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A PLAN FOR IMPROVING REPORTING PRACTICES
IN THE GRADE SCHOOLS OF
HAMILTON, MONTANA

by

WILFORD G. POPPIE
B.E., Western Montana College of Education, 1943

Presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The problem. The problem of this study is a realized need to challenge teachers, pupils, and the community to a possible change in Hamilton's reporting practice. It is apparent that there is a consciousness of the strain of competitive marking and this research may open the way for a report card that will lessen this phase of marking. This research is also hopeful of pointing the way to word marking in terms of the child's ability to achieve.

Purposes of the study. The purpose of this study was to survey the field of educational literature dealing with school reports to parents on pupil progress; also to assist the elementary teaching staff and the parents of the community in developing a more satisfactory report card for the elementary children of Hamilton, Montana.

The present reporting practice of Hamilton can be classified as traditional. This practice attempts to evaluate achievement of pupils by one set of marks in subject matter, knowledge, and skills, using the marks A, B, C, D, and F. Character appraisal space is included, but seems to give negative evaluation, meaning little to teacher or parent. Traditionally the cards are sent home every six weeks and the parent indicates inspection by his

signature.

Limitation of the study. An analytical study of various report cards shows rather clearly that the problem of pupil reports is one of considerable magnitude and complexity. This study would seem to indicate that the very nature of a good reporting system eliminates any contact with the routine static type of report card. Some educators seem to believe that the report plan should be made more flexible and subject to change to meet the dynamic functions of the school. This fact is apparent in view of the many new type report cards which are making their appearance today.

Importance of the study. The problem deepens in complexity as we become aware of our limited knowledge of growth patterns in view of the development of the whole child. If a reporting plan is to be valid, this plan should attempt to interpret the school as the school is. While the parents of a community may be willing to broaden their educational viewpoint to follow where a changing and progressive reporting system might lead, they must not be expected to follow blindly and without some knowledge of where they are being led.

By means of a questionnaire, it may be possible to interpret and communicate to the community the schools' philosophy, so that they might help in the development of

a new reporting system. Along with the questionnaire would be the following suggestions for evaluation which were set down in The Elementary Course of Study of Pennsylvania:¹

1. A report that is meaningful to teachers, pupils, and parents.
2. A report that would emphasize the child's strength rather than his points of weakness and his failures alone.
3. It should stimulate a desire on the part of the parent and pupil to overcome weaknesses.
4. It should reflect the educational objectives of the school.
5. It should tell the parent how his child is growing in terms of his ability to achieve, as well as general achievement in comparison with general expectations of his whole age group.
6. It should report progress in terms of the development of the whole child rather than in terms of growth in subject matter fields only. Progress in the development of social qualities, of emotional maturity, of physical characteristics, and of desirable work habits should also be included.
7. It should provide for comments by both teachers and parents, and make provisions for conferences desired by the teacher or the parent.

Literature on reporting practices in general. There is a wealth of material regarding reports to parents, indicative of the wide interest in the field. The varied types of cards show the relative variance of opinions by the schools and school personnel. The many new adoptions of reporting practices speak volubly for the efforts of

¹Department of Public Instruction, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Bulletin 233-B, Interim Report 1949, p. 31.

educators to conform to the modern concepts of reporting, and to rely on the research and study of child development as we know of it today. The tendency in reporting practices seems to emphasize the well-rounded development of the whole child, where the physical, social, and emotional aspects are considered along with the intellectual.²

Educational periodicals contain the reports of many philosophies of reporting. Articles by parents and laymen not in the field of education, offer suggestions and criticisms. Most textbooks on educational administration and in the field of guidance discuss the subject.

Literature from selected schools. The Montana Educational Directory³ was used to establish the original breakdown of the districts of Montana for the selection of requests for report cards. The method of soliciting was a simple request to various superintendents for a copy of their report card. The following factors were kept in mind while making the selection:

1. An attempt to obtain report cards from as many schools and towns as possible.
2. The size and financial condition of the various districts.

²Ruth Strang, Reporting to Parents, New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1947. p. 102.

³State Department of Public Instruction, Helena, Montana, 1950-51, Montana Educational Directory, p. 35.

From ninety-three requests mailed, seventy-five answers were received. Eleven replies were received to twenty-one requests made to schools outside the State of Montana. Thirty-one cards were obtained from teacher and pupil transfers into the Hamilton school system. This constituted a total of one hundred and thirteen report cards from which to establish a nucleus for the research for this paper.

CHAPTER II

TYPES OF REPORTING PRACTICES

Traditional. The traditional card until the last few decades has been the theme of standardization and may still be found in some schools of today.¹ It attempted to evaluate achievement of pupils by one set of marks in subject matter, knowledge, and skills. Usually this was done by percentage marks, or marks of A, B, C, D, F, each of which has a percentage meaning. Character appraisal, if included at all, was usually denoted by a grade in conduct or deportment. The card appeared small and unattractive, giving little or no information beyond the basic school subjects. The parent would indicate his inspection of the card by his signature at the end of every marking period. Traditionally, the cards were sent home once a month. Inasmuch as such cards were frequently selected by trustees of the districts or by county superintendents for an entire county, many commercial companies printed standardized cards to meet the market demand.

