

**June Weissman**  
**Fourth Grade**  
**Tuesday, February 15, 2005**  
**9:30 to 12:00**

## **A CONSIDERATION OF EXCELLENCE**



**Today's class consists of eleven students from Sicomac School**

**Objectives:** Given examples of superior work, students will distill those characteristics that connote excellence. Given scenarios in which the protagonists are forced to make difficult decisions, students will discover how each person's values and beliefs contribute to his or her definition of excellence. Given a set of goals, students will begin to realize the personal dimensions to their definitions of excellence.

**Anticipatory Set:** Students will view their original songs, which have been posted on the WEL website. Through the use of rubrics, peers have reviewed their efforts. Would others agree with their concept of excellence? Who composed the rubric? What did I seek? Might another teacher have other criteria? Why is it that

two people can view the same work and have different reactions?  
Can there be a standard definition of excellence?

**Materials:**

- “When High Schools Try Getting Tough, Parents Fight Back”—article from the Wall Street Journal, 2/8/05
- GoodWork Toolkit Scenarios about Carol Marin and the president of Swarthmore College, Alfred Bloom
- Letters from students’ WEL.com books
- Internet and Smartboard
- Q-Sort Cards
- Student Samples of Excellence
- Legal pads
- White drawing paper
- Markers, pencils

**Procedure:** Students were asked to bring to class some work, not necessarily their own, that they consider excellent. Each student will tell why he or she thinks the work is excellent. We will consider these samples in light of letters students had written in the back of their WEL.com books on the subject of good work. How does the student define excellence? I will ask which work is most excellent? Are there measures to help determine what work is best? Does excellence change over time?

How do the students define excellence? How is excellence measured? What standards should be used in assessment?

I will read the article, which pits schools and teachers against parents and students in a quest for excellence and seek student feedback. Students will meet in groups of three and four to consider the following questions. Who are the major players? What is each of their concerns? What are the schools’ criteria for excellence? What are their values and beliefs? What are the parents’ criteria for excellence? What are their values and beliefs?

What are the students' criteria for excellence? What are their values and beliefs? What are the teachers' criteria for excellence? What are their values and beliefs? Answers will be charted on white drawing paper. Is excellence defined by good grades or by tackling work that is challenging? How do colleges and employees decide whom they should accept?

If time permits, one or two scenarios from the toolkit will be shared and analyzed. The first considers the case of Carol Marin, a journalist who left a prestigious job as an anchorperson because of resistance to a change that she considered an affront to the station's integrity. Another considers a dilemma faced by the president of Swarthmore College who had to terminate the men's football team in order to keep the student population diversified. Students will be encouraged to see that in large part their own beliefs and values determine their concept of excellence.

Each will create an identity chart, including words and phrases that they believe describe them, such as physical traits, gender, age and roles. With another color pen, they will include words and phrases that describe the way they are viewed by others. A list of physical and personality traits will be provided as a resource.

They will classify their findings into major categories of descriptors (physical traits, activities, roles, etc.). Which would they not be willing to give up or compromise? They will compare their lists with others. What most surprises them? Are there instances in which their self-concepts clash with what others think of them? What tension does that cause? What roles have been identified? How is their concept of excellence influenced by these values, traits and beliefs?

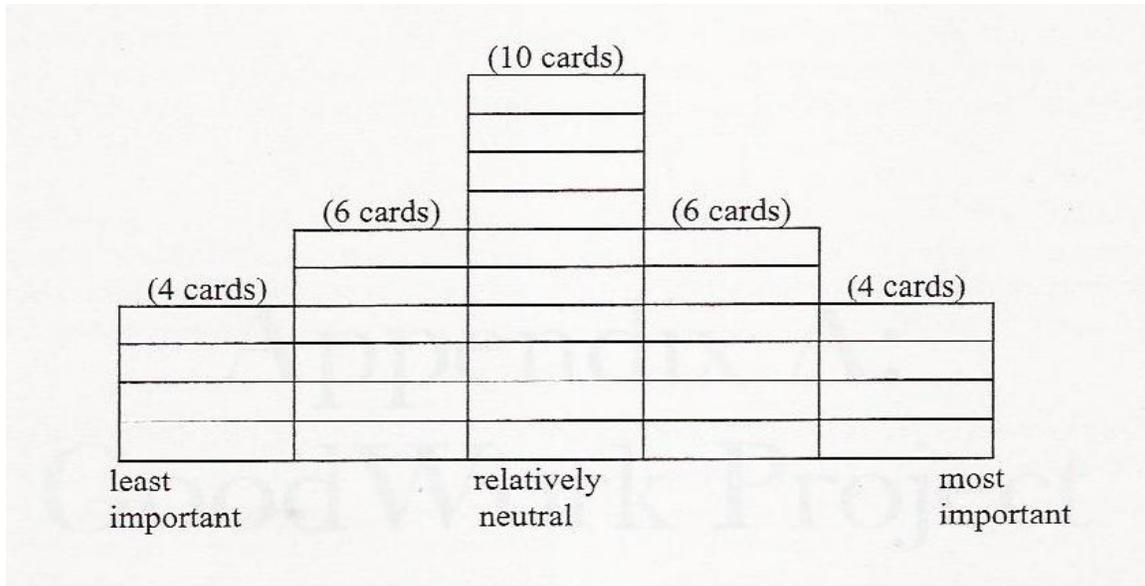
**Closure:** Cards will be distributed to the students that reflect 30 different values and beliefs. Students will sort the cards according to their perceived importance: the four most important, six more

important, ten relatively neutral, six less important, and 4 least important. To what extent do they guide this student's actions and impressions of excellent work?

The attributes are:

1. Accomplishment
2. Recognition by one's parents
3. Quality
4. Recognition by one's peers
5. Recognition by one's teachers
6. Rewarding and supportive relationships
7. Searching for knowledge, uncovering truth
8. Self-examination, self-understanding
9. Social concerns
10. Solitude, contemplation
11. Satisfaction
12. Teaching, mentoring
13. Understanding, helping and serving others
14. Vision
15. Wealth, material well-being
16. Challenge
17. Courage, risk-taking
18. Broad interests
19. Creating balance in one's life
20. Creativity
21. Curiosity
22. Efficient work habits
23. Enjoyment of the activity
24. Faith
25. Fame, success
26. Hard work and commitment
27. Honesty and integrity
28. Independence
29. Personal growth and learning
30. Power and influence

Students will record their values on a chart by writing the number of the value on the back of the card on the following grid.



They will compare their grids to see and decide in what way their results may influence their criteria for excellence.

**Assessment:** Students will demonstrate their understanding of the personal aspects of excellence by composing letters describing their discoveries. By comparing these with their letters written in the first week of February, I will be able to measure their growth. I will also challenge them to use their own beliefs and values in a continuing journey towards the attainment of excellence.