



'Employability' assessment now a part of report cards

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COUNCIL BLUFFS — The Council Bluffs school district has begun listing "employability skills" on report cards issued to middle school and high school students.

Corey Vorthmann said the concept isn't new, but the approach is.

The employability score reflects classroom behavior, said Vorthmann, district supervisor of secondary education.

Employability skills are expectations in the community and in the workplace, Vorthmann said, "and expectations have to be taught. Our community sends us their very best kids every day, and our job is to send them home a little bit better prepared every day."

Previously, behavior could become part of a student's grade at the elementary school level. The old approach might have been called "deportment" at one time.

However, a student who participated in class and seemed "well-behaved, kind to others and compliant" might have been able to get a better grade even if he or she did not meet all required proficiency standards.

"In this new approach, we designed a way to give students and parents feedback in course-work separately from behavior," Vorthmann said.

In other words, academic performance counts toward such things as a grade-point average, but participation in class or ability to get along with others no longer affects the grade.

The employability score measures a separate set of skills. It will not affect a student's grade-point average, credit earned or class rank.

"Behavior's not included in the letter grade, but we provide guidance," Vorthmann said.

In a note sent to parents, the district said: "This separate report of scores is designed to help communicate important 21st century skills. These scores provide feedback to your student in order to help them develop life skills."

Vorthmann and other district officials describe the "employability rubric" as an assessment of student work habits that help or hinder classroom or workplace performance. The rubric — essentially, a score sheet — considers four skills and attributes: participation, work completion, behavior and working with oth-

ers.

Students receive scores on a scale of 0 to 4, a 4 indicating the student has demonstrated mastery in the skill and a 0 that the student is not meeting the minimum standard.

Vorthmann and Ann Mausbach, executive director of curriculum and instruction, developed the employability assessment with a district grading committee.

Vorthmann said feedback from teachers, parents and students will be important, because "the idea is to provide ways to improve. Data is great, but if it's not turned into something useful or meaningful, it's just data."