Modern. The modern trend has a tendency to follow two lines of thought differing from the traditional. These

¹Ruth Strang, Reporting to Parents, New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1947. p. 9.

newer type reports would mark the achievement of the child relative to his capacities, and provide means of appraising his social, emotional, and physical development.² Growth of the child seems to be the criterion of marking, swinging away from the field of competition. Elimination of the grade curve is entirely possible, for while the card measures pupil achievement in relation to a norm, this is not on a competitive standard with his classmate. Seemingly then, this card should present a more complete picture to the parent who is interested in interpreting his child's achievement. We find a breakdown of the subject fields into individual skills, giving an opportunity to locate various difficulties more easily. The field of character attributes are enumerated and indicated to aid parents in understanding more of the whole picture. Space has been provided for teacher and parent comment. The superintendent quite frequently explains the aims of the school, urging parent visitation and cooperation. The marking system uses fewer symbols and generally gives a clear and understanding explanation. This card is usually larger, generously spaced and more attractive.

Narrative. The letter form has been used by some schools as a means of informing the parents of their child's progress. This type of report, due to the extra hours of

²Ida B. DePencier, Trends in Reporting Pupil Progress in the Elementary Grades, The Elementary School Journal, 1938-1949. p. 519.

work involved on the part of each teacher, must of necessity vary as to the number of times such a report is made to the parents. It is obvious that a careful, analytical study of all phases of the child's school life will lay a heavier burden on the teacher than the present method of report. However, the school probably would set up a pattern for making such a report from two to four times a year. The following suggestions for the use of the personal letter are typical of this type of report.³

1. The school community should be thoroughly acquainted with the purpose of the personal letter and interview, in order that wholesale competition and comparison may be avoided.

2. The letter is indeed "personal" and contains the school's professional diagnosis of a pupil. Therefore, its contents must be regarded as strictly confidential.

3. The teacher and administrator must know why the child is not giving evidence of normal growth.

4. The child's achievement should be compared with his previous efforts, not with those of his classmates or older brothers or sisters.

5. Mention should be made of the child's growth--social, physical, and academic.

6. Parental help and cooperation should be solicited.

7. The letter should begin with some encouraging comment and close with concrete suggestions for further growth and development.

Some disadvantages of the informal type are as follows:

1. The writing of such letters is a burden on the teacher.

³Ruth Streitz, "The Use of Tests, Reports and Records," Nineteenth Yearbook of the National Elementary Principal, Washington, D. C., National Education Association, 1940. p. 298.

2. The letters may tend to become stereotyped; some teachers are not gifted in expressing themselves.

3. Such letters may not be understood in communities with a large per cent of foreign-born parents, or where illiteracy is common.

Some schools attempted to overcome some of these objections by giving each teacher a list of suggestions to use in the writing of letters. Santa Monica was one of these schools, but after a trial, authorities found it necessary to discontinue this type of reporting to parents because some of the teachers found it "extremely difficult to comment on pupils" with any variety of expression and without tiresome repetition.⁴

Form letter. Another variation, the form letter, seems to incorporate some of the features of the new-type report and some of the aspects of the informal letter to parents. The letters list the objectives and activities of the school, leaving teacher space for appraisal, and are sent out at regular periods. This type of report seems to be quite flexible, but to be effective may require more facility of expression than many teachers are capable of exercising. The following is one example of this type of report:

Shattuck School
Dec. 1, 1938

Betty Blank

Grade 2

⁴Willard S. Elsbree, Pupil Progress in the Elementary School, New York, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1943. p. 82.

Attitude towards:

Work: Betty has a spasmodic interest in work. She does not always complete assigned work on time and concentrates with difficulty.

Play: Does not mingle with many children; likes to tell on others. Demands a great deal of attention.

Special Ability: Betty shows a special interest in writing and frequently practices by herself.

Special Disability: Phonics:
Betty requires individual help in applying sounds in building new words.

Reading: Betty reads fairly well orally, but does not comprehend very well silently. We have noticed progress in her reading and much more interest in supplementary books.

Writing: Good.

Spelling: Fair.

Arithmetic: Shows an interest in numbers, but is not very accurate.

Absent: 0 Sessions

Tardy: 0 Sessions

Note to Parents: Your comments on this report and suggestions to me for your child's welfare are invited. If you wish you may use the back of this report for your comments.⁵

Check-list. This type of card is finding favor in many schools today, largely because it is so easy to use. Each subject field or character trait is broken down into various items which can be marked by a simple check. The columns of this marking system usually have some of the following classifications: "Always," "Nearly Always," "Seldom," and "Never." While there is a marked tendency to avoid comparison between children and reduce the number of marking symbols, it is noticeable that there is little uniformity in

⁵Wm. H. Burton, The Guidance of Learning Activities. New York, D. Appleton-Century Company, 1944. p. 510.

the items to be checked, or similarity in the method of rating them. With the check-list type, it is possible to focus attention upon the specific objectives of the school, but this plan has some weaknesses:

1. It is too uniform; makes no provision for elaboration.
2. It may omit many important objectives.
3. The plan does not afford opportunities for teachers to emphasize the special gifts or needs of pupils.

