# 3. Seven Ways Assessments Can Build Student Motivation

(Originally titled “Can Assessments Motivate?)

“Many educators believe that success breeds success – that achievement leads to motivation,” says Richard Curwin (David Yellin Academic College of Education, Jerusalem) in this *Educational Leadership* article. “However, that’s backward. Motivation or effort leads to success, not the other way around. Cheating, luck, and easy work can all lead to success, but they do not increase motivation.” Tests, unfortunately, often kill motivation, says Curwin. Test scores and other extrinsic rewards may keep students working, but they create *finishers*, not learners.

Curwin believes certain assessment practices spur effort and motivation in students. Here are some examples:

• *Never fail a student who tries, and never give top grades to one who doesn’t*. Effort should be counted as part of grades, he says – improvement should count, as should asking for help, offering to help others, and extra work. And students who coast to good grades should be seeking out (or given) more-challenging assignments.

• *Start with the positive*. Commend students on what they got right before correcting what they got wrong.

• *See mistakes as learning opportunities*. “In every life situation, from building relationships to playing computer games, except school, mistakes are important in the learning process,” says Curwin. Mistakes in school should be used as diagnostic tools.

• *Give do-overs*. Students should be able to learn from their mistakes and try assessments again.

• *Show students the final test as they begin a unit*. “This way, they can see what they need to learn, what the teacher’s priorities are, and how to organize their learning,” says Curwin.

• *Prioritize corrections*. Too much red ink overwhelms students and makes it more likely that the corrected paper will be thrown away. “Tell students you’ll give them a chance to fix those two most important mistakes, which you’ve marked, before moving on to two more,” he suggests.

• *Do not compare students*. Grades should be given based on standards, now how other students are doing, says Curwin.

“Can Assessments Motivate?” by Richard Curwin in *Educational Leadership*, September 2014 (Vol. 72, #1, p. 38-40), <http://bit.ly/1si36QU>; Curwin is at [richardcurwin@gmail.com](mailto:richardcurwin@gmail.com).

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