

A STUDY OF THE METHODS OF REPORTING
PUPIL PROGRESS TO PARENTS
USED BY THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
OF NORTH DAKOTA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Reporting pupil progress to parents has never been easy, and it is apparently becoming more difficult. In recent years the emphasis has shifted from a report of textbook learning alone to reporting that now includes both academic and social progress.¹

Schools are experimenting with many methods of reporting, including conferences, notes, letters, and different versions of report cards. The traditional report card, although still used extensively in many schools, has been in question, as evidenced by the many attempts to modify, supplement, or eliminate the report card.

Reports in educational journals, research bulletins, and periodicals have shown a marked concern by administrators, teachers, and parents pertaining to reporting practices in elementary schools. Emphasis of the individual as an important constituent element in the culture has increased the importance of providing better and improved reporting techniques.

Problems inherited in the "report card only" method of reporting pupil progress were experienced by the writer during his first year as superintendent of schools at Palermo, North Dakota. The traditional report card had been used exclusively at Palermo during the preceding years. Individual interpretation of marking and evaluation

¹"Destination: The Home," Pebbles, NEA, 1960, p. 22.

procedures resulted in tension between teachers. Lack of communications between teachers and parents presented many problems concerning homework, poor grades, and decisions to retain or promote.

Some of the questions which confronted the writer in his attempt to improve reporting methods at the Palermo school were the following:

1. What methods of reporting have been used by other schools in North Dakota?
2. How often should pupil progress be reported to parents?
3. Which method is best in promoting better understanding between parents and teachers?
4. Which method is best at encouraging parents to co-operate with the teachers?
5. Which method best reports the progress of the slow learner?
6. Which method is best regarding fairness to all children, even those who work hard and accomplish little?
7. What are the current trends in reporting methods in the state of North Dakota?

This research study has been designed to help answer the above questions.

The Problem

It was the purpose of this study to discover what methods of reporting pupil progress to parents are used in the elementary schools of North Dakota, to evaluate the effectiveness of these methods, and to present a method for improving the reporting procedures in the elementary school at Palermo, North Dakota.

Procedures

The first approach to the problem was to make a study of available literature relative to the history, development, and present trends in reporting methods.

Next a questionnaire was formulated concerning many different elements of current reporting practices in the elementary schools of North Dakota. This questionnaire was sent to 142 elementary principals in the minor and fully accredited schools of North Dakota. An opportunity was given each principal to evaluate the reporting methods used in his school. The results of the questionnaire were drawn together in tabular and summary forms for analysis of apparent strengths, weaknesses, and trends.

Limitations

As problems of reporting pupil progress to parents differ so greatly between the highly departmentalized high school and the self-contained classroom of the elementary school, this study has been limited to a study of reporting methods in the elementary schools.

The review of literature was limited to research bulletins and books obtained from the National Education Association and the library of Montana State College.

The survey regarding the reporting methods was limited to a questionnaire-type survey of the elementary principals from all minor and fully accredited elementary schools in North Dakota. Minor and fully accredited schools include all the elementary schools from towns

and cities which have met the requirements set forth by the Department of Public Instruction. Rural schools and consolidated schools from the smaller towns usually receive an "approved" rating and are excluded from the survey.

Definition of Terms

Since they are often misinterpreted, the following words are defined as they are used in this paper.

Evaluation is the total process by which school staffs measure the educational growth or progress of pupils. What is to be evaluated is determined by the purposes of the educational program. Means for evaluation include such procedures as standardized tests, classroom observations and analyses of written work, and individual projects. The teacher's judgment is usually a vital factor in the evaluation process. As a result of evaluation, a teacher should be able to render comprehensive professional judgment on the educational progress the pupils make.

Marking or grading--on the basis of evaluation, a teacher assigns a mark or prepares a summary statement of the progress made by each pupil. Marks or grades may be presented as letters or numbers, or in more elaborate forms. Variation in the form of marking is usually found between elementary and secondary schools and not infrequently within these two levels.

Reporting is the process of communicating results of evaluation and marking. By this means a teacher's interpretation of each pupil's

progress is presented to parents and others concerned. Occurring within the framework of the total educational process, this communication is the basic purpose of reporting.²

The first step in this investigation was a review of literature. The findings of the review of literature are presented in Chapter II.

²Whigham, El. "What Should Report Cards Report?" School Executive, May, 1958, p. 21.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the review of literature for this study, attention was given to the development of reporting methods, and to the objectives and criteria which make up a successful reporting method.

The traditional plan for grading and reporting pupil progress has been under fire for many years, and the literature relating to marking systems has grown voluminous.¹ Parents, teachers, and administrators have been among those writing articles for newspapers, magazines, and research papers discussing current reporting practices. Quite often these articles presented the shortcomings of the reporting methods, yet offered no constructive criteria to correct these shortcomings.