The dual. Competitive marking in our high schools and colleges and some demand from parents to indicate a measure revealing how their child compares to grade standards, provides some justification for a dual marking system. Such a system would show the relative standing of the pupil with class average, or a grade norm, and at the same time would indicate whether his achievement was good or poor according to his ability level. Individualization of education requires raising standards for certain individuals and lowering them for others. Ruth Strang mentions that "Without individual standards it would be difficult to stimulate all pupils to achieve the optimum quality of work of which they are capable."⁶

There is a demand for information that will tell parents with some definiteness where their children are

⁶Ruth Strang, Pupil Personnel and Guidance, New York, MacMillan Company, 1941. p. 86.

showing strengths and weaknesses as judged by normal expectations.

There is a danger that dual marking might become too complex and confusing to the parent and child. One card examined indicated achievement with a B for better than average, a C for average and a D for lower than average, with an S or a U immediately after the achievement mark. This interpretation would mean in a C-U mark, that he was doing average work, but capable of doing much better. Another card used a five point scale of achievement with a plus or minus mark to indicate performance above or below the ability of the pupil.

Summary of trends. 1. A trend away from the formal routine report card as the sole reporting device to supplementing the card with diagnostic, personal letters and notes.

2. A trend toward greater emphasis upon reporting the social and emotional development of children, with the use of a different marking system from that used in marking subject matter achievement.

3. A trend toward reporting pupil progress in terms of the individual's growth rather than in terms of class standards.

4. A change toward the use of more constructive statements in reporting, such as "needs help in methods of

study," as against the negative type such as "wastes time."

5. A trend away from monthly reports to reporting every six weeks, quarterly, twice a year, or at no set periods.

6. A trend toward using different report forms for different school levels, as one form for kindergarten, another for the primary level, another for the intermediate level, and another for the Junior High grades.

7. Less uniformity in school systems than previously, with more encouragement for individual schools to experiment with reporting plans.

8. A trend away from percentage marks to use of five-point and three-point scales, and recently to use of two-point scale, "satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory".

9. There is a trend toward the use of larger and more colorful cards containing more information and explanatory material.

10. More attention is directed today to lack of abilities or maladjustment that hinder a child's progress.⁷

⁷Ruth Strang, Reporting to Parents, New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1947. p. 8.

CHAPTER III

DESIRABLE FEATURES OF A GOOD REPORT FORM

Philosophy. The report card should represent the philosophy of the school and this spirit should so interpret the purposes and methods of the educational system to the children and parents of the community.¹

It has been said, "Show me the type of report card a school is using, and I will tell you how modern the school is." Parents can and do interpret fairly accurately the philosophy of a school by studying the marking system. The parent can note the emphasis placed on the mastery of subject matter, can judge the efforts of the administration to evaluate pupil development, and determine which of the social attitudes and personality traits are valued by the school. It would seem important that a reporting policy be as modern as the educational practices.

The first step would be the formulation of an understandable school philosophy that would reflect the cooperative planning of all concerned, the parents, pupils, teachers, and

¹Ruth Strang, Reporting to Parents, New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1947. pp. 6-7.

²John M. Miller and Roben J. Maaske, The Report Card Can Interpret School Objectives, National Elementary Principal, XXV, September, 1945. p. 127.

administrators. The second step would be to devise valid interpretation of said philosophy through the medium of a good report card.

The study of selected report cards leads one to believe that some schools are not cognizant of their educational purposes. A small unattractive report card, using the percentage marking system on subject matter achievement, might well be used in a school that does not mark relative to their modern philosophy. Obviously, if the administrator is content to follow the lines of traditional patterns in his marking practices, perhaps only he and some of the teachers would understand the attempted practices. The means of educating the public to objectives would be accomplished by establishing a cooperative working unit of parents, pupils, teachers, and the administration. Only by such action would all concerned understand fully what the school is attempting to do for the child. The report would not mean one thing to the teacher, another to the child and something else to the parent. Some pupils in Pasadena were dissatisfied with competitive marking and asked to assist in evaluating. With the aid of the teacher they proposed some questions as: "How active a part do I take?", and "How sensible are my questions?". Later, after consultations with the teacher, they wrote a few statements under each heading. These statements were later appraised by the teacher before marks

were given. The parents upon receiving the card were able to give their comment before returning the card to the school. This type of reporting practice, while not giving an evaluation of acquisition of subject matter, nevertheless reflects the cooperative nature of a progressive system.³

Adaptability. A good reporting system should change with changing concepts of educational standards and philosophies.⁴

Despite the traditional pressure evoked by many parents, it is conceivable that many of our schools today are more progressive than the report cards would have us believe. This belief should guide school men into the field of careful planning and parent education when contemplating reporting changes. The change should be gradual, perhaps starting with the primary grades, extending to the other grades in the succeeding years. Laymen are not as well informed on the new aspects of child growth as are the educators, and must be informed if acceptance of changes are to be assured.

