

Signature School's Assessment Policy

As a public charter in the State of Indiana, our primary obligation is to provide the state with assessment data. The State of Indiana, in turn, reports all required data to the United States government. Signature School abides by all state regulations regarding student assessment and in so doing meets all national requirements as interpreted by the State of Indiana.

Signature School's Learning Plan, as outlined in the school's charter, promises local tax payers that the school will work to meet or surpass local, state, national, and global averages in both participation in and success on Advanced Placement exams, International Baccalaureate exams, the ACT, the SAT and SAT subject tests, and the PSAT and the PLAN, as well as any exams required by the State of Indiana.

As described in our charter, high quality, external assessment is an important element in fostering a collaborative school culture and in developing students who are more likely than their peers to earn on-time, four-year university degrees. Such assessments are valuable to both students and the school. Students have the opportunity to earn credentials that will help them achieve their academic aspirations. The school meets its accountability obligations named in the preceding paragraph and receives valuable information on how it may better serve its own mission as well as that of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme.

Whom do we assess?

We assess our students, our teachers, and our school's Program of Studies. Furthermore, as a public charter, local Indiana taxpayers as well as our sponsoring agency assess our efficacy the same tools of assessment that we use to evaluate our program and students. Data we gather through AP, IB, SAT, ACT, PSAT, and state-mandated testing are all published by state charter law in an annual report to our sponsoring agency.

What do we assess?

We assess student achievement in meeting criterion-referenced academic standards. We also assess the need for increased school support for individual students to reach these standards of achievement. Achievement goals extend well beyond subject matter expertise and include the extent to which students demonstrate the characteristics of the IB Learner Profile: that they be inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective. We prize the holistic assessment practices of the IB and, increasingly, those of AP.

Further detail of subject area and IB core assessments may be found below in "How do we assess?"

When do we assess?

While we believe strongly in the efficacy of high-quality summative assessment tools, we uphold the value of formative assessment to scaffold learning and performance tasks. Mastery does not happen all at once, and teachers are expected to break down projects and test preparation into manageable chunks and to use the information gained at these discrete intervals to intervene on behalf of student success where necessary. Thus, assessments happen throughout the school year.

Teacher gradebooks are expected to show a variety of easily recognizable assessment techniques; these gradebooks should be updated at least weekly so that parents and students can have timely access to feedback. All teachers are required to have a final exam or another summative assessment each semester.

Assessment requires forethought and planning on the part of students and teachers. Last minute scheduling and assignments that are made without the big picture in mind do grave harm to students and teachers. Teachers are expected to keep to published deadlines on large assessments and must respect the internal IB deadlines posted on the IB assessment calendar, updated yearly in May at a meeting of involved faculty and included at the end of this document.

How do we assess?

All new IB teachers attend IB workshops to learn about IB assessments and methods, and all experienced IB teachers attend level 3 workshops if they wish and attend IB workshops for introducing curriculum changes.

In cases where there is more than one teacher for a particular IB subject, the school provides time for teachers to standardize their grading of internal assessments. The IB coordinator ensures that such standardization takes place by coordinating meeting time between and among teachers.

There are some subjects in which more than one assessment is used to evaluate student achievement. For example, the first year of IB Math HL is AP Calculus BC and, furthermore, students take the PSAT and often the SAT and ACT that same year. The IB coordinator ensures that such teachers, well-trained in AP and IB, are given the vertical and horizontal meeting time needed to plan course schedules that allow students appropriate experiences to perform well in all of the assessments. However, because IB curriculum is the most comprehensive and in-depth curriculum the school offers, meeting the various assessments for a given course is generally not difficult. The school follows IB course demands and in so doing, most other assessment needs are generally met.

As mentioned above, all assessments are entered in an electronic grade book accessible to students and their families. Teachers have complete discretion about how to set up their gradebooks as points or percentages with the only rule of thumb being that the final summative assessment for each semester must be between 15 and 20 percent of the semester grade. IB internal assessments and externally assessed student work is broken down into components and deadlines that are reflected as a series of smaller assignments leading up to one large assignment in teacher gradebooks.

Teachers are also given complete discretion as to how to weigh IB external and internal assessments in their grade books. Some teachers score an internal assessment as a test grade; others as a final summative grade. Some teachers convert an internal assessment grade into an IB score of 1-7 using mark bands published in the IB examiner reports and then convert those scores to percentages (e.g., 7 = 100%; 6 = 90%, etc.)

