

Assessment Q & A – Battle River School Division

What does assessment mean?

Assessment is the collection of evidence related to a student's learning. It is more than simply tests and quizzes. A good collection of evidence results in accurate measurement of a student's learning, and it gives information that helps improve both learning and teaching.

What is the Program of Studies?

The Program of Studies is set by Alberta Education. It outlines what Alberta students are expected to learn in each subject and at each grade level. Teachers use the documents at this link to plan for and assess student learning: <http://www.education.alberta.ca/teachers/program.aspx>

There are parent-friendly curriculum handbooks and summaries at this link: <http://www.education.alberta.ca/parents/resources/handbook.aspx>

What is the difference between Assessment *for* Learning and Assessment *of* Learning?

Assessment *for* Learning is the practice and coaching that leads up to 'game day.' It means using evidence of what a student has learned as a basis for helping that student learn even more. Schools also call this *Formative Assessment*. It's the learning that happens as students are *forming* their understanding.

Assessment *of* Learning is like 'game day.' This is the evidence that shows what a student has learned—how much understanding they have developed so far. It could include observations, conversations, projects, presentations, assignments or tests that are marked and calculated in a student's grade. Assessment *of* Learning is also called *Summative Assessment* (as in, the *summary or summation* of what has been learned).

How will these changes to assessment impact what my child does in school every day?

Learning is a series of stepping stones towards a target or destination. Students will receive clear expectations of what they are being asked to learn (Learner Outcomes) and clear information about how they will be asked to show what they've learned. The expectations will be based on Learner Outcomes from the Alberta Program of Studies.

Evidence of learning will be collected in a number of ways, not just using paper and pencil assignments. Watching students learn and talking with them about the learning gives teachers clear information about students' understanding. All of these types of evidence help teachers determine the level of understanding each student has and what steps to take next in the learning process.

Students need feedback—verbal and/or written—to understand how well they are doing and how they can improve. This feedback comes from self, classmates, teachers and parents.

What does feedback about learning include?

When teachers provide oral or written feedback, they describe:

- areas in which the student is doing well (strengths),
- areas where the student is not doing as well (challenges),
- and also provide strategies the student might use to improve.

Feedback is given on a regular, ongoing basis. It might be verbal, or in the form of written comments on assignments, in student agendas or in other ways.

Feedback will focus only on the specific student. There will be no comparison with other students.

As a parent, how will I get feedback? How can I help my child succeed?

Students will bring home regular updates about what they are studying in school and what they are expected to learn. They will also bring home samples of their work and written comments about how well they are meeting the learner outcomes. There will continue to be report cards and conferences.

Parents and guardians are essential and welcome participants in learning. You are invited to be part of school/classroom volunteer programs and school councils. Bulletin boards, websites, newsletters, phone calls/emails and report cards all contain information and feedback. You are welcome to communicate with your child's teacher(s) for suggestions about how your child is doing and how to help him or her succeed.

Battle River School Division staff is working with new student information software called Maplewood. In addition to common report cards across BRSD, in the 2011-12 school year parents can access ongoing information about student progress through an online parent portal. When parents/guardians log in, they will only see information about their child's learning.

Why aren't class averages shared anymore?

You may be used to seeing class averages with student marks. You'll notice now that class averages are neither calculated nor shared. The reason is because students are not measured in relation to each other. Learning is measured in relation to the curriculum—in terms of how each student is progressing towards the Learner Outcomes in the provincial curriculum.

In some education systems, there are a limited number of passing marks available, the bell curve is used. The bell curve is not part of the K-12 classroom assessment system in Alberta. If a lot of students learn a concept very well, any number of them can earn an "achieving" or "excelling."

What if my child has the levels Beginning and Developing on the report card? Should I be worried?

Learner Outcomes describe what is to be learned by the *end* of a grade level or course. Most learners do not start out at Achieving and Excelling. Some concepts and skills may be at beginning or developing stages in the first part of the course and be solidly understood by the end of the course/year.

It is a normal, natural progression for learning to begin at and move through the Beginning and Developing stages before hitting Achieving and Excelling.

A teacher's verbal and written comments—in class, on assignments, on report cards—should help clarify if the learning is 'on track' in relation to the time of year, and what supports are needed for the next steps in learning.

What are PLPs?

Some students have adapted and modified programs that are developed to meet their individual learning needs. These are referred to as PLPs (Personalized Learning Plans). PLPs used to be called IPPs (Individualized Program Plans). The school and parents co-sign PLPs (IPPs) when a student's program is adapted or modified. That PLP (IPP) helps direct the plan and strategies used to meet the individual student's learning needs. The PLP may indicate specific goals for the student as well as what assessment strategies will help the student to be successful.