Comprehensiveness. A good report card should present a report of growth that is broad enough to cover all important educational objectives, subject matter, knowledge, and

³Grace Ball, "An Evolutionary Report Card," Progressive Education, XII, February, 1935, pp. 89-94.

⁴Strang, op. cit., p. 5.

skills, character development, social adjustment, health factors, and appreciations.⁵

Modern concepts of reporting seem to attempt to describe the school activities in a more complete manner than that of the traditional card. Compared to the traditional general idea of subject matter achievement, attendance and conduct, newer concepts would call for a more complete card. Smith and Tyler⁶ set out the function as:

Taken as a whole, the report when filled in should give a reasonably complete picture of the child as observed by adults. In general it should show a pupil's most common behavior and attitudes. When such a complete appraisal of the child is made, the way is made more clear for constructive guidance than is true if several factors are expressed in one mark.

Attempts have been made by educators to evaluate the character traits most desired for use on a report card. Hill⁷ listed twelve traits most commonly found on 250 elementary cards as follows: industry or effort, courtesy, conduct, neatness or carefulness, reliability, cooperation, obedience, promptness, proper use of time, attention, self-control and persistence.

The addition of other items to mark creates other problems. Some schools attempt to evaluate personality

⁵Ibid., p. 4.

⁶Eugene R. Smith, and Ralph W. Tyler, Appraising and Recording Student Progress, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1942, p. 237.

⁷George E. Hill, "The Report Card in Present Practice," Educational Method, 15:115-31, December, 1935.

traits by letters A, B, C, D, and F. This policy has been attacked on the grounds that it is impossible for a teacher to justify a mark of B, for instance, in honesty or courtesy. From this approach the method of checking has developed, whereby a pupil weak in one trait might receive a check on a report form with some explanation of how this trait might be developed.

Following the trend of reporting the "whole" child, consideration of at least three limitations on the amount of material reported would seem important. First, the possibility of including too much material making it difficult to interpret; second, a need for limiting the report card to a practical size, and third, observing the danger of overburdening the teacher with report material. Examination of many report cards reveals a tendency to more or less standardize traits and attitudes reported, giving only such information as might be meaningful to the parents.

Causes and outcomes. A good reporting practice should attempt to indicate causes as well as outcomes, informing the parent of factors which contribute to the evaluation of the child.⁸

To give a child an unsatisfactory mark in reading, for instance, is not sufficient for proper understanding by

⁸Strang, op. cit., p. 4.

the parent. One trend in reporting systems tends to break up each subject into individual skills, such as "reads with understanding," "reads at satisfactory rate," and "reads widely." The same trend is noticed regarding personality traits. Such items as work habits might be sub-divided into sub-headings such as, "makes good use of time," "starts and finishes work promptly," and "follows directions." There is naturally a limitation on the number of items that might be included under each major heading. This limitation may be provided for by leaving a blank space or two after each major item in which causal factors might be written. They could be noted in the teacher's comments section, or in a special note. The main objective is to permit the parent to deduce from the report particular weaknesses the child might be encouraged to improve.

Clarity. A good report card should give an account of pupil progress that is understandable and interesting to parents and pupils.⁹

If the reporting practice is to be meaningful to parents and pupils, certain considerations should be fulfilled. The outcomes should be of prime importance, and specifically defined in terms agreed upon by all teachers,

⁹Ibid., p. 5.

and understandable to the parents. In one study¹⁰ in which over 100 teachers listed 1051 incidents contributing to character education, an attempt was made to combine and report the factors according to three standards, namely, "well-developed," "improvement marked," and "home and school should cooperate to improve."

The trends toward specifying definite skills and behavior traits have done much to clarify reports to parents. If a child is checked on such an item as "listens while others are talking," this is more meaningful than if he were merely checked on "courtesy." In an effort to complete reporting, some schools have probably gone too far, or at least expressed their objectives in terms not meaningful to the average parent. One card lists such items as "senses number relationships," "knows relationships between living things and physical environment," "developing a scientific attitude," "shows appreciation of nature," and the like. These items would be difficult for a teacher to appraise, and would probably mean little to the parent. Such terms as "initiative," "reliability," "application," "emotional stability," and the like probably mean little to the pupil unless further explanation is included in the report.