When a student fails to meet the interval deadlines of an IB internal or external deadline, the teacher contacts Student Services, the IB coordinator and the family so that this group can work together to get the student back on track or to make appropriate changes in the student's course load.

Below, we offer a breakdown of assessment in each IB subject area group.

- **Group 1 (Language A)**- In addition to formal internal and external IB speaking and writing assessments required in the HL course of study and in addition to the literary content and analysis required by AP English Literature and Composition which largely serve as year 1 of the course, Group 1 relies on informal assessments such as participation in class discussions as well as creative projects including journaling, skits, and visual arts like posters and collages. Ultimately, we seek to provide a flexible assessment environment that caters to various types of learners. Students study authors and cultures in different places and eras in these varied ways, ones we feel improve retention and better engage students in their own learning.

Group 1 teachers are also aware of their obligation to prepare students to perform well on standardized college admission and recognition tests such as the PSAT, the SAT, and the ACT. Group 1 teachers work with grade level resource teams to prepare and practice materials that will help students achieve their best on these exams.

Group 1 teachers at the 10th grade level do their utmost to determine what Indiana-mandated assessments will be utilized. Planning for assessment time is tricky for them because, not only are they preparing students for their first English external assessment,

AP Language and Composition, but they must also give up up to 4 instructional days for state testing, if recent years may serve as a guide.

- **Group 2 (Language B)-** Language students are assessed formally through internal and external IB speaking and writing assignments. Language teachers must also frequently conduct informal assessments to ensure that students gradually gain proficiency in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. We assess these skills by administering several individual, partner, and group assignments throughout the year, including interviews, debates, dialogues, oral quizzes, presentations, essays, and informal discussions. We also attempt through these assignments to connect students to the cultures of the languages being learned. In keeping with school policy, we prepare any student who wishes to participate in AP language testing.
- **Group 3 (Individuals and Societies)-** Individuals and society are the foundations for intercultural understanding and respect, the instruments by which the IB program aims to create a more peaceful world. On this premise, group three at Signature strives to assess students' and teachers' intellectual curiosities about the rest of humanity, their reflective knowledge of the earthly environment, and their balanced open-mindedness which leads to caring, sometimes risky, communication with far-away places and times. The official IB assessment tools measure constantly teachers' and students' progress both during and at the culmination of the courses of studies. IB workshops and performing as IB examiners ensure that teachers uphold to the IB standards; practice with published IB exams assist students in reaching IBO's and Signature's educational goals.

Group 3 prepares students for a host of AP assessments, all required by the state of Indiana: AP U.S. History at the 9th grade level, AP World History at the 10th grade level, AP U.S. Government and Politics, and AP Micro/Macroeconomics. We believe that preparation for each of these assessments makes our IB students that much more knowledgeable about the world they inhabit. The strength and structure of the AP program are why IB History HL students study AP European History as the first year of the course.

- **Group 4 (Experimental Sciences)-** Formal internal assessment is in the form of the written laboratory reports and the Group 4 Project. Formal external assessment comes from the external moderation of the laboratory reports and from Papers 1-3 of the IB end of course assessments and from AP exams at the end of year 1 of IB Chemistry SL and HL, IB Environmental Systems and Societies, and IB Physics and at the end of year 2 of IB Biology HL if the student elects to take both exams. Informal assessment is carried out using written assignments, daily quizzes, unit exams, group projects, research papers, and lab reports.

Freshmen teachers prepare students for the state-mandated biology exam. It is unclear how this data is assessed by the Indiana Department of Education. However, teachers must plan their classes around the reality that students will miss up to two days of instructional time to take the test.

- **Group 5 (Mathematics)**- Students studying IB mathematics are assessed in a variety of ways. The open-ended assessment of the Math Studies Project and the Mathematics SL/HL Exploration assists in gauging a student's ability to communicate mathematical thinking, to creatively solve open-ended problems and to use technology to clearly demonstrate complex ideas. We build towards these large projects daily by assessing students on their participation and engagement in the classroom and by structuring assignments and tests to force students to reach for tools that help them to visualize and that extend their mathematical power. The IB exams, as well as other tests and quizzes along the way, require that the classroom teacher understand the scope of student mastery required for success over the material.

