



Performance Assessment Profile: Oakland International High School

By Anna Maier and Elise Levin-Guracar

Overview

Oakland International High School is a small public school in Oakland, California, that exclusively educates recent immigrants, all of whom are or recently were English Learners. Oakland International is a member of the Internationals Network for Public Schools, a nonprofit network of 22 schools in New York, Virginia, Maryland, and California. The vision of the Internationals Network is to “ensure all recent immigrant students have access to a quality high school education that prepares them for college, career and full participation in democratic society, thereby opening doors to the American Dream.”¹

The Internationals Network pedagogical model is based on the following five principles:

- **Heterogeneity and collaboration.** Students with different English proficiency levels, primary languages, and academic experiences work together closely.
- **Experiential learning.** Field trips, internships, and project-based learning, including the portfolio assessment system detailed in this brief, bring students outside of the traditional four walls of the classroom.
- **Language and content integration.** English language instruction occurs in the context of collaborative learning in content-area classes.
- **Localized autonomy and responsibility.** A representative leadership team makes major decisions affecting the school community.
- **One learning model for all.** All members of the learning community, including students and teachers, share constructive feedback in their respective peer groups.

Oakland International has added three additional values to its model:

- **Rigor.** Students prepare for college and careers through rigorous, Common Core-aligned curricula and assessments.
- **Nurturing immigrant students.** As a full-service community school, Oakland International supports students’ academic, physical, and social-emotional needs.
- **Education as a civil right.** Oakland International serves all recently arrived immigrant students, regardless of their time of entry to the United States or their educational background.

¹ Internationals Network for Public Schools. (n.d.). <http://internationalsnps.org/> (accessed 9/10/16).

Figure 1. Oakland International High School at a Glance (2015–16)

Student Enrollment	373
Race/Ethnicity	64% Latino 21% Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander 7% White 4% African American 4% Other
Low-Income Students	92% ^a
English Learners^b	98% Languages spoken: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spanish – 55%• Arabic – 11%• 13 other languages
Additional Information	Schoolwide, about 33% of students have experienced an interruption of 2 or more years in their formal education. ^c

^a Does not include low-income students who did not apply for free or reduced-price meals.

^b Does not include English Learners who have been reclassified as “fluent English proficient.”

^c Unpublished data from Oakland International High School, 2016.

Source: California Department of Education DataQuest.

Performance Assessment at Oakland International High School

Each spring, students at Oakland International engage in a portfolio process by assembling a collection of work from their classes, reflecting on their academic progress, and presenting their knowledge to an audience. This approach enables them to demonstrate what they have learned and are capable of in a more authentic manner than a single test. In addition, for 12th-grade students, the portfolio satisfies Oakland Unified School District’s “senior project” graduation requirement.

How the System Works

At Oakland International, performance assessment starts in content-area classes, with students selecting work samples to add to their digital portfolio on an annual basis, accompanied by a reflective cover letter. They then use this content to create a digital presentation for their peers and teachers on an annual basis. Teachers use rubrics to grade both the portfolio and the presentation.

Work Products

Starting in 9th grade, Oakland International students begin to compile a digital portfolio of their work using Google Sites, a free service from Google that easily allows users to create and share websites. The resulting portfolio grows over time to include one piece of work from each course that a student takes, organized by grade level and subject. Students also upload cover letters reflecting on the quality of their work and what they have learned in their Mathematics, English, History, Career Readiness/

Internship, and other courses. In 12th grade, the reflective paper is replaced by an “application for graduate status” in which students explain why they deserve to graduate. This process occurs every May for 9th- and 10th-grade students, and every April for those in the 11th and 12th grades.

What Goes into a Digital Portfolio?

When Oakland International High School students construct a website for their digital portfolio, they use a template that has a number of different content-area pages that correspond to their classes. Here is an example of the different pages that can make up a customized website and the content that might be included on each page:

- Home Page. Personal content about students, such as their academic goals, career aspirations, and reading progress
- Advisory. Cover letter essay reflecting on the student’s academic growth in his or her content-area classes
- PE. Essay about the importance of physical fitness
- Art. Self-portrait mosaic accompanied by an artist’s statement
- Science. Analysis of a 3-D computer model demonstrating a scientific concept
- Mathematics. Screencast presentation showing how the student solved a series of mathematics problems
- English. “Journey book” essay describing the student’s path to the United States
- History. Transcript of a podcast in which the student discusses a historical event
- Reading. Essay analyzing a biography that the student read
- Survival English. Essay about the student’s neighborhood
- Career Readiness/Internship. Professional résumé and reflection on lessons learned from internship experience

Source: Site visit to Oakland International High School

Presentations

After assembling their portfolio, students create an oral and digital presentation on two subjects chosen by their teachers. The presentation provides them with an opportunity to practice their English skills and showcase what they have learned in their courses. In 12th grade, students may start out by sharing their postgraduation plans. The presentation can also include an academic thesis describing how the student learns, such as “It is better to work slowly and carefully than to rush through my work and make mistakes.” The audience is composed of the student’s teachers and peers. When older students (11th and 12th grade) present, younger students (9th and 10th grade) are able to watch and learn.

