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> **Leaders of Their Own Learning: Chapter 6: Celebrations of Learning**

Leaders of Their Own Learning: Chapter 6: Celebrations of Learning

How can celebrating student work publicly build students' sense of pride about academic work and contribution to the community?

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It is not uncommon for students to be in the spotlight in front of their communities from time to time. Almost always this happens in one of two formats: a performance, such as a school play or concert, or a sporting event. The pressure of preparing for a big concert, play, or game compels students to practice and to strive to improve. In the same way, celebrations of learning involving all students showcase students' efforts to do more than they think possible and honor students as contributors to the broader community.

Knowing that their work will be public fuels students' learning all year long. When they know that the work they are doing will culminate in high-quality final products for display in front of their community, students approach their learning with the same commitment and focus as they would in preparation for a performance or big game. They are more willing to revise, meet deadlines, and take responsibility for their learning. Whether the event is at the school, town library, or museum, students beam with pride when their families, community members, and professional experts look closely at their work, and students can articulate what they have learned and how they have grown.

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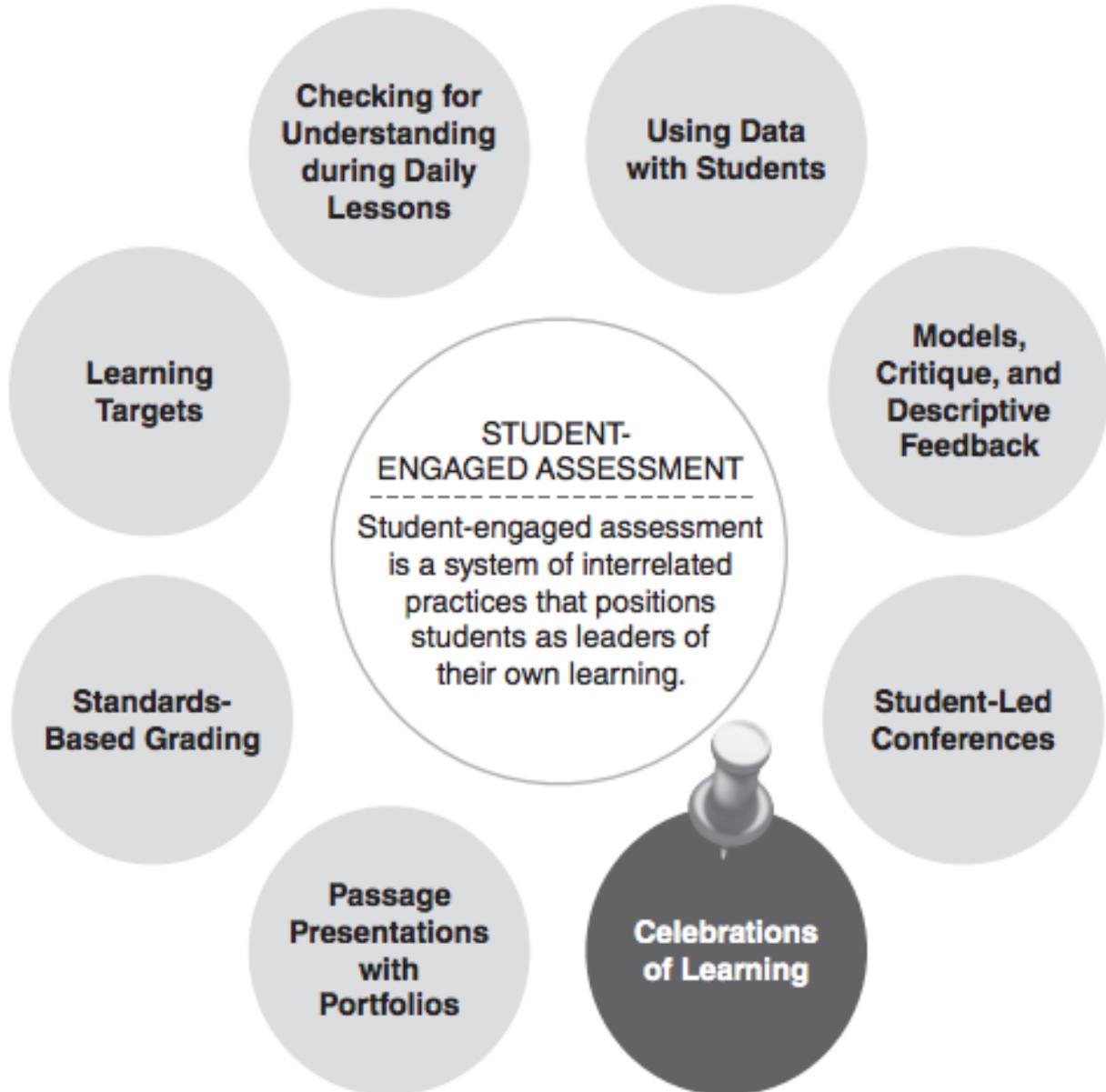
Knowing that their work will be public fuels students' learning all year long. When they know that the work they are doing will culminate in high-quality final products for display in front of their community, students approach their learning with the same commitment and focus as they would in preparation for a performance or big game. They are more willing to revise, meet deadlines, and take responsibility for their learning. Whether the event is at the school, town library, or museum, students beam with pride when their families, community members, and professional experts look closely at their work, and students can articulate what they have learned and how they have grown.

