

Not so Standardized:
Parent Perceptions of the Manitoba Provincial Report Card

by

David Barkman

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Administration, Foundations & Psychology

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

Copyright © 2017 by David Barkman

Abstract

Manitoba introduced a standardized, standards-based report card format in 2013-2014 with the four intended benefits as being: (i) reporting of student achievement in a way that is clear and coherent for parents, students and teachers (including plain language, personalized information); (ii) building positive school-parent relationships; (iii) improving learning; and, (iv) creating consistency across the province. The policy change was made with press releases and appearances by then premier Greg Selinger, creating a campaign-like atmosphere rather than one characterized by a research-based adjustment to practice.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the process of reporting learning, and see to what degree the four benefits are being achieved. The study finds that Manitoba Education's own literature base regarding reporting, and the work of leading researchers supports the delineations in standards-based reporting. Six parent(s) interviewed in a rural Manitoba school division expressed some favourable impressions, but were not convinced that the new report card format made an impact beyond creating consistency in the format. Parents held highly individualized preferences in regard to what they valued in the report card and showed equally diverse interpretations of the meaning. The study concludes that any value added is in the fact that it is a standards-based report card providing greater detail in feedback, rather than that it is a standardized report card. The greater detail in the feedback also created contradictory messages as to whether the document was summative or formative, personalized or standardized, objective or subjective.

Supervisory Committee

Jon Young, (Advisor) Senior Scholar Department of Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology

John Wiens, Dean Emeritus and Senior Scholar Department of Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology

Gary Babiuk, Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

Ken Klassen, Executive Director, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Supervisory Committee	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures	vii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Background to the Study	1
The Context for the Study	2
Statement of the Problem and Research Questions	5
Methodology	6
Limitations	7
Delimitations	7
Significance of the Study	8
Chapter Two: Literature Review	9
Summary of Key Policy Documents Guiding the Report Card	10
Manitoba Documents Promoting Parent-School Partnership	17
Key Features of the New Manitoba Report Card	18

West to East: What’s happening around us? Alberta and Ontario	24
Summary of Literature	30
Chapter Three: Methodology	32
Participants	33
Participant Profiles	33
Data Collection	36
Data Analysis.....	36
Chapter Four: Findings 1: Individualized Readings of a Standardized Report Card	38
How Parents are Interacting with the Report Card.....	39
Who is Reading the Report Card.....	42
How the Report Card is Being Reviewed.....	44
Chapter Five: Findings 2: The Pursuit of Clarity and Coherence	48
Perceptions Regarding Clarity and Coherence.....	48
Clarity and Coherence of Specific Elements of the Manitoba Report Card.....	50
Percentages and Ordinal scores.....	50
Comments	59
Learning Behaviours	67

Perceptions Regarding Improved Relationship	70
Perceptions Regarding Improved Learning	74
Impact of Consistency in Format	75
Chapter Six: Conclusions	76
Key Findings	77
Implications for Policy Makers	79
Implications for School Practitioners	81
Recommendations for Further Research	84
References	85
Appendix 1: A selection of events relating to standards-based curriculum and standardization of education in Manitoba from 1989 to 2013.	93
Appendix 2: Parental Perceptions of the Manitoba Provincial Report Card	98
Appendix 3: Manitoba Grade 7/8 report card template	103
Appendix 4: Ontario Grade 7/8 report card template	109

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1: Key Influences on the Manitoba Provincial Report Card</i>	11
<i>Figure 2: Traditional and Reconfigured Assessment Pyramid</i>	12
<i>Figure 3: Similar Features Between Manitoba and Ontario 7/8 Report Cards</i>	29
<i>Figure 4: Report Card Delivery Methods and Preferences Expressed</i>	41
<i>Figure 5: Order and Scope of the Report Card Sharing Circle</i>	43
<i>Figure 6: Aspect of the Report Card that Draw Attention First</i>	46
<i>Figure 7: A Sample Section of the Manitoba Report Card Showing the Hybrid Use of Ordinal and Percentage Grades</i>	51
<i>Figure 8: A Breakdown of the Corresponding Percentage Ranges and Descriptors of Each Ordinal Score</i>	52
<i>Figure 9: Parent Perception of Ordinal Scores</i>	56
<i>Figure 10: Areas of Concern Parents Identify Regarding Clarity of Comments</i>	61
<i>Figure 11: Reasons for Perceived Differences in Teacher Comments</i>	65
<i>Figure 12: The Learning Behaviours Scale and Descriptors</i>	68
<i>Figure 13: Ways Schools and Parents Communicated</i>	71

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The shift to a common K-12 curriculum by Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning (MEAL) has led to significant rethinking of the process of reporting student progress. The move to standardized provincial curriculum has dominated Manitoba's educational landscape since Manitoba introduced the 1994 document, *Renewing Education: New Directions – The Blueprint*. Until 2013, schools were free to create their own report cards without provincial oversight. The province's new standards-based reporting legislation attempts to align the report card with standards-based curriculum that has been in place for years. This study examined how student learning was communicated through Manitoba report cards, and how that communication was interpreted and used by parents. Evaluating how effective the standards-based report card is in relation to its intended results could inform the practice of reporting in Manitoba.

There are two primary purposes of the new Manitoba report card, as identified in the document, *Manitoba Provincial Report Card Policy and Guidelines: Partners for Learning* (2013). The first is to “formally communicate to parents, at certain points in time, information on their children’s growth and achievement as learners” (p. 3). This document, then, aims to help clarify the purpose for reporting, identifies a clear audience for the report, and clearly indicates what will be reported.

The second purpose of the new provincial report card is to form “one part of an important communication system.... [that] formally documents and communicates a student’s summative achievement to parents” (p. 4). It is important to note that this document views reporting as a single part of a more comprehensive communication system, as this perspective is easy to lose

sight of since a report card grade may carry an air of finality to it. Communication systems rely on shared understanding and interpretations. Although the format of Manitoba's report card is standardized, the interpretation by parents may not be.

In an earlier small study of rural principal perceptions of the new report card, all three principals interviewed noted silence on the part of parents during the 2013 report card implementation (Barkman, 2014) - a response of silence from parents to a report card billed specifically as an improved communication tool indicated a need for exploration. According to informal survey data collected by school divisions and reported by MEAL, "about two-thirds of divisions formally collected feedback from parents about the new report card. Most reported that parents found the new report cards about as good as what was in place before (about 40% to 50%), and 17% to 25% reported parents found the new report card was an improvement, depending on grade level" (Manitoba Education, 2013a, p. 10). Worded pessimistically, 75%-83% of parents who responded found the report card as good or worse than what was in place. So how are Manitoba parents making meaning of the report card and how are they using the results? This study formally gathered qualitative information from a small sample of parents from one rural Manitoba school division, allowing for a deeper understanding of what those numbers might mean. Another advantage in gathering information in this way was that parents were able to provide the context for their opinion.

The Context for the Study

Manitoba is not an isolated actor in the field of education reform. In the mid-1990s, Manitoba followed Canadian and international trends to standardize curriculum as a way for the province to guide more explicitly what was being taught, and alongside this trend came increased

spending on standardized testing to measure what was being learned. Appendix 1 highlights selected K-12 events and policies from 1989-2013 that show developments in Manitoba's approach to curriculum, assessment and reporting (Britton, 2006). A change in government in 1999 brought a change in attitude toward standardized testing, as evidenced by a 60% cut to the budget of the Assessment Branch (Clifton, 2009). This could be seen as a softening of attention to summative assessment and accountability-driven policy and a shift toward formative assessment and parent partnership in their children's education.

Under the New Democratic Party (NDP) government, Manitoba continued to produce policy documents reflecting that researchers were thinking about how assessment and reporting could influence learning. Researchers Lorna Earl and Stephen Katz wrote a document for Manitoba called *Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind Assessment for Learning, Assessment as Learning, Assessment of Learning* (2006) in which they emphasized the power of formative assessment also known as assessment for learning. How that learning was communicated, particularly report card format decisions, however, was left to school divisions or even to individual schools for a few more years. In 2008, MEAL published *Communicating Student Learning: Guidelines for Schools*, a document authored by Ken O'Connor and Damian Cooper with a stated purpose of providing educators with practices for effective communication with students and parents about student learning. The principles and recommendations in this document are strongly reflected in the new report card. A further step in the process toward standardization in assessment and reporting occurred with the 2010 release of a provincial assessment policy that required school divisions to formalize an assessment policy that conformed to the provincial policy (Manitoba Education, 2010). In September 2010, then Premier Greg Selinger announced that a "parent-friendly" report card would be developed "to

ensure that parents get the information they need to be full partners in their children's education” (Province of Manitoba, 2010, para. 2). The resulting format was similar to the report cards that Ontario developed, although missing the sections for student and parent contribution (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a).

The idea of engaging parents as partners as a way to increase student learning is supported by a number of researchers. Ken Leithwood calls it co-producing learning and says that homes can have a significant impact on improving student achievement (Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall, & Strauss, 2010; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b). Research by John Hattie and J. Douglas Willms also indicates that parental expectations have a strong impact on achievement (Hattie, 2009; McKenna & Willms, 1998). While definitions of parent engagement vary, common themes like encouraging good study habits, reading to children, asking questions, and having high expectations are important. Exactly how educators can encourage these practices for parents is less certain. It is reasonable to assume that a standards-based report card with multiple reporting categories could give parents the opportunity to have meaningful conversations with their children.

Whether a report card can help deliver an impact on learning is likely to be dependent on how parents understand the report card and construct their interpretation of its purpose and meaning (Epstein, 1995; Guskey, 2004a). It assumes that what the report card communicates is an accurate reflection of a student’s learning, and that parents will interpret that communication correctly and take the appropriate action. This study asked how parents interpreted and responded to the information on the report card.

To claim that a report card can accurately reflect a student's learning relies on some confident assumptions—including the assumption that the assessments that make up the grade have a common purpose. Both Lorna Earl and Robert Marzano stress the importance of a clearly defined purpose of assessment, and favour a report card grade that consists of assessment *of* learning, not assessment *for* or *as* learning (Manitoba Education, 2006; Marzano, 2000; O'Connor, 2010; Reeves, 2000). Manitoba's report card format directs teachers to follow this track, but Earl's research indicates that only 20% of teachers make the distinction correctly (Earl & Timperley, 2014). This suggests, then, that the chance of miscommunication is high, since teachers are arriving at grades in different ways, and parents interpret the purpose of the report card differently as well.

Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which select parents of middle school students from a single Manitoba rural school division understand and use the Manitoba newly implemented Provincial Report Card in relation to the four intended benefits outlined by Manitoba Education (2014): (i) reporting of student achievement in a way that is clear and coherent for parents, students and teachers (including plain language, personalized information); (ii) building positive school-parent relationships; (iii) improving learning; and, (iv) creating consistency across the province.

Specifically, the study addresses:

1. How are parents interacting with the report card and what processes are parents using to develop an understanding of the report card?

2. What are the selected parents' perceptions of the clarity and coherence of the report card with reference to student achievement?
3. What are the selected parents' perceptions of the value of the new report card in contributing to, and enhancing parent-school relationships?
4. Do parents perceive the new report card as having the potential to improve their child's learning?
5. Do parents perceive that consistency in the report card format improves the consistency in any way beyond format?

Methodology

The first phase of research for this study involved analyzing the documents published by the province relating to the provincial report card. I then worked back through provincial publications regarding reporting, assessment practices, and parent-school communication to get a clear picture of trends over time and identify key influences in Manitoba Education literature. I broadened that base of literature by reading authors who co-wrote or informed the opinions expressed in the Manitoba literature as well as other authors working on assessment, reporting, and parent-school partnerships. In the second phase of this study, original research was conducted in a rural Manitoba school division. With permission from the Superintendent, and awareness from the school principals, I gave invitations for participants to three schools. These invitations were disseminated by the Parent Association Council. Invitations were also given to a local immigration support service, but this method did not yield results. Respondents to the invitation were provided with a further description of the study and participated in a one-hour interview. The six participant families I interviewed bore similarity in that the parents were all well educated and between the age of 40-55. I was able to realize some diversity among

participants; two sets of parents had immigrated to Canada, one family had a student with special needs. I recorded the interviews, transcribed them, and coded them for themes. I also collected direct quotes that expressed strongly worded viewpoints.

Limitations

The sample size of six families interviewed for this study is very small, so trends in findings cannot be reliably established for the larger population. The fact that parent participants were all well-educated also limits the ability to say that findings are representative of the whole parent population. As an inexperienced researcher, my skills were a limitation - I was learning throughout the interviews about balancing the amount of time spent on each research question. My own biases and curiosities may have influenced the volume of information on certain topics. The large volume of data in a single interview also made it difficult to narrow the scope of the research especially because parent perceptions and interpretations were so diverse.

Delimitations

I chose not to draw participants from an organized group such as a Parent Council so that I could access greater diversity in the backgrounds and level of school involvement. The number of participants was also limited to manage the volume of data generated by a one-hour interview. I also chose a semi-structured interview process to allow for a more natural conversation with parents, which I could adjust to track issues that they were most passionate about. It was that detailed, in-depth response from a parent that I wanted to get, which is why I did not pursue quantitative methods or even a focus group.

Significance of the Study

This study shows how standards-based assessment policy has influenced changes to reporting in Manitoba. Improving communication with parents may be political wording rather than a data-driven basis for the changes in Manitoba, but some literature does support specific changes to reporting that have been made. Some parents are embracing those changes, but others showed skepticism.

The study tried to find the voice of parents. Parent perception of the report card was different from parent to parent. By interviewing parents, I found out that further study needs to be done to understand how parents from diverse backgrounds make meaning of the report card. Understanding the purpose of a text is important to interpreting the meaning, I found that out that parents perceive the purpose of the report card differently.

There was a reflective and evaluative component to this study that does not appear to be a part of the cycle for education policy in Manitoba; I did not come across research into the effectiveness of assessment or reporting in Manitoba. I became more aware of this when I read the Alberta Assessment Study, which was commissioned by Alberta Education but carried out independently by researchers from several Alberta universities (Webber, Aitken, Lupart, & Scott, 2009). Maybe a scheduled evaluation of policies that are implemented in Manitoba could be a valuable addition to the practice.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2010, then Premier Greg Selinger announced that Manitoba would develop a single standard provincial report card. The stated goals of the changes were to “make life easier for families, and help students excel in school,” (Province of Manitoba, 2010, para. 1) and to “ensure parents get the information they need to be full partners in their children’s education” (Province of Manitoba, 2010, para. 2). Selinger explained,

We have heard from parents and have listened to their concerns regarding the way report cards are currently presented. Parents tell me they aren’t always getting the information they need from their children’s reports. I am especially concerned about parents for whom English is not their first language. I am confident in the end we will develop a functional and understandable report card that tells parents where their children are excelling and where they need a little more support (Province of Manitoba, 2010, para. 3).

Pushing past political rhetoric to develop and implement a report card that is in agreement with provincial reporting and assessment policies is no small task. British Columbia abandoned their bid to develop a standardized report card in 2004, after being unable to get agreement between stakeholders on what a standardized report card should contain (BC Teachers’ Federation, 2004). Assistant Deputy Minister Jean-Vianney Auclair (personal communication, December 4, 2014) described the process in Manitoba as a consensus-based approach where recommendations would be discussed and revised until all representatives could support them. An advisory committee with members consisting of the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils (MAPC), the Manitoba Association of School Business Officials (MASBO), the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS), the Manitoba Teachers’ Society (MTS), and the

Manitoba School Boards Association (MSBA) was established for ongoing consultation and feedback.

The new report card was pilot tested in the 2011-2012 school year, with feedback from parents and teachers used to make revisions. Three versions of the report card were developed to reflect the needs of the different grade levels (see Appendix 3). The process also included a pilot phase, which saw parents, teachers, and school administrators completing questionnaires. Auclair notes that representation for pilot testing included various geographic regions, urban and rural, and the different types of school programs (English, Français, and French Immersion). Input was reviewed by the oversight committee and used to refine the templates. The advisory committee representatives would also, on occasion, take certain issues back to their respective organizations for broader consultation, the results of which would subsequently be shared with the committee to arrive at consensus (J.-V. Auclair, personal communication, December 4, 2014).

This literature review focuses on an examination of the documents Manitoba has developed to guide its reporting practices and the literature that informs Manitoba's texts. Attention is given to key concepts of: (i) clarity and coherence, (ii) enhancing parent-school relationships, (iii) improved learning, and (iv) improved consistency.

Summary of Key Policy Documents Guiding the Report Card

Figure 1 illustrates some of the key researchers and MEAL documents that influence the Manitoba report card. Two of the MEAL documents that inform the report card are written by researchers. Following Figure 1, I have summarized key aspects of the MEAL policy documents

that seem to have had an impact on the development. MEAL has utilized the expertise of a number of researchers to write policy documents for Manitoba.

