



INTERNATIONALS NETWORK

Transforming education for multilingual learners

Introduction

Portfolio assessments have existed in the Internationals Network since the founding of the first International High School at LaGuardia Community College, which, together with the Brooklyn and Manhattan International High Schools, has been part of the New York Performance Standards Consortium from their inception. Since 2013, all International High Schools in NYC have been granted a variance from New York State graduation requirements “to use portfolio assessments to satisfy graduation requirements” in several content areas. We have worked hard at learning the benefits of these portfolio assessment systems and facing the challenges inherent in them. This Resource Guide collects many practices in our schools that have helped to make this vision a reality.

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1. What are student portfolios and what purpose do they serve at our schools?

One of the five core principles of the Internationals Network for Public Schools is experiential learning, which includes hands-on projects and asserts that “expansion of the 21st century schools beyond the four walls of the building motivates adolescents and enhances their capacity to successfully participate in modern society.” Authentic assessment is a concept connected to experiential learning. In contrast to one-shot tests, authentic assessments such as the semester and graduation portfolios, as well as ongoing project work, enable students to demonstrate what they have learned. With authentic assessment in place in International High Schools, students are led to: retain content longer, use higher level thinking, draw upon a wider range of resources, employ creative and various problem-solving strategies, and develop social skills and academic language.

According to a report from the [Northeast Regional Educational Lab at Brown University](#), “an assessment portfolio is the systematic collection and evaluation of student work measured against predetermined scoring criteria, such as scoring guides, rubrics, checklists, or rating scales” (O’Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). The report lists the following advantages to portfolios over standardized tests like the NYS Regents, and these apply to all Internationals High Schools: portfolios are inclusive of all students (including ELLs); they can demonstrate student learning and achievement more accurately than single test scores do; they can result in improved student learning, especially when students participate in understanding the rubrics that are used to assess their work; portfolios can improve teaching practice when teachers evaluate their goals and move

towards student-centered teaching; and they can help schools create a shared vision of student learning, aligned to standards.

In International High Schools in New York City, portfolios serve the purpose of engaging various school stakeholders in deep explorations of student work through specific types of products, such as literary essays, research papers, scientific lab reports, or reflections on their native-language proficiencies and English-language learning. Rather than having to prepare for a test with many discrete pieces of knowledge as in standardized exams, students graduating through assessment portfolios have to prepare for an oral panel discussion to demonstrate mastery of learning, as they would in a university setting, facing questions and debates that are deeper than those they would engage in during a New York State Regents exam.

2. What are the required components?

- Each student must prepare and orally present graduation-worthy projects in each of the following areas:
 - ELA
 - Science
 - Social Studies
 - Math
 - Native Language
 - Personal Statement
- Panels consisting of at least two teachers to assess and rate student portfolios
- Completed cover sheet for each student presenter, with signatures from attending teachers and panelists
- Archiving and record keeping of all work and ratings, maintained for a number of years

While these are the minimum requirements, many of our schools also require students to complete a Creative/Arts project for graduation, while others also expect that students will complete and present an internship or CTE/Career Technical Education project.

This resource guide sets out to relay the additional expectations and understandings about best practices in portfolio.

3. A Note on the Unique Interplay Between “One Model for All” and “Localized Autonomy” in Portfolios Across the Network and in this Resource Guide

A core principle of the Internationals approach is “one model for all,” wherein “every member of our school community experiences the same learning model, maximizing an environment of mutual academic support. Thus, all members of our school community work in diverse, collaborative groups on hands-on projects; put another way, the model for adult learning and student learning mirror each other.” This might suggest that everything is the same for all stakeholders across our schools, but this assumption is complicated by another core principle: “localized autonomy,” which puts a primacy on “providing structures in which diverse members of the school community can develop their perspectives, discuss, and make decisions collectively,” which we believe “is likely to strengthen... and develop the individual capacity of the members of the community.” The harmony that exists between these two core principles – shared practices and individualized, context-specific decisions – is exemplified in the network’s simultaneous unity and plurality around portfolios. Portfolios have been implemented across our 15 NYC schools in a way that honors a central philosophy of teaching, with

common requirements and systems, but may vary slightly in implementation given the context of each school, to powerful effect.

This Portfolio Resource Guide honors these principles and innovations by presenting a variety of promising practices that a network-wide Portfolio Committee of teachers and school leaders has curated, discussed, and expanded upon. They are suggested as discussion pieces for each school to consider, tweak, and implement if helpful.

4. A Note on the Process of Constructing this Resource

Embodying another core principle, “heterogeneity and collaboration,” this resource guide is the product of the collaborative efforts of numerous representatives from across NYC network schools, including the Portfolio Committee members of both 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, comprised of teachers from all 15 NYC high schools, along with numerous other school-based volunteers. It marks the first instance of an entirely communally-constructed resource guide from Internationals Network, and as such is a unique testament to the collective strength embodied in our schools. Likewise, it is our first entirely digital resource guide, and thus provides opportunities for changes in practices to be reflected in a more ongoing and interactive manner. As such, the guide will adapt as the portfolio process inevitably evolves among our schools, reflecting the ongoing learning built into the portfolio process.

Besides Internationals staff members Dolan Morgan, Genna Robbins, and Luis Duany, the following individuals from our schools contributed content, ideas, and time to this Resource Guide (listed in alphabetical order):

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