

More Graded Student Work to Come Home

For more than a year, CFE has been having discussions with the CR administration about the issue of returning graded tests and other assessments to students. On March 1, 2012, the first public meeting on this topic was held when a discussion took place at an Academic Standards committee meeting. A panel, including four parents and five teachers, representing both high schools, was assembled for the purpose of presenting the perspective of each group so that members of the administration and school board could better understand each side's concerns.

The parents shared some of their reasons for wanting graded assessments sent home:

- They can be used to study for midterms, finals, AP tests and SAT Subject Tests.
- Helps students improve study skills by focusing on what they don't know.
- When returned tests are simply reviewed in class, there is not necessarily sufficient time to process errors and learn.
- Due to other student obligations, students cannot always get to clinic.
- Having assessments at home allows students and parents to see if there are trends in areas of weakness.
- It is possible that teachers can make errors in grading or arithmetic.
- Paid tutors often have access to assessments that parents do not.
- It is not easy for parents to get to school to look at tests because of family obligations or work schedules.
- Reviewing previous work helps students focus on areas of weakness, making studying less stressful and more productive.
- A parent contacted Robert Marzano, author of "The Art and Science of Teaching," a book the district has adopted for the staff this year. When asked about returning tests, he said, "Teacher(s) should be using various types of assessments designed and scored by individual teachers. These should be routinely given back to students and parents."

The teachers shared some of their rationale for keeping tests in school:

- Creating good tests requires a great deal of effort, often in collaboration between multiple teachers over time. Questions are sometimes thrown out or re-worked to make them better, and a good test should be able to be used over again in subsequent years.
- Tests kept in school allow teachers to see patterns of weakness or challenge, which can help them better teach students.
- Teachers give students time to review assessments in class.
- In the absence of past assessments, study guides, homework and class notes should adequately prepare students for future assessments, midterms, finals and AP exams.
- Teachers don't want students to think the only thing to focus on when studying is past tests. Teachers are hoping for broader, more comprehensive learning from students.

In January, the administration distributed to staff the following revised expectations regarding the return of graded assessments. (To date, the administration has not directly communicated these changes to parents though the high school PTO's are including updates in their monthly newsletters.) The assessments marked with an "X" will go home (though some exceptions may be enforced, which the teacher will communicate through the course syllabus distributed on the first day of class for students and to parents at Back to School Night):

	Essays	HW	Quizzes/Chapter Areas of Study	Projects/Labs	District/Dept. Tests*
English	X	X	X	X	

Science	X	X	X	X	
Social Studies	X	X	X	X	
Math		X	X	X	
World Language	X	X	X	X	

- *This includes midterms, finals and other district tests.

All teachers have been informed of the guidelines noted in the chart. The administration wants to hear from parents if there are teachers not following the above guidelines and asked that the appropriate school principal be notified in cases of noncompliance. Joy McClendon, Director of Elementary Education and Curriculum stated, "Everyone must realize that change does not happen overnight, but change is what we are seeking."

The parents suggested it would be helpful to use the Home Access Center to note which assessments were coming home. For example, the description of an assessment could be posted with an asterisk (or some other notation) to indicate it is being sent home with students (for example: *Quiz – Chapter 7). Assessment items without an asterisk mean that they are staying with the teacher. By using this simple method of notation in the Home Access Center, students and parents would know which assessments they can expect to see at home, teachers and curriculum coordinators can quickly evaluate how much work is actually going home, and most importantly, the administration would have access to quantifiable data from across all disciplines at both schools to assess how well their directive is being implemented.

At the April 12 Academic Standards meeting, it was announced that the administration is in the process of developing an administrative regulation to address what will and will not be sent home, how teachers will review assessments with students and how district assessments will be reflected in the Home Access Center. The regulation will be completed by the end of the school year, along with a timeline for full implementation.

CFE will continue to monitor this issue to ensure that the district directive is followed and progress in this area is made.