Mutual understanding. A good report card should

¹⁰A. H. Anderson, "The Report Card in Character Education," Journal of the National Education Association, December, 1930, XIX, pp. 307-8.

attempt to bring about closer cooperation and greater mutual understanding between home and school.¹¹

As the report to parents is one of the most common media of communication between the school and home, care should be used in its design and use to prevent misunderstandings and ill-feeling. The tone of the report should be courteous. It should not adopt the tone of one card which stated in big letters at the top of the card, "Sign this card and return at once." The card should not list goals in a negative manner. The items "Hands and face frequently dirty" or "annoys others," does little to cement friendly relations.

No report should result in inimical relations with the home, and if the objectives of the school are clearly understood, parents will be more sympathetic with what the schools are trying to accomplish. Frequent letters, notes and conferences will do much to maintain a friendly spirit.

Many current reports provide a space for parent comments or questions. Such a provision will result in better understanding by the school of the parent point of view, and may call attention to ambiguity of purposes or terms of the report. Many times a suggestion made by a parent has definite value, and the school should give careful consideration to what is suggested. If the suggestion made by the

¹¹Strang, op. cit., p. 7.

parent is opposed to a valid and justifiable portion of the school's philosophy, there is indicated a need for explanation of the purposes of the school to the parent concerned. Some report cards have been developed that contain a portion of the card that may be torn off and returned to the school with the parents' message and signature. The school record of the pupil is retained in the home. This practice would probably entail making a duplicate report card so the school would have a copy.

Some schools, in cooperation with parent committees, have developed report cards for parents. One such report card presents these questions to the parent, aiming at interpretation of the report in the proper spirit.¹²

1. Do you bear in mind your child's abilities as you read his report?
2. Do you recall your own school difficulties?
3. Do you let the child offer explanations for his marks?
4. Do you try to show him the relationship between school work and his world's work?

Another author¹³ listed suggestions for a check list to parents so they might rate their efficiency in proper attitudes regarding their child's report card. The check list included such items as the following:

1. Do you provide proper study conditions?
2. Do you bear in mind your child's abilities when reading his report?

¹²L. H. Robbins, "D is for Dandy," New York Times Magazine, June 1, 1947, p. 24.

¹³C. Mackenzie, Report Card for Parents," New York Times Magazine, June 16, 1946, p. 34.

3. Do you praise good points on the report?

Parents were to check themselves on this list by a scale of "never," "sometimes," and "always." Such devices might have value in bringing to the minds of parents their responsibility regarding school reports.

Achievement. A good report card should indicate the achievement of the child in relation to his basic abilities and capacities.¹⁴

This concept of pupil appraisal is gaining favor in the light of the findings of countless studies which emphasize the factor of individual differences. Under this concept pupil evaluation is made in light of capacity to learn, and not as arbitrarily set for the grade, in the amount of knowledge and skills attained. Many studies have indicated the unreliability of percentage grades, and the unjustification for rigid standards set for subject matter mastery applied to all students in a grade. Hill¹⁵ gives figures to show that the trend is definitely away from such narrow concepts of pupil appraisal. He reports that in a 1925 survey, 29 per cent of the schools were using per cent evaluations, and ten years later, in 1935, only 9 per cent of this group of schools used this device. If there is a

¹⁴Strang, op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁵George E. Hill, "Improvement of Report Cards and Reporting," Educational Trends, April, 1934, pp. 28-35.

range of from three to five years of ability level among the students of most grade groups, it is difficult to justify a policy of attempting to bring all pupils up to the same level of achievement.

This fact brings to the front the necessity of determining some valid means of arriving at an estimate of a pupil's ability level. If we are to appraise him with regard to his ability to achieve, we must have some basis for determining that level. A survey made by Hartley¹⁶ indicates how the normal achievement of children was determined in some 118 schools of communities of over 2500 population. The schools reported as follows:

Methods	
Mental age	45
Teacher opinion	67
Intelligence quotient	52
Past record	41
Achievement tests	5
Combinations of above methods	47

Perhaps it would not seem a good criterion to adopt a combination of these factors in determining a child's ability level, for even then the appraisal would probably be somewhat subjective. However, it would seem to be more justifiable than determining a pupil's advancement by his rating with his classmates on teacher-made tests and subjective evaluation. To those who argue that it is impossible to

¹⁶H. H. Hartley, "Report Card Trends in the West," The Nations Schools, November, 1939, XXIV, pp. 51-53.

accurately judge a pupil's ability level to use as a basis for appraisal, we might say that by a combination of the above-mentioned bases, we could probably more accurately judge his ability level than we could hope to judge his achievement level by usual methods.

Mention of other results of Hartley's¹⁷ survey might be pertinent at this point. He received the following answers from superintendents:

	Yes	No
Do you believe grades to be very significant of achievement?-----	24	61
Do you believe it would be possible for anyone to achieve a perfect report regardless of his inherent ability?-----	28	57
Do you believe grades are necessary as a stimulant to scholarship?-----	32	62
Do you believe rewards, honor rolls, etc., are justifiable in a democracy?-----	37	55
Do you believe that by making it possible for all to succeed we may be increasing the difficulty of adjustment upon leaving school?-----	43	55
Do you believe the competitive element in grades to be necessary and proper in training for democratic life?-----	32	59

The implications of these answers are interesting. No doubt many of these superintendents would be more liberal today. Burton¹⁸ is in disagreement with those answering

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 52-53.