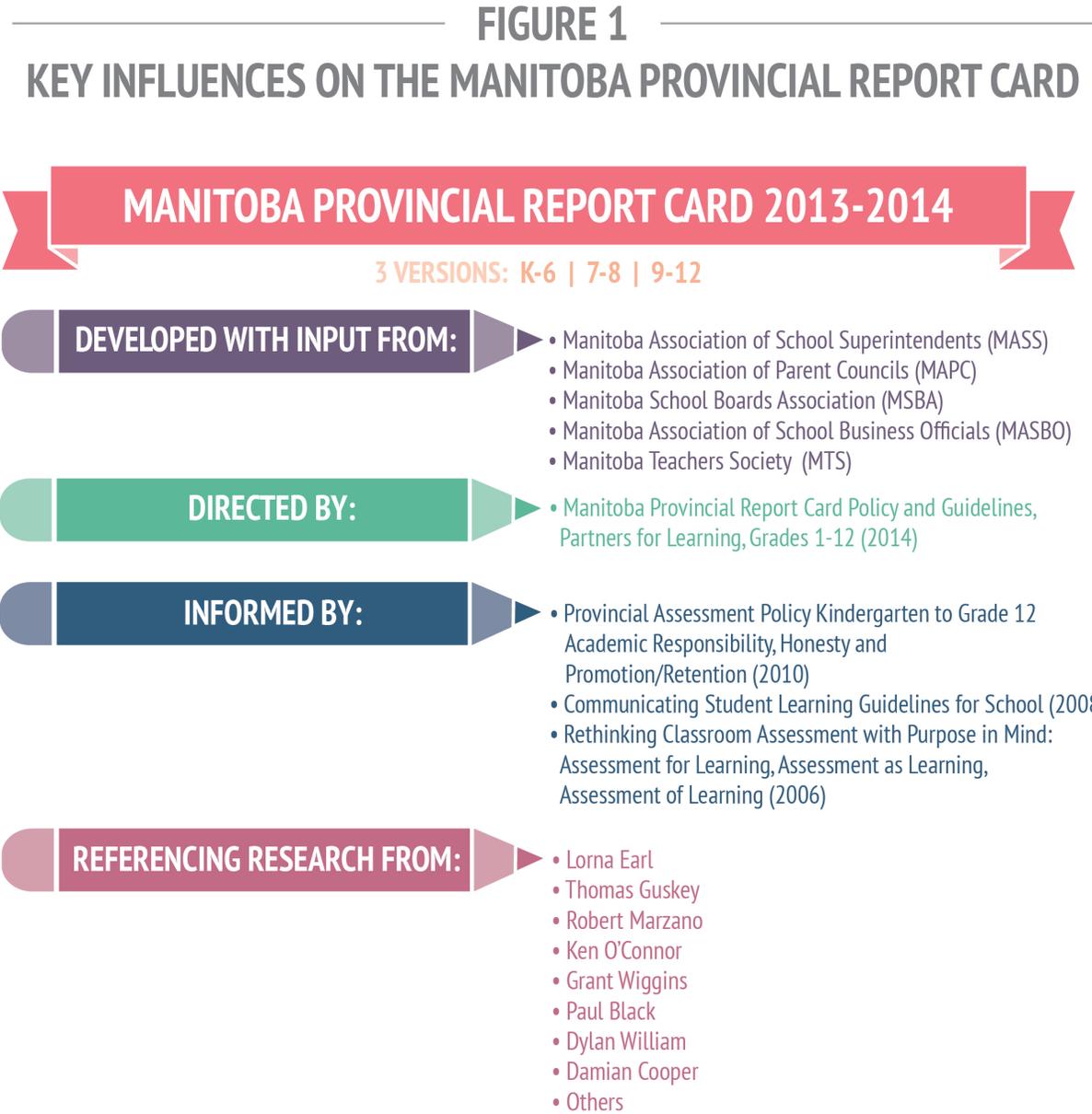


Figure 1. Key influences on the Manitoba Provincial Report Card

Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind Assessment for Learning, Assessment as Learning, Assessment of Learning (2006)

This document was developed by Dr. Lorna Earl and Dr. Steven Katz, and is used by provinces in the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Education as a support for teachers to assess students. Much of their work focuses on the idea that the type of assessment must fit the purpose (p. vii). They identify three purposes of assessment: for learning, as learning, and of learning (p. 13). Assessment of learning refers to a process of finding out what a student has learned; assessment for learning refers to assessment that a teacher will use to help modify teaching and learning activities; and assessment as learning is a process where teachers support metacognition for student so that they become aware of their own learning. Earl advocates for far greater emphasis to be put on assessment as learning and far less on assessment of learning. Figure 2 illustrates a traditional balancing of these purposes and Earl’s proposal (2003, p. 27).

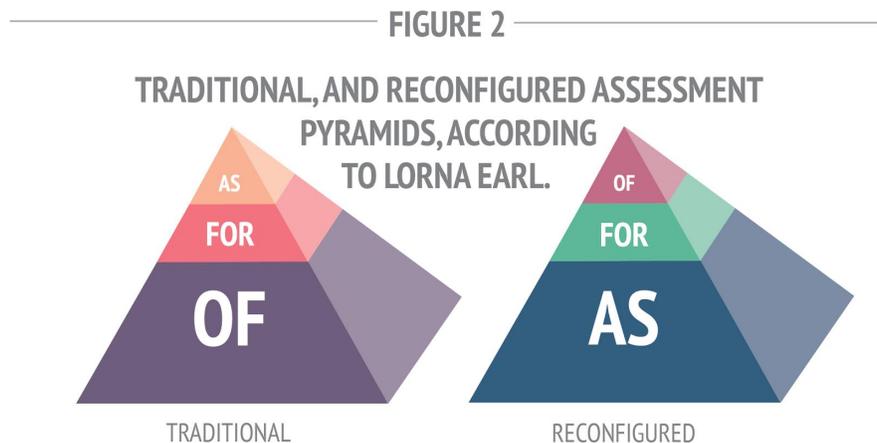


Figure 2. Assessment as learning vs. Assessment for learning

Regarding the reporting of learning, Earl and Katz identify the fundamental purpose as enabling parents and students to understand performance and decide what is required for future progress (p. 16). They critique traditional reporting which relies on average scores and tells little about skill development (p. 60) which could be reported with a continuum. Earl and Katz acknowledge that assessment of learning becomes public, contributes to pivotal decisions about a student's future and therefore needs to be credible and defensible (p. 55). This presents a challenge to the learning-focused balance that Earl advocates since assessment as and for learning are not held up to public scrutiny. It stands to reason that teachers will spend considerable time making sure that the grades they report publicly are defensible, leading to a puzzle of how to reconcile competing interests. Earl seems to say that if learning is the key, assessment of learning is not where the bulk of the time should be spent.

Communicating Student Learning Guidelines for Schools (2008)

The content of this document appears to be quite influential in directing the changes that were adopted in the Manitoba provincial report card. Ken O'Connor and Damian Cooper wrote this MEAL document with the purpose of providing educators with principles for "effective communication with students and parents about student learning" (p. 1). It identifies assessment and communication as "part of the same process, with assessment rising from and leading naturally to communication" (p. 6). It makes use of Lorna Earl's division of the purpose of assessment as being of/for/as learning, and acknowledges the shift where a "greater emphasis is being placed on using assessment to focus on learning rather than on using assessment to accumulate marks" (p. 1).

This document's influence on the Manitoba provincial report card is reflected by the adoption of these recommendations:

1. Advocate descriptive feedback for students using Wiggins' 1998 model of strengths, challenges, and next steps (a practice advocated for when the purpose is formative) (p. 6)
2. Advocate multifaceted reporting system, not relying on the "tendency to rely on report cards and grades as the main communication tool" (p. 18,19)
3. Advocate for grades to be based only on learning outcomes unencumbered by non-achievement factors (p. 24)
4. Advocate for "expanded format report card with one section for achievement and one for non-achievement factors such as behaviour, work habits, citizenship" (p. 28)
5. Advocate for parents as partners in the communication process (p. 38)

Provincial Assessment Policy Kindergarten to Grade 12 Academic Responsibility, Honesty and Promotion/Retention (2010)

While the focus of this literature review is reporting, a report is generated from assessment, so Manitoba's assessment policies do impact the report card (Manitoba Education, 2008). This document directed Manitoba school divisions in the formation of their individual divisional assessment policies with a mandatory implementation date of September 2011.

Like other provincial documents, it identifies the "primary purpose of assessment is to improve student learning" (p. 5) and clarifies that this policy document is focused on "summative assessment, or assessment of learning" (p. 6). However, it has a different tone to it than other provincial documents directing assessment and reporting. The importance of accurate measurement of a summative learning is present, but emphasis is also put on students' being

responsible and accountable for their work. Holistic goals for children to “become responsible adults, develop integrity, and contribute to building strong and democratic communities” appear in the text (p. 5). It encourages policies to be rooted in values, “especially our shared sense of diligence, honesty and fairness” (p. 5) and it speaks about holding students accountable for doing their work and following timelines (p. 6) with consequences that could include grade penalties for incomplete, late, and plagiarized work (p. 7, 9, 10).

The audience considered to make use of the results of assessment is also broad, where the report card sees parents as the primary audience (Manitoba Education, 2014), this document more clearly identifies that students, parents, other teachers, employers, and institutions of further learning all interpret the results of summative assessment (p. 6).

The idea that unfinished, late, or plagiarized work could factor into determining a grade is not completely synchronized with Manitoba Provincial Report Card Policy and Guidelines Partners for Learning Grades 1 to 12 (Manitoba Education, 2014), where these factors would be categorized as self-management/learning behaviours. Perhaps the discrepancy comes from the focus of purpose for the documents; this document appears to focus on “who do we want students to become?” while other policy documents focus on “what is the most accurate method of determining a grade?”

Manitoba Provincial Report Card Policy and Guidelines: Partners for Learning, Grades 1 to 12 (2014)

The 2014 policy document that guides the report card is titled Manitoba Provincial Report Card Policy and Guidelines: Partners for Learning, Grades 1-12. The purposes of reporting are identified as being to formally communicate to parents about their children’s

growth and learning in such a way that strengths challenges and next steps can be used to improve learning (p. 3).

It limits the scope of purpose by indicating that the report card is “one part of an important communication system” and that “specific details about what students are learning or how their learning is being demonstrated are best demonstrated through other forms of communication” (p. 4).

The four benefits that the provincial report card hopes to extend are:

1. Primarily, reporting student information in a way that is clear and coherent.
2. Promotion of positive school-parent relationships (clear reporting will lead to positive, learning partner relationships between educators, parents and students) (p. 5).
3. Improved learning (because the data provided will assist educators and parents to collaboratively plan for improved learning and when students move from one school to another school teams could review the data to identify learning strengths/areas for improvement (p. 5).
4. Consistency across the province. (The report card provides an opportunity to develop a common language for grading practices) (p. 5).

The primary stated purpose of this report card is to describe to parents the cumulative, curricular achievement of students established by summative assessments of learning. The goal is measurement focused, with a high value placed on accuracy. Lorna Earl’s work on assessment may not disagree with the purpose of the report card, but her thinking about weighting the importance of the purposes of assessment is relevant to this discussion. Earl (2003, p. 27)

identifies the primary purpose of assessment as being assessment for learning and only a fraction of time on assessment of learning.

She sees these two types of assessment as quite distinct. To use assessment of learning results as though they are assessments for learning instruments may be problematic, but the bigger issue may be that the more time spent on generating accurate defensible grades from summative assessments, the less time spent on assessment for and as learning.

The consideration of time and balance is highlighted further by the statement that limits the scope of the report card as just a part of a communication system; this leads to a discussion of the relative importance of the report card (p. 4). Do parents see the report card as the primary method of communication or are they finding other media more important in gathering information about their child's progress? The goal of involving parents as learning partners who can "provide appropriate support" is an important aspect of the report card (p. 5). Researchers indicate that parents have a powerful impact on learning (Hattie, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2010; Michel, 1997). What do parents view their role to be, and does the report card support or challenge that understanding?

Manitoba Documents Promoting Parent-School Partnership

MEAL has two print publications concerned with parent partnerships, though neither of them is specifically directed toward improving student learning. One focuses on conflict resolution and one focuses on setting up a Parent Advisory Committee. MEAL also has a website that describes what is happening at each grade level and promotes ideas about what parents can do to support learning (Manitoba Education, 2015). While clear communication with parents is stated to be an important goal of the new report card, provincial documents covering

the topic of parent-school communication focus on how to resolve a conflict with educators and how to develop a Parent Advisory Council.

Working Together: A Guide to Positive Problem Solving for Schools, Families, and Communities (2004)

I read this 2004 document with the thought that it might have information about parents and schools working together to improve learning, since this is a focal idea for the new provincial report card. The document is primarily a conflict resolution resource citing some of Joyce Epstein's work and George Michel's 1997 book, *Building Schools*, in which he states, "one of the central ideas of parent involvement is that student behaviour, achievement and discipline can be improved and changed if parents are involved and become committed to school decisions. Basic research shows that student achievement can be increased by including and working with parents" (as cited in Manitoba Education, 2004, p. 5).

School Partnerships: A Guide for Parents, Schools, and Communities (2005)

This document is "designed to support parents, educators, community members and other individuals interested in participating in a partnership to support student learning" (p. 2).

Partnerships, however, are defined parent and community councils, and do not describe ways in which schools and parents can partner to improve learning through reporting.

Key Features of the new Manitoba Report Card

In the following four sections I looked for what literature says about each of the four areas the new Manitoba report card seeks to address. Much of what is by researchers is about best practice in assessment so that information may need to be extrapolated to fit the four goals

identified by MEAL. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen to use the version of the report card used for Grade 7-8 when speaking about specific features of the report card.

Clarity and Coherence

Clarity of meaning for parents is cited as the primary consideration in the development of the new report card (Auclair, personal communication, December 4, 2014). A standards-based report provides more detailed information about achievement by breaking down a percentage grade into several curricular categories and assigning a score to each category. Many researchers agree that a single grade that encompasses all elements of learning is less accurate and therefore less clear (Guskey & Bailey, 2010; Marzano, 2000; O'Connor, 2010). However, standards-based forms can become too complicated for parents to understand (Guskey, 2001) and Guskey further notes that, “grading and reporting are less exercises in quantifying achievement than they are challenges in effective communication” (2004a, p. 329).

Some of the features in Manitoba’s Gr. 7-8 report card that may present challenges for parents to understand include: a 4-point ordinal grade scale, breaking grades into separately reported essential skills, separating learning behaviours from learning, and narrative teacher comments about curricular achievement.

Requiring declaration of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and English as an Additional Language (EAL) designations are other ways in which the new report card seeks to improve the clarity of communication. In cases where it is not reasonable to expect the student to meet or approximate the learning expectation of the provincial curriculum for the grade in the subject the report card would indicate that the student achievement grades are not based on the same expectations as students with regular programming (Manitoba Education, n.d.).

The practice of modifying curricular standard to accommodate a student with special circumstances is supported by literature (Jung & Guskey, 2010). The impact of this feature could be minimal depending on how schools were using IEPs prior to the new report card. Some schools may have only created IEPs for categorically funded students and simply modified the programming as needed for students who had gaps, but did not formally inform parents so the standardized report card could push that communication to happen.

Regarding clarity and coherence, a feature of the new Grade 1-6 and 7-8 report cards is that each subject has grades assigned to 3-4 essential standards, quite similar to the model Guskey and Bailey (2010) advocate in their book, *Developing Standards-Based Report Cards*. The Grade 7-8 report card adds a percentage category called the “Overall Grade” to the 4-point scaled scores, creating something of a hybrid model of a standards-based report and a traditional percentage score report.

Another feature of the report card is that attainment of curricular achievement and learning behaviours is reported separately. The primary consideration directing this separation is that learning behaviours are not often curricular outcomes, so penalizing a student for not demonstrating the outcome distorts the picture of what a student has learned (Guskey, 2004b; Stiggins, 2001; Wiggins, 1994). Marzano and Heflebower (2011) refer to the traditional grade as an “omnibus grade” because of the practice of factoring in a number of things other than an assessed standard. The logic is that a more accurate grade, especially if broken into specified components, will allow users of the grade to know what to improve. Separating learning from learning behaviours may be done to report learning more accurately, but does it reflect the connection between the two strongly enough? Or does the increased focus on accuracy in the report unintentionally reduce the importance of learning behaviours like completing work,

participating in class activities, and working with others? Changes to the Ontario report card in 2010 are aimed at ascribing greater value to these types of behaviours under the grounds that these are the habits that build success in learning and in the workplace (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010c).

