Setting High Expectation Through a Course Syllabus

Garfield's course syllabus is our tool for communicating high expectations to students and parents. When teachers work together to develop a common syllabus across different sections of the same course or to develop syllabi that create good articulation over a sequence of courses (for example, LA 9, LA 10, etc.), then the course syllabi also become a tool for answering important questions in creating a culture of **high expectations:**

- What does it mean to have high expectations in a course?
- What should we expect of students (assignments, tests, projects, etc.) to show that they have met the standards for a course?
- How should we assess what students know and assign a course grade for that work?

Developing a course syllabus is the next step after completing written curriculum that is aligned to state and national standards and includes sample learning activities and assessments. The course syllabus outlines particular assignments that teacher expects and how student's grades will be determined for the course.

There is no one "right format for a syllabus, but when teachers discuss certain syllabus components it helps them focus in on issues related to high expectations. Possible components may include but are not limited to:

Course Description: A brief paragraph describing what it will be like to experience this course as a student, including the kinds of learning activities that will be used to actively engage students, expectations for student participation, and any special learning experiences (field trips, community projects, or work-based learning). Will students be expected to wok with other? How is the classroom organized for learning?

Course Goals: The major standards (state or national) or "power standards" for the course, usually no more than 8 to 10 in number

Major course Projects and Assignments: A list of the assignments and major projects for the course that students will complete to demonstrate that they have mastered the standards for the course. If the school has a literacy and/or numeracy focus, there would also be reading, writing, and mathematics assignments.

In order to help organize students creating a chart with each goal or standard for the course and the major projects, assignments, and assessments should ask students to complete work that is at the proficient and/or advanced level in relation to the standards (apply, synthesize, analyze, and/or evaluate concepts, skills, and information).

Assessment and Grading Plan: A description of the assessment methods to be used (projects, tests, quizzes, notebooks, homework, etc.) and how those assessments are grades averaged? A thorough grading and assessment plan should include:

- **The components of the Grade:** Explain the assessment methods that will be used and about what weight they will carry in the overall grade for the course and for the grading period. (For example, tests are 40 percent of the grade; projects are 30 percent; class work is 15 percent; and homework is 15 percent).
- **A Policy for Re-doing Work:** Write a description of how you will ask students to re-do work that is not to expected levels of quality.
- **Opportunities for Extra Help:** Describe how students can access extra help for this course so that they can develop proficiency in the course standards.

- **An Overall Grading Rubric:** Write a general description of what each level of work looks like so that students will know hat it takes to earn a grade of "A" or "B" in the class. As the course progresses, you may provide more specific rubrics for projects, assignments, and assessments

The Grading Controversy

Garfield students shared with me the teachers at Garfield assumed that they new how to get an "A", or "B". Most teachers do assume that grades and grade point averages are precise indicators of what students know and can do in a subject area. Current grading practices date back to the 1700s, when Yale began using a four-point scale. Yet there is still little agreement as to the exact meaning of letter grades. National surveys show great discrepancies between how teachers determine letter grades.

Although all teachers seem to include what students know in the subject, elements such as effort, behavior, and attendance are also considered and weighted differently. Grades given by one teacher might mean something entirely differently from grades given by another teacher, even though the teachers preside over two identical classes with identical students who are assigned identical work. For example, one teacher might count effort and cooperation as 25% of the grade; another teacher might not count these variables at all.

Please evaluate your Syllabi

Criteria for Assessing High Expectations in a Course

Rate the specific criteria for each section of the syllabus on the following

1. = Does not meet this criteria
2. = Meets the criteria somewhat
3. = Meets the criteria in an average way
4. = Meets the criteria very well
5. = Meets the criteria in an exemplary way

I. **Course description: does the course have a clear purpose with in program of high school study?**

- Is there a clearly stated purpose for the course? 1 2 3 4 5
- Is there a description as to how this course fits into an overall Program of high school students with a rigorous academic core and a concentration? 1 2 3 4 5
- Is there a rationale for why this course is important to students future success in further learning and the workplace? 1 2 3 4 5
- Are pre-requisites identified? 1 2 3 4 5

