

Understanding your child's report card

By Jane Whiting

It's report card season and hopefully your child is making the grade! However, the reporting process can be difficult to understand with marks that may be hard to decipher. To help parents with this, the Ontario Ministry of Education provides grade guides to the Provincial Report Card which include the following useful information:

Q: What should elementary school parents know about the reporting process?

A: The Provincial Report Card for Grades 1 to 8 ensures that all students attending publicly funded elementary schools in Ontario receive a standard report card based on the Ontario curriculum expectations. The report card provides clear, detailed, straightforward information to parents about how their child is achieving and progressing in school in relation to provincial curriculum expectations and standards. It is designed to involve students in assessing their own progress and setting goals, and to provide parents with the information they need to identify how they can support their child's learning at home.

Q: How important is the report card as a measurement of achievement?

A: The Provincial Report Card is only one among several means used by teachers for reporting student achievement to parents and students. Communication about student achievement should be continuous throughout the year and should include, in addition to the report card, such things as parent-student-teacher conferences, portfolios of student work, interviews, phone calls, informal reports, and so on.

Q: Do all elementary report cards look the same?

A: There are two main versions of the Provincial Report Card: one for Grades 1 to 6 and one for Grades 7 and 8. There are two key differences between these versions. First, letter grades are used to show achievement in Grades 1 to 6, while percentage marks are used in Grades 7 and 8. Second, the Grade 7 and 8 version shows the average for the grade. There is also a version for the use of Catholic schools, which includes a section called "Religious and Family Life Education."

Q: Why do report cards use letter grades and percentage marks for levels of achievement?

A: Achievement is reported on the Provincial Report Card using letter grades and percentage marks. For all students in Grades 1 to 6, student achievement should be reported as a letter grade (A, B, C, etc.) with a plus or minus sign as required. For all students in Grades 7 and 8, student achievement should be reported as a percentage mark (85, 72, etc.).

Q: What do these letter grades and percentage marks represent?

A: The chart under “Achievement of the Provincial Curriculum Expectations” explains the meaning of the letter grades and percentage marks. The chart shows how the four levels of achievement used for assessment in the new ministry curriculum documents correspond to the letter grades/percentage marks used for reporting. Each range of letter grades/percentage marks matches one of the four levels of achievement. For example, A– to A+ or 80 per cent to 100 per cent matches level 4.

Q: What is the “Provincial Guide for Grading”?

A: Teachers will use the general descriptors in the four achievement levels as the basis for assessing student work. These descriptors encourage teachers and students to focus on what the student has learned and provide specific information to students about what they can do to improve. There is no expectation that a certain number of students must be allocated to any one level of achievement. Teachers will use a variety of methods to assess what students know and are able to do during each reporting period and identify the most consistent level of achievement for reporting purposes.

Q: What is the Provincial Standard?

A: Level 3 (which corresponds to B– to B+ or 70 per cent to 79 per cent) is the provincial standard. Level 3 is a high level of achievement of the provincial curriculum expectations. Parents of students achieving at level 3 in a particular grade can be confident that their child will be prepared for the next grade.

Q: What does it mean to get an “A” or “R”?

An A– to A+ (or 80 per cent to 100 per cent) corresponds to level 4 of the provincial curriculum expectations and states: “The student has demonstrated the

required knowledge and skills. Achievement exceeds the provincial standard.” Achievement at level 4 does not mean the child is working beyond the expectations for the grade. It does, however, indicate a grasp of the knowledge and skills specified for the grade that is significantly above average

The Meaning of “R” or “Below 50” does not correspond to one of the four achievement levels and is used for reporting purposes to flag the need for remediation and parent involvement. “R” signals that additional learning is required before the student will begin to achieve success with this grade’s expectations. “R” indicates the need for the development of a plan to address the student’s specific learning needs and to ensure success for learning.

Q: How is the “Grade Average” determined?

A: A grade average is reported only for Grades 7 and 8 at the elementary level. It is the average of the marks of all students in the school in this grade for the subject /strand. All percentage marks entered in the grade/mark column are included in the grade average.

This article originally appeared in the November 2009 issue of Capital Parent Newspaper.