Enhancing Parent-School Relationships

That parent-school relationships are important is supported widely for their impact on improving learning. (Epstein et al., 2002; Hattie, 2009; McKenna & Willms, 1998). Reporting student learning to parents may serve as an accountability function; the view that the public should keep an eye on teachers by what students have learned is not unusual. Epstein stands out as a lead researcher on the most helpful types of parent partnerships. Two of the six types of parental involvement in her framework that are addressed by the Manitoba report card are 1) communication, and 2) learning at home (Epstein, 1995).

Epstein notes that the challenge is to make communication understandable to all families, and redefine communication to include 2-way interactions between schools and parents (Epstein et al., 2002). This is an issue of particular concern for families who are learning English as an additional language (EAL), but Epstein identifies that the rewards are both relational and support learning (Epstein et al., 2002).

The hypothesis being used in Manitoba is that if the report card communicates with greater clarity, there will be better parent-school partnerships. The features that hold promise in delivering this are the narrative comments from teachers about the students' achievement. If comments are personal and communicate strengths/challenges/next steps (Tri-County Regional School Board, n.d.), perhaps parents will know what to work on collaboratively to improve.

An obvious increase in the length of the report card presents an interesting conundrum—more information could give more to talk about, but if the volume and specificity of the information is overwhelming, as Guskey (2001) identified, what impact will that have on parents’ response to the report card? This is a special concern, expressed by Premier Selinger for parents whose first language is not English, as they may find the additional information overwhelming (Province of Manitoba, 2010).

Improving Learning

Lorna Earl (2003; 2007) identifies that the primary purpose of assessment is to drive learning, but sees assessment for learning and as learning being more influential than the assessment of learning (summative) found on a report card. She cautions that “large scale reform efforts give the illusion that learning can be directed from the outside” (Earl, 2003). The aim in her writing is not to undermine reform efforts or to pit types of assessment against each other but rather seems to be an encouragement to spend time on what has a greater impact on learning; which from her research is formative assessment, not lots of reporting of summative achievement. The issue of where to ask teachers to allocate time is underscored by a concern that standards-based reporting requires a lot of work by teachers (Guskey, 2001). Leithwood identifies that poor working conditions, real or perceived, have a negative impact on a teacher’s commitment to their job (Leithwood & McAdie, 2010). So if there are gains to learning made by the Manitoba report card, they could be mitigated by losses to an area such as teacher motivation. It seems difficult to quantify the impact on learning in comparison to a percentage grade on a traditional report card.

On the other hand, standards-based grading facilitates teaching and learning better than other grading methods so it is not a leap to assert that reporting by standards will help too (Guskey, 2001). There is an element of accountability to the public when achievement is reported. Teachers who may not have been assessing by standards could be pushed by the format the report card to finally begin to do or risk being challenged by a parent or student.

In my mind, the most compelling argument for improved learning via a new report card is that by featuring grades for separate outcome categories in a subject, and by writing narrative comments for each subject, all the stakeholders know which weaknesses to target and what the next steps are to improve. Crucial to whether this actually has any impact is that parents and teachers see the purpose of the report card similarly and that parents interpret it as educators intend. (It also assumes that this information was not being made available to parents or students through online records or other means of communication.) If parents can take the report card and feel that it gives them tangible ways to support their child's learning, educators can unlock the power of the engaged parent identified in the work of Epstein, Hattie, and Leithwood (Epstein et al., 2002; Hattie, 2009; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2006).

Improving Consistency

A criticism of locally designed report cards is that differences create confusion when students transfer from one school to another. Manitoba Education addressed this perceived problem by developing three similar, but separate report cards for Grades 1-6, 7-8, and 9-12 students. The reports are written in an extended form, ranging from four to six pages as the minimum length, and longer depending on teachers' narrative comments. All reports separate the reporting of outcomes from the reporting of learning behaviours, and all reports contain

narrative comments. All reports identify if a student is on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or if they are learning English as an Additional Language (EAL).

Standardizing a report card may communicate a one-size-fits-all approach that resists individualized, creative adaptation to fit a particular context. Another trade-off in increasing consistency is the restriction of innovation by the users since change to the report card must now go through bureaucratic process. However, the fact that there are three versions of the standardized report card does indicate an awareness of differences between user groups and a willingness to accept adaptation. Consistency in form does not necessarily mean that information for the report is gathered or interpreted by teachers in a consistent manner so students and parents may see a familiar format but the consistency may end there (Leithwood et al., 2010).

West to East: What's happening around us? Alberta and Ontario

To provide points of comparison, I chose to look west and east to see what the provinces around us are doing in regard to reporting/assessment. I studied Alberta because they share an agreement between Education Ministers under the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol and through that share curriculum, and Ontario because they use a provincial report card.

The movement toward standardizing curriculum has been one that crosses provincial borders. Provincial, not federal, governments have jurisdiction over education so national standards have not been developed. However, Canada's western provinces voluntarily formed the Western Canadian Protocol for Education in 1993 (WNCP) with a goal of collaborating in developing common curriculum (Western and Northern Canadian Protocol, 2011). Manitoba

Education's 2006 document, *Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind*, is also shared by Alberta.

In spite of the similarities of assessment pedagogy communicated through this document, Alberta's path in reporting has shown greater interest in standardization than Manitoba, but a number of recent changes show that Alberta is in the process of rethinking this practice. Alberta's report card is not standardized, but many other features of communicating learning are. In 2007, Alberta implemented province-wide Grade Level Achievement (GLA) reporting where teachers reported to the province whether a student was below level, at level, or above level. The goal was that "GLA data will provide all levels of the education system with student performance information that will help decision-makers at the school, jurisdiction and provincial levels evaluate the impact of education programs. This information, [Alberta Education suggests,] will be particularly useful in examining performance of groups of students (e.g., by gender, students with high mobility rates, the performance of ESL students, students with special needs, etc.)" (Alberta Education, 2009, p.1).

Ironically, the guiding document for the GLA initiative quotes, "Unfortunately, our images of schools are almost factory images, so school is very standardized. But kids don't come in standard issue. The challenge is having teachers question the standardized notion of school and then helping kids realize there is a better way to do school" (as cited in Alberta Education, 2006, p. 11)

In 2011, Alberta Education stopped collecting GLA reports centrally, but required that school divisions still collect the reports (Alberta Education, 2015b). A four-year tenure in centrally collected results seems short, possibly indicating that the standardized report did not do

what the province hoped it would do, or perhaps showing a change in the direction the province is going. GLA testing ended in June 2014, and a new standardized assessment tool called the Student Learning Assessment (SLA) was piloted in 2016. Rather than being a year-end assessment, it was conducted as a check-in at the beginning of the Grade 3 school year.

Another area Alberta has shown commitment to standardized methods of reporting learning is through Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs), which take place at grades 6 and 9. Diploma examinations at grade 12 complete the battery of provincial tests. Alberta's focus on reporting achievement through standardized instruments created a degree of tension with Alberta Teachers' Association which laments that "Alberta students and school jurisdictions are subjected to more provincial standardized testing programs, reporting and accountability requirements in Alberta, than students and schools in any other Canadian jurisdiction" (Couture, 2007). The society committed that "through the collective efforts of teachers we will continue to encourage the government to explore a better alternative to the current bureaucratic approaches to educational accountability" (Couture, 2009).

That lobby may be seeing results; in September of 2015, the Grade 12 tests will shift in value from 70% of the final grade to 50%, showing a change in importance (Alberta Education, 2015a). Of greater significance, the Grade 3 PAT became optional in 2014, and was replaced by a Student Learning Assessment (SLA) written at the start of the year with a purpose of improving student learning by giving teachers a diagnostic starting point (Alberta Education, 2015c). This puts emphasis on what can be learned, instead of what learning has been missed.

The teacher lobby may be one component contributing to change, but a study titled *The Alberta Student Assessment Study: Final Report* could also be directing some of the changes.

This study, commissioned by Alberta Education and carried out by researchers from the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and Lethbridge University, gathered information from teachers, students, and parents providing rich information for understanding assessment. While affirming standardized testing, the study showed discontent with the Grade 3 PATs and the heavy weighting of the Diploma Exams. These concerns both appear to have been addressed through the recent amendments to practice (Webber et al., 2009).

Alberta's path in communicating student learning has been more consistently focused on standardized assessment, but has not led to a standardized report card. The fact that Alberta Education commissioned a study of assessment shows a desire to refine assessment practices. *The Alberta Student Assessment Study: Final Report* (Webber et al., 2009) overlaps with the interests of my study in several areas:

1. *Clarity and Coherence*: Alberta report cards were affirmed as “easy to understand” by 82-93% of the respondents (p. 114). In spite of this affirmation, a “miscommunication theme” emerged in the study (p. 120). Concerns about the report card not communicating actual learning outcomes, using standardized comment banks, and behaviours influencing grades are all issues the new Manitoba report card addresses. In my study, I hope to unpack parents’ understanding of the new Manitoba report card to see how it compares to the intent expressed by the MEAL documents.
2. *Promoting Parent School Relationships*: Report card as part of a communication network: i) Educators, students, and parents in Alberta identified the report card as the main source of communication about how a student is progressing as a learner (p. 113). Is that the case in Manitoba or do we have a balanced communication system?
ii) Qualitative data indicate perception that communication from school to parents is

generally regarding bad news and not welcomed warmly (p. 119). This suggests that increasing communication could be detrimental if the purpose of communication is not a shared purpose.

Looking to the east, Ontario moved to implement a standardized provincial report card in 1998, much earlier than Manitoba (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1998). Three versions of the report card were developed to reflect differences in Grade 1-6, 7-8, and 9-12. Documents guiding reporting in Ontario clearly state that “the purpose of assessment and evaluation is to improve student learning” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010c, cover), a statement that seems to echo Earl and Katz’s work (2008).

Ontario changed the format of its report card in 2010, to focus more attention on learning skills and work habits at all grade levels (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010c). This is an interesting progression in thought regarding learning behaviours, since considerable effort has been made to encourage grades to separate learning behaviours from academic achievement (Davies, 2000; Guskey, 2004; Stiggins, 2001; Wiggins, 1994), and may have unintentionally marginalized the importance of learning behaviours in the process of learning. Those learning behaviours appear to be rebounding in formats like 21st Century Learning Skills and are being woven into new curriculum as outcomes.

Manitoba’s new Grade 7/8 report card mirrors many of the same features found in Ontario’s report card as illustrated in Figure 3 (templates found in Appendix 3 and Appendix 4).

One difference is the opportunity Ontario provides for the student to comment on their goals and for the parents to indicate how they will help their child. This provides students a way to be involved in their own evaluation, and invites parents to be partners in their child’s learning

by committing to an action (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a). This could also reduce confusion about who is identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and next steps since some teachers in Manitoba are having students self-report this information as a way of letting them become reflective learners (Barkman, 2014).

FIGURE 3

SIMILAR FEATURES BETWEEN MANITOBA AND ONTARIO GRADE 7/8 REPORT CARDS.	 MB	 ON
ABSENCE/ LATE TOTALS	✓	✓
SEPARATE RECORD FOR LEARNING BEHAVIORS/ CURRICULAR OUTCOMES	✓	✓
PERCENTAGE GRADE	✓	✓
SCALED SCORE/ GRADE	✓	✓
ESL/ EAL DESIGNATION	✓	✓
IEP DESIGNATIONS	✓	✓
NARRATIVE TEACHER COMMENTS	✓	✓
STUDENT COMMENT SECTION		✓
PARENT COMMENT SECTION		✓
GRADE/ SCORE CATEGORIES WITHIN EACH SUBJECT	✓	

Figure 3. Similar features between Manitoba and Ontario Report Cards

Another difference is that the new version of the Ontario report card makes a deliberate attempt to boost the importance of the learning behaviour portion on the report by putting this information all alone on the front page of the report card. The document directing Ontario's report card, *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools*, explains this change by stating that "there is broad agreement, both nationally and internationally, that skills of this type, by whatever name, are critically important to student success" (2010a, p. 12). Reviewing the number of similarities between the report cards, Manitoba seems to have made good use of Ontario's 17 years of experience utilizing a provincial, standards-based report card; it is interesting that this recent Ontario revision was not adopted by Manitoba.

Summary of Literature

A review of Manitoba's journey in communicating student learning to parents shows that decisions to standardize curriculum made over 20 years ago set the foundation for developing standardized, standards-based report cards. It is overly simplistic to attribute a province's interest in standardization with development of a provincial report card, if that were the case Alberta would likely have developed one; however standardization of curriculum, and outcomes-based assessment makes it possible to implement a standardized, standards-based report card. Researchers are agreed that a standards-based report card gives more detailed information about a student's learning than a single percentage or letter grade arrived it by combining a number of factors. The fact that some of these researchers have written much of the assessment and reporting policy for Manitoba means that the concepts and language are familiar to teachers even though they may not practice it as intended. Research is less clear that changing to a standardized, standards-based report card will result in the four benefits (clarity, improved

parent-school relationships, improved learning, consistency) identified by the Manitoba government; especially if the main concern is parents for whom English is not their first language. This study will provide data about parents' perceptions of the new Manitoba report card to see if the intended benefits are being realized or if parents understand the report card in unintended ways.

For the purpose of this paper I will accept the somewhat narrow definition of learning as the degree of mastery of a set body of outcomes because that is what many researchers are assuming. There are voices urging broader understanding of what is learning and what type of learning beyond prescribed outcomes has value to students and by extension, society (Wiens, 2011). A conundrum for the education system is that establishing specific outcomes provides a way to measure learning objectively so that educators can diagnose the missed learning. However, the act of narrowing what those learning outcomes are is a highly subjective exercise and really limits which learning has value. As outcomes are refined for more accurate measurement, educators can end up measuring increasingly irrelevant learning and lose track of the relational piece of a holistic education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The study focused on gathering the perceptions of selected parents of middle school students in a rural Manitoba school division through semi-structured interviews. The central stated purpose for making changes to the report card was to improve the clarity of communication with parents. Three principals spanning K-12 indicated in previous interviews that parental feedback on the report card was minimal (Barkman, 2014). Interviewing parents establishes what some parents have been thinking. It was a goal of the design of this study to capture something of the diversity of the divisional population in the interviews rather than recruiting from within a group of parents such as the Parent Advisory Committees who may be less representative of the whole parent population. While I was able to establish a degree of ethnic diversity in a small sample size, participants bore resemblance to one another in that they were all: two-parent families, with above average education, and whose children were doing well in school.

Parents of middle school children were recruited for this study because they had prior experience in the school system, something which allows them reflect on their experiences with the previous report card and are likely to be more engaged in their child's education than parents of high school parents (Epstein et al., 2002). The impending onset of high school and course credits may also increase the importance for parents of middle school children to have information needed to make course decisions. The report card format for middle school has some hybrid features not found in the high school report, such as categories for grades within a single subject, and a 4-point scale with percentage equivalents. These categories were not exact matches of the curriculum so there was some risk of muddled interpretations by parents reading middle years report cards.

Participants

Parents of middle school children could provide perspective that comes at a time when some disenchantment or disengagement could be emerging since parents are generally considered to be most engaged at early years and most disengaged at high school (Epstein et al., 2002).

With permission of the superintendent of the school division, I invited parents from three middle school communities to participate in the study in November, 2015. My interest was to gather information from a diverse group of participants. To access participants, I worked through the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) at each school. I invited PACs to distribute an invitation to parents to participate in an interview. The first six participants (ensuring as diverse representation of the division's population as possible) who expressed an interest in an interview were contacted with information about the study and with consent forms to take part in a one-hour interview. The interviews were scheduled within four weeks of receiving their child's report card to ensure that their reflections were timely.

Participant Profiles

Interview 1: Maria and Josh

Maria and Josh grew up in rural Manitoba near the community their children now attend school. Both parents are employed in careers connected to education. Together, they have three school-aged children. They are invested in the education of their children, closely monitoring achievement, interacting with the teachers, and actively volunteering at school. Their outlook on education and the educators is positive.

Interview 2: Sven

Sven immigrated to Canada ten years ago; it is the third country for him to raise his family of eleven. He is well educated, passionate about his views, and keenly aware of differences in the educational systems of the three countries. Although he is self-conscious about his own ability to communicate in English and considers himself very ordinary, he follows his children's education closely and asks questions of the school if he needs clarification. Sven is not afraid to share his perspectives when he disagrees with the school's direction.

Interview 3: Brenda

Brenda is a married medical health care professional with four children in school. She grew up in the community where she currently resides. She is the primary connection to her children's schools. Her children all do very well in school academics. Brenda values achievement measured by good grades, but because she knows she can depend on high grade achievement, she looks more carefully at social development in teachers' comments.

Interview 4: Juanita and Phillip

Phillip and Juanita are newcomers to Manitoba with professional degrees from their home country. Phillip came on his own and found employment, his wife and four children followed six months ago when Juanita secured employment. Education is given significant value in their home country, and teachers are held in high regard. Prior to arriving in Canada Phillip and Juanita's four children were enrolled in private schools that taught English but they are now adjusting to studying entirely in English. They are adapting quickly and are finding early success in school. The parents are involved closely in the education of their children and access support from the guidance counselor or teacher when they have questions. While good grades are

important to them, they are cognizant of subjectivity in grading and prefer the eye-test of seeing that their children study diligently to measure success.