A question-and-answer session follows all student presentations, even for students who are new to the school and in the early stages of learning English. In order to support newcomer students, the process is highly structured. For example, they receive a list of expected questions in advance of their presentation and practice answering those questions with support from their peers and teachers. By

contrast, the process is free-ranging for 12th graders, who have presented their portfolio multiple times and are approaching graduation. Anyone can ask an off-the-cuff question, and the student is expected to be ready to defend his or her knowledge.

Grading

Oakland Unified School District has developed a [graduate profile](#) to identify the elements of college, career, and community readiness that all students should achieve:

- Post-high school plan in hand with a motivated, focused, and resourceful attitude
- Academically proficient in content, skills, and habit
- Civically engaged in a manner that is capable, connected, committed, and compassionate
- Essential communicator in every situation and with everyone
- Socially, emotionally, and physically thriving, while feeling resilient, proactive, and empowered
- Culturally disciplined, self-aware, and able to build and maintain cross-cultural alliances

In addition to the graduate profile, [district graduation requirements](#) include a “senior project or exhibition” during the 12th-grade year of high school that “shall be a serious research project or exhibition which demonstrates achievement of school-wide learning goals and designated key content standards.” The 12th-grade portfolio at Oakland International satisfies this requirement in a rigorous manner.

Teachers use rubrics to score each element of the portfolio process separately. For example, this [portfolio project rubric](#) is used for each work sample that a student selects for his or her portfolio. The rubric focuses on language objectives such as grammar, punctuation, writing strategies, revision, and teacher-designed content objectives based on the subject and assignment. For each objective, the teacher assigns a numeric score on a scale from one to 10 that corresponds to a letter grade (“A” for sufficient examples/no mistakes, “B/C” for sufficient examples/some mistakes, “D/F” for insufficient examples/many mistakes, or “Not Present”).

There are separate rubrics for the reflective [cover essay](#) that accompanies each portfolio artifact, as well as the [portfolio website](#) that students construct. The cover essay is graded on language objectives such as sentence structure and revision, while learning objectives focus on students’ abilities to reflect on their strengths and struggles, identify and reflect on what they learned, and identify what they did to increase their English knowledge. The website rubric assesses students on the usability and customization of their websites, including layout and look, removal of placeholder text, and addition of grammatically correct original text to each subject-area page. The rubric also assesses whether students have successfully added content to each subject-area page on their Google Site. For each objective, students receive a numeric score corresponding to a letter grade for the cover essay (“A” for sufficient examples/no mistakes, “B/C” for sufficient examples/some mistakes, “D/F” for insufficient examples/many mistakes, or “Not Present”) or a qualitative assessment for the website (“Excellent,” “Average,” “Below Average,” or “Not Present”).

Student presentations are graded with a [presentation rubric](#) that assesses public speaking and presentation skills, content mastery, ability to use English, and listening skills. The rubric also has space for comments on the student’s strengths and areas for improvement. After students present, they wait outside while their peers and teachers in the audience discuss and collaboratively score the presentation. Figure 2 is an example of different scoring levels for the content mastery domain of the 11th- and 12th-grade presentation rubric.

Figure 2. Excerpt from 11th- and 12th-Grade Presentation Rubric

	D/F Not Satisfactory	B/C Satisfactory	A Excellent
Content Mastery (40% of total grade)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot explain use of content in the real world • Ideas not supported by explanation • Few examples or examples are unoriginal/formulaic • Cannot explain meanings of vocabulary • Unable to answer questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can make some connections to the real world • Ideas are explained in a clear but basic manner • Examples and descriptions are adequate • Vocabulary is used correctly • Questions are answered correctly but may be formulaic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can clearly explain connections between content and real life • Can expand on ideas beyond content on visual aids • Uses multiple examples and descriptions that are exact and clear • Demonstrates deep understanding of vocabulary • Expands on ideas and can explain thoroughly when answering questions

The final grade for the portfolio project is split evenly between the presentation rubric and the average score across all of the student’s portfolio project rubric scores. From 9th to 11th grade, students do not need to achieve a minimum score on their portfolio in order to be promoted to the next grade. However, given that the portfolio is 20% of their grade in each class, a poor score could prevent a student from passing a class. Because the 12th-grade portfolio satisfies a graduation requirement for Oakland Unified School District, students must receive a passing grade to graduate.

Revising

Students have time in each class to polish their work before adding it to their portfolio. In addition, they receive a full week to practice and revise their final presentation prior to formally sharing their work with their peers and teachers. Students who receive a failing score on an individual portfolio assignment have an opportunity to revise their work. In 12th grade, students who receive a failing grade on the overall portfolio (assignments plus presentation) cannot walk the stage at graduation. However, they do have an opportunity to redo their presentation so that they can still receive a diploma.

