

New Reports for Old

OLIN J. WILLS

The kinds of reports which children carry home have always been a source of deep concern for parents, teachers, and children. What these reports do to children as well as their effectiveness in translating the school's instructional program to parents are matters for grave consideration. Olin J. Wills, chairman, Records and Reports Committee, Lincoln High School, Portland, Ore., describes one situation in which all persons concerned worked together toward improved preparation of these reports.

FOLLOWING a parent-teacher survey of opinion on reporting practices in Portland (Ore.) schools, a school committee on records and reports was set up early in the spring of 1945 as a sub-committee of a long-range Curriculum Council Committee working in the area of "Child Growth and Development." Invitations to membership were issued by the director of curriculum to persons who had indicated previous interest and to staff members recommended by administrators. The initial group consisted of twenty-five members and fourteen consultants representing the teachers of the primary, intermediate, high schools, and special schools, the high school vice-principals, the elementary and high school principals, the supervisors and directors, and parent-teacher associations.

Meetings were held bi-weekly after school hours until June. During this time evaluation, marking, and reporting were defined as specific problems to be studied. Literature in this field was abstracted and discussed and a collection of reporting forms in current use in other cities begun.

General principles that evolved from this work were:

The report to parents should represent the philosophy and purpose of the school system in which it is used.

The report should be so constructed as to be understood by the child and the parents.

Any notice of unsatisfactory work should be accompanied by an explanation of causes of the difficulty and by suggestions for remedial measures.

The child should have an opportunity to assist in evaluating his own growth for the report to his parents.

The tone of the report should be warm and personal.

The report should include an estimate of the intellectual, physical, social, and emotional aspects of the child's growth. The report should be a confidential matter which is the concern only of the school, the parents, and the child.

The proposed report form should avoid the use of marking systems which make unnecessary comparisons among pupils in subject achievement, in effort, or in ability. It should be helpful to pupil and parent in evaluating growth in terms of the child's *own* needs, achievements, and potentialities.

The report should provide space for written comment by teacher to parent. The report should provide space for a comment by the parent to the teacher. Separate forms should be supplied for use in the primary grades (1-3), in the intermediate-upper grades (4-8), and in the high schools.

That portion of the report devoted to the behavior of the child should be made in positive terms.

The regular report should be sent home less frequently with more complete information included. It should be supplemented by personal notes or interviews whenever special problems arise.

The system of reporting should not make undue demands upon the time of the teacher.

Whenever a child is not making satisfactory progress, the teacher should call the parent in for a conference before the end of the term.

A committee of ten principals continued the study half time for six weeks during the summer of 1945. They contributed three provisional reporting forms.

Ideas Are Submitted

In September the original committee resumed work. Subcommittees were set up to work in the primary, intermediate, and high school fields. As ideas took shape in these small groups, they were submitted to the whole group. When approved, they were mimeographed and submitted to the administrative-supervisory group, and in turn by the school principals to their teachers for comment. Three forms were developed in this manner and these were submitted to the Curriculum Council for approval. The council recommended their acceptance to the superintendent's staff, after a number of changes.

The cards were approved for trial use for the spring 1946 term. The teaching staff of forty-three out of fifty-nine elementary schools and five out of eleven high schools elected to try the cards on an experimental basis for one term. One special high school came in on request.

It was recognized that just as various groups were represented in the development of the form, so was it necessary to make careful preparation for its first use. Before the cards were issued, a mimeographed "Guide to the Use of the New Progress Report" was sent to all participating schools and a letter from the superintendent was distributed to parents, telling them of the experimental use of the new reporting forms. Articles were also submitted to the daily newspapers and student papers. The superintendent described the change in reports in a radio broadcast, and a panel discussion was placed on the air. Parent-teacher groups followed up by setting up small study groups in each school after a trial use of the new report form.

"Evaluation Questionnaires for the Tentative Progress Record Card" were distributed to all parents, teachers, and students above the fifth grade near the end of the term.

These asked:

1. Do you like the analyzed picture of what students actually do in different school situations? Why?
2. Do you approve of marking on the basis of the progress the child makes in relation to what he is able to do? Why?
3. If your answer is "No" in no. 2, what other marking system would you recommend?
4. How often would you like the card sent home?
5. What do you like most about the card?
6. What do you dislike most about the card?
7. What suggestions do you have for improving or clarifying the card?
8. Have you attended any study or discussion meetings on the report cards?
9. In general, do you approve of the new report card?