Interview 5: J.P. and Francis

J.P. and Francis are a married couple with two children. J.P. is a banking professional and Francis is a support worker in elementary education. Their youngest is a middle school student with special communication needs. His programming is largely covered by an Individual Education Plan. He attends and participates in classes, but is not working on grade level curriculum. J.P. and Francis stay in close contact with the resource teacher at the school; a daily communication log travels between school and home every day. The parents' main goal for their child is that he is happy and included in as many school activities as possible.

Interview 6: Garth

Garth is a married father of twins. He started his own business as a second career and works out of a home office. His wife works out of the home. Garth is closely involved in the day-to-day aspects of his children's education. Both parents are volunteers in the school through coaching and parent advisory committees. Garth values the mentoring aspect of a student-teacher relationship over good grades. He says his wife is more concerned with good grades than he is but recognizes that as long as the grades on report cards are good, it's easy for him to have a cavalier attitude toward them.

Data Collection

Participants chose the location and time of the one-hour interviews. I offered to meet at a local restaurant, travel to convenient location for them, or book a conference room at a local school. Four interviews were conducted in a school, two were conducted at the homes of participants. Three interviews had both parents present and three were attended by one parent. All interviews followed a standard protocol to ensure data could be compared. However, based on the answers participants provided, I adjusted clarifying questions from interview to interview. Every effort was made to provide confidentiality. Participants were not identifiable by their individual comments and pseudonyms were used in any commentary used as supporting quotations. Participants could have withdrawn from the study at any time and had they done so their information would have been stripped from the study. None of the participants chose to withdraw.

Audio digital recordings and electronic data were stored on a password-protected computer. All hard data was stored in a locked filing cabinet in the principal researcher's home office at all times and was not shared with anyone. All electronic data will be trashed and all hard data deleted within five years of the study's completion, anticipated to be August, 2017.

Data Analysis

Transcribed data amounted to approximately 20 - 25 typed pages per interview. I spaced interviews to allow me time to transcribe each interview before conducting the next so that I could identify emerging themes and improve my own interviewing skills. In the case of the first interview, I provided enough time to consult with my advisor regarding the data gathered. Once all interviews were completed, my process for data analysis began by simply reading each

interview twice to establish the tone and message. I highlighted quotations that expressed strong emotions, and began to identify themes in the margins. The next task was coding parent feedback according to the five research questions. I created a spreadsheet identifying each interview on the horizontal axis and the themes along the vertical axis. This format allowed for quick reference to similarities and differences across the interviews. I read through each interview looking specifically for thematic feedback and noted the lines referenced for each instance or occurrence. On the same spreadsheet I included a field for notable quotations for each interview according to each theme, and a field at the bottom for my observations about each of the research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR:

FINDINGS 1: INDIVIDUALIZED READINGS OF A STANDARDIZED REPORT CARD

In this chapter I present a profile of the participants and explore the context surrounding what happens to report cards when the schools distribute them. These are “findings” in and of themselves but I have separated them from a second chapter of findings because they serve more to set a context for the parent perceptions that I present in the following chapter. The second chapter of findings deals with the four goals articulated by the provincial government for the new report card. Participants have been assigned pseudonyms, and some personal details were altered to ensure that their identities remain private. It is evident that the group of parents responding to my requests for interviews had above average education and may have been above average in terms of their belief in, and commitment to their children’s education. This could have been a product of the recruitment process.

These findings suggest that there was a nostalgic and symbolic significance in children bringing home report cards. This may be why percentage grades were generally the primary focus for parents even though so many other categories of information were available on the report card. It was also clear that little beyond the format of the report card could be described as standardized; distribution, audience, processes, interpretations, and preferences were all individualized constructs.

For this study, six families shared their perspectives regarding the new Manitoba Provincial Report Card in a one-hour interview. I began each interview by listening to the story of how they received, processed, and responded to the report card. Next, I asked parents to share their perceptions regarding specific elements of the report card to establish how well the four

goals that the provincial government articulated the new report card are being met (Manitoba Education, 2014). Those goals were to (i) improve the clarity of reporting achievement, (ii) to enhance parent-school relationship, (iii) to improve learning, and (iv) to improve consistency.

How Parents are Interacting with the Report Card

Each report card has its own story as to what happens to it when it is received. I traced the stories of report cards in six families to see what they do with these documents. This provided a context for interpreting the perceptions these parents held regarding the four goals of the provincial report card initiative. The parents interviewed all sent their children to school in the same division, but three different middle schools were represented in this study. Although all parents currently had a child in middle school, in their interviews they referenced experiences with report cards across all levels of school. There may be a temptation to view report cards as a simple communication between schools and parents, but this study shows it as one part of complex communications among several teachers, a student, and parent(s)/guardian(s).

The narrative of interpretation is impacted by a school's method of delivery. Whoever sees the report card first may have a better chance to control the narrative. Several parents identified that report cards were sent in an unsealed envelope with the child; certainly showing that report cards were not exclusively communication between schools and parents. In this school division, among schools where report cards came home with the children, an electronic option was also available to families. The first person to see the report card was the child in four of the six families interviewed. In cases where the report card was emailed, parents had the opportunity to review it before the child saw it. Email options were not available at all schools and were referred to by Maria and Josh as a new option (Interview 1, Line 16).

One of many underlying tensions was that nostalgia influenced the acceptance of changes to report cards. This idea may have been impacting parent perception throughout the interview. The concept of nostalgia is that a parent may hold a personal preference for their child to experience report cards the same way the parent remembers experiencing them. Parents within a single family were sometimes divided regarding their preferred method of receiving the report card as shown in Figure 4; nostalgia and tradition seemed to be in tension with the convenience of instant email delivery. Nostalgia or symbolic value of a child bringing home the report card was expressed by at least one parent in four of the interviews. That nostalgia and symbolism was dismissed by the other spouse in two of those situations. Preferences regarding this and other aspects of the report card were held by the individual rather than by a family unit. Phillip and Juanita, who recently emigrated from Southeast Asia shared how the subtle symbolism of a child delivering the fruit of their efforts is less subtle in their previous country: “If you get a failing grade, you won’t be able to hand it (your report card) to your parents, your parents have to go to the school to talk to the teachers” before they can get it. (Interview 4, Lines 29-31). I did not encounter parents who were determined to enforce nostalgic practices; I saw nostalgia operating in the background, with parents willing to step out of the way of what they saw as progress, but not interested in stepping aside for a whim. A report card is itself a nostalgic symbol, so changes to the content or delivery method received scrutiny from some parents.

FIGURE 4

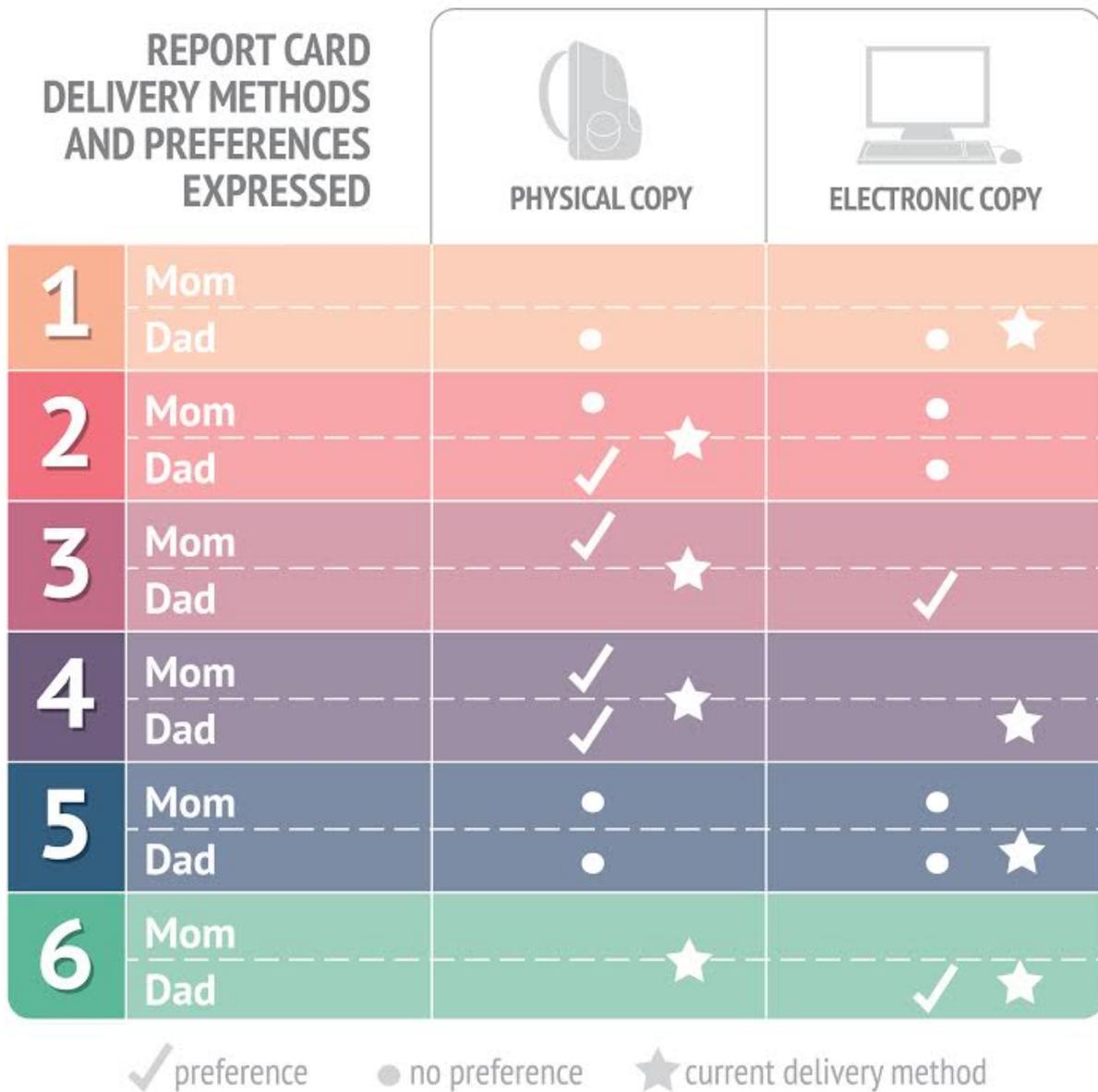


Figure 4. The variety in delivery methods and preferences expressed.

A second important concept that echoed throughout the interviews was that preferences and understanding are individualized constructs. For example, no single pattern was evident regarding preference between electronic delivery or hard copy delivery. It wasn't one gender

preferring one method or any other cue such as culture, as to which person would prefer traditional hard copy delivery. Figure 4 also shows that spouses were not necessarily in agreement on this question, illustrating that families are different and that within families, parents are different. Maria, Brenda, and Garth preferred the hard copy coming home. When asked about her interest in the physical copy, Maria explained that it was the level of importance she attributed to the report card; “I prefer emails for newsletters...but for report cards, I think I like it coming home” (Interview 1, Line 18). Brenda expressed that she preferred the paper copy because she kept the report cards for posterity’s sake (Interview 3, Line 12).

Who is Reading the Report Card?

While the report card is intended to primarily enhance communication between schools and parents, children are often the first people to see the report card, and the circle of sharing grades is broader than I anticipated. My recollection of report card day was that I would quickly scan my grades to find the subject with the highest grade, and then I would proceed to solicit comparisons of that grade with friends, while avoiding comparison of my lowest subject score. Beyond that, my memory is fuzzy on the matter but I’m sure that my parents did see the report card at some point. Although the Manitoba Report Card Policy and Guidelines document (Manitoba Education, 2014) identifies parents as the primary audience in contrast, Figure 5 shows that the report card audience was a unique compound configuration for each family.

FIGURE 5

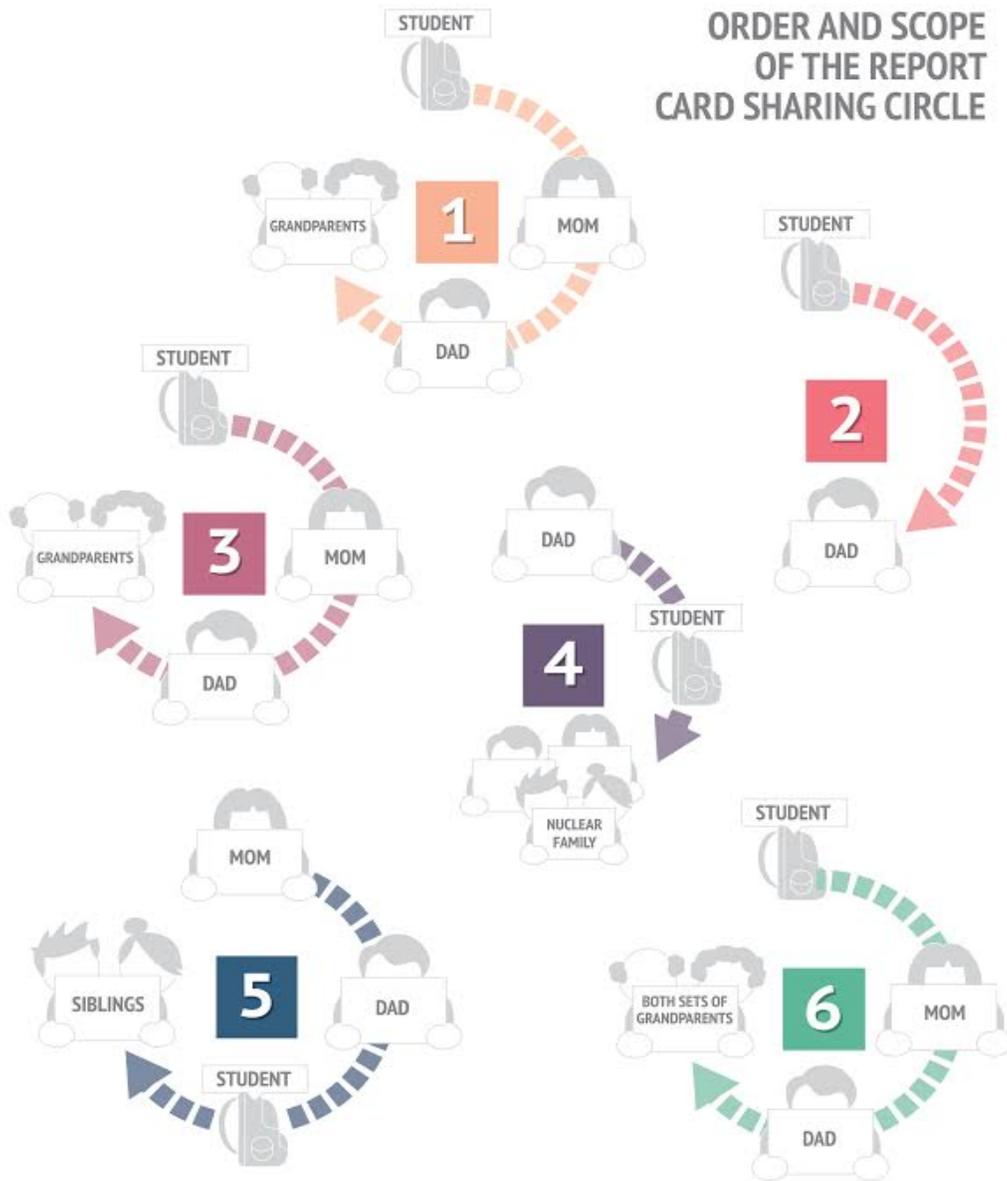


Figure 5. Order and Scope of the Report Card Sharing Circle.

Emailed report cards placed the information in the hands of parents quickly, rather than trusting that students would deliver it. This allowed parents the first chance to interpret the meaning. Communication can be tailored to a specific audience, but the audience for a report card appears to be diverse. In that regard, a report card that highlights several aspects of

achievement has a chance of having “something for everyone”. There was, however, no standard pattern of which parent reviewed the report card first.

In half of the instances, mothers were the first parent to review the report card, and in half it was fathers. Through personal experience as a teacher and principal, mothers were more likely to communicate with the school about their children’s education, and so I expected that they would be the first parent to review the report card. Interestingly, three families shared the grades with grandparents; this is a broader circle of sharing than anticipated and suggests a high degree of importance is being given to the grades portion of the report card. Brenda said that, “we definitely brag about them (grades) to the grandparents” and implied that when the children were younger, money was given by grandparents for good grades (Interview 3, Line 68). Garth explained the context that led to this family tradition, stating that grandpa is a retired teacher and that his other grandchildren didn’t do well in school; so grandpa “celebrates all things school...a little extremely” (Interview 6, Line 167). Sharing grades with grandparents shows students that good grades are valued in the family, and provides encouragement from another angle.