Any time you make the work public, set the bar high, and are transparent about the steps to make a high-quality product, kids will deliver.

— Mike McCarthy, Principal, King Middle School, Portland, Maine

Learning Targets

1. I can describe the power of celebrations of learning.
2. I can determine how to support students in sharing their learning with an authentic audience.



Read: Why This Practice Matters

Celebrations of learning are more than a display of student work and more than a party at the end of the year. The events compel students to tell the story of their learning by reflecting on and articulating what they have learned, how they learned, questions they answered, research they conducted, and areas of strength and struggles. They are powerful opportunities to make learning public.

At the center of celebrations of learning are high-quality products and performances that reflect the content and skills that students have learned. Typically, products are modeled after real-world formats, guided by professional models, and created for an audience beyond the classroom. Preparing work to be shared with the public—the authentic audience— motivates students and creates a purpose for them to care about the quality of their work. Presenting work to an authentic audience also raises the stakes and sets the expectation that all students, not just a select group, will share their high-quality products.

Figure 6.1 from page 215 of *Leaders of Their Own Learning* shows a page from a field guide created by seventh-graders. Take a moment to reflect on how preparing work like this for an authentic audience can impact the quality of student work.

Mountain Laurel

Kalmia latifolia



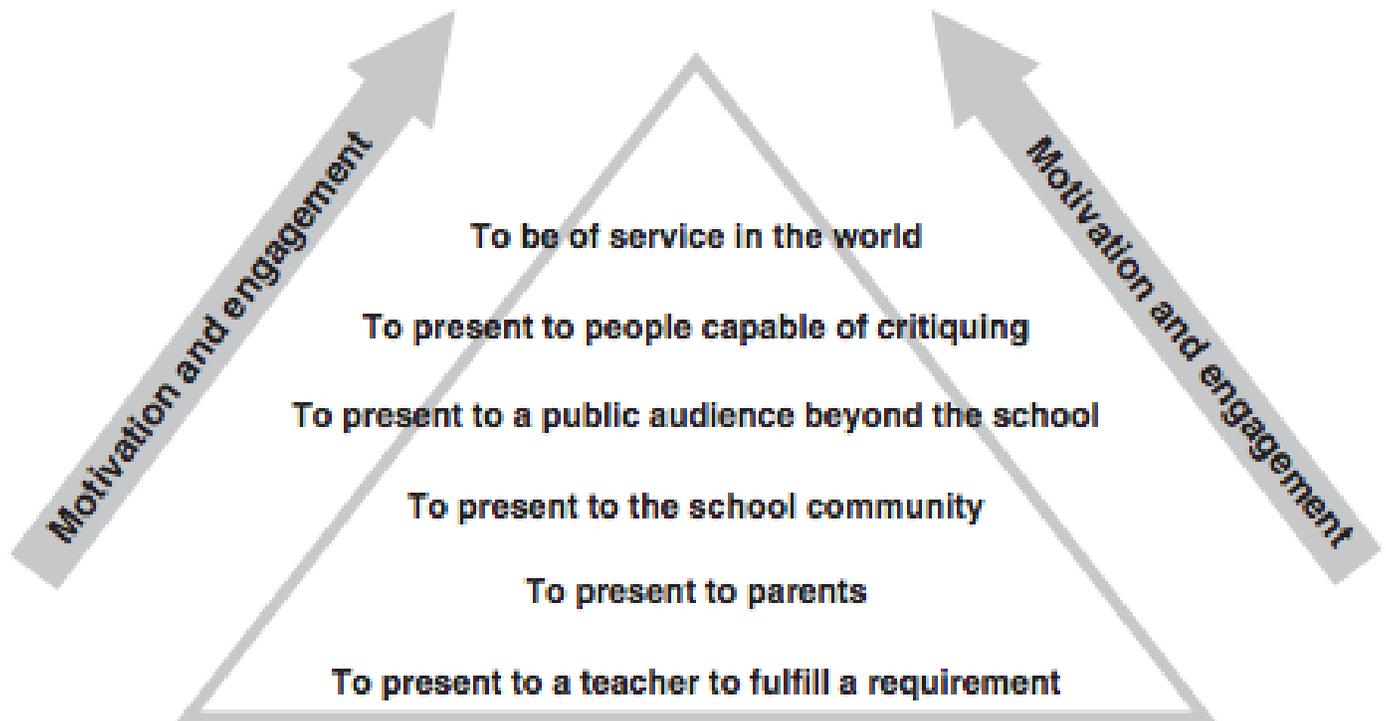
Celebrations of learning feature students as the communicators. Students are front and center, articulating their learning, the process of learning, and their strengths and struggles. In order for students to effectively communicate their achievement and learning, they must have regular opportunities to assess and articulate their progress toward learning targets. Regular reflection on progress creates opportunities for students to set goals and become partners with their teachers in meeting the standards. To help prepare students for a celebration of learning it is essential for them to reflect on key learning experiences.

