

[Teacher Blogs](#) > [Work in Progress](#)

Make School About Learning, Not About Grades

By [Starr Sackstein](#) on [October 7, 2017 7:00 AM](#)



What do we value more in our classrooms, enduring learning or a classroom full of compliant, high scoring children who only value grades?

Yes, there is a difference.

School systems have traditionally trained children to be good little drones who answer questions with right answers and do as they're told.

Unfortunately, in today's reality, just following directions isn't good enough.

Classroom environments must be rich, adventure producing, risk promoting atmospheres that allow students to be naturally curious, ask sometimes unanswerable questions and promote skills that seek new solutions.

The **Peel Schools in Ontario** are doing that and they are not alone.

Teachers who actively put students in the driver's seat of their own learning **engage kids to prepare** for their futures as modern lifelong learners. They don't merely seek the one right answer, but broaden questions to understand there are many possibilities and they know how to talk about. And although they may not know all of them, they certainly know how and where to look for answers.

One way we can change learning environments is getting rid of grades and deemphasizing the importance of marks. Teaching students to address skills and content they know about and which

they need help with by providing them with multiple opportunities to learn in different ways and teaching them a vocabulary to communicate it.

Here are some thoughts about readiness for this process as teachers prepare to make this huge leap for student learning:

"Student voice and choice are worth the work it takes to shift our practices [and one thing that can be done to promote that is] communicating overarching learning goals and success criteria consistently and clearly." - Hema Khodai, Teacher (Mathematics), North Park Secondary School

"Get students to give each other feedback, release control, take risks!" - Sonya Rubio, Instructional Coach

"That I am not alone on this learning journey and there is value in deemphasizing grades to help student learning. What stuck with me was that learning is not perfect, something I have always believed (never believed in this averages of 100%), you reaffirmed my thinking." -Leanne Gignac, Science Teacher, North Park Secondary School

"Change the conversation from "What did you get?" to "What do you know? [and] I will continue to practice patience and remember that what I'm doing is "for the kids"." Lisa Fernandes, Instructional Coach, CISESS

"TRUST! Build the rapport and transparency with your students so you can trust them to design their own projects and establish their own timelines." - Amanda, English LTO, Gordon Graydon Memorial Secondary School

"Two things I will take away: the importance of iteration in all assessment practices to give each student the best possible chance of being successful and the importance of ensuring that each task builds on prior experience and skills." - Jenn Banrhouse, FS teacher and department head, Mayfield SS

"Assessment shouldn't be something that is just done to students. They must be a part of the entire process." - Nicole James, Modern Learning Resource Teacher

"The journey will be messy, but by sharing our mistakes with each other we can make this happen." - Amit Mehrotra - Modern Learning Resource Teacher

"Students need to know How to learn = different ways and What type of learner are they? These are transferable, cross-curricular, life skills." - Laura Smiley, Acting Moderns Department Head at John Fraser Secondary School

As we continue to shift our beliefs about assessment, we must be honest with ourselves and each other. Learning is messy and taking risks means that some **attempts will fail**, not just for the student learner, but for the teacher as well. If we are going to truly shift this practice, this must be a team effort supported by school leaders and parents, changing the conversations. In this way, we will no longer have to worry about some systemic constraints that will have to shift over time with it.

For example, post-secondary education will eventually need to start looking portfolios or other measures of learning if we change the way report cards look. We will have to stop ranking kids like they are animals at the country fair. We can promote individuality and collaboration at the same time.

Every learner deserves a chance to grow and feel about his/her self as he/she does it.

So what will you do today to make that shift start to happen? Please share