Many experiments and modifications which have taken place in reporting methods during the past 50 years lacked planning, taking place spontaneously without an organized plan of objectives and criteria to fit the specific need.² Wrinkle, director of the campus schools at Colorado State College, recognized the need for objectives and organized planning after 10 years of experimenting with reporting methods, as shown by the following quotation:

¹Traxler, Arthur E., Techniques of Guidance, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1957, p. 233.

²Wrinkle, William L., Improving Marking and Reporting Practices in Elementary and Secondary Schools, Rinehart and Co., New York, 1947, p. 3

Finally, almost ten years later, we discovered that we couldn't report intelligently, unless we first evaluated intelligently, and that we couldn't evaluate intelligently unless we knew what we were trying to do. We then planned everything accordingly--administrative organization, program, materials, methods, evaluation, records, and reports. We should have been smart enough in the beginning to have seen that reporting couldn't be separated from objectives, but there we landed with both feet in the middle of the curriculum problem.³

At the beginning of Formal Public Education in the United States most educators used the same basic traditional report of pupil progress in each subject. The traditional reporting method is discussed in the following section.

Traditional Reporting Methods

The traditional method of reporting pupil progress was a "report card only" method. The report cards of a generation and more ago were confined mainly to a record of grades in school subjects with the addition of an item for the number of days absent and tardy and one for deportment or conduct.⁴

The marks or grades which appeared on the traditional report card were originally percentage grades; 75, 85, etc. with a low grade of 70 or 75 required for passing. These percentage grades were used by nearly all early grammar schools, high schools, and colleges in the United States. Since the early 1900's the percentage

³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴ Ojeman, Ralph H. and McCandless, Ruth A., "Suggestion for a Fundamental Revision of Report Cards", Educational Administration and Supervision, 32: 110-116, February, 1946.

grade has rapidly evolved to the A, B, C, D, and F, or 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or similar rankings.⁵ Wrinkle stated that the greatest single innovation in marking practices, during the 25 years preceding 1947, was the substitution of letter grades for the per cent grades.⁶ Peck, in an article concerning the complexity of certain progressive report cards, mentioned the simplicity of the traditional report card in the following way:

Once upon a time a report card was a concise document, about the size and color of a penny post card. It used the letters A,B,C,D, and F or 1,2,3,4, and 5 or the simple percentage rating from 100 on down. Thus at a glance, one could sum up the progress and scholastic ability of any child. Either he did or didn't and that was about it.⁷

It seems generally agreed that although the traditional report card was simple it could not stand alone in reporting pupil progress satisfactorily in the elementary school. There has been much dissatisfaction by teachers, parents, and administrators with traditional reporting methods. From the standpoint of teachers and parents, grades alone have had definite limitations as a vehicle of communications between child, teacher, and parent.⁸ Since teachers' grading standards have varied so much, the marks have been misleading and not understood by parents. Still another objection was that teachers tend to allow

⁵Hill, George, "The Report Card in Present Practice" Educational Method, XV: 115-131, December, 1935.

⁶Wrinkle, op. cit., p. 30.

⁷Peck, Susan, "New Report Cards; For Freud", New York Times Magazine, January, 1951, pp. 31-36.

⁸"Conference Time for Teachers and Parents", National School Public Relations Association, 1961, NEA Library of Congress Catalog No. 61-14064, p.

good or bad behavior, personal likes and dislikes, personal appearance, "apple polishing", and other extraneous influences to affect grades.⁹

The authorities cited thus far pointed out the following limitations of the traditional "report card only" method used in reporting pupil progress to parents.

1. The temptation to use marking as a device to coerce children into better work.
2. Possibility of discouraging child receiving low grades to the point of giving up trying.
3. Probability of developing undesirable attitudes, such as superiority complexes, selfish pride, or snobbery of children who receive high grades.
4. Possibility of over-emphasizing the memorization of facts.
5. The offering of rewards for high grades may encourage the child to resort to undesirable means of securing information by cheating or lying.
6. Possibility of students concerning themselves with grades rather than the desire to improve and grow in the acquisition of knowledge.
7. Possible misunderstandings of objectives by parents.