Reflect on Fig. 6.2 below, which is from Chapter 6 of *Leaders of Their Own Learning* to illustrate the connection between audience and student performance.

- In your experience, how does audience impact student engagement and motivation? What makes a truly authentic audience and how can you broaden the audience for your students' work?
- What would it look like to have students as the primary communicators during celebrations of learning in your school community? What would you need to do to prepare students to speak about their own learning?

Figure 6.2 from page 216 of *Leaders of Their Own Learning*

Figure 6.2 Hierarchy of Audience



Read: Getting Started With Celebrations of Learning

Celebrations of learning can be structured in a variety of ways and can look very different depending on grade level, content area, school context, and school traditions. In some schools, celebrations of learning are schoolwide, showcasing work at all grade levels, and occur at key moments throughout the year (e.g., the end of each trimester).



In other schools, celebrations occur at the end of a unit, learning expedition, or long-term project. Celebrations of learning can be schoolwide, grade level, or thematic. Regardless of the time, name, or type of celebration, the event needs to be thoughtfully planned and structured so that all students are supported to communicate their learning and present high-quality work to an authentic audience.

When planning a celebration of learning, it is first necessary to determine the purpose of the event and then decide which format will best fit that purpose.

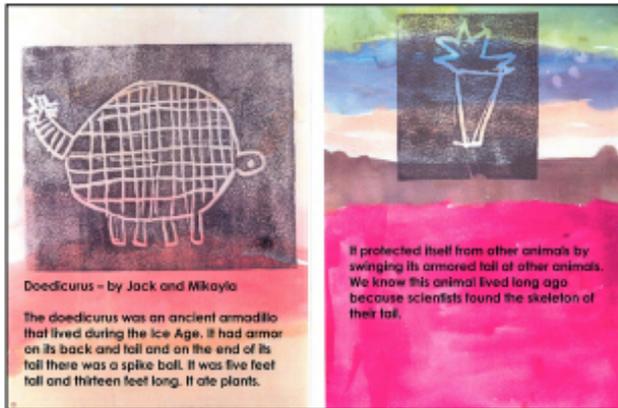
The following are two of the most common structures for celebrations of learning.

- **Classroom- or Grade-Level-Based Celebrations of Learning at the Conclusion of a Unit, Learning Expedition, or Long-Term Project:** This type of celebration of learning might feature the final

product or performance created by students and would be presented to an audience that is connected to the work.

