

## Grade Reporting in Primary Grades

One of the biggest topics of discussion in school districts today is how to report student learning. There are multitudes of books, articles, and videos available on this topic that provide recommendations for the many issues to be considered when making decisions about report cards. Probably at the top of the list among those issues are these two questions: Do we use traditional letter grades at all grade levels, or do we use them only for older students, and use some other type of mark for younger students? And do we include *effort* in whatever type of mark we use?

Naturally, there are arguments for both sides of these two questions. Let's start with whether to use letter grades at all grade levels. Here are some reasons *for* using letter grades all the way through school.

- When other marks are used (i.e. numbers 1-4, S, U, NA, E) parents often try to interpret those according to letter grades anyway. (Oh, good! She got a "4." I think that's the same thing as an "A.")
- A mark such as an "S" can cover such a broad range of achievement, it can be misleading. If we did compare such marks to traditional letter grades, an "E" (excellent) might compare to an "A," and a "U" (unsatisfactory) might equal an "F." This leaves "S" equivalent to "B, C, and D." So a student could go all the way through the primary grades with all "S" markings, and then reach the letter-grade year, when suddenly there are lots of "Cs" and "Ds" on the report card, and parents are shocked.

On the other side of the argument, is the stigma associated with low grades, particularly "F." Young children come to us eager to learn, and to keep trying. But if they cannot pass grade-level assessments, the true grade to be reported is an "F," and because that letter has traditionally stood for *failing*, it can be devastating to a young learner and definitely impact the child's willingness to keep trying.

There are also, of course, two sides to the argument about whether to include effort in determining a grade. The argument *for* certainly makes sense: if a student works really hard, and keeps trying – that effort should be rewarded! However, the argument *against* tells us that including effort results in a misleading grade. For example, suppose a student who is struggling in math has never actually earned even a "C" on any assessments or papers/projects for which a score is recorded. The student has had at least one "F" and the rest of the scores are "Ds" – a few might be *high* "Ds" (getting close to "C") but all are "Ds" nonetheless. However, the student continually turns in all assignments and tries really hard to improve, so the teacher rewards and encourages the student by putting a "C" on the report card. This child's parents would naturally assume that while their child isn't a math whiz by any means, at least he's performing as well as the average child, and is doing "just fine." But that assumption would be false.

The recommendation given by recognized experts who've done much research in this field (such as Rick Stiggins and Ken O'Connor) is – at all grade levels – to record two separate grades on the report card... one for actual achievement and one for effort. Thus the math student described above would have a "D" for achievement and an "A" for effort on his math report card. This tells his parents much more accurately what is actually happening in their child's learning process.

The issues presented above pertain to all grade levels. But teachers in the primary grades are often still uncomfortable with having to give any kind of "grade" to their students. Even if they can give a high mark for *effort*, and regardless of whether they are using traditional letter grades or other marks, they believe that low marks have too great an impact on such young – and so far – enthusiastic learners.

There isn't any one solution to this dilemma; each district must consider their school populations and what will provide the most accurate communication about student learning. But here is one suggestion to consider. What if, instead of the usual marks, the primary-grades report card just provides *yes* or *no* answers to three basic questions:

1. Is the student achieving the published expectations for this grade level in this subject (**all** expectations that have been taught to date)?
2. Is the student definitely progressing and showing growth in this subject?
3. Has the student already demonstrated expectations (taught so far) for this grade level and is the student also doing enrichment work?

On the following page is a sample of what that report card might look like. The sample includes only the core subjects but the same questions could easily be applied to all subjects for which there are clearly communicated expectations. Such a report card could be started at any point in the curriculum development process, with new subjects being added each year – when the expectations (outcomes) for those subjects have been completed and validated.

GRADE REPORTING IN PRIMARY GRADES

<b>Reading</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Is the student achieving the published expectations for this grade level in this subject ( <b>all</b> expectations that have been taught to date)?		X
Is the student definitely progressing and showing growth in this subject?	X	
Has the student already demonstrated expectations (taught so far) for this grade level and is the student also doing enrichment work?		X
<b>Math</b>		
Is the student achieving the published expectations for this grade level in this subject ( <b>all</b> expectations that have been taught to date)?		X
Is the student definitely progressing and showing growth in this subject?		X
Has the student already demonstrated expectations (taught so far) for this grade level and is the student also doing enrichment work?		X
<b>Science</b>		
Is the student achieving the published expectations for this grade level in this subject ( <b>all</b> expectations that have been taught to date)?	X	
Is the student definitely progressing and showing growth in this subject?	X	
Has the student already demonstrated expectations (taught so far) for this grade level and is the student also doing enrichment work?	X	
<b>Social Studies</b>		
Is the student achieving the published expectations for this grade level in this subject ( <b>all</b> expectations that have been taught to date)?	X	
Is the student definitely progressing and showing growth in this subject?	X	
Has the student already demonstrated expectations (taught so far) for this grade level and is the student also doing enrichment work?		X

The “published expectations” (the curriculum outcomes) *should be enclosed with the report card*. (If the student is working on below-grade-level outcomes, enclose those as well.) Marks on the enclosure(s) would indicate which outcomes have been addressed to date, and which of those outcomes the student has demonstrated at an acceptable level. If the student has been doing enrichment work beyond the published expectations, an explanation of that enrichment – and possibly examples – should also be provided. A report card such as this one would communicate simply and directly the information parents need to know about their child’s progress.