How the Report Card is Being Reviewed

The amount of time families spend on a report card could indicate some measure of the level of importance they attribute to this document. The time for a report card to be reviewed ranged from a few minutes to the length of a family supper (Interview 5, Line 46-5; Interview 4, Line 38-42). Three interviews reported 10-15 minutes as the time they took to review a report card. I interpret that 10 minutes could be closer to the norm since the family spending only a few minutes on the report card found it of little value in their context, and the family who discussed it over supper reviewed several children’s report cards in that time.

How parents reviewed the report card showed variation too. J.P. and Francis, whose child had special needs, didn't review the report card with their child because they said it didn't pertain to what they valued. In fact, they didn't print off the emailed report card for a week or two after getting it (Interview 5, Line 71). The report card had less meaning due to the fact that they got detailed, personal interactions with the school through Individualized Educational Program (IEP) meetings. In contrast, Phillip and Juanita said they "scrutinize everything" online the day the information is released...before their child even brings the hard copy home (Interview 4, Line 89). With all the variables around who is making the report card, who is viewing it first, and how they are reading it, and what other information streams they have accessed, it is clear that a standard report card form does not lead to a standard response from parents.

Among the variations in receiving and reviewing report cards, two similarities stood out: a discussion of results with the child, and a common interest in first seeing the percentage grade reported for each subject. Garth aptly described the report card as a "catalyst for discussion," but beyond this general function, the process of review looked quite different amongst the interviewees (Interview 6, Line 31). Phillip and Juanita made sure the conversation with children had both parents present. In the other families the conversation was sequential, with whichever parent was home first holding the first round of talks. In the homes of the two families newly arrived to Manitoba something of a ritualized process took place. Sven collected all the report cards to circumvent a circus of grade comparisons among his nine children. He then proceeded to review each report card with its owner. He reported that he spent ten minutes on each if it was a good report card, and longer if there were problems. Sven said he asked clarifying questions of the children and asked about their next steps too (Interview 2, Lines 103-

117). Phillip and Juanita, also newcomers, had their conversation over a family supper with siblings participating in the discussion of each other's report card (Interview 4, Lines 41, 50).

The category of information that generated the first interest for families, shown in Figure 6, is the percentage grades.



Figure 6. The aspects of the report card that draw attention first.

Of particular interest is that Maria identified that, while the boys in her house gravitate to grades, she and her daughter are drawn more to the comments (Interview 1, Line 24). Maria and Josh also identified that they read the report cards differently for each of their children because “each student is very individual” so the parents respond differently to an identical score on two different children’s report card (Interview 1, Line 237). The concept that interpretation is individualized down to this level is interesting; they were factoring in pre-existing perceptions of the particular strengths and weaknesses of their child to create meaning from the scores and comments on the report card. The second most noted aspect of the report card mentioned is comments.

In summary, report cards hold a nostalgic value for some parents, making change more difficult to accept. Some parents embraced changes to things like the method of delivery and score ranges while others were comfortable with tradition. The tradition of percentage grades was strongly valued. Parents focused on different elements of the report cards for each child, but spent approximately ten minutes reviewing it with them. Report cards were often shared with grandparents—indicating that parents view success in school something worth celebrating. These findings indicate a highly individualized context for the perceptions explored by the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5:

FINDINGS 2: THE PURSUIT OF CLARITY AND COHERENCE

In this chapter I focus specifically on the following four research questions:

1. What are the selected parents' perceptions of the clarity and coherence of the report card with reference to student achievement?
2. What are the selected parents' perceptions of the value of the new report card in contributing to/ enhancing parent-school relationships?
3. Do parents perceive the new report card as having the potential to improve their child's learning?
4. Do parents perceive that consistency in the report card format improves the consistency in any way beyond format?

These four research questions are reiterations of the four goals stated by the province of Manitoba when the provincial report card initiative was launched (2014).

Perceptions Regarding Clarity and Coherence with Reference to Student Achievement

To explore the topic of clarity and coherence, I asked parents about specific elements of the report card and have given each element its own section. All interview participants maintained a positive response to the report card with regard to their ability to navigate through the document and make meaning of it. In spite of the positive response overall, the findings regarding clarity reveal a theme of internal tension which emerged where competing ideas manifested in the report card were met with critique or praise by parents. Consider the following examples from the small sample size I interviewed:

- a) A stated goal at the time of implementation was that this report card would be especially clear for newcomers trying to understand Manitoba's education system, but in reality a 6-plus page report with a considerable volume of text created tension for a newcomer who was learning English.
- b) A stated goal for comment writing was that comments communicate a curricular strength, challenge and next step for each student. The first printing of exemplar comments from Manitoba Education focused on curricular comments, but the second printing highlighted more personal commentary to humanize the tone. Diagnostic curricular comments were well-received by parents seeking to co-produce learning by helping learn content, but warm personal comments were preferred by parents who valued character development more than tips about curricular content.
- c) The use of ordinal scores implied that calculating learning down to a single percent is not possible, but the ordinal score is presented right alongside a percentage score on the Grade 7/8 report card, creating a tension that jumped off the page for parents.

Interviews with two families whose first language was not English identified the struggle for newcomers to understand the format and language. They seemed to accept this as a temporary condition made better by getting an interpreter and learning the language more fully over time. Sven in particular, however, showed a longer lasting concern that “for regular, basic people, I think that it is overwhelming information” (Interview 2, Line 27).

A similar sentiment of frustration was described by Garth, a lifelong English speaker who critiqued overuse of curricular language and “gobble-de-gook” by some educators for the purpose of “appearing smart” (Interview 6, Line 339). Whether the intent of educators was to sound smart or to mirror curricular language, the impact was not positive; some parents felt

frustrated and tended to skip past the heavy text in favour of numbers.

A further question of overall clarity and consistency came from J.P. and Francis who identified that the report card did not correspond to their son's IEP goals, so there was little relevance for them; not only had they not opened the emailed report card near the date it arrived, J.P. jokingly conceded he hadn't been aware there had been a change in the report card format. For families like J.P. and Francis, clarity was figuring out how the standardized report card connected to their child's experience at all. In addition to these issues of global clarity, drilling down to specific elements of the report card highlighted the diversity of interpretations, and surfaced tensions regarding the clarity of communication.

Clarity and Coherence of Specific Elements of the Manitoba Report Card

Percentages and Ordinal Scores

Manitoba parents with Grade 7-8 children in 2015/16 were well positioned to reflect on the recent changes to grade reporting because they were the first ones to experience all three versions of the standardized report card and are the only ones who will have recent memory of the report cards prior to provincial standardization. With the exception of the family who immigrated to Canada in 2016, this group received report cards with a hybrid use of ordinal scores and percentage scores as depicted in Figure 4: A sample section of the Manitoba Grade 7 and 8 report card. They were also familiar with report cards that only use ordinal scores (1-4) because that is the model used for Grade 1-6 students since 2013/14. Prior to 2013/14, each school developed its own report card, so parents may also have seen report cards with only a percentage grade. Even if their children's report card has never been in percentage terms, parents

are familiar with percentage grades as part of their own school experience and as discussed earlier, the nostalgia of the familiar resonated with some parents.

FIGURE 7

A SAMPLE SECTION OF THE MANITOBA REPORT CARD SHOWING THE HYBRID USE OF ORDINAL AND PERCENTAGE GRADES

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT		LEARNING BEHAVIOURS		OVERALL GRADE		
Academic Achievement	Term 1	Term 2	Learning Behaviours	Term 1	Term 2	Final
Knowledge and understanding	3	2	Management skills	U	U	
Scientific inquiry process	3	3	Participation in learning	C	U	
Design process and problem solving	4	4	Responsibility	S	C	
OVERALL GRADE	78%	70%				

Figure 7. A sample section of the Manitoba Grade 7 and 8 Report Card showing hybrid use of ordinal and percentage scores.

Whatever their past experiences, parents made a distinction between the clarity of percentage scores and ordinal scores. Ordinal score ranges simply divide grades into five grade

divisions; not dissimilar to letter grades. Figure 8 shows the range of possible percentage grades a student could be earning when they are assigned an ordinal score.

FIGURE 8

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF PROVINCIAL EXPECTATIONS	
GRADE SCALE	DESCRIPTOR
4 (80% to 100%)	VERY GOOD TO EXCELLENT UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF CONCEPTS AND SKILLS
3 (70% to 79%)	GOOD UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF CONCEPTS AND SKILLS
2 (60% to 69%)	BASIC UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF CONCEPTS AND SKILLS
1 (50% to 59%)	LIMITED UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF CONCEPTS AND SKILLS; SEE TEACHER COMMENTS
ND (less than 50%)	DOES NOT YET DEMONSTRATE THE REQUIRED UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF THE CONCEPTS AND SKILLS; SEE TEACHER COMMENTS

A BREAKDOWN OF THE CORRESPONDING PERCENTAGE RANGES & DESCRIPTORS OF EACH ORDINAL SCORE

Figure 8. Ordinal scores and the corresponding percentage ranges and descriptors

Percentages were favoured in the majority of the interviews and seen as clearer indicators of achievement. Ordinal scores had support from Phillip and Juanita who embraced score ranges because of a strong trust in the teacher. They valued the teacher’s subjective comments above their notion of what a numerical score meant. J.P. and Francis found the reported grades irrelevant to their context because they receive face-to-face communication in IEP meetings.

However the rest of the participants reacted somewhat negatively to the use of ordinal score ranges.

Nostalgia, the magnetism of the familiar, is one possible explanation for the preference; percentages were described as being the frame of reference that parents bring to the table (Interview 3, Line 97). It is perhaps the riskiest change to the report card simply because it may be unfamiliar. Some parents considered ordinal scores to be vague and imprecise (Interview 1, Line 40). Without a percentage (referencing the Grade 1-6 report card) Sven identified that he was temporarily confused (Interview 2, Line 203). Josh commented that he felt percentages were clearer for his child (Interview 1, Line 39). However, the majority of parent feedback was not celebrating the merit of percentage reporting, it was critiquing ordinal scores. Parent reaction to ordinal scores was generally negative.

The range in percentage value on the grade scale was one of the main critiques of parents interviewed. For example, a student earning a score of 4 might be sitting at 100% or an 80%. Garth identified that parents “get frustrated with it and lose interest” and that ordinal scores were “a real roadblock for parents to take that part seriously” (Interview 6, Line 389, Line 436). Parents had different reasons for wanting what they perceived to be a more precise grade; some wanted the exact percentage for the purpose of celebrating high achievement, others wanted to know when grades were slipping so they could intervene (Interview 3, Line 136; Interview 2, Line 66). Sven took exception to the large range because he felt that it could mask a declining grade and delay him from implementing intervention strategies (Interview 2, Line 140, 205). I find this comment fascinating. The concept behind ordinal scores is that a grade is not as accurate as the 100-point percentage scale implies, so a score range better reflects the subjective realities of measuring learning. While parents reacted differently to ordinal scores and

percentage grades, I did not get the sense that any parent wanted the percentage grade in order to rank and compare students. Ordinal scores were a break from the tradition in this school division, but I don't think it is fair to say that nostalgia was the only reason for the strong dislike. It was certainly a contributing factor, but there were repeated concerns about the large ordinal score ranges and subjectivity.

Scale ranges and provincial descriptions of what each ordinal score meant drew criticism. Brenda stated that she found it odd to have an imbalanced conversion scale where a 4 covered a 20% spread, while 1, 2, and 3 covered a 10% spread, and Not yet Demonstrated (ND) covered 50%. The broad categories planted a seed of doubt for Josh and Maria as to whether all tests and assignments were actually calculated into the grade (Interview 1, Line 79). Another concern voiced in the interview with Brenda was that she said she didn't know what a "3" meant because the provincial descriptor was too generic (Interview 3, Line 136). (See descriptors in Figure 8 above.) For a score to have meaning, she said the descriptor needed to be more specific. Josh and Maria echoed that feeling of uncertainty about what an ordinal score meant. They said they have had to ask more clarifying questions of teachers since they don't trust the precision of the ordinal grade (Interview 1, Line 283). While "full partnership with parents" was a goal of the Manitoba Provincial Report Card, I don't think the expected result would be parents coming to ask what the grades meant.

The fear of too much subjectivity in assessment also reared its head when discussing ordinal scores. Brenda reported she had "heard rumours" that some teachers deliberately assign lower ordinal scores in the first report card so that there was some room to give a higher number on subsequent report cards (Interview 3, Line 112). This may be a work-around for teachers who see grades as a motivational tool and are presented by the problem that a student could stay

within the same ordinal bracket for the entire year, but rumours like this one contribute to the narrative of unfair subjectivity in grades. Sven raised this concern to an even higher level by musing about whether the grades teachers give are influenced by how previous siblings fared in class (Interview 2, Line 143-148). The trust that parents exhibited in percentage scores was not complete, there were references to subjectivity as a general concern in grading, but ordinal scores seemed to draw out disdain.

Notions that objectivity can and should be the goal became problematic when looking closely at the whole endeavour of constructing a report card. Parents may be sensitive to subjectivity, but there is an inevitable subjectivity from the beginning to the end of the process of reporting learning which makes things difficult for any type of report card - perhaps more so for one carrying the title of "standardized." Parents reviewing the same Manitoba's standardized, standards-based report card had different interpretations; this shows that the question regarding subjectivity is a reality whether the format is standardized or not. Reporting learning from several angles tacitly acknowledged the limitations of a single stream of information to report learning precisely and to create shared meaning, but using ordinal scores was a fairly overt message that grades are approximate. Narrow score ranges might increase parents' confidence that a grade is precise and therefore less subjective. Diversifying the communication system between schools and parents to place less emphasis on the report card might be an effective tool as well. A standards-based report card containing teachers' comments, grades, and learning behaviours may be at higher risk of internal inconsistencies because it reports on several aspects of learning. These inconsistencies get interpreted negatively as evidence of subjectivity, or rather bias. It is also possible that reporting on several aspects of learning could make it seem like the report card is the most important communication from schools.

FIGURE 9



Figure 9. Perceptions parents have of ordinal scores.

The critique in each of the four interviews has its own unique angle even while they agree that they do not favour ordinal scores. Figure 9 illustrates the rationale presented in each of the cases that cited skepticism about ordinal scores.

Not all perception of the ordinal scores was negative, supporting the premise that parents have individual expectations for what appears in the report card. Phillip and Juanita had no qualms about seeing the 100-point percentage scale changed to a 4-point scale. They described it as “representing the same thing” just through a different system (Interview 4, Line 264, 269). Rather than being concerned about numerical precision, they appeared to embrace generality, saying that they preferred not to know if their child had a 75% or 80% (Interview 4, Line 269). One advantage they cited for their support of ordinal score ranges is that seeing small drops in a grade may unnecessarily discourage a student and make them feel like failures (Interview 4, Line 279).

A second reason Phillip and Juanita preferred ordinal scores is that they said percentages lend themselves to ranking –they personally did not see learning as a competition (Interview 4, Line 119). They said that when their daughter complained about a low grade they directed her to the teacher’s comment that indicated that she was doing very well. This comment, they explained to their daughter, is the more accurate reflection of accomplishment; one teacher may assign lower grades than the next but a positive comment from the teacher reflects, whether or not a student is doing well.

Overall though, parent perception regarding ordinal scores was not positive. I assess that some of the negativity was due to the fact that ordinal scores were a break from tradition, but there was more to it than that. Some parents might simply disagree with the premise of a score

range itself. These parents who responded to my request for them to participate in the interview described that their children did well in school, so these parents might be predisposed to want to see the exact high grade that their children earned. The sample size of this study is too small to make claims as to what the majority of people believe about ordinal scores but it does suggest that work would need to be done to convince parents that ordinal scores are better than percentages.

The strength of the criticisms leads me to believe that parents and schools are leaning heavily on the report card as the primary method of communication regarding achievement. If parents were getting clear indication from multiple streams of evidence about their child's achievement, would they be so concerned about a ordinal score range? Perhaps the ordinal score was interfering with something parents wanted to do with the report card. Sven thought that ordinal score ranges could mask a drop in grade that would normally have triggered him to act. What action was he referring to? Parents rarely described actively assisting their children with curricular content, their role was consistently to encourage and hold their child accountable for doing the work. I'm speculating, but in a traditional percentage model parents ferret out what work is missing, making sure the child completes it, and then feel rewarded when the percentage grade moves upward. It is less likely that this process would change an ordinal score. Ordinal scores may challenge the role parents have been playing by reducing the noticeable impact on the grade.