- School-wide Celebrations of Learning: Celebrations of learning can occur at designated times in the year and showcase work across multiple grade levels and disciplines. Often a common thread ties together the work of students at all grade levels.

Figure 2: Student Work from a Celebration of Learning with a Common Academic Thread



While all students in the school studied pre-history, the content focus of each class was different based on grade-level standards. At the celebration of learning, K-1 students displayed work based on their study of fossils (left), while 4-5 students displayed work based on their study of land formations (below).

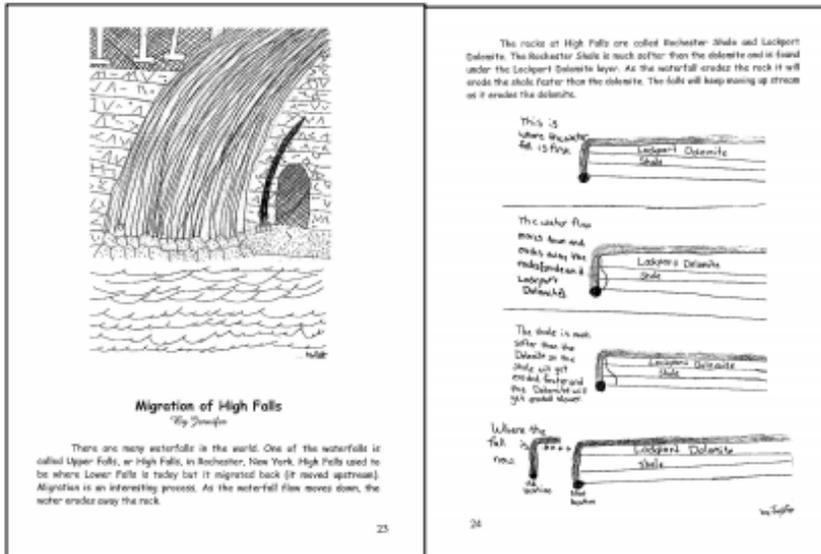


Figure 3: Sample Exhibition Night Program

**Mary O. Pottenger School
Presents:**



**Arts Across the Curriculum
Exhibition Night**

Wednesday, June 3, 2009
6-7 p.m.

<p style="text-align: center;">FIFTH GRADE</p> <p>Kim Jones Room 1</p>  <p>Revolutionary Portraits</p> <p><i>Students wrote biographies about famous people from the American Revolution during English Language Arts class and drew portraits of those people during art class. Students combined the biographies and portraits to create calendars which highlight important historical dates related to the American Revolution.</i></p> <p>Andrea Lantillo Room 3</p>  <p>Research and the American Revolution</p> <p><i>Students developed research projects and learned how to write important details related to the historical people and events of the American Revolution. Students examined the causes and events leading up to the Revolutionary War. Students created a book to educate other students and document their learning via content study.</i></p> <p>Angela Beacon Miriam Santiago-Arco Room 5</p>  <p>Mathematical Game Boards</p> <p><i>Students developed games and game boards with mathematical themes. Artistic design and layout was an important element of the game board. Students wrote game objectives, goal materials, and instructions.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">FIRST GRADE</p> <p>Kathleen Puffin Christine Hebell Abigail DeJachere Edith Montano Gymnasium</p>  <p>An Apple Study</p> <p><i>First grade students studied the life cycle of an apple, visited an orchard, and contributed apple recipes. The students cooked apple goodies and had an apple-tasting day. The study culminated in a student-made apple cookbook. Students practiced procedural writing in their cookbooks.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">SECOND GRADE</p> <p>Lisa Murray Anne Rzewnicki Cathy Adcox Daisy Arrechea Joyce Welch Room 12, 16, 18, 20</p>  <p>Cultures from Around the World</p> <p><i>Students have learned about different cultures by reading folktales and creating traditional art pieces. By exploring different cultures, students have learned about how diverse and special the world and its people can be. Final expedition products include a scrapbook and postcard about Mexico.</i></p>
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Questions:

After reading this section and looking at the various images, consider the following questions:

- What areas in your current curriculum lend themselves to celebrations of learning (conclusion of a unit, expedition, or long term project)?
- How can you envision a schoolwide celebration of learning in your current setting?

