

Benchmark Assessment System, Third Edition **Introduction and Parent Letter for Online Resources**

Purpose: Inform families on the purpose/value of the assessment and talk about the meaning of Fountas and Pinnell reading levels

Informing parents and families about the *Benchmark Assessment System*

The purpose of this letter is to help you introduce parents and families to *the Benchmark Assessment System, Third Edition*. In broad terms, the letter defines what *Benchmark Assessment* is, its value as an instructional tool, and the purpose of the Fountas & Pinnell Text Level Gradient™ reading levels. We recommend you send the letter home to your students' families prior to beginning the initial assessment period in August/September. This letter is available in multiple languages—Spanish, French, Hmong, and Haitian Creole—in the Online Resources.

When speaking to families about *Benchmark Assessment*, emphasize its value as a critical tool that allows you to observe and quantify specific literacy behaviors and to use that data to plan meaningful, responsive instruction. Invite families to ask questions, and explain to them that assessment information will be shared and discussed at forthcoming parent/teacher conferences.

A note on the recommended frequency of BAS administration:

We suggest that you administer the assessment at the beginning of the year to help you determine where to start your teaching with each student. You may also want to conduct the assessment in the middle of the year, to take stock of progress, though you may already have the information from your ongoing use of reading records in instruction. Finally, near the end of the year you may want to conduct one more assessment to obtain a final record of the student's growth across the year. You may decide to administer the last assessment a couple of months before the end of the year. In this case, the assessment can provide information for instruction during the last months of school, while avoiding the redundancy of testing at the very end of one year and the beginning of the next.

Dear Parent or Guardian,

As an invested partner in your child's learning, I want to share some information about the literacy assessment I'll be using in my class this year. The *Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System*, Third Edition is a one-on-one assessment that helps me identify your child's specific reading strengths and appropriate instructional reading level for small-group instruction as determined by the F&P Text Level Gradient™. The data gained from this standardized assessment helps me identify goals and plan instruction that supports your child's reading progress across the school year. Within each level are easier and harder books, and a range of topics and book types. The text levels are not intended for students or for families to categorize readers, but in the hands of teachers, they inform instruction.

The *Benchmark Assessment System* provides a snapshot in time of your child's literacy development and will be given _____ to _____ times across the year. Over the next few weeks, I will assess each student in the class by having him read several *Benchmark Assessment* books, having him think about the books, and talking one-on-one with them about each book. This natural, authentic assessment conference is a wonderful opportunity for me to get to know your child as a reader and to observe him engaged in literacy activities. It will provide a rich source of information to inform my teaching.

Your child will experience a wide variety of book levels across the day in read-aloud, shared reading, book clubs, and independent reading. When selecting books for enjoyment, your child selects from a wide range of books that appeal to his interests; they are not selected based on reading level. Your child will also have leveled instruction in a small group for a small part of the day, as it is one critical component of our literacy teaching for lifting your child's competencies.

I invite you to ask any questions that arise throughout the school year and I look forward to upcoming parent/teacher conferences so we can discuss your child's literacy progress. In the meantime, here are some ways you can support your child's literacy learning at home:

- 1. Visit your local library together. Encourage your child to select books that interest and excite him.**
- 2. Read books to or with your child and talk about them together.**
- 3. Listen to your child read books and talk about them together.**
- 4. Most importantly, enjoy your time together reading, writing, and talking!**

Sincerely yours,