Comments

The purpose(s) and expectation(s) that each individual had for teacher comments created issues with clarity. Comments were written by teachers in the space beneath each subject being reported on. (As an added factor regarding clarity, my previous research on the Manitoba report card indicated that some teachers have had the students participate in their learning by writing their own strength/challenge/next step in an attempt to use assessment as learning. The point being that some comments on the report card could be the reflections of students.) Between seven and nine comment sections appear on each Grade 7-8 level report card, depending on the number of classes each student takes. Although standardized in format, this section provides an avenue for completely individualized and personal reflection by teachers on a student's achievement. However, the quality of writing, the teacher's understanding on the function of the comments, and parents' expectations of what comments should focus on, led to diverse interpretations. Parents noticed the differences in the way that teachers wrote comments, both by comparing the report cards of siblings and by seeing comments written by a number of teachers on a single report card. One parent noted that some teachers comments were "definitely better than others" and that "when done properly, they were very helpful in giving insight into what the numbers and letters mean" (Interview 1 Line 65, 437). Parents noticed the curricular and personal foci as features of the comment section and Josh and Maria identified that a difference between the "old" report card and the provincial report card comments was that there was a 'next-steps' element that helped them know what they could do with their child at home (Interview 1, Line 32, 283).

Parents agreed in general terms that they liked the comment sections and that they found the meaning of comments to be clear. How valuable and how clear appear to be on a broad

spectrum though, as shown in the following examples: Philip and Juanita perceived the comments as being the most important aspect of the report card because it most clearly reflected the opinions of the teachers. Since they “respect the profession of teachers” even the percentage grade was reinterpreted based on the opinion expressed in the comments (Interview 4, Line 209). Sven thought that comments from every teacher on every subject made for too much information for him and overworked tired teachers (Interview 2, Line 186). Not unlike parents’ reflection on grades, the sentiment toward report card comments was positive, but when parents shared their reservations, a spectrum of how people interpreted the report card emerged not only between families, but also within a single family.

When parents expressed some of the ways that the comments were not clear, we see that each parent’s perception about what was not clear was unique to their experience. Josh and Maria identified that, when done properly, comments were very helpful because they gave insight into what the letters and numbers meant, but noted that some teachers were definitely better at it than others (Interview 1 Line 437. Interview 1, Line 72). Their interpretation came in the context that Josh and Maria were not convinced that ordinal scores were providing much meaning so they were searching to find meaning. It also highlighted the perception that not all teachers write comments that the parents considered to be “proper.”

FIGURE 10

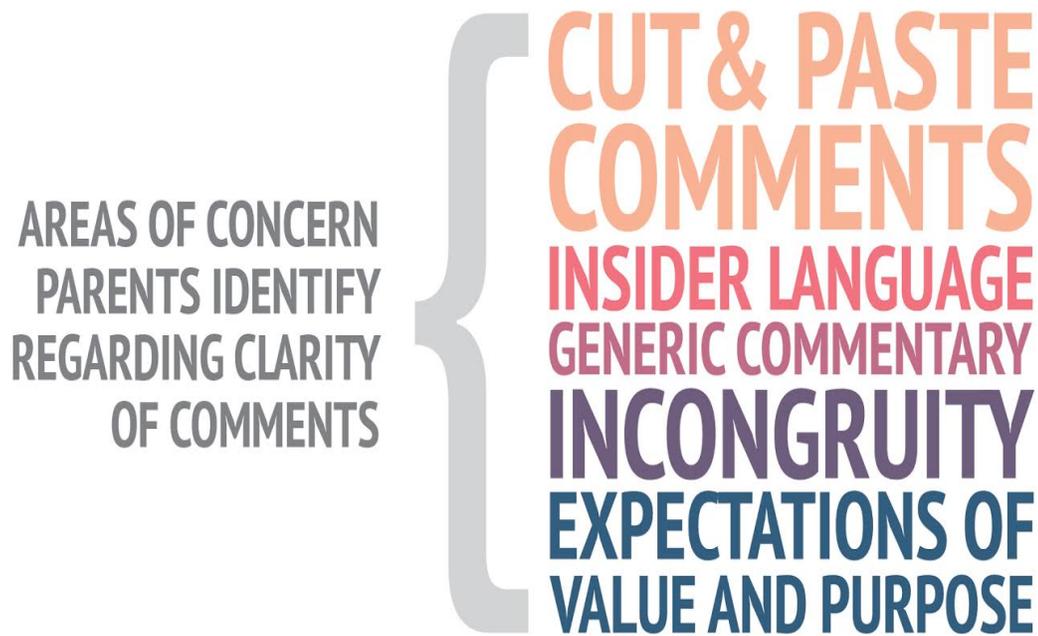


Figure 10. Areas of concern parents identified regarding clarity of comments.

Cut-and-paste. “Cutting and pasting” standardized comments into a standardized report card seems like a rational choice by teachers because of its efficiency, but it was not well received by all and, in some cases, undermined the sense of trust parents have in teachers. In four of the interviews, parents identified that teachers were cutting and pasting comments to multiple report cards. Parents noticed instances where the same comments appeared from one term to the next, or from one child to the next with Garth referring lightly to it as the “Command C function” (Interview 6, Line 315). Seeing this practice has varied effects on parents. Garth saw it as a casual reality not worth begrudging, Josh saw it as evidence of a lack of effort by the teacher, and Sven saw it as a sign that teachers were overworked by this reporting format (Interview 6, Line 326; Interview 1, Line 55; Interview 2, Line 47-49). Garth, who viewed it

casually, said he didn't expect every teacher to write personal comments about the character of his kids, "but there are many who do" (Interview 6, Line 213). Josh viewed it as a lack of effort and perceived that vital information was missing if the comment was not personalized for his children. Cut-and-paste comments resulted in Josh having "no confidence at all" that the teacher's assessment of his children was meaningful (Interview 1, Line 72-73). Sven saw cutting-and-pasting as a sign of an overwhelmed teacher providing information that in turn overwhelmed him, and he suggested that comments sections should not be done for every subject. Even when parents shared a perception that comments were being cut-and-pasted, the interpretation as to why that was happening and the response to that practice was distinct. Cut-and-paste comments could simply be seen as an extension of standardization –since the report card is standardized why wouldn't teachers standardize their comments? The findings from this small sample group suggest that personalization was valued more than standardization. Personalization alone, however, would not solve the problem since parents were looking for different things in the comments.

Generic comments. A correlate of the cut-and-paste concern was the perception that comments were not specific enough to have meaning. Three interviewees identified that there were times when the comments were too general for their liking. This could be because the comment was comprised of niceties when Sven, for example, was looking for subject-specific commentary (Interview 2, Line 80-84). Perhaps, like Brenda, parents could think that comments like "Should strive for excellence and speak French at every opportunity" was something that could be said about everyone" (Interview 3, Line 209). In Brenda's case, she could reliably predict that her children would have good grades so she was looking to the comments to give her

specific information about strengths and weaknesses, and was disappointed when the comments did not further interpret the grade.

Insider Language. The tension between diagnostically reporting on curricular standards versus commenting personally about a student's behaviours was highlighted by the parents' perception that teachers are at times using *insider* language. Language from the curriculum was described as dry and formulaic by Brenda, while Garth interpreted use of curricular language in comments as an effort by teachers to sound smart at the cost of being real (Interview 3, Line 78; Interview 6, Line 339). Garth read into the comments to find out who cared about his kids' personality and spirit and those who are not just concerned with covering curriculum. (Interview 6, Line 226-229). Two newcomer families for whom English was not a first language held separate opinions. Both acknowledged the initial difficulty with the language, but Phillip and Juanita valued comments and said that subject specific comments were what was missing from the report cards in their prior country (Interview 4). Sven, on the other hand, believed the volume of commenting overwhelmed teachers and confused him, since his language skills were still developing (Interview 2). The length of stay in Canada did not predict the level of difficulty experienced, as in this example the family appreciative of the comments had been in Canada for a much shorter period of time.

Incongruity. Parents perceived some comments to be incongruent with other elements of the report card, making the meaning less clear. In Interview 2, Sven reported that although his child's grade dropped, the comment remained positive, giving him a conflicting message about the true state of affairs (Interview 2, Line 186). Brenda cited an example where the comment conflicted with statements made directly to her child by the teacher (Interview 3, Line 51). Josh and Maria recounted an instance where the ordinal grade for reading dropped from a 4 to a 3, but

the comment indicated that their daughter was reading at grade level (Interview 1, Line 48). The daughter rejected that she was even at grade level. This example shows the complexity of finding a shared meaning. The term ‘grade level’ could be interpreted by the teacher as anywhere from a 2-4, and a parent’s interpretation could be that only a 4 is ‘grade level,’ or that a drop from a 4 to a 3 should be at least be accompanied by a comment to motivate change. In addition, a child could be getting her perception of what ‘grade level’ means based on self-confidence, teacher comments, or a myriad of other factors. Another form of incongruity was highlighted by Sven who noted that each teacher painted a different picture of his child in the comments so he was left wondering if his boy was the “the best boy ever” or “lazy” (Interview 2, Line 53). Congruent messaging across each element of the report card appeared to be difficult to arrive at due to the many points of reference from which parents were drawing their meaning. The added fact that multiple authors contribute to a single report card may have added to the perception of incongruence.

Expectations of value and purpose. A variety of interpretations emerged regarding the purpose, expectation, and value of the comments; which presented an issue for achieving clarity. After reviewing grades, comments were the second stopping place for the majority of parents interviewed, so they definitely saw some value in them. Parents reported that they saw differences in the quality of comments teachers wrote and attributed it to laziness, being overworked, being too concerned with curriculum, being too concerned with niceties, or simply having too many students to get to know.

FIGURE 11

REASONS FOR PERCEIVED DIFFERENCES IN TEACHER COMMENTS

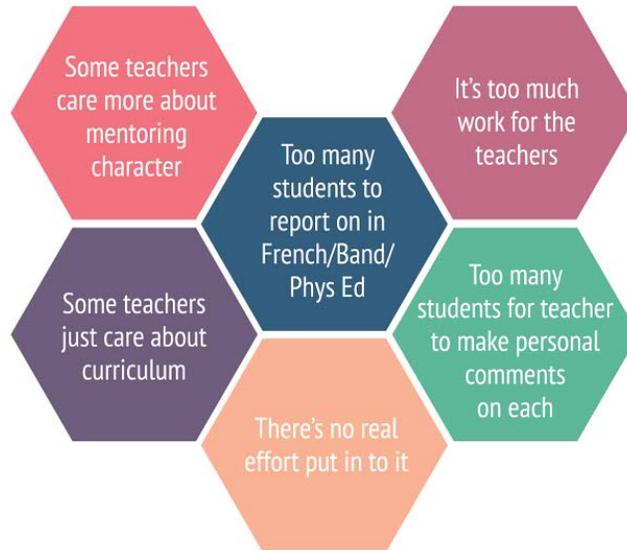


Figure 11. Reasons parents provided for the perceived quality differences in teacher comments.

Families were at times themselves divided (even between family members) regarding the purpose and value of comments. Complex tensions around value and purpose of comments were expressed in the case of Josh and Maria. In the simplest form, Josh was interested in what he perceived to be an objective grade and all other information on the report card paled in value. Comments had more value to him when only the ordinal score was reported. Maria did not disagree with the interest in objective grades, but was drawn to comments that told her “how the children are doing as people” (Interview 1, Line 182-184). There was difference in the value on comments and purpose of comments depending on which child’s report card they were reading, as well. The sons in the family both did well in school and were drawn to the percentage grades, so when parents read their report cards “comment” value was not high. The purpose of reading

the comments was to find out what was happening because the boys didn't share much about what they were learning at school (Interview 1, Line 27). On the other hand, their daughter struggled to achieve high grades and they were drawn to the comments that tended to be affirmative despite her average grades. Josh and Maria agreed that they read the report cards differently for each child so when reading their daughter's report card they gave more importance to comments, and the purpose was to find encouraging news and get some ideas about her next learning steps. It was likely that a particular teacher's comment would not fit the expectation a parent had in mind when they read the report card for that particular child. Parents were looking for affirmation, explanation of a grade, curricular commentary, next steps for learning and a number of other purposes. The tensions within a single family illustrate the difficulty in developing comments that would be considered clear by all. A further layer of complexity might be added to this by researching what different teachers are seeing as the purpose of comments.

It strikes me that comments which include a strength, a challenge, and a next step to improve learning have a formative viewpoint in a document that has traditionally been summative. *Manitoba Report Card Policy and Guidelines* (2014) uses that traditional summative definition and describes that the report card "formally documents and communicates a student's summative achievement to parents" (p. 4). It could be that the goal of this definition is to clearly separate formative assessment results from summative assessment results to increase the diagnostic accuracy of a grade. Yet it seems to me that repositioning the report card as a formative document could be beneficial in: a) communicating that learning is ongoing b) that schools invite parents to participate in improving learning

Learning Behaviours

In addition to ordinal scores/percentage scores, and comment sections for each course, teachers assess Learning Behaviours in three categories on a four-part scale. Figure 9 depicts the scale used to describe Learning Behaviours of students. Teachers assign scores of *Consistently*, *Usually*, *Sometimes*, or *Rarely* to describe how a student is managing time, participating, and being socially responsible in the school context. Guskey (2010) refers to three types of reporting as being product goals, process goals, and progress goals. Learning Behaviours are process goals. In what Marzano (2000) refers to as “omnibus grades” (p. 4) teachers worked process goals (participation/completion of work, etc.) into an overall grade.

In courses where learning behaviours are not directly written in as curricular goals this section may serve to separate process skills from academic achievement grades. This separation is an important element in the writings of Grant Stiggins, Ken O’Connor, and Damian Cooper, and appears in the 2008 Manitoba Education document, *Communicating Student Learning: Guidelines for Schools*.

FIGURE 12

LEARNING BEHAVIOURS	
SCALE	
C: Consistently - almost all or all of the time U: Usually - more than half of the time S: Sometimes - less than half of the time R: Rarely - almost never or never	
PERSONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS	USES CLASS TIME EFFECTIVELY; WORKS INDEPENDENTLY; COMPLETES HOMEWORK AND ASSIGNMENTS ON TIME.
ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING	PARTICIPATES IN CLASS ACTIVITIES; SELF ASSESSES; SETS LEARNING GOALS
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	WORKS WELL WITH OTHERS; RESOLVES CONFLICTS APPROPRIATELY; RESPECTS SELF, OTHERS AND ENVIRONMENT; CONTRIBUTES IN A POSITIVE WAY TO COMMUNITIES

THE LEARNING BEHAVIOURS SCALE AND DESCRIPTORS

Figure 12. Provincial descriptors of learning behaviours.

I am very interested in parents’ perceptions regarding this section of the report card. In our rapidly changing world, a specific body of knowledge is less likely to be relevant than an approach that emphasizes the process of learning new information. Learning Behaviours have the potential to highlight process. They also seem to be a natural place for parents to find out what they can do to influence students in a more lasting way than simply finding out which assignments were not completed and ensuring that work is submitted. Despite my interest, my findings here were limited. Either by virtue of the topic, the timing within the interview itself, or how the questions were phrased, parents did not have much to say about the Learning Behaviour

section. Even J.P. and Francis, whose goals for their child were tightly aligned with social and adaptive functioning rather than curricular achievement, did not have much to say about this category of reporting.

Parents identified that they got enough information from the provincial descriptors for the meaning to be clear. Maria identified that the Learning Behaviour section helped her get to know how her children were getting along with others (Interview 1, Line 182). Brenda said that she knew that these qualities had the lasting property of transferable skills and saw value because of that longevity (Interview 3, Line 144). Parents saw a connection between good learning behaviours and academic achievement, and they saw it as a factor that they could influence (Interview 4, Line 321; Interview 6, Line 272-275).

The topic of learning behaviours did not seem to resonate strongly in a positive or negative way, and parents did provide some hints as to why this was the case. The prospect of a low Learning Behaviour grade seemed to be a hypothetical situation, Garth identified that they saw mostly or all reports of ‘Consistently’ (Interview 6, Line 450). This makes me curious as to how Learning Behaviour grades are arrived at by teachers and how these scores correlate to the ordinal/percentage grade. Brenda added that the large number of qualities lumped into each learning behaviour category limited the meaning of the report and that she doesn’t know how that score was arrived at anyway (Interview 3, Line 159). Perhaps the most interesting comment made by a parent regarding learning behaviours was that “process is great for education ... it’s just not great for reporting” (Interview 6, Line 386). Whether the meaning was so clear that parent had less to say about learning behaviours, or the parents were only seeing high scores in this reporting category, or that meaningfulness was hidden by having several behaviours covered by a single number, this group of parents focused on other elements of the report card. I can’t

escape the feeling that our collective understanding and valuing of learning behaviours is an untapped resource.