One argument in favor of the traditional report card, which reports only the pupil development in subject matter, should be acknowledged. It would emphasize the fact that people live in a highly competitive world, where abilities and aptitudes are compared with others throughout life; therefore children should meet this problem in the formative years of childhood. The significance of

⁹Morse, A. D., "Let's Abolish Report Cards", Education Digest, pp. 17-19, October, 1951.

this statement seems hard to rebut and perhaps should be one of the objectives of an improved reporting method.¹⁰

The many modifications and supplements which have been experimented with since 1900 are commonly called "the Progressive Methods" and are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Progressive Methods

Throughout the literature on elementary educational programs there is much emphasis placed upon the development of the whole child. Schools have become concerned with the physical, social, and emotional, as well as with the academic development of children. As a result of this broadened emphasis in teaching the trend has been away from the subject-centered toward the pupil-centered reports. There has been a trend toward using more descriptive and anecdotal material and interpretative comments to supplement the quantitative data.¹¹ The descriptive materials strive to report on social, emotional, personality and character development. The trend has been away from mere judgment-passing and toward the analysis of problems and difficulties, the latter accompanied by concrete suggestions for improvement.¹²

¹⁰Traxler, op. cit., p. 233.

¹¹Whigham, El, "What Should Report Cards Report?" School Executive, 77: 21-23, May, 1958.

¹²Ibid., p. 21.

Progressive methods of reporting pupil progress have included modified report cards, notes and letters, parent-teacher conferences and group conferences. There could be thousands of different modifications and combinations within the basic structure of the four methods listed above. One school may use three conferences and two letters, another may use three letters and one conference and still another may use two conferences and six report cards; any number of different combinations can be conceived. Camp mentioned that the nature of the school and community helped determine which method is best when he reported that:

The first point to be made in any discussion dealing with improvement of reporting techniques is that there is no one "best" way of reporting to parents. The nature of the community and of the school will determine in each case what method of reporting is most satisfactory to all concerned.¹³

Modified Report Card methods are usually a conservative change from the traditional card. The first modifications were checklists, used in an attempt to report items of interest to parents concerning the social and personal life of their children.¹⁴

A second type of modification was an attempt to report grades on a two point scale, S and U, or other equivalent symbols. The literature on marking procedures included articles explaining the advantages and disadvantages of the two point scale, as illustrated

¹³Camp, Louie T., "Improving Reporting Techniques", NEA Journal, 48: 15-28, December, 1959.

¹⁴Traxler, op. cit., p. 233-265.

in the following:

The S and U marking system had its advantages because, since it was more general, the mark became less important, and because it did not discourage poor students. It certainly did reduce the importance attached to marks, and it took the sting out of the D when a student wanted at least a C. But it also deflated the functioning of the marking system with reference to motivation. With the S and U marking system, if all the student is working for is a grade, all he has to do is keep out of the U (the former F) territory.

The experience of many schools that changed to the S and U marking system was that with the removal of the possibility of an A, B, or C many students became concerned only in staying just over the border in the S area. As a corrective move to recover the stimulation which the A had provided, they added a third letter, usually an H which stood for "Honors". Some affixed + and - signs to the H and S (H, H-, S+, S, S-), and they were back almost where they started; they then had a 6 point marking system.¹⁵

Grades and marks alone have not determined the success and failure of reporting systems. The two-point scale proved satisfactory in some schools and unsatisfactory in others. How the marks were reported and understanding between parents and teachers seemed equally important in determining success.¹⁶

Many other modifications of report cards have been used. In Montclair, New Jersey, a reporting method was developed using two cards. One card reported progress in relation to ability while the other reported achievement in actual comparison with national norms.¹⁷

¹⁵Wrinkle, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁷Gitelman, Robert E., "Two Reports are Better Than One", National Educational Association Journal, 48: 33-34, March, 1959.

Gitelman pointed out that the method combines the best of both the traditional and current reporting procedures in the following words:

The debate about report cards is perennial. The widespread current public interest in methods of reporting was focused recently on Montclair, New Jersey, where a reporting method has been developed which seems to combine what is best in traditional and current procedures. Montclair employs a different approach to tell parents what they really want to know about their children.

The Montclair method uses two cards: one, a report of progress, which the child receives three times a year; the other a report of achievement, distributed to parents at a parent teacher conference in November and mailed to the home in June.¹⁸

The Montclair experiment showed co-operation and added interest from parents concerning the objectives of the school and teachers. This success can partially be attributed to extensive planning and a careful outline of objectives.

Notes and letters have often been used in conjunction with report cards in reporting pupil progress. A well written note informing parents on school activities and the experiences of their children can be a big boost towards better communications between teachers and parents.¹⁹ According to Wrinkle, a blank sheet of paper in the hands of a teacher who is capable of writing so that parents can understand could, next to the conference plan, be the best means of reporting.²⁰ The informal letter type of report has

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁹ "Dear Parents", Public Relations Gold Mine, 3: 13-16, National School Public Relations Association, 1961, Washington D. C.

