From the President

Dear Pine Crest Community,

In Kerri-Anne Alexanderson’s Developmental Psychology course there are very few traditional multiple choice and written assessments. Instead of a semester exam, for instance, students will design a preschool classroom informed by the research of psychologists they are studying. Through a comprehensive paper and presentation, students will be challenged to explain the ways psychological theory has infused their preschool classrooms, and to justify how their proposed educational models are stronger than those of competitor schools.

Seldom is rote memorization intriguing or exciting, but the novelty of alternative assessments such as Ms. Alexanderson’s almost always is. Every day I walk the corridors of our Boca Raton and Fort Lauderdale campuses and marvel over the quality and originality of the assessments assigned by our faculty in every grade. Examples abound:

• Students in the fifth grade on the Fort Lauderdale campus created a business and are presenting their proposals at the fifth-grade Business Expo. In developing their business and marketing plans, students use their knowledge and skills in math, reading, social studies and writing, all of which are assessed for their grades on the assignment.

• In seventh grade, Claudia Pancer and Margaret Devash asked students to create online interactive travel posters for a Spanish-speaking country of their choice. Students compiled, organized, evaluated and synthesized information on their countries, and then presented their findings in a creatively cogent manner.

• And while many of us remember as teenagers reading *Lord of the Flies*, we were not given the task of comparing it to the box office hit, *Mean Girls*, in an expository essay. Yet, that is exactly the assignment that many students completed in Marisa Ortega’s freshman English class.

As we shape the next chapter of Pine Crest’s story, “alternative assessments” provide students invaluable chances to hone their “21st century thinking skills” in three important ways. First, such assignments challenge students to use their abilities to make connections between theory and practice, and between what often appear to them to be disparate pieces of information. With these abilities our students will be able to sift through and comprehend the flood of new knowledge that the 21st century brings.

Secondly, alternative assessments demand that students employ their creativity. Students are nudged to think in new ways and to devise their own methods for tackling the tasks at hand. We know that novel challenges will emerge with regularity over the coming years, and it will be our students’ responsibility as
the next generation of leaders to solve these problems. Because such challenges never have guidebooks or formulas for conquering them (they wouldn’t be novel if they did!), our students will need to develop their creativity to identify solutions to these problems.

And finally, these assessments test students’ capacity to adapt. In these assignments, there are no single right answers, no defined starting points, and no obvious ends, and the open-endedness of such tasks demands that students define and evaluate a variety of parameters for themselves. Likewise, the economy that our students will inherit will be comprised of jobs and opportunities that do not yet exist. Our students will need to know how to adjust, readjust, go with the flow, and carve out clarity in a world filled with layers of gray.

As students completed these assessments, most did not even realize that they were honing skills that will be necessary for their futures. Yet our teachers did. At Pine Crest, our faculty members remain committed to offering a learning environment that “prepares students to meet the global challenges of our future” in dynamic and innovative ways.