a way for them, their parents, and their teachers to see how much the students have learned and how much their skills have improved during the year. Stress that the portfolio will not be graded.

Transfers responsibility of learning to the student

Allowing students to help choose pieces that reflect academic and spiritual growth makes them responsible (in part) for their own learning.

Promotes improved self-image or self-esteem

As students choose pieces and communicate why they chose particular pieces, they have an image of themselves as learners and as valued partners with teachers.

Provides a means where instruction and assessment can be woven together

Although we are not “grading” portfolios as a means to decide what a particular student knows or does not know, assessing portfolios for each grade level can and will allow us to evaluate our curriculum. We will be able to determine where our strengths and weakness are and how to best plan for the needs of our students and parents.

Allows for real-world experiences

It would be impossible for us to keep every item that shows growth in each individual subject. Projects or pieces that are integrated with one another will be the best way for us to choose clear artifacts that demonstrate how students are able to transfer school knowledge to real world applications.

Provides a relief from test anxiety

This is not a strong point for our portfolios. If students, however, know that they have another venue to demonstrate knowledge, it may help those who suffer from test anxiety.

This was a good review of what we have learned about portfolios. We are now ready to expand the use of portfolios and the types of information needed to be included this year.

During this session, we will discuss the possible student entries in the portfolio.

What do portfolios contain? Grosvenor (1993, pp. 14-15) lists three basic models:

- Showcase model, consisting of work samples chosen by the student.
- Descriptive model, consisting of representative work of the student, with no attempt at evaluation.
- Evaluative model, consisting of representative products that have been evaluated by criteria.

In summary DeFina (1992) lists the following assumptions about portfolio assessment:

- "Portfolios are systematic, purposeful, and meaningful collections of students' works in one or more subject areas.
- Students of any age or grade level can learn not only to select pieces to be placed into their portfolios but can also learn to establish criteria for their selections.

- Portfolio collections may include input by teachers, parents, peers, and school administrators.
- In all cases, portfolios should reflect the actual day-to-day learning activities of students.
- Portfolios should be ongoing so that they show the students' efforts, progress, and achievements over a period of time.
- Portfolios may contain several compartments, or subfolders.
- Selected works in portfolios may be in a variety of media and may be multidimensional." (pp. 13-16)

What benefits can they bring? Teachers who have experience with portfolio assessment report that it complements such developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction as whole language, hands-on approaches, and process mathematics. It also allows them to assess children's individual learning styles, enhances their ability to communicate with parents about children's learning, and helps to fulfill professional requirements of school and community accountability (Polakowski, 1993). Implemented well, portfolios can ensure that the focus and content of assessment are aligned with important learning goals.

How can they be managed? The planning, collecting, storing, and interpreting of authentic information on children's progress over time is time consuming. Many teachers are initially hesitant or resistant to use portfolio assessment because they fear that adding it to their existing responsibilities may prove overwhelming.

Teachers who have made the transition from traditional assessment to portfolio assessment advise that it requires a refocusing, not a redoubling of teacher effort. Since the kinds of materials collected are typical classroom tasks, assessment and instruction are joined together with curriculum. Time spent in this kind of assessment, then, is not time taken away from teaching and learning activities (Polakowski, 1993; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991).

Polakowski (1993, pp. 52-53) describes three management techniques she uses concurrently for instruction and individualized assessment:

- Teacher-directed, timed centers through which small groups of students rotate for equal amounts of time.
- Child-directed, timed centers that children choose for the allotted time.
- Child-selected, timed centers that include some "must do" tasks.

Using such techniques, a teacher is able to engage in one-to-one assessment conferences or instructional conversations and collect products for assessment purposes.