II. **Instructional philosophy: Will this course actively engage students in learning challenging content?**

- Does the class environment described included active engagement
- strategies, such as 1 2 3 4 5
- hands-on activities
- Laboratory experiences
- Class discussion

- Open-ended problem solving
- Work based learning
- Project based learning
- Does the course engage students in using technology, such as
- Using computer –assisted research/assignments at least monthly? 1 2 3 4 5
- Using processing at least weekly to complete an assignment or project 1 2 3 4 5
- Does the course require students to work in cooperative groups weekly to deepen understanding of content? 1 2 3 4 5

III. **Course Goals or Power Standards: is the course based on national, state, and/or industry standards**?

- Are students required to demonstrate the essential concepts,
- principles, and skills of the discipline? 1 2 3 4 5
- Are students required to apply academic skills that cross all Curriculum areas, such as
  - Reading 1 2 3 4 5
  - Writing 1 2 3 4 5
  - Numeracy
  - Oral presentations 1 2 3 4 5
- Are students asked to demonstrate general workplace competencies such as solving problems, using technology, and working as a team?

IV. Major projects, assignments, and assessments: does the course engage students in a variety of intellectually challenging work that will get students to proficiency with regard to the standards for the course?

- Do the projects, assignments, and assessments described ask Students to produce work at the proficient or advanced level (apply, synthesize, analyze, and/or evaluate concepts, skills And information)? 1 2 3 4 5
- Are students required to work on an extended major project that Lasts a week or more at least once a semester? 1 2 3 4 5
- Is at least one short writing assignment given weekly? 1 2 3 4 5
- Are students required to complete a research paper? 1 2 3 4 5
- Does this course make appropriate contribution to helping Students read 25 or more books-or their equivalent-across all classes each year? 1 2 3 4 5
- Is meaningful homework assigned? 1 2 3 4 5

V. Assessment plan: Does the plan provide for a thorough assessment of the standards for the course?

- Are there adequate projects, assignments, and assessment to Determine whether or not students are proficient in the standards for the course? 1 2 3 4 5

- Does the plan include a variety of clearly defined, expanded Assessment methods, such as
- Tests with essay and open-response questions? 1 2 3 4 5
- An end-of –course exam that is common across different sections of the same course? 1 2 3 4 5
- A portfolio of student work? 1 2 3 4 5

- Does the syllabus clearly indicate the amount and quality of work necessary to get an A or a B?
- Grading Scale 1 2 3 4 5
- Components of the grade 1 2 3 4 5
- An overall grading rubric that describes quality work 1 2 3 4 5
- Does the syllabus specify the policy for redoing work to quality? 1 2 3 4 5
- Does the syllabus explain where and when students can Receive extra help? 1 2 3 4 5

SAMPLE - Physical Science Course Syllabus

Course Description

Physical science, a required year-long course for all ninth grade students, is designed to form the foundation of further study of science through an understanding of scientific ways of knowing, scientific inquiry, and how technology is used in science. The course content focuses on the structures of matter and its interaction with energy. Principles of physics are explored through the study of wave phenomenon, electromagnetism, sound, light, and electricity. Chemistry principles are also included in the course: atoms and the periodic table of elements, physical and chemical changes and reactions, solutions, acids and bases, and nuclear changes. Students who master the course content will be prepared for the state science assessment and have foundational understanding to apply scientific principles to further study and the real world.

Instructional Philosophy

Students will be engaged in a variety of challenging real-world projects and assignments to show how science is used in everyday life and in the world of work. They will be held to high expectations regarding their quality of work and personal behavior. Students will be given opportunities to redo major assignments until they meet standards. Laboratory technique and experimental design, which include data collection, interpretation, and manipulation, will be consistent components of this course. Students will often work in teams, but will be expected to complete individual assignments in relation to the team's work. There will be frequent opportunities to use technology as students use scientific equipment, calculators, and express their findings using a variety of computer software-spreadsheets, word processing, and desktop publishing.