²⁰ Wrinkle, op. cit., p. 54.

real possibilities if the reporting is done by competent, conscientious teachers who are willing to devote a lot of time to reporting.²¹

Limitations on using the letter exclusively for reporting pupil progress included the following:

1. Many teachers cannot do an effective job in making themselves understood in writing.
2. Teachers with a large number of pupils would not have the time to do an effective job.
3. In schools with departmentalized programs it would be difficult for any one teacher to write the report.²²

The National Public Relations Association mentioned that, as a report card supplement, the letter or note can be quite effective, as shown in the following quotation:

The most common report card supplement, and one of the most effective, is the personal note or letter home.

One classroom teacher, new to the school system, tried an interesting variation and sent the parents a report about herself including a short biographical sketch and a statement of her aims as a teacher. The parents liked it.

Rating tops with parents is the little handwritten note that deals in specifics about their child. "Johnny is doing better in reading and spelling but he's failing in arithmetic. I think a little more homework, with your encouragement, will do him a great deal of good."

Carlos Dezafrá, Jr. of Charlotte High School in Rochester, N. Y., writes a personal and congratulatory note to the parents of each youngster in his classes who do above-average work. Parental response was heartwarming.²³

²¹Ibid., p. 54.

²²Ibid., p. 54.

²³"Dear Parents", op. cit., p. 13.

Parent-Teacher Conferences have been becoming an important part of school reporting procedures.²⁴ In many localities individual parent-teachers conferences have been replacing the written report to parents, especially in the lower elementary grades, and school systems in general report a high degree of interest in these conferences.²⁵

Conferences are a two-way exchange of information that can do more than the report card alone as supported by the following quotation:

A teacher-parent conference is a two-way exchange of information about a child. In some communities, it is the sole means of reporting to parents. In others, it supplements a report card. Because it can do so much more than a report card alone, it is becoming a part of more and more school programs. Where the technique has been used and used well, it has been almost inevitably well received.²⁶

Literature revealed that scheduled conferences were experimented with at the beginning of the century. Hanus mentioned the use of parent-teacher conferences as a means of reporting in schools before 1910. Although new at the time, they met with some success wherever used, as shown in the following statement:

²⁴The Parent-Teacher Conference, National Education Association Journal, 48: 21, December, 1959.

²⁵Rupright, Ester, "Let's Talk It Over," Educational Leadership, 7: 312-314, February, 1950.

²⁶Conference Time for Teachers and Parents, National School Public Relations Association, 1961, p. 5.

In some schools a rather elaborate plan has been worked out, during the past few years, whereby parents and teachers necessarily co-operate in caring for the interest of their common charges. By means of question blanks sent to the parents, much information concerning each child is secured by the teachers, and this information is made the basis of conferences between parents and teachers. This plan has also usually included blanks for recording information about pupils by teachers, for transmission to other teachers or schools as the pupil advances from one grade to another or from one school to another.

The entire plan has been called "Pupil Study". It seems to be useful and bids fair to win favor gradually wherever it is undertaken. There is no doubt, I think, that when wisely administered such a plan may provide an excellent basis for effective co-operation between teachers, and between parents and teachers in promoting not only the pupil's physical welfare, but a wise treatment of the pupil in every detail of his school career.²⁷

For the past 35 years the Shorewood, Wisconsin, schools have used parent-teacher conferences.²⁸ In the elementary schools, two conferences are held with the parents of each child yearly, although additional conferences are often held. Pupils, as well as parents and teachers, often participate in these conferences. They are included at the elementary level when the teacher sees a need for this.

Conferences are intended to bring together the parent and teacher. They may compare notes concerning the child at school and at home. A recent publication mentioned that parents and teachers

²⁷Hanus, Paul H., Modern School, Macmillian Co., New York, 1911, pp. 127-128.

²⁸"The Parent-Teacher Conference," National Education Journal, 48: 21, December, 1959.

may gain an insight to what the child is like at home or in the school in this manner:

The individual parent-teacher conference begins where other reporting methods end. The parent brings to the conference his own very special understandings of what the child is like at home. The teacher brings insight of what the child is like at school. With these two perspectives in focus, everyone gains, especially the child.²⁹

Although parent-teacher conferences have been quite successful in most elementary schools that use them, planning objectives and methods so that parents and teachers have a complete understanding of the materials and procedures used has increased the chance of success. Regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences are not easy, they require time to plan, organize and follow through.³⁰ The National School Public Relations Association reported that: "The entire school system benefits from effective conferences as the public relations value alone pays rich dividends."³¹

Group Conferences between a teacher and a group of parents has provided still another basis for co-operative effort. Such group conferences give teachers an opportunity to describe to parents the activity carried on in a classroom situation.³² Group conferences of this kind have usually been promoted by the school or the teacher

²⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 21.