¹⁸W. H. Burton, The Guidance of Learning Activities, New York, D. Appleton-Century Company, 1944, p. 500.

"yes" on the last item when he states, "There is no fundamental, philosophic, psychological, or sociological arguments to support competitive marking in school classrooms."

Many reports include the provision for checking the item, "Promotion in Danger." Possibly the necessity for this item is the fault of the report, or a teacher's neglect in conferring with the parent, but parents of limited understanding have been known to express great surprise and disapproval when their child was not promoted, even when the report showed predominance of failing marks.

Validity. A good reporting practice should rate growth and progress by means of valid and reliable marking systems. It should describe that which it purports to describe, and report only that which can be described reliably.¹⁹

This principle is probably more idealistic than practical. No matter how scientific our tests, much of our appraisal of a child's growth must be subjective, and marks will still be influenced by such chance factors as pupil personality, teacher personality, and the like. However, this principle may be justified as a goal for marking. Much has been said about the unreliability of per cent marks as they were used on the traditional report card. Scales

¹⁹Strang, op. cit., p. 11.

which use letters to indicate per cent equivalents merely lessen the number of points on the marking scale, and the factor of unreliability creeps in when a teacher gives a child a B for a numerical mark of 85 and another child a C for a grade of 84. Another device commonly used is that of interpreting an A as excellent, a B as good; but a parent may well question, "good for what--or on what basis?" If we are to report the achievement of a pupil as compared with his ability to achieve, it should be enough to indicate whether his progress is satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Within reasonable limits, we can say that a child is working to about his level of ability, or he is not. If it is desired to rate the accomplishment of the child according to grade standards, some device may be used to indicate this factor as well. One such plan uses S for satisfactory and U for unsatisfactory progress as compared with ability, and adds a plus or minus mark to indicate above or below grade standard. This dual type of marking may satisfy the parent who wishes to know how his child stands in relation to class norms, and yet avoids the inadvisable elements of pure competitive marking. At the same time, it places the emphasis upon individual appraisal.

The argument is frequently raised that some type of marks such as A, B, C, are necessary because they must be recorded in the child's permanent record and on transcripts.

Obviously this is so, since another school system might fail to interpret correctly your school's type of marking. Schools using the two-point system must keep marks of the traditional types in class books, permanent records and in the record files for each pupil, but these marks, with all the other appraisal devices, are then considered to determine a mark for the report card.

It must be remembered that whatever system of marking is used, it should be clearly understood by pupils, teachers, and parents. A mark that is mis-interpreted or gives the wrong impression is probably worse than no mark at all.

Appearance. A good report card should conform to reasonable standards of size, form, and appearance.

It has been mentioned before that there is a trend toward a larger and more comprehensive type of report. This is natural when we consider that modern educational philosophy is concerned with more aspects of child development than formerly. A study made in 1929 showed that only 16 per cent of the report forms in 224 schools were of the folder type.

Another survey made in 1935 found that of 250 schools 55 per cent were using the folder type.²⁰

There is a danger that a report may be so comprehensive and complex that the parent will not be able to find

²⁰Hill, op. cit., pp. 115-31.

in it an intelligible evaluation of his child. It is probably justifiable to say that after a certain point, the law of diminishing returns applies to information on a report card. Many details on some report cards might well be omitted or combined under one division of the card. For instance, the item, "good use of time and materials" which appears after subject on one card, might be listed as one item under such a heading as "Work Habits." Any other elaboration of the point could be included under the teacher's comments section.

The report card should be of sufficient size and so arranged that the information will not appear crowded. Use of different colors for the report forms of different grade levels will help to avoid confusion of the types by teachers. The arrangement of days present, days absent, and times tardy, into vertical columns makes totalling easier. Many of the cards used today include in the message to parents, the statement that parent signature on the card serves only to indicate that the parent has examined the card. This practice has been made advisable by the beliefs of certain parents that their signature on a card means that they approve of the type of work their child is doing.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A philosophy of reporting. Reporting a pupil's progress to his parents is not the simple thing it at first seems to be. As we delve into the problem, we find ourselves involved in the whole philosophy of education, policies of marking and promotion, curriculum, and instruction. Since the report card is the oldest and most widely used means of communication between the home and the school, and, since in the majority of cases it is the only source of information which the parents receive concerning the progress of the pupil or lack of it, the report should represent the true spirit and philosophy of the school. Recognition of the following principles are suggestive of a basic philosophy in Hamilton for report card marking as seen by the author of this paper:

1. That pupil progress should be evaluated in terms of the abilities of each child.
2. That the progress and growth of a child should be evaluated to the greatest possible extent in the light of his physical, mental, emotional, and social aspects.
3. That the school has a moral responsibility to inform parents of their child's school progress in as comprehensive a manner as is practical; to provide

information necessary for a sound working relationship between the school and the home for the guidance of the child.