Perceptions Regarding Improved Relationship with the School as a Result of the new Report Card

The premise of improving relationships between parents and schools is that together these two parties can co-produce learning, a concept Kenneth Leithwood develops in his Four Paths Framework (Leithwood et al., 2010). A standards-based report card may give more delineated information for parents to act on than when each Manitoba school determined how they structured their report card, and parents acting on specific information could improve student learning. Knowing exactly what the ideal relationship between parent and school is, or how a parent should respond to a report card is difficult to conceptualize. I would say it looks different for each parent. Parents in this study did not report any change to their relationship with the school as a result of the new report card, and expressed a degree of confusion as to how the new report card could improve learning. This could be because the parents who participated in the interview already had a developed relationship with their school and that their children were high achievers, or it could indicate that parents weren't making a connection between the new report card and some new way that it allowed them to participate in their child's education. It could also mean that the report card was a less relevant medium of communication for parents to get the information they felt they needed to create the partnership they wanted.

The report card was not intended to be the only communication with parents. If the report card was the only communication, then I would be concerned that the information would be inadequate to build a family-school partnership that could co-produce student learning. Parents

interviewed in this study described multiple positive ways that parents and schools were communicating with each other. Several parents referred to themselves as not like other parents in their involvement and they perceived they had more frequent interactions than many parents. Figure 13 identifies the types of communication parents referred to as part of the communication system they have with their school.

FIGURE 13

WAYS SCHOOLS AND PARENTS COMMUNICATED

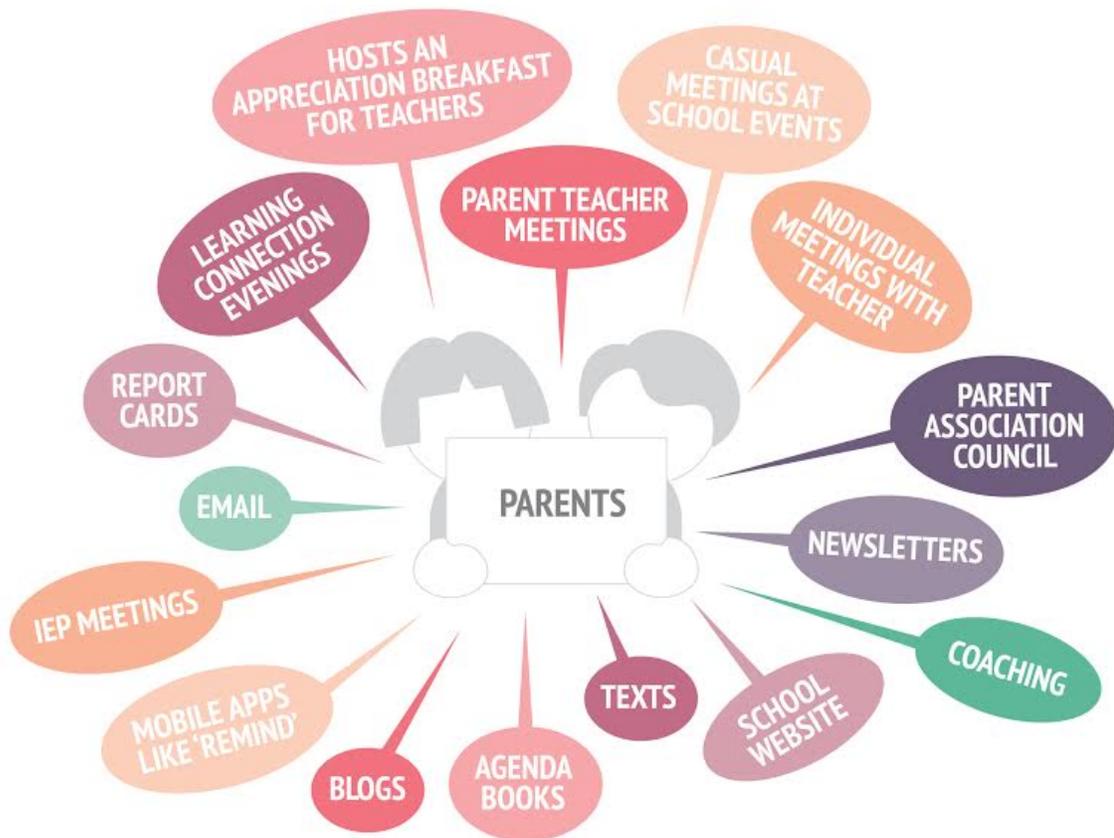


Figure 13. Ways schools and parents communicated.

The variety of interactions parents referred to is an indication that, for them, a system of communication existed beyond the report cards. Technology-based methods of communication featured prominently into how parents and schools were relating with one another. The ability to immediately communicate student learning is impacting traditional methods. Brenda commented on the increased accessibility of teachers through technology, but noted a decrease of products coming home for parent review and signature (Interview 3, Line 281). Some perspectives in the literature are viewing traditional report cards as anachronistic and see e-portfolios as the way of the future, but I did not gather that sentiment from parents (Beloin, 2015). The interviews in this study showed that each of the families had their own preferences as to how they communicated and, while technology-based communications made for increased accessibility, they didn't seem to be the single solution. While Brenda was glad to embrace the mobile apps that some teachers were using to communicate about what was happening at school, Maria fondly recalled agenda books (Interview 3, Line 266; Interview 1, Line 399). Several parents identified the report card as the most valuable communication from the school, but others described personal communication as the most important because of the level of insight it provided. An interesting perspective on this point was found in Interview 6, where Garth stated that when a teacher was less interested in communicating personally with parents then the report card became more important (Interview 6, Line 112). However, when these parents needed clarification or wanted to address a problem on the report card, they seemed comfortable contacting teachers, guidance counsellors, or principals personally.

For J.P. and Francis, whose child has an IEP, personal communication with teachers certainly was the most important; they did not look closely at the report card because it was less relevant to what they received by way of face-to-face communication at IEP meetings. Guskey

and Jung (2009) describe the challenges in developing report cards for students with special needs and present one advantage of a standards-based report card is that the product/process/progress grades can be separated which results in a more accurate account for parents but, in many cases face-to-face conversations are more valued than standardized report cards.

Parent Teacher evenings served to facilitate face-to-face meetings for parents. Parent Teacher evenings did not seem to be everyone's choice either; sometimes it was the parent who could not or chose not to participate, and sometimes the schools themselves sought alternative ways to engage parents. Sven indicated that parents were only invited to the parent teacher meetings if there was a problem, but since he did not trust his ability to speak English and did not have an interpreter, he did not go to these meetings (Interview 2, Line 365-369). Brenda reported reticence that her school had replaced parent teacher meetings with an evening where students showcase what they have been studying because she missed out on dedicated meeting time (Interview 3, Line 245-250).

What the study shows is that families used a variety of methods to communicate with school personnel to develop a system of communication. Technology improved the timeliness of communication and made teachers more accessible but no single method of communication was relied on. Families had personal preferences in the methods they used to receive and return communication. Report cards were perceived to be an important part of communication, but personal communication can be timelier and was perceived to be clearer than the interpretations parents made when reading the report card. The relationship with the school as described by the parents in this study was strong, but there was little to indicate that parents were involved in curricular aspects of learning. Perhaps this is because parents described their children as mostly

having good grades. Maria and Josh referenced using the “next steps” component of the teachers’ comments to help their children, but more common was checking on work completion or getting clarification on why the grade was what it was.

Perceptions Regarding Improved Learning

Parents did not perceive the new report card to have contributed to improved learning by their children. Report cards can be seen as a post-mortem of learning rather than a tool to improve future learning. Parents in this study saw relevance for future learning, but they identified that by the time the report card came it was too late to change the grade on it and weaknesses identified could be regarding material studied two months ago (Interview 2, Line 65-69). I think the basis for saying that this report card will improve student learning was that a detailed account that separated learning into visible categories could help parents know where to put their support. However, my research indicated that parents spent time ensuring work completion, and encouraging work ethic rather than intervening on specific curricular outcomes. As such, reporting categories may be more helpful for teachers doing future planning than for parents responding to the report card. Even in cases where parents did try to address a learning challenge they went back to the teacher. Josh and Maria identified that the strength-challenge-next step format of teacher comments made it possible at times for them to clearly go back to a child to address a challenge, but they also stated that “whether it be this format or the last format we would take the report card in to the parent teacher meeting to discuss the challenges” (Interview 1, Line 389-391). Garth agreed that the report card did a good job of recognizing weaknesses that allowed him to try to help, but when asked about the impact of the new report card on learning he stated that he thought that it watered down learning and cited the ordinal

scores for that perception (Interview 6, Line 176). The parents interviewed for this study did not see a clear connection between the new Manitoba Provincial report card and improved learning.

Impact of Consistency in Format

Standardizing the format of the report card across Manitoba has some potential advantages. When a student progresses from an Elementary school to Middle School, or if a physical change in address puts a student in a new school there could be an advantage for parents being familiar with the standardized format. Another advantage could be realized if, by standardizing the format, parents and educators could expect seamless transitions in reported achievement from one school to the next. No parents in this study experienced a mid-year move so that was not a point of reference for them. Parents did indicate that the change to the current format was not particularly difficult to make, so the value of consistent format was low for them (Interview 3, Line 151; Interview 4, Line 111).

The format of Manitoba standardized report cards makes mandatory some of the positions regarding assessment that were adopted in the 2008 MEAL document *Communicating Student Learning: Guidelines for Schools*, authored by Ken O'Connor and Damian Cooper. Depending on perception, the new format either unifies the approach to reporting student achievement, or narrows the possibilities of how to report student achievement. Based on the variety of conclusions parents arrived at when interpreting the report card, I would argue that there are many subjective factors involved and that there is very little meaningful standardized information on the report card beyond the format itself.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

The new Manitoba Provincial Report Card followed ideas closely aligned with the literature published by Manitoba Education regarding a commitment to outcomes-based education. It essentially enacted the recommendations found in *Communicating Student Learning: Guidelines for Schools* (Manitoba Education, 2008). These recommendations focused on arriving at grades that measure mastery of curricular outcomes free of non-achievement factors. Without baseline data to tell us exactly what the report card at each school looked like prior to standardization, we can only speculate as to how big or small the changes were because each school had some autonomy in creating the previous format. One aspect that likely changed for schools was that the standardized report card formalized division between outcomes and learning behaviours. This concept was present in Manitoba Education's literature for years, but a traditional report card with a single grade would not have reflected that as clearly as an outcomes-based report card. Separating these categories within the report card set a philosophical framework for educators, reminding them to report non-achievement factors separately, or perhaps providing an accountability framework to keep non-achievement factors out.

This report card, however, might be 'late to the dance' because the significance of specific content goals for 21st Century learners is debatable, and curricula are including more outcomes that are skills and processes, making the lines between learning behaviours and outcome achievement increasingly blurry. In that way, the Manitoba report card is a microcosm of the tension in education where there is a desire to have diagnostic assessment data that can drive learning forward for the individual, and simultaneously a belief that content is changing so quickly that skills and processes reflected by the learning behaviours category are more

important for future learning. I've begun a process of identifying the strengths and weaknesses in this study, though I recognize that a much broader, systemic approach to reviewing significant educational policy would be preferable. In this chapter, I divided key findings of the study into sections that discuss the implications for policy makers, then practitioners, and I ended by providing some possibilities for further research to extend understanding about communicating learning.

Key Findings

Beyond the format, little about the report card could be described as standardized. Instead, I found that the processes for distribution, processes for reviewing, and the interpretations of the report card were individualized. Those findings suggested that standardization did not automatically result in an instrument for comparison. Standardizing the report card did not standardize how material was taught, or what assessments were conducted. Pasi Sahlberg identified standardization as the worst enemy of creativity and innovation in school (TED, 2012). I'm not passionately against standardization; in fact, I quite like its applications to improve a system. With regard to this application, however, I did not find strong evidence that it has yet achieved the goals set for it: to improve relationships with parents, and to lead to increased learning. In retrospect, the rollout had a political flavour to it rather than a focus on literature to support a standards-based report cards. That could become problematic for the longevity of the report card; it could easily be seen as a politically motivated document because of the public announcements by the former premier.

The new report card did not appear to have changed what parents do with report card data. Within a family, parents emphasized different aspects of the report card and interpreted the

information individually, going so far as to focus on different aspects of the report card for each child. Perhaps the greatest strength of this report card was that it gave parents the option to focus on grades, comments, or learning behaviours. Giving parents detailed and specific information increased the chance to find something to celebrate –an opportunity the parents I interviewed were looking for in a report card.

Although detail was deemed a strength, that added complexity was also a weakness. For example, the dense language of standards-based reporting created comprehension issues for some parents. Disagreement emerged regarding ordinal score ranges as well, and differences of opinion surfaced as to what constituted a good comment.

Parents interviewed for this study did not perceive that the new format of the report card enhanced their partnership with the school or that it improved their child’s learning. Even before the new report card was implemented, all of the participants in this study had positive partnerships with their school and their child was doing well. I hypothesize that parents who did not have a developed relationship with their child’s school, or who had a child who struggled in school, would share the perception that the new report card had little impact on their relationship with the school. Modern communication methods that can show students in the process of learning threaten the relevance of the report card that looks at learning “in the rear-view mirror”. Nostalgia and the symbolic value of a report card will give it a long life, but a report card is not the tool that is going to improve partnerships or be the next driver in improved learning if for no other reason than that it is not as timely feedback as other methods available.

Implications for Policy Makers

Standardizing something as complex as communicating a student's learning is difficult. That's why Manitoba Education wisely states that a report card is one piece of a larger network of communication. Parents consider the report card a key component of school-parent communication, so attention to making a great report card is worthwhile. Standardizing it establishes the appearance of a set standard, but I'm skeptical that the standard was uniform because there were so many individual choices, preferences, and perceptions involved in the creation and reading of the report card. Each variable in the process reduced the reliability of the report card communicating a uniform meaning. If comparable data is not possible to extract, I would argue there is reduced benefit of standardization for policy makers.

System-wide policies are suited to a broad consultation and review process to help determine the need, and to see if the intended benefits are being realized. I see room for improving parent, student, and teacher input and evaluation of system-wide policies in Manitoba. The tricky part is to navigate where to go if the feedback takes you in a different direction than you want it to go –still, collaboration sends a message about the type of system you envision. Standardization without a high level of participation from a population has the connotation of a system seeking top-down accountability, in this case from teachers, rather than creating the message that the system is welcoming innovation. Opening the invitation for feedback on policies is simple with online surveys, and makes a step in the direction of a shared accountability.

Several examples of the valuable ideas that parents expressed stand out for me. First, parents interviewed for this study were not focused on the report card as a diagnostic tool for

identifying which curricular concepts they would start working on to help their child learn. Instead, they hoped that the report card would hold some things that they could talk about and celebrate: a much more relational than clinical approach. If a clinical approach is the one expected from parents, a considerable amount of education in how they view their responsibilities, capabilities and roles in relationship to teachers and schools will be needed. Second, parents recognized the subjectivity of reporting learning, but most saw objectivity as a desirable goal. The most passionate critique by parents centered on ordinal scores, and particularly the range in achievement registered in the top ordinal. I see this as another place of internal tension for the report card; standardization and specificity communicated to parents that accuracy was paramount, but an ordinal score range of 20% communicated to parents that grades were an approximation. While a nostalgic attachment to percentage grades certainly impacted perceptions regarding the new ordinal scoring system, some parents interpreted the ordinal scores as more subjective, and holding less meaning than percentage. It would be difficult to argue how one measure is more or less subjective, but a simple compromise of narrowing the score ranges could be a way to address this concern. A third insight gained from parents is that the detail in a standards-based report card may create confusion for newcomers with less understanding of English.

Something that I think policy makers will want to watch closely is the change to curricular outcomes. This is significant because the report card makes the formal division between curricular achievement and learning behaviours at a time when curricula are reducing the number and specificity of learning outcomes and increasing the focus on learning skills. Parents in this study seemed to understand the learning behaviours category as lacking enough specificity to mean anything or simply saw it as an extraneous category that reflected whether

students had good or bad behaviour in class. However, if learning outcomes overlap too much with learning behaviours I think there could be questions about duplication in reporting.

As a final note of interest for policy makers, I draw attention to a subtle tension created by the new report card. Lorna Earl added perspective to Manitoba Education's literature on summative and formative feedback, showing that formative feedback increases learning in ways summative does not. I think that message has worked its way into the mindset of many teachers so a long-form report card, described as a summative document, may not be the agreed upon method of increasing learning. To have teachers spend additional hours to prepare a document emphasizing summative results would be inconsistent with Earl's writing for Manitoba Education. Within the summative reporting document, teachers are instructed to provide formative feedback in their comments. It may be helpful to begin speaking about the report card as both summative and formative.

Implications for School Practitioners

Knowing more about how parents interpreted this reporting tool gives valuable information for school practitioners to refine communication. School practitioners need to know that parents valued communication, and that the more individual, constructive (in regard to curricular achievement and personal development), and timelier it was, the better. Giving parents increased opportunities for more meaningful conversations with their child was a way of building connections with parents. If practitioners can provide reasons to celebrate the student some of the time, rather than listing a series of failures, then relationships have a better chance of being reciprocated.