³¹ Ibid., p. 21

³² Ibid., p. 21.

and have not had all the characteristics of naturally stimulated co-operative effort, yet they have often been the beginning to a program in which parents participate quite freely. Parents are interested in the learning experiences of their child, they want to know about marks and homework.³³ The following quotation illustrates the fullness of group conferences in answering questions of general interest:

Nearly all parents want to know some of the same things. They're usually curious about what is to be taught and how. They want to know about school marks and homework. They want to know what they should and should not do. These questions are important--they're general--and they can be answered at a group conference. Such meetings offer parents a general background for understanding what the school is trying to do. Group meetings allow more time for specific talk about Freddy when Mother and Teacher meet at their individual conference. As a prelude to individual conferences, the group conference pays big dividends--and school systems from coast to coast are finding this so.³⁴

The review of literature brought out the following trends of reporting methods.

Trends

De Pencier in a study of practices in reporting pupil progress in the elementary grades, 1938-1949, reported the following trends:

1. A trend toward considering the child as a whole and reporting his total development.

³³ Alexander, William M., "Reporting to Parents-Why? What? How?," NEA Journal 48: 15-28, December, 1959.

³⁴ Public Relations Gold Mine, Vol. 2, p. 13.

2. The trend in frequency of issuance of reports is away from nine times a year and toward six times a year or even fewer.
3. A trend away from the use of specific ratings, such as percentage marks, A, B, C, D ratings etc.
4. A trend toward closer relations between home and school.
5. A trend towards wider use of parent-teacher conferences, and toward administrative adjustment to make marking an integral part of the school program instead of an appendage.³⁵

A review of current literature indicated that the trends mentioned by De Pencier 12 years ago enumerated the current trends. In an NEA Research study of administrative practices in urban school districts in 1958-59 the following trends were noted:

1. About half the urban school systems send parents at least six reports a year on the progress of their children.
2. More than 3/4 of the districts report pupil progress in elementary schools by means of both parent conferences and report cards.
3. The trend at all levels is away from reporting by card only and toward reporting by card plus a conference with the parents.³⁶

A trend towards improving school-home relations, parent participation and co-operation in an effort to increase the educational opportunities for each child was mentioned in numerous recent articles. Matthews mentioned the co-operative planning of a reporting

³⁵De Pencier, Ida B., "Trends in Reporting Pupil Progress in the Elementary Grades", 519-523, Elementary School Journal, May, 1951

³⁶NEA Research Bulletin

method by teachers and parents in the North Elementary School at Delaware, Ohio. After an extensive investigation into reporting methods, they adopted a combination letter, conference and discarded the report card completely. It met with success and after two years reported favorable reaction from the majority of parents.³⁷

The "trends" as reported in literature are not necessarily common in the field. The printed materials represented forward thinking and experimenting. Common practice often lags behind.³⁸

³⁷ Matthews, Vera A., "We Abolished Grades", NEA, 48:25, December, 1959.

³⁸ De Pencier, op. cit., pp. 519-523.

SUMMARY

Throughout the vast amount of literature regarding methods for reporting pupil progress to parents there seemed to be general agreement that the traditional "report card only" method can not do the job satisfactorily. The traditional method has shown definite limitations as to what it can report.

Educators constantly experimented with varied methods in an attempt to improve reporting procedures. The resulting new methods have been termed progressive methods and include modified report cards and letters, notes, parent-teacher conferences, and group conferences and varied combinations of these.

Report card and card supplements are constantly undergoing revision. Generally these changes have been attempts at reporting social and personal progress. The modifications included new symbols, two-point scale (S-U), two grades (one against ability, the other against national norm) and check lists on personal and social traits.

These modifications, when well planned and defined for the teachers and parents, often met with success. However, much of the literature reviewed included articles outlining the limitations of such modifications.

Notes and letters have been used as a report card supplement. In the hands of a capable teacher the letters can be interesting and informative and are generally well liked. It seems agreed that, although a good reporting supplement, letters and notes exclusively cannot do the job of reporting pupil progress satisfactorily.

Parent-teacher conferences have generally met with success wherever used and of the progressive methods is the most widely accepted. Schools using parent-teacher conferences generally indicated no tendency towards change. There was a definite trend by elementary schools toward parent-teacher conferences in combination with report cards.

Group conferences with parents have helped explain the objectives of the school and teachers, resulting in better understanding and co-operation by parents.

The findings of the survey by questionnaire regarding the reporting methods in the elementary schools of North Dakota are presented in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF SURVEY

A questionnaire was sent to 142 elementary principals of minor and fully accredited schools in North Dakota as listed in the 1961-62 North Dakota Educational Directory.¹ Ninety-eight questionnaires were completed and returned. This was a 69% response. The results of this questionnaire are presented in this chapter.

Structure of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was constructed by the writer to determine answers for the following questions regarding the reporting methods in the Elementary Schools of North Dakota.