4. That grades and marks are merely means to the end of the utmost in child development and are not to be regarded as educational goals.

Summary. The purpose of this study was to discover, as far as possible, prevailing trends and practices in developing reports to parents on pupil progress, with the end in view of designing a type of report that might be used as a guide to assist committees in developing a new report card in the Hamilton Elementary Schools. Such a report form has been devised,*¹ using as guides the principles of a good report card as discussed in this paper on the one hand and conforming to the philosophy of a good reporting practice as the writer believes it should exist in Hamilton today. These cards are included in this paper.

One factor, however, has yet to be considered before a final recommendation of a report card can be made. This factor is the consensus of opinion of the parents of the community and the elementary teachers of Hamilton, on what they consider essential in a report card, and how information should be reported. Consideration of this final factor

*¹See Appendix A.

must wait until returns are available on a questionnaire form,*2 supplemented by suggestions and criticisms from parents, teachers, and others, through meetings and conferences. The report form as developed here may well serve as a basis for discussion, and will indicate the viewpoint of the writer as to what he considers valid to appraise, and how the evaluation of the child should be presented.

Recommendations. Since the writer believes that nothing reflects the educational philosophy of the school more vividly than the type of report issued to parents and pupils, he deems it advisable that the report evolve from the cooperation of all concerned. If the dual type of reporting is the desired goal of our school system, much time should be devoted to developing a card that will reflect this philosophy. By enlisting the interests of all groups--teachers, parents, the school board,--much good can be accomplished in directing the basic thinking of all concerned toward the improvement of the whole school program. The writer offers the following suggested procedure as one of several to follow in developing a new report card:

1. Select a committee consisting of members from the professional staff to draw up a suggested report card.
2. Submit the suggested card in duplicated form to various groups for discussion.

*2See Appendix B.

3. Issue an instructive questionnaire to the parents to obtain their viewpoints.

4. Revise the card further in the light of suggested ideas from items two and three.

5. Place the card in use in the school for a trial period of a year.

6. Invite further discussion of the card by various groups, such as the parent-teacher association, the school board, and the teachers. A talk on the revision of the report card may be of interest to service clubs and other community organizations.

7. Further revision by the committee, further trial periods, and further discussions, if necessary, should be continued until the report card is ready to be adopted as the official report for the school.

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APPENDIX A

(Page one of report form)

Hamilton Public Schools

Hamilton, Montana

Report of _____

Grade _____

School _____

Teacher _____

Principal _____

Grades
(4,5,6,7,8)

195_

195_

To the Parents:

This pupil progress report is sent home four times a year to inform you of the progress your child is making in the varied activities of the school. Special individual reports will be made at such times as may appear advisable. Please sign and return this report promptly. Your signature shows that you have examined the report and indicates neither approval or disapproval. You are urged to visit the school at any time progress does not appear satisfactory. Parents should confer with the principal or with the teacher after the close of school.

C. D. Haynes
Superintendent

Recommendations

Promoted to grade _____ Retained in grade _____

Principal

(Page two of report form)

Growth in Habits and Attitudes

Explanation of Marks:

Indicates need for improvement

No marks indicate satisfactory growth

"Keep Your Record Clean"

Work and Study Habits

Begins and completes work

promptly

Works with concentration

Is accurate

Does work neatly

Takes part freely and thought-

fully in class activities

Makes effective contribution to

class work

Reporting Periods

:	:	:	:	:
:	1	:	2	:
:	:	:	3	:
:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	4	:
:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:	:
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:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:	:

		Reporting Periods			
		: 1	: 2	: 3	: 4
Finds new tasks when assignments are finished		:	:	:	:
		:	:	:	:
Listens carefully to directions		:	:	:	:
		:	:	:	:
Social and Personal Traits		:	:	:	:
		:	:	:	:
Is courteous and considerate		:	:	:	:
		:	:	:	:
Respects the rights of others		:	:	:	:
		:	:	:	:
Accepts criticisms in the proper spirit		:	:	:	:
		:	:	:	:
Health Habits		:	:	:	:
		:	:	:	:
Practices habits of cleanliness		:	:	:	:
		:	:	:	:
Maintains good posture		:	:	:	:
		:	:	:	:
Apparently gets sufficient sleep		:	:	:	:
		:	:	:	:
Observes common safety rules		:	:	:	:
		:	:	:	:
Citizenship		:	:	:	:
		:	:	:	:
Cooperates in keeping School rules		:	:	:	:
		:	:	:	:
Cooperates in keeping Bus rules		:	:	:	:
		:	:	:	:

Attendance and Growth Record

	:Days :Present	:Days :Absent	:Times :Tardy	:	Height	:	Weight	:
1st Period	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
2nd Period	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
3rd Period	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
4th Period	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:

(Page three of report form)

Progress in Subject Matter and Skills

These marks indicate two aspects of your child's development: How well he is progressing according to his ability, and how his achievement compares with grade standards.

