

What support is evident within Alberta Education documents for a no-zero policy?

The [School Act, Guide to Education](#) and the [Teaching Quality Standard](#) all include references to assessment practices and responsibilities of teachers and leaders. However, the following documents shed additional light on the current dialogue surrounding the issue of a no-zero policy.

According to Alberta Education's [Principal Quality Practice Guideline](#), "The principal ensures that student assessment and evaluation practices throughout the school are fair, appropriate and balanced" (2009, p. 5). Although the document does not define what constitutes "fair, appropriate and balanced" assessment practices, references in other documents shed light on this topic.

The [Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada](#) was developed in 1993 by a working group of representatives from a variety of professional organizations and ministries of education across Canada.

The *Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada* is the product of a comprehensive effort to reach consensus on what constitutes sound principles to guide the fair assessment of students. The principles and their related guidelines should be considered neither exhaustive nor mandatory; however, organizations, institutions, and individual professionals who endorse them are committing themselves **to endeavor to follow their intent and spirit** so as to achieve fair and equitable assessments of students (1993, p. 2).

One of the principles specifically relates to the need to separate achievement from effort.

4. Combining disparate kinds of results into a single summary should be done cautiously. To the extent possible, achievement, effort, participation, and other behaviors should be graded separately.

A single comment or grade cannot adequately serve all functions. For example, letter grades used to summarize achievement are most meaningful when they represent only achievement. When they include other aspects of student performance such as effort, amount (as opposed to quality) of work completed, neatness, class participation, personal conduct, or punctuality, not only do they lose their meaningfulness as a measure of achievement, but they also suppress information concerning other important aspects of learning and invite inequities. Thus, to more adequately and fairly summarize the different aspects of student performance, letter grades for achievement might be complemented with alternate summary forms (e.g., checklists, written comments) suitable for summarizing results related to these other behaviors (p. 10).

Assessment leaders throughout the world support this position. The *Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada* do not in and of themselves have legal status; however, a key research study, the [Alberta Student Assessment Study](#) (2009), commissioned by Alberta Education speaks to the importance of the *Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada* and the resulting implications for classroom assessment.

As part of its findings, the research team identified a set of theoretical principles that would optimize classroom assessment practices. Four of these principles support the tenets of a no-zero policy.

1. Educators must know and understand the document *Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada* (Centre for Research in Applied Measurement and Evaluation, 1993).
13. Assessment must not be used to reward or punish.
14. Assessment of achievement is not aggregated with assessment of behaviour.
17. No-zero policies support student-learning outcomes (pp. 134 – 135).

Among the resulting recommendations, two relate specifically the issue of no-zeros.

Assessment in Alberta will:

7. Be guided by the *Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada* (Centre for Research in Applied Measurement and Evaluation, 1993).
13. Report academic achievement, behaviour, and social-emotional development separately and accurately (pp. 145 – 146).

It should be remembered that the issue surrounding the use or non-use of zero is a summative grading issue. However, a world-wide research base (Black & Wiliam, 1998) supports the use of formative assessment as having the greatest impact on student learning. As important as open and fair grading practices are, they are only one part of a complete picture of sound classroom assessment practices. Addressing the topic of classroom assessment from a holistic perspective as articulated in the [AAC Key Visual](#) provides jurisdictions, schools and teachers with a solid foundation on which to approach the development of sound classroom assessment practices.