AP Calculus BC provides the coherent foundation that initiates Mathematics HL students' deep thinking in mathematics. The mathematics department also incorporates standardized test practice to support student performance on the PSAT, SAT, and ACT, as well as on the SAT II subject tests; we also use data from these tests to determine whether there are gaps in our curriculum that need to be closed and to help students build credentials in their mathematics portfolio.

- **Group 6 (Arts and Electives)**- We have structured the IB Music program at Signature School to free up the Senior year for Music History and preparation for the final projects by using AP Music Theory as the Junior year component for HL and as a pre-requisite for SL. This frees up our time to become familiar with the music of the world as well as its historic progression. Evaluation comes in the form of objective testing, classroom participation in discussion and research, and performance opportunities, which tie in nicely with their historic/world study and performance obligations for the IB.

In the arts, we continually push students to know themselves and their craft better by asking them to experiment with new techniques and continuously create. The IB Art program encourages students to make and experiment with their art as they develop their concentrations. They are given the opportunity to rework their projects with the IB Art rubric in mind in order to help them achieve perfection and a better understanding of the complexity of Art as postsecondary course of study. The first-year students are directed to

learn the intricacies of the IB external assessment rubrics and are continually challenged to expand their repertoires, while the second-year students work with guidance to master their projects. In order to be sure the students are on track and understanding their work, the art teacher takes daily grades as benchmarks to encourage the students to continue progressing.

IB Dance at the SL and HL levels embraces the holistic assessment that characterizes the IB program. Assessment helps students prioritize. Through the complexity of IB Dance assessments, students understand that the study of dance is the study of culture and history; it is a creative act that involves movement and choreograph, that requires reflection and risk-taking.

- **Core (Extended Essay, ToK, CAS)-** Aside from the formal external assessment of the Extended Essay, the EE coordinator and EE supervisors assess students on their progress through regular deadlines managed through the Resource period and kept track of on ManageBac.

The CAS program is assessed mainly through the use of the ManageBAC software program which we have used for eight years. The students are broken down in manageable groups between the CAS Coordinator and the CAS coaches. Through ManageBAC we are able to communicate with the students through e-mail both personally and as a group to encourage, give feedback, and prompt deeper reflection. The supervisors are able to fill out the supervisor evaluations electronically after seeing both the evidence and reflection done by the student for the activity and e-mail those back to the students' worksheets. Consequently, our students' CAS portfolios are entirely electronic, and IB can access those records online as well. CAS is an example of formative assessment at its very best. Parents are kept apprised of CAS progress through frequent communication from CAS coaches.

Theory of Knowledge students are assessed in a variety of ways. Informal assessment occurs throughout the duration of the course and includes classroom assignments, homework assignments, quizzes, group projects. Students are often given participation grades for contributing to classroom discussions. Formal assessment takes place through the ToK Presentation and the ToK Essay, both of which are broken down into smaller deadlines managed through ManageBac.

How do we communicate assessment expectations and results to students and families?

Enrollment information meetings for new students and families are held to explain academic expectations and assessment policies. During these meetings, the school is careful to explain

- the weighted grade policy as outlined in the Program of Studies (students who take the AP or IB exam at the end of a course receive a weighted grade for the calculation of the Grade Point Average—a weighted A receives 5 rather than 4 points; a B receives 4 rather than 3 points, etc)
- students who receive below a C in a course required for the Indiana Academic Honors Diploma must repeat the course to show mastery

Incoming 11th graders and their parents meet with the IB coordinator who ensures that IB assessment policies and practices are well understood and who also ensures that families receive a copy of the document, *General regulations: Diploma Programme*. During this time, students work with the IB coordinator and their teachers to map out a two-year plan which can end in an IB Diploma.

Throughout the year, teachers work with Student Services and the IB coordinator, as mentioned above, to help keep students on track to receive the IB Diploma. Students who fail to stay on track for their original IB course schedule work with Student Services and the IB coordinator to come up with a new plan for achieving the diploma or for mapping a path that ends in as many completed IB courses as possible given the limitations of on-time graduation.

After IB results are published in July, the IB coordinator holds meetings with candidates, courses students, and anticipated candidates and their families to go over the component grade reports to determine if a re-mark is warranted and, in the case of anticipated candidates, to make adjustments to the senior year course schedule as required in order to best position the student to receive the IB Diploma.