Results Are Tallied

Returns were received from over 15,000 parents, 10,000 students, and 745 teachers. Majority approval was secured from parents and teachers for the basic questions nos. 1, 2, and 9. High school students approved only #“2.” Many constructive suggestions were elicited by the other parts of the questionnaire.

A section of the Summer 1946 Curriculum Workshop was assigned to the revision of the tentative cards in the light of the above returns. Invitations to parents, teachers, and administrators were extended through all participating schools. Responses were confined to four elementary principals, two high school vice-principals, and four parents.

This group made a further study of the available literature on the development of school reports, individual differences in relation to reporting, effects of grades on mental health, promotional policies and college entrance requirements, and relation of reports to cumulative records. This study and the following discussion crystallized the following points of view:

The members of the section feel that evaluation, marking, and reporting are not the whole of, but parts of, the educational process and that intelligent use of these parts can give direction to the teaching-learning process. They believe that:

The whole child is involved in the learning process—the physical, social, and emotional, as well as the mental. Evaluation must consider these.

The child as an individual is unique in regards to his interests, abilities, needs, and previous experiences. Competitive marking ignores this uniqueness and gives rise to undesirable tensions.

Desirable outcomes are much broader than mere retention of subject matter.

They must include subject skills and understandings, and habits and attitudes.

Desirable outcomes may be secured by use of a wide variety of material and activities. It is not necessary for all children to meet exactly the same requirements.

Students should participate in the evaluation and marking process.

The use of report cards is but one of the ways of keeping parents informed.

The members also agree that the improvement of reporting is not a simple matter of manipulation of symbols, but rather a difficult task involving formulation of educational objectives, the determination of individual abilities, and the reporting of evaluations to parents in an understandable manner.

With this as a background they revised the cards on the basis of majority approval and comment and submitted these revisions in discussion meetings to other workshop groups, the elementary and high school principals, and the supervisory staff members as consultants.

A New Format Evolves

The forms resulting from such interaction were submitted to the superintendent's staff directly, since the Curriculum Council holds no summer meetings. After further changes the progress reports were approved for use in all of the city schools for 1946-47.

The elementary forms have specific statements of what students actually do in school. Under headings such as: "Habits and Attitudes," and "Learning to Share and Receive Ideas," one finds "Writes legibly," "Reads with interest," and "Is courteous and considerate."

On the high school card each subject area is divided into two sections for reporting:

"Achievement in skills and understandings."

"Habits and Attitudes," which includes four specific items such as "Organizes and completes work," and "Respects rights of others," with spaces for three items more peculiar to the teaching methods, subject, or student.

The marking system is the same for all three cards. By reporting to parents and students whether the child's achievement is (1) better than, (2) consistent with, or (3) poorer than could be expected in the light of what the school knows about him, it is hoped that situations will be created in which poor students can succeed and good students will be stimulated to capacity.

Spaces are provided for teacher and parent comments, and a message to parents encouraging them to seek school conferences for more information.

The high school card promises, in addition:

During the year we will report to you

in person or by letter on:

1. How the pupil's progress compares with that of his group.
2. How well he is acquiring such basic skills as those involved in communicating ideas and using numbers.

"Reports on the Development of and Suggestions for the Use of the New Progress Records" were distributed to all schools with the cards. Principals were asked to hold study and discussion meetings with their teachers and parents. The teachers in turn were to discuss the revised forms with their students.

A vigorous sales campaign has been studiously avoided. Newspaper interviews, guest editorials, letters to the editor, and radio appearances have been used in moderation. It is the ardent hope of the sponsors that parents, teachers, and students will explore with open minds the value of the new forms and present constructive comment to the schools at the close of the year.

Youngsters Take a Hand

PAUL R. GRIM

If evaluation of child growth is to be truly effective, it must keep in step with the changes fundamental to good development. Paul R. Grim, director, Student Teaching, College of Education, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, reminds us that in this measurement of attainments the child himself must have his share in appraisal.

AS OTHER ARTICLES have pointed out in this issue, the modern concept and practice of evaluation is comprehensive in scope, going far beyond the traditional process of testing, measuring, or examining. Evaluation is the process

of gathering and interpreting evidence regarding the progress and problems of the learner in achieving desirable educational objectives. It is based upon the assumption that the *values of curricular experiences are to be determined*. The

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