1. What methods of reporting have been used by other schools in North Dakota?
2. How often should pupil progress be reported to parents?
3. Which method is best in promoting better understanding between parents and teachers?
4. Which method is best at encouraging parents to co-operate with the teachers?
5. Which method best reports the progress of the slow learner?
6. Which method is best regarding fairness to all children, even those who work hard and accomplish little?
7. What are the current trends in reporting methods in the state of North Dakota?

¹See Appendix A, p. 35

Methods of Reporting

Some form of parent-teacher conference was used by 69% of the schools responding in this research. Less than 24% of the schools rely solely on the report card. All other methods together make up the remaining nine per cent.

In schools using the parent-teacher conferences method, 61% scheduled conferences for all parents, while 39% held special conferences for cases resulting from discipline or failing work. Usually the principal or teacher decided which parents needed to be called in for special conferences.

TABLE I. FREQUENCY OF USE OF VARIOUS METHODS OF REPORTING IN THE MINOR AND FULLY ACCREDITED ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF NORTH DAKOTA, 1961-62

Method Used	Number	Percent
Report cards and special conferences	26	26.6
Report cards only.	24	24.5
Report cards and scheduled conferences		
2 conferences	20	20.4
1 conference.	18	18.4
3 conferences	1	1.0
Report cards and letters	6	6.1
Conferences only	2	2.0
Letters only	1	1.0
Total	98	100.0

Frequency of Reporting

In the elementary schools of North Dakota, the pattern was for progress reports to be issued four or six times each year. These two practices were used in 90% of the schools. Those reporting six times a year account for 72.5%, while those reporting four times a year account for 18.4% of the total responding.

About five percent of the schools reported to parents as infrequently as two or three times a year. In contrast, 4.1% reported nine times a year.

Strength of Reporting Methods

The elementary principals were asked to classify their reporting methods either "weak" or "strong" according to the following four points.

1. Promotes better understanding between the parents and teachers.
2. Encourages parents to co-operate with the teachers.
3. Reports the status of the slow learner satisfactorily.
4. Fair to all children, even those who work hard and accomplish little.

A tabulation of the responses to the questionnaire is shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Points 1 and 2 on the "report card only" method of reporting were rated strong by nearly 75% of the principals, while about 60% of the principals rated points 3 and 4 weak.

TABLE 2. NUMBER AND PER CENT* OF 98 NORTH DAKOTA ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS RATING METHODS OF REPORTING PUPIL PROGRESS STRONG OR WEAK ON PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING AND ENCOURAGING CO-OPERATION BY PARENTS, 1961-1962

Method of Reporting	Promotes Understanding				Encourages Co-operation			
	Strong #	Strong %	Weak #	Weak %	Strong #	Strong %	Weak #	Weak %
Report cards only	19	73	5	19	21	81	4	15.4
Report cards and special conferences	5	21	18	75	5	21	17	71.0
Report cards and scheduled conferences to all parents								
1 conference	18	100	0	-	15	83.4	2	11.2
2 conferences	20	100	0	-	19	95.0	1	5.0
3 conferences	1	100			1	100		
Conferences only	2	100			2	100		
Report cards and letters	5	83	1	17	4	67.0	1	17.0
Letters only	1	100			1	100		

*Some principals did not rate their systems for all four points, thus totals under each point will vary, percentages have been figured using total number of schools in each method of reporting.

TABLE 3. NUMBER AND PER CENT* OF 98 NORTH DAKOTA ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS' RATING METHODS OF REPORTING PUPIL PROGRESS STRONG OR WEAK, ON REPORTING THE PROGRESS OF THE SLOW LEARNER AND FAIRNESS TO ALL CHILDREN, 1961-1962

Method of Reporting	Progress of Slow Learners				Fairness to All Children			
	Strong #	Strong %	Weak #	Weak %	Strong #	Strong %	Weak #	Weak %
Report cards only	8	30.8	16	61.5	6	23	15	56
Report cards and special conferences	4	17.0	19	79.0	4	17	18	75
Report cards and scheduled conferences for parents								
1 conference	10	55.5	4	22.0	13	72.3	1	5.5
2 conferences	13	65.0	7	35.0	18	90.0	2	10
3 conferences	1	100			1	100		
Conferences only	2	100			2	100		
Report cards and letters	2	33.0	3	50.0	2	33.0	4	67
Letters only	1	100			1	100		

*Some principals did not rate their systems for all four points, thus totals under each point will vary, percentages have been figured using total number of schools in each method of reporting.

Nearly 75% of the principals using "report cards and special conferences" rated this method weak in all four points.

Principals using "report cards with scheduled conferences" generally rated this method strong, although there were some indecisions, along with weaker ratings on points 3 and 4.

