

Sample Parent Letter: Balanced Assessment

Dear Parents or Guardians,

During this school year, our teachers will begin to use a wider variety of assessment types than you have been used to. These will include assessment through observation and assessment through conversation. Why are we making these changes, and what may they look like?

While observing what your children do and listening to what they say were common ways to assess their learning in the early grades, assessment from grades 3 and beyond has tended to rely heavily on written tests, quizzes, and examinations. And while those methods may have served us reasonably well when teaching and learning were concerned primarily with acquiring lots of knowledge, our world today is changing rapidly.

Your children are expected to develop increasingly complex skills and competencies in order to be successful once they graduate. And so in addition to literacy and numeracy, children are developing the skills of critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, communication and collaboration, flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, leadership and responsibility, life and career skills, as well as information, media, and technology skills.

Yes, it's quite a daunting list! And we are sure you can see how we can no longer rely primarily on traditional testing to assess your children's learning and inform you about their successes and areas of need.

That is why our teachers will be making increasing use of observation and conversation to assess your children's learning, with much of it occurring while the learning is occurring—what is called *formative assessment*.

With your written permission, some teachers will be using the recording functions on smartphones, tablets, and other devices to capture digital evidence of your child's learning. Over time, you can expect your child and his or her teachers to begin sharing brief recordings with you, both to keep you informed about your child's progress, and so you may support further learning at home.

As always, we welcome your questions and inquiries if you wish to learn more about this move to more balanced assessment.

Yours sincerely,