Read and Watch: Teaching Students Presentation and Communication Skills

The celebration of learning is not “teacher work.” Students partner with teachers in all aspects of preparing for the celebration of learning, from preparing visual displays to greeting and guiding adults. They often help with the design and creation of programs, flyers, posters, and signs; prepare food, music; and are involved in setting up and cleaning up.

Preparing students for their role in the celebration and explicitly teaching presentation skills is a key to success. Whether presenting a documentation panel to visitors “open house style” or standing at the microphone before a large audience, public speaking is challenging for most students. As representatives of their own learning—and the school—students need ample time and preparation for this aspect of the celebration of learning.

What follows are examples of structures to help prepare students for an oral presentation (each is described in greater detail in Chapter 6 of *Leaders of Their Own Learning*:

- Use rubrics to define expectations for students and to paint a picture of what a quality presentation looks like.
- Create a “fishbowl” experience to model characteristics of a quality presentation and a weak presentation and have students reflect on the process.
- Allow students to critique an oral presentation done by someone else (e.g., the teacher, video from previous years), using the rubric with which they will be assessed.
- Provide multiple opportunities for students to practice.
- Make sure that all students understand the sequence of events at a celebration of learning.

Watch the videos [Students Share Work that Matters with an Authentic Audience](https://vimeo.com/48803088) (<https://vimeo.com/48803088>) and [Kindergartners as Experts](https://vimeo.com/69120172) (<https://vimeo.com/69120172>). As you watch, consider the following questions:

- Prioritizing oral presentation might represent a significant shift in your teaching practice. Based on the strategies listed above and what you see in the video, how would you prepare your students to describe what they learned and how they learned it?
- As you watch the video, what do you notice about the role students played in this celebration of learning? How would you describe the emotional connection students had to their content? What

do you notice about the engagement of the audience during the celebration of learning? What would you like to lift out of this video to use with your own students?



Students Share Work that Matters with an Authentic Audience

from [EL Education](#)

05:25 |



Students Share Work that Matters with an Authentic Audience



Kindergarteners as Experts

from [EL Education](#)

05:38 |



Dig Deeper

[The Power of Audience by Steven Levy \(https://eleducation.org/resources/ascd-the-power-of-audience-by-steven-levy-educational-leadership-nov-2008-link-to-resource\)](https://eleducation.org/resources/ascd-the-power-of-audience-by-steven-levy-educational-leadership-nov-2008-link-to-resource). In this article, originally published in ASCD's Educational Leadership, Steven Levy demonstrates through stories, examples, and anecdotes the powerful impact that an authentic audience has on student learning and engagement.

Table 6.2 [The Who, What, and Why of Celebrations of Learning \(https://eleducation.org/resources/the-who-what-and-why-of-celebrations-of-learning\)](https://eleducation.org/resources/the-who-what-and-why-of-celebrations-of-learning) from Chapter 6 of *Leaders of Their Own Learning*. Table 6.2 illustrates the who, what, and why of celebrations of learning as a tool for increasing student engagement and achievement. Consider entry points for this practice in your own setting.

[The Human Face of Human Rights \(http://modelsofexcellence.eleducation.org/projects/human-face-human-rights\)](http://modelsofexcellence.eleducation.org/projects/human-face-human-rights). Explore how students at Casco Bay High School in Casco Bay, Maine developed interviewing and oral history skills by telling the stories of refugees in their community—and then sharing those stories publicly through a gallery exhibition of photographs and oral histories.

Synthesize

For Teachers...

1. What do you see as the most exciting benefits to celebrations of learning? What is inspiring about this practice?
2. What challenges do you see to implementing celebrations of learning in your school setting?
For more on common challenges, refer to pages 250-252 in Chapter 6 of *Leaders of Their Own Learning*
3. Review the instructional timeline for a project you would like your students to present publicly. Build in time for teaching and practicing presentation skills that will make your first celebration a success. How will you focus the preparation process for your students?

For School Leaders...

1. Does your school community prioritize and support the creation of high-quality work that is needed for celebrations of learning? How can you focus collaborative planning and professional

learning, or provide resources that will help teachers plan for and display high-quality student work?

2. Demonstrate your commitment to hosting meaningful celebrations of learning at your school by scheduling conversations with teachers whose students are doing great work. What do they need to make that work public?

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