Course Standards

1. Understand the impact of scientific concepts on individuals and families, the community, the workplace and the world.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of scientific reasoning and inquiry by applying a logical sequence to solving problems and designing experiments with variables and controls.
3. Read and interpret scientific information and literature.
4. Develop communication skills and abilities in writing, listening, and speaking.
5. Use technology to collect and analyze data and communicate scientific ideas and findings.
6. Demonstrate and understand of the following scientific concepts through written and oral language, graphic representation, data analysis, and simulation:

Science safety history of science nature and structure of matter atoms and the periodic table of elements physical and chemical changes and reactions nuclear changes (radioactivity, fission, and fusion	Weather and climate Earth cycles Forces and motion Simple machines Energy and energy transformations Waves (light and sound) and the electromagnetic spectrum

Major Projects and Assignments

Weekly Labs and Lab Reports and/or Analysis

Each laboratory experience will include a written plan that illustrates the use of scientific reasoning and inquiry and a written analysis interpreting the data and findings of the study. Findings will regularly be presented to the entire class.

Daily Class work, Homework, and Portfolio of Work

Students will complete in-class assignments daily and homework assignments about twice a wee. To encourage reflection on learning, students will answer questions on class notes and regularly complete exit slips and "Do Nows." All work will be collected in a student portfolio on which students will regularly be asked to reflect on the quality of their work.

"Science in the News"

Twice each month, students will locate and read abut past, present, and future science discoveries and theories in science magazines or newspapers. An oral or written report (altering) will be made summarizing the article and discussing the implications of the information for individuals and families, the community, the workplace, and the world.

Projects

- Famous science inventors; Students will write a computer-generated research report on a science inventor and analyze the implications of the inventor's work on individuals and families, the community, the workplace, and the world.
- Building a Weather Station; Students will assemble tools to measure wind speed, humidity, and rainfall, collect and analyze the data, and attempt to make accurate weather forecasts.
- Roller coasters; Students will delve into the workings of potential and kinetic energy by designing a roller coaster.
- Element Brochure; Students will create a brochure explaining an element from the periodic table.
- Wind Chimes; Students will explore the phenomena of waves and sound by using different materials to create a set of wind chimes. Frequency and wavelength will be measured.

Tests and Quizzes

Quizzes are given weekly over the course content. Unit tests are given approximately three to five times per grading period and will include essay and open-response questions. A semester exam and a final exam are also given and are comprehensive.

Assessment Plan
All assignments are designed to show whether students have met the standards for the course. Any unit test, project, lab report, or "science in the news" report assessed as "poor quality" will be expected to be REDONE for higher credit.

Distribution of Grading Components
Grades are determined by dividing the points earned by the number of points available in the grading period. Each major project and assignment commands an approximate percentage of the total points for the grading period as follows:

Lab plans and Reports	25%
Homework, Class work, and Course Portfolio	10%
"Science in the News"	5%
Projects	25%
Tests, Quizzes, and Exams	35%

Description of Grading and Quality Work in Physical Science

Grade	Scale	Description of Work
A	93-100%	Consistently demonstrates an exceptional level of quality and effort. Having all work in on time and completed to exceed expectations. Mastery in evaluation, synthesizing, and applying the principles of physical science.
B	85-92%	Consistently demonstrates proficient knowledge with a good effort and quality of work. All assignments are complete and on time. Demonstrates the ability to evaluate, analyze, synthesize and apply the principles of physical science.
C	70-84%	Demonstrates proficient knowledge and the ability to apply and analyze physical science principles. Work shows average effort. A few assignments may be missed or late.
D	62-70%	Work shows minimal effort and some assignments are late. Demonstrates a basic understanding of recalling or comprehending physical science principles.
N	Below 62%	Understanding is below basic in relation to physical science principles work is of poor quality and does not meet standards of expectations.

Extra Help
Extra help is available after school Tuesday through Thursdays in the Homework Center and during lunch periods each day. Any student who falls below a C (the proficient level) will receive a parent phone call and an explanation of the reasons for the drop in grade. Students who persist in doing work that is below the proficient level will be asked to develop a specific contract for the improvement in the course grade and quality of work. Parents will be involved in the process and will sign the improvement contract.