The two principals using "conferences only" and the one principal using "letters only" rated each method strong in all four points.

Principals using "report cards and letters" rated this method strong on points 1 and 2, and weak on points 3 and 4.

Trends

The predominant trend in reporting procedures of the elementary schools of North Dakota was toward the use of parent-teacher conferences. A change was anticipated in 67% of the 24 schools using report cards as the sole means of reporting. In all of the schools planning changes, parent-teacher conferences were being considered. Lack of communication with parents was given as one of the main reasons for this tendency to change reporting procedures. The following quote given by one of the principals completing the questionnaire was typical: "I believe that it (report card only method) is somewhat out of date due to changes in techniques and increasing interest of parents in school affairs."

In elementary schools using report cards and special conferences, 54% planned a change of reporting procedures. Half of those schools planned to add some form of regularly scheduled conferences.

The remaining half planned varied modifications of their present systems, modifying the report card or changing from special conferences to scheduled conferences.

Those elementary schools using the combination card conference method showed very little tendency for change. The changes which were mentioned included adding another conference or modifying the mechanics of the present systems.

The nine schools using conferences only, report cards with letters, and letters only, reported that no changes were being considered.

Summary

The following is a summary of facts concerning reporting methods in the elementary schools of North Dakota as brought out by the questionnaire:

1. About 73% of the schools issue reports to parents six times a year. Others vary from two reports to as many as nine each school year.
2. The traditional report card as the sole means of reporting is being replaced by a combination report card with parent-teacher conferences. Conferences scheduled for all parents account for 42%, while 27% of the schools use special conferences only in cases of disciplinary problems or failing work.
3. Schools using regularly scheduled conferences in conjunction with a report card were experiencing the best participation and co-operation from parents.
4. The trend was away from reporting by report card only and toward reporting by a combination card conference method, with regular scheduled conferences for all parents.

5. About 75% of the principals, using parent-teacher conferences for special cases only, indicated their method was "weak" on all four "strengths" surveyed.

The summary, conclusions, and recommendations for this study are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to discover what methods of reporting pupil progress to parents are used in the elementary schools of North Dakota, to evaluate the effectiveness of these methods, and to present a method for improving the reporting procedures in the elementary school at Palermo, North Dakota.

A review of literature indicated that the traditional "report card only" method of reporting pupil progress did not do the job satisfactorily. Various experiments and modifications of the traditional reporting method have been undertaken. These deviations from the traditional method were termed "progressive" and included letters and notes, parent-teacher conferences, group conferences and various checklists. The review of literature revealed a definite trend toward the use of conferences with parents as supplements for report cards.

A mailed questionnaire was chosen as the means for the collection of data. Questionnaires were returned by 98 of the 142 elementary principals in North Dakota. The responses to the questionnaire indicated that most schools in North Dakota issue reports to parents four or six times a year. Parent-teacher conferences were used in 69% of the schools responding to the questionnaire. Principals using scheduled conferences for all parents rated the method strong while principals using special conferences rated this method weak. A definite trend was indicated toward the use of parent-teacher conferences in combination with report cards in the elementary schools of

North Dakota.

From the results of this study, the following findings would seem to emerge:

1. A reporting method should aid and improve the educational opportunities of each child.
2. A reporting method should provide a channel between parents and teachers for transmission of clear and concise information on the progress of each child.
3. A reporting method should provide information to the pupil concerning his progress--information the child may use to improve himself socially as well as academically.
4. Changing symbols to S and U or other symbolizations without sufficient planning and orientation for teachers and parents tends to cause misunderstandings and confusion.
5. Schools using scheduled conferences for all parents generally experience better co-operation from parents than the schools using special conferences in cases of discipline or failing work.
6. Group conferences between a teacher and a group of parents can be useful in answering general questions pertaining to the objectives of the school and teacher.
7. Letters and notes used as the sole means of reporting pupil progress can be successful in the hands of an exceptional teacher, yet may be inadequate in the hands of the poor teacher. However, letters and notes used as supplements to report cards can be very helpful.

Conclusions

On the basis of this investigation the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The traditional "report card only" method of reporting pupil progress to parents is inadequate for reporting pupil progress in the elementary school.
2. For the improvement of the reporting procedures at Palermo, the following methods were adopted.

- a. The use of a standard report card, using the symbols (A, B, C, D, and F), should be continued.
- b. Periodic evaluation and reports should continue to be issued six times a year.
- c. Provisions for two regular scheduled conferences each year for all parents, with the first conference scheduled at the end of the first six weeks period, a second conference at the end of the fifth six weeks, and extra conferences at the request of the teacher or parent. Time for these conferences should be secured by dismissal of all the elementary pupils for an entire day. Conferences should be of 15 minutes duration with a 5 minute period between conferences.