School Instruction and Support

As with all Internationals Network schools, Oakland International provides an intensely personal and supportive learning environment for its students. The school structures that help to facilitate the performance assessment process include the small size of the school (each grade level has no more than 100 students) and the block scheduling that allows students to spend a longer time in each class period by alternating their class schedule on different days of the week. The emphasis on collaborative learning also helps students to develop their English language and oral presentation skills. In addition, teachers are able to use the portfolio process to drive instruction. Each summer before school starts, they identify a menu of portfolio assignments and the associated language and content skills embedded in each project. From there, the Oakland International staff is able to backward map as they design their instructional units for the year.

Student supports include a small-group advisory course that focuses on relationship building among students and their advisors, providing a space to address academic and life challenges in an encouraging environment. Students remain with the same team of five teachers during their first 2 years at Oakland International, which allows them to build close relationships. All students participate in a multimedia California Partnership Academy that provides technology training to prepare for their digital portfolios and presentations.

The portfolio assembly process is highly structured to support student success. It takes place over several weeks each spring, during which time students work on their portfolio in all classes. In each class, the teacher provides a set number of assignments from which students can select, and supports students in polishing and uploading their portfolio assignments. The Google Site template for the digital portfolio allows students to customize the existing content rather than starting from scratch with a new technology.

Scoring Calibration

In order to score student portfolios as fairly and consistently as possible, Oakland International teachers spend time norming their use of rubrics during schoolwide professional development sessions and grade-level or content-area meetings. Practice sessions begin with teachers watching and scoring portfolio presentation videos from previous years. The staff then discuss their scores to identify areas where they agreed or judged the student performance differently. Each participant is able to explain his or her thinking, with the goal of reaching a general consensus on how the student scored for each performance objective. The same process is also used to norm the scoring of portfolios. These practice sessions occur several times each spring to increase the likelihood that teachers are grading student work and presentations similarly.

How Students Benefit

Oakland International serves a diverse population of low-income, newcomer English Learners. The performance-assessment system accommodates the needs of each student by allowing for individual agency (students choose the work they include in the portfolio and often the topics for each assignment), opportunities for practice and revision, and flexible levels of support from school staff. It also empowers students to demonstrate their growth and mastery of both the English language and academic content. Developing and sharing a digital portfolio strengthens students' presentation and technology skills, thereby increasing their college and career readiness.

While Oakland International's standardized test scores fall below statewide averages, the access rate to the A-G coursework (a sequence of courses required for admission to the University of California or California State University system) outpaces statewide averages. This is a remarkable accomplishment given the high-needs population the school serves. It is also important to note that the graduation rate, while low, is impacted by Oakland Unified School District policy. Students who arrive in Oakland at age 16 would be placed in 11th grade by the district enrollment center, even if they have never attended high school and have no academic credits. When those students arrive at Oakland International, they would start in 9th grade to accurately reflect their experience. However, the district does not account for this change, and students would still be counted as not having graduated on time if they take 4 years, rather than 2 years, to earn a diploma.²

² Personal email with Carmelita Reyes, Principal of Oakland International High School (September 28, 2016).

Figure 3. Oakland International High School Student Outcomes

	Oakland International High	State Average
California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress^a 2015–16	11th-Grade ELA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5% standard nearly met • 95% standard not met 11th-Grade Mathematics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4% standard met or exceeded • 10% standard nearly met • 85% standard not met 	11th-Grade ELA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 59% standard met or exceeded (15% for English Learners^b) • 22% standard nearly met (22% for English Learners^b) • 19% standard not met (63% for English Learners^b) 11th-Grade Mathematics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33% standard met or exceeded (18% for English Learners^b) • 25% standard nearly met (17% for English Learners^b) • 43% standard not met (65% for English Learners^b)
Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate 2014–15	35% (18% continued enrollment, ^c 47% dropout) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander: 32%^d (23% continued enrollment,^c 46% dropout) • Latino: 33% (19% continued enrollment,^c 48% dropout) • White: 29%^d (14% continued enrollment,^c 57% dropout) • African American: 60%^d (0% continued enrollment,^c 40% dropout) 	82% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander: 92% • Latino: 79% • White: 88% • African American: 71%
A-G Course Requirements for UC/CSU Admission 2014–15	51% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander: 60% • Latino: 42% • White: 20%^d • African American: 80%^d 	43% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander: 67% • Latino: 35% • White: 50% • African American: 33%

^a Totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Schoolwide test outcomes are not broken down by English-Learner status in the same manner as statewide test outcomes, because nearly all students at Oakland International are classified as English Learners. Therefore, schoolwide outcomes can be compared directly to the statewide outcomes for English Learners.

^b Enrolled in school in the United States for less than 12 months.

^c Recent immigrants may need more than 4 years to strengthen their English proficiency and accumulate the necessary credits to graduate.

^d Ten or fewer students.

Source: California Department of Education DataQuest.

There are also important opportunities for social-emotional learning built into the Oakland International portfolio process. By pausing to reflect on their academic growth and English language development each semester, students are able to celebrate their successes, acknowledge challenges, and consider future goals. They also learn how to continually revise their work and gain confidence in their ability to speak English in front of an audience. These skills serve Oakland International students well as they enroll in higher education or begin their careers. The school portfolio process demonstrates that rigorous performance assessment activities are accessible to all student populations, provided that the appropriate support structures are in place to facilitate success.