For Subjects:

S indicates satisfactory progress consistent with ability

N indicates need for more effort if progress is to be consistent with ability

+ Achievement above grade level

- Achievement below grade level

No mark indicates achievement average for grade level

For Individual Skills:

No Mark--satisfactory

- Need for improvement

Arithmetic

Increasing knowledge of
fundamentals

Works with accuracy

Shows reasoning ability

Art

Reporting Periods					
:	:	:	:	:	:
:	1	:	2	:	3
:	:	:	:	:	4
:	:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:	:	:
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:	:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:	:	:

		Reporting Periods				
		:	:	:	:	:
		:	1	:	2	:
		:	:	:	3	:
		:	:	:	:	4
		:	:	:	:	:
Writing		:	:	:	:	:
History		:	:	:	:	:
Geography		:	:	:	:	:
	Learns essential facts and is	:	:	:	:	:
	developing an interest and	:	:	:	:	:
	understanding of the world	:	:	:	:	:
	about him	:	:	:	:	:
	Makes effective use of refer-	:	:	:	:	:
	ences	:	:	:	:	:
Hygiene		:	:	:	:	:
Language		:	:	:	:	:
	Speaks distinctly in a	:	:	:	:	:
	pleasing tone	:	:	:	:	:
	Expresses thoughts well orally	:	:	:	:	:
	Expresses thoughts well in	:	:	:	:	:
	writing	:	:	:	:	:
	Uses correct English	:	:	:	:	:
Music		:	:	:	:	:
	Shows knowledge of music	:	:	:	:	:
	fundamentals	:	:	:	:	:
	Enjoys participation	:	:	:	:	:
Reading		:	:	:	:	:
	Reads with understanding	:	:	:	:	:
	Reads at a satisfactory rate	:	:	:	:	:
	Reads widely	:	:	:	:	:

	Reporting Periods				
Science	:	:	:	:	:
Spelling	:	:	:	:	:
Masters spelling of new words	:	:	:	:	:
Uses correct spelling in	:	:	:	:	:
written work	:	:	:	:	:
Promotion in Danger	:	:	:	:	:

(Page four of report form)

Teacher's Comments

The space below may be used to report additional information to the parent.

1st period _____

2nd period _____

3rd period _____

4th period _____

Parents' Comments and Signature

Please sign your name on the space provided below, and write any comments you wish.

1st period _____ Signature _____

2nd period _____ Signature _____

3rd period _____ Signature _____

4th period _____ Signature _____

Our P.T.A. meets regularly on the _____
of each month.

The following matters should be made the subject
of a personal interview or conference: Special abilities,
physical health, mental health, conduct, or immaturity
which makes the grading of his progress difficult.

APPENDIX B

COPY OF TENTATIVE REPORT FORM, FOLDER TYPE, 4½" by 8"

Questionnaire to Parents

Hamilton Public Schools

To the Parents:

We are anxious to enlist your cooperation in a study of our report cards. The schools have long used report cards as one of several methods of reporting on the activities of your child at school. The purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain information on what points you would like to have reported.

Traditional report cards (present reporting practice) listed a mark based upon how well a pupil mastered certain subject matter and skills, and he was graded in competition with his classmates.

The suggested New Type report card differs from the traditional type in two principal aspects. First, it attempts to indicate the growth and progress of the pupil in such facts as desirable habits, attitudes, social and personal traits, citizenship and health goals. Secondly, the new type card attempts to measure the knowledge and skills of a child in relation with his abilities to learn, and not in comparison with the achievements of his classmates. Note: in conjunction with this grade it seems advisable to also list a mark indicative of the pupils ability relative to a grade standard. This policy is based

on the belief that all pupils vary in ability and maturation, and if a pupil of limited ability works to his capacity, he should receive a satisfactory mark even though his achievement is below the standard set for the grade.

Please indicate your opinions on the following points:

1. Which of the following three types of report card would you prefer?

A. A report card that judged your child's achievement in comparison with class standards?

Yes _____ No _____ Undecided _____

B. A report card that indicated your child's achievement in comparison with his ability to achieve?

Yes _____ No _____ Undecided _____

C. A report card that indicated both these factors?

Yes _____ No _____ Undecided _____

2. How do you believe a report on your child's attitudes, habits, social and personality traits should rate in importance with a report on his subject matter achievement?

Of More Importance _____ Of Less Importance _____

3. If your child is not making satisfactory progress in school, how would you prefer to be informed?

By regular report card alone _____

By regular report card supplemented with teacher
comments _____

By regular report card and conference with the
teacher _____

By regular report cards, teacher comments and
conference _____

4. Do you prefer a report card with space for teacher
comments?

Yes _____

No _____

5. Do you prefer a report card with space for parent
comments?

Yes _____

No _____