3. The administrator and teachers need to work together co-operatively in planning and administering the conferences, each doing his specific duties as follows:

A. Administrative Responsibilities.

- 1. Supply conference handbooks for teachers.
- 2. Supply conference handbooks for parents.
- 3. Write an orientation letter to parents explaining the purpose of the conferences.
- 4. Arrange for release time (use a full day) and set up time schedule beginning at 8:00 A.M.
- 5. Supply teachers with a standard form for notifying parents the time and date of each conference.
- 6. Schedule faculty meetings to discuss and arrange individual conferences, taking into consideration the parents occupation and number of different conferences each pair of parents will have to attend and taking care to arrange consecutive conferences for those parents who have children in more than one room.
- 7. Arrange for high school girls to act as receptionists.
- 8. Be available when needed.

B. Teachers Responsibilities.

1. Brief pupils as to the purpose and mechanics of the conference.
2. Send out the standard form to parents, giving the time and date of their conference.
3. Arrange the room in a neat and orderly manner.
4. Prepare for the conference by including a sample of the pupil's work, his anecdotal record, special work (such as art), and an accurate idea of the child's achievement, according to achievement tests.
5. The teacher should have ready the standard report card with her own evaluation of the child's progress.
6. Carry out the conferences in an efficient, cheerful, but business-like atmosphere.

Recommendations

As a result of this study the following recommendations were made:

1. Inasmuch as the data collected indicated that there was a variety of attitudes concerning the value of the different progressive reporting methods, it would be of great interest to make a more extensive study. The instigation of pilot plans with follow-up studies could help determine the effectiveness of different methods over a period of time.
2. Administrators and teachers anticipating changing their current reporting methods should work together co-operatively, making a survey of literature, planning objectives, organizing criteria, and interpreting the changes to parents, pupils and teachers.
3. A follow-up study should be made by the school administrators on all revisions of reporting methods in their schools. This study should include a survey of parent, teacher and pupil attitudes. Such a follow-up study may bring to light the misunderstandings and defects of the new reporting procedures, and can be helpful in planning further improvements.

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APPENDIX A
Questionnaire

**QUESTIONNAIRE
CURRENT REPORTING PRACTICES
IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF NORTH DAKOTA**

TO: PRINCIPALS OF THE NORTH DAKOTA ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

FROM: JACK KREITINGER, SUPERINTENDENT: PALERMO, NORTH DAKOTA

Dear Principal,

I am currently making a study of the reporting practices in the elementary schools of North Dakota. Please complete the attached questionnaire and return in the enclosed envelope.

I would appreciate receiving any materials such as teachers' handbooks, special report cards, schedules and so on, which you use in planning and executing the reporting of students' progress.

This questionnaire is being sent out to 142 elementary school principals in the state of North Dakota. If you would like a summary please enclose a self-addressed envelope.

NAME OF SCHOOL _____ GRADES (circle one)
1-6 1-8
ADDRESS _____ NUMBER OF PUPILS _____
NAME _____

1. How many times during each school year do you report students' progress to parents? _____
2. What methods of reporting do you use? (check below)
☐ Report cards only.
☐ Report cards and Parent-Teacher Conferences.
☐ Parent-Teacher Conferences only.
☐ Teacher Letters or Notes in conjunction with Report Cards.
☐ Others (please specify) _____
3. Mark (S) in the space provided for those which you consider strong points of your reporting system, mark (W) for those which you consider weak points in your present reporting system.
☐ Promotes better understanding between the parents and teachers.
☐ Encourages parents to cooperate with the teachers.
☐ Reports the status of the slow learner satisfactorily.
☐ Fair to all children, even those who work hard and accomplish little.

4. Do you anticipate a change in reporting practices in the next year or two? _____ If yes, what change would you consider?

5. Comments: (Evaluation of your present system) _____

PART II - Complete this section if you are using PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

1. How many years has your present school used the Parent-Teacher Conference as a means of reporting pupil progress? _____

2. How many conferences do you schedule each year? _____

3. In which weeks of the school year are the conferences used? (please specify)

4. Are all of the parents scheduled for conferences or just special cases? _____

If special cases, how are they determined? _____

5. Check those invited to attend the conference: Mother _____
 Father _____
 Pupil _____

6. How much time is spent at each conference? _____

7. Is there a teacher break between individual conferences? (Yes) (No)
 How long? _____ minutes.

8. How is time secured for the conferences? (please specify if school is dismissed early, all-day, etc.) _____

9. What percentage of attendance have experienced at these conferences? _____
 (Estimate the percentage)

10. Comments:---(Evaluation of Parent-Teacher Conferences) _____