The grade on a report card is what drew parents' attention first. They were not obsessed with grades, but typically saw percentage grades as the most important measure of success. If practitioners prefer to steer attention toward ordinal scores, comments, or learning behaviours it would require working with parents to persuade them of the merits of these alternate categories of reporting learning. Ordinal scores in particular would need to be addressed to help build a communication bridge. If the 20% score range between a score of 4 and 5 remains, I don't think practitioners will see parents embracing that discussion. In regard to the percentage grade, one way schools can work to improve relationships with parents and improve achievement is to find ways to deal with missing work before the report card is issued.

Another consideration for schools is how to construct comments on report cards. Comments live in an ethereal realm, trying to be curricular and personal, summative and formative, positive and encouraging, for the parent and for the student. It was no surprise to find that parents were seeing cut-and-paste comments because faced with such a difficult and time-expensive task, teachers were looking for ways to streamline the process, and standardized comments for a standardized report cards was a logical step for some. Unintentionally though, this creates a complicated problem of comparison. Report cards contained comments from multiple teachers so the difference in the focus each teacher took and their writing ability was on display. Parents held individual perceptions of what a good comment should look like. Standardized comments, and comments that used curricular language were generally seen as obstacles to clear communication, but personal/relational comments faced some criticism from parents looking for specific direction on how to improve achievement.

Finding a way to create great comments for every student, from every teacher, as judged by each user of the report card sounds unlikely, but I would propose that comments hold the

most strength in their ability to communicate that teachers know and care for students, so that should be the focus of comments. Correctly diagnosing a curricular shortcoming has value, but when placed on a report card it doesn't address who needs to do what about it and probably is not timely. Unless the curricular shortcoming is intended to be the work of parent, this could be communicated through other means.

Practitioners can be confident that providing individualized feedback will be better received than standardized comments. Cut-and-paste or generic comments that could apply to any student do not build confidence that teachers know or care for the individual, so whether the comment is directed toward curriculum or a learning behaviour, being personal builds trust.

Building trust through the use of relatable language is another way Manitoba Education got it right when they identified that plain language is important, yet there seems to be difficulty reconciling that with the expectation to communicate about curriculum. Colloquial language to describe curricular outcomes may be one option; another might be to make attempts to address curricular shortcomings through another medium. Report cards describe learning over a two or three month period, so emails or phone calls could better address specific concerns in a timely manner.

Parents interviewed for this study all welcomed communication from their child's school and made an effort to interact positively with the school. They showed a deep concern for the well-being of their children and wanted them to be successful socially and academically. That individualized concern for a child is a key to understanding how to communicate with parents about learning. Making time to communicate in ways that each parent finds meaningful could be valuable.

Recommendations for further research

I think there is value in pursuing further research in the area of reporting achievement and its potential to impact learning. Teachers spend considerable time and effort generating reports so it is important to discover how parents are interpreting and using that information. Manitoba could benefit from a comprehensive reflection step after implementing an educational change as part of a continuous improvement cycle. This could be done by gathering parent perceptions from a larger group with greater diversity in their school experience to determine the impact of the standardized, standards-based report card.

The literature base used to direct the Manitoba report card focused on limiting conflating factors in grades in an effort to measure learning more accurately. Research to find out how teachers are establishing and using the data from report cards could help determine how accurate report cards are, and whether teachers are using summative assessments in their own planning cycle. I would be interested in finding out how much time was spent generating data for summative assessment and preparing report cards in comparison to time spent on formative feedback and other forms of communication with parents. Research into how students interpreted and used this report card would be another area of research to provide feedback on the impact that report cards have on learning. The more that is known about how a report is made and used the easier it is to make revisions.

References

- Alberta Education. (2006). *Grade level of achievement reporting: Teacher and administrator handbook*. Retrieved from <https://education.alberta.ca/media/346277/teachadminhandbook.pdf>
- Alberta Education. (2009). *Grade level of achievement reporting, questions and answers*. Retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/media/552416/gla_qanda.pdf
- Alberta Education. (2015a). *Diploma examinations*. Retrieved from <https://education.alberta.ca/admin/testing/diplomaexams/>
- Alberta Education. (2015b). *Grade level of achievement reporting*. Retrieved from <https://education.alberta.ca/admin/resources/gla/>
- Alberta Education. (2015c). *Student learning assessment update*. Retrieved from <https://education.alberta.ca/media/15240031/slaupdatesummer2015.pdf>
- Barkman, T. (2014). *The Manitoba provincial report card: Principal perceptions on whether policy intent aligns with the realities of teaching and learning* (Unpublished dissertation). University of Manitoba, Winnipeg.
- BC Teachers' Federation. (2004). BCTF Response to the draft standardized provincial report card templates [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://www.bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=5778>
- Beloin, Sharon. (2015). *A review of student progress reports in BC: Aligning the 'Report Card' with the BC education plan* (Master's thesis, University of Victoria, Victoria). Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1828/6801>

Britton, C. J. (2006). *A historical listing of significant events in Manitoba's elementary-secondary education, post-secondary education and training systems, 1989-2006*.

Retrieved from

http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/medicine/units/community_health_sciences/departamental_units/mchp/protocol/media/history_education_events_1989to2006.pdf

Clifton, R. (2009, April 17). Standard tests boost accountability. *Winnipeg Free Press*. Retrieved from <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/analysis/standard-tests-boost-accountability-43164727.html>

Couture, J.-C. Alberta Teachers' Association. (2007). The issue that won't go away: FAQs about grade level achievement reporting. *ATA News*, 41(10). Retrieved from <http://www.teachers.ab.ca/Publications/ATA%20News/Volume%2041/Number%2010/In%20the%20News/Pages/FAQs%20about%20Grade%20Level%20of%20Achievement.aspx>

Couture, J.-C. Alberta Teachers' Association. (2009). Collateral damage of government's accountability policies a key focus of 2009 ARA. *ATA News*, 43(18). Retrieved from <http://www.teachers.ab.ca/Publications/ATA%20News/Volume%2043/Number18/InTheNews/Pages/Collateraldamageofgovernment%E2%80%99saccountabilitypoliciesakeyfocusof2009ARA.aspx>

Davies, A. (2000). *Making classroom assessment work*. Merville, BC: Classroom Connections International.

- Earl, L. (2003). *Assessment as learning: Using classroom assessment to maximize student learning*. Experts in Assessment. T. R. Guskey & R. J. Marzano (Eds.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Earl, L. (2007). Assessment – A powerful lever for learning. *Brock Education Journal* 16(1), 1-15. Retrieved from <http://brock.scholarsportal.info/journals/brocked/home/article/view/29/29>
- Earl, L. & Katz, S. (2008). Getting to the core of learning: Using assessment for self-monitoring and self-regulation. In S. Swaffield (Ed.), *Unlocking assessment: Understanding for reflection and application* (pp. 90-104). London: David Fulton Publishers.
- Earl, L. M. & Timperley, H. (2014). Challenging conceptions of assessment. In C. Wyatt-Smith et al. (Ed.). *Designing assessment for quality learning: The enabling power of assessment*, 1, 325-336. doi: 10.1007/978-94-007-5902-2
- Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(5), 701-712.
- Epstein, J., Sanders, M., Simon, B., Salinas, K., Jansorn, N., & Van Voorhis, F. (2002). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Guskey, T. R. (2001). Helping standards make the grade. *Educational Leadership*, 59(1), 20-27.
- Guskey, T. R. (2004a). The communication challenge of standards-based reporting. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(4), 326-329.
- Guskey, T. R. (2004b). Zero alternatives. *Principal Leadership* 52(2), 49-53.

- Guskey, T. R. (2010). *Practical Solutions for Serious Problems in Standards-Based Grading*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Guskey, T. R. & Bailey, J. M. (2010). *Developing standards-based report cards*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Guskey, T. R.. & Jung, L. A. (2009). Grading and reporting in a standards-based environment: Implications for students with special needs. *Theory Into Practice*, 48(1), 53-62.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. London: Routledge.
- Jung, L. A. & Guskey, T. R. (2010). Grading exceptional learners. *Educational Leadership*, 67(5), 31-35.
- Leithwood, K., Anderson, S., Mascall, B., & Strauss T. (2010). School leaders' influences on student learning: The four paths. In T. Bush, L. Bell, & D. Middlewood (Eds.), *The principles of educational leadership and management* (2nd ed.). (pp. 13-30). London: SAGE publications.
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2006). Transformational school leadership for large-scale reform: Effects on students, teachers, and their classroom practices. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 17(2), 201-227.
- Leithwood, K., & McAdie, P. (2010). Teacher working conditions that matter. *Education Canada* 47(2). Retrieved from <http://www.cea-ace.ca/sites/cea-ace.ca/files/EdCan-2007-v47-n2-Leithwood.pdf>

Manitoba Education. (1994). *Renewing education: New directions*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education and Training.

Manitoba Education. (2004). *Working together: A guide to positive problem solving for schools, families, and communities*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth.

Manitoba Education. (2005). *School partnerships: A guide for parents, schools, and communities*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth.

Manitoba Education. (2006). *Rethinking classroom assessment with purpose in mind: Assessment for learning, assessment as learning, assessment of learning*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth.

Manitoba Education. (2008). *Communicating student learning: Guidelines for schools*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth.

Manitoba Education. (2010). *Provincial assessment policy, Kindergarten to grade 12: Academic responsibility, honesty, and promotion/retention*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning.

Manitoba Education. (2013a). *Manitoba provincial report card—Fall 2013 implementation* [letter]. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/report_cards/docs/letter2013.pdf

Manitoba Education. (2013b). *Manitoba's provincial report card: Information for parents, grades 1 to 8* [Brochure]. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning.

Manitoba Education. (2013c). *Grades 7 and 8 report card*. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/report_cards/docs/eng_my.pdf

- Manitoba Education. (2014). *Manitoba provincial report card policy and guidelines: Partners for learning, grades 1 to 12*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning.
- Manitoba Education. (2015). *My child in school: A resource for parents*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/mychild/>
- Manitoba Education. (n.d.). *Support information: IEP code provincial report card*. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/spcedu/programming/iep_report.html
- Marzano, R. J. (2000). *Transforming classroom grading*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Marzano, R. J., & Heflebower, T. (2011, November). Grades that show what students know. *Educational Leadership*, 69(3), 34-39.
- McKenna, M., & Willms, J. D. (1998). Co-operation between families and schools: ‘What Works’ in Canada. *Research Papers in Education*, 13(1), 19-41. Doi: 10.1080/0267152980130103
- Michel, G. J. (1997). *Building schools: The new school and community relations*. Washington, D.C.: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- O’Connor, K. (2010). *A repair kit for grading: Fifteen fixes for broken grades* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (1998). *Guide to the provincial report card, grades 1-8*. Retrieved from <http://www.eqao.com/emagazine/2008/05/pdf/repgde.pdf>

- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2010a). *Growing success: Assessment, evaluation, and reporting in Ontario schools: First edition, covering grades 1-12*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growSuccess.pdf>
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2010b). *Parents in partnership: A parent engagement policy for Ontario schools*. Retrieved from https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/PE_Policy2010.pdf
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2010c). *Supporting your child's learning through assessment, evaluation, and reporting*. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/ReportCard_En.pdf
- Province of Manitoba. (2010). *Premier unveils innovative changes to report cards, in-service days* [Press Release]. Retrieved from <http://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?archive=2010-9-01&item=9642>
- Reeves, D. B. (2000). Standards are not enough: Essential transformations for school success. *NASSP Bulletin*, 84(620), 5-19. Doi: 10.1177/019263650008462002
- Stiggins, R. J. (2001). *Student-involved classroom assessment*. (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- TED. (2012, June 27). *Pasi Sahlberg: GERM that kills schools* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdgS--9Zg_0

- Tri-County Regional School Board. (n.d.) *Creating strong report card comments: A handbook for elementary teachers*. Retrieved from <http://www.tcrsb.ca/sis/staff/Report%20Card/Creating%20Strong%20Report%20Card%20Comments%20-%20A%20Handbook%20for%20Elementary%20Teachers.pdf>
- Webber, C. F., Aitken, N., Lupart, J., & Scott, S. (2009). *The Alberta student assessment study: Final report*. Alberta Education. Retrieved from <http://education.alberta.ca/media/1165612/albertaassessmentstudyfinalreport.pdf>
- Western and Northern Canadian Protocol. (2011). *Welcome*. Retrieved from <https://www.wncp.ca/english/wncphome.aspx>
- Wiens, J. R. (2011). Human flourishing in the 21st century. *Education Canada*, 51(1). Retrieved from <https://www.edcan.ca/articles/deans-speak-out/>
- Wiggins, G. (1994). Toward better report cards. *Educational Leadership*, 52(2), 28-37.

Appendix 1:

A selection of events relating to standards-based curriculum and standardization of education in Manitoba from 1989 to 2013.

(Selections from C. Jean Britton’s comprehensive work: *A Historical Listing of Significant Events in Manitoba’s Elementary-Secondary Education, Post-Secondary Education and Training Systems 1989-2006.*)

Spring 1989– The Canadian Education Statistics Council (CESC) was established to facilitate enhanced education data collection and reporting.

June 1990 – Department released “Answering the Challenge: Strategies for Success in Manitoba High Schools”; the blueprint for the future development of curriculum, assessment, evaluation and reporting over the next decade.

October 1992– Department sponsored a public seminar entitled “Assessment and Evaluation: Issues, Trends and New Realities”

November 1992 – Premier unveiled a series of initiatives aimed to equip Manitobans with the knowledge and skills needed to compete: including options to improve standards and increased province-wide testing and evaluation of students.

April 1993– Manitoba participated in the first School Assessment Indicators Program (SAIP), a panCanadian initiative administered through CMEC.

September 1993 – Education ministers (CMEC) set a national agenda for education (Victoria

Declaration). Priority areas include: (1) informing the public on the quality of learning in Canada. SAIP be expanded 2) establishing a national group to examine curriculum comparability and joint initiatives in curriculum development.

December 1993– The first Western and Northern Canadian Protocol (WNCP) was signed which facilitated provincial/territorial cooperation and sharing for curriculum development.

Results of Canada-wide SAIP in math released. (Manitoba students performed poorly.)

July 1994– New education reform was announced with release of “Renewing Education: New Directions” – A Blueprint for Action, followed by “Renewing Education: The Action Plan” in January 1995. Future policy will focus on the following 6 key directions: essential learning, educational standards and evaluation, school effectiveness, parent and community involvement, distance education and technology, and teacher education.

June 1995 – The WNCP partner provinces released “The Common Curriculum Framework for Mathematics, K-G9” and “The Common Curriculum Framework in ELA, K-G9”.

January 1996 -The first Senior 4 English Language Arts (ELA) provincial exam in 25 years was piloted.

Spring 1996– The Education Administration Act was amended by government to allow the Minister to prescribe methods, procedures and reporting of student assessments.

June 1996– The first provincial standards test for Grade 3 Mathematics was piloted.

March 1998– English Language Arts common curriculum framework was released by WNCP partners to bring consistency to classrooms in Western Canada and the territories.

March 1999 – Manitoba Association of School Trustees (MAST) joined Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS) in lobbying government to rescind standards testing at grade 3.

April 1999 – Government's 1999-2000 budget announced a focus on early years intervention, core subject curriculum development, standards testing,

Spring 2000-- Manitoba students participated in OECD's "Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)", and "Youth in Transition Survey (YITS)".

September 2000– Grade 3 standards tests were replaced with a start of the year in-school assessment of literacy and numeracy skills. Standards tests for Grade 6, Senior 1, and Senior 4 continued without change.

June 2001– Department initiated survey of parents and teachers confirmed the merit of early assessment for Grade 3 students.

June 2002– A new initiative called "Achieving Outcomes: Reporting to Families and Communities" was announced by the Department. The initiative is designed to increase accountability and provide more information on the public schools system to parents and the community.

Fall 2002 – A new website that informs parents and community members about what children learn in compulsory subject areas in K-G8 was launched.

Fall 2004– Department launched a study in to determine the educational needs of adolescent refugee learners found the number of these types of students growing.

2006-2007– A new Statistics Canada survey found that Manitoba lost more people to other provinces in 2005 than in any other year since 1990, yet managed to have a total population gain

thanks to the biggest influx of immigrants in more than 34 years.

-Introduced province-wide formative assessment of reading and writing competencies in Grade 8, mathematical competencies in Grade 7, student engagement in Grade 7.

-Released the WNCP document on classroom-based assessment, Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind: Assessment for Learning, Assessment as Learning, Assessment of Learning http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ar_ecy_0607/report.pdf

2007-2008 - The WNCP Grades 10-12 Mathematics Common Curriculum Framework was signed off by jurisdictions.

-Communicating Student Learning was released as a consultation draft.

-In December 2007, the results of the 2006 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey were released, with a focus on science literacy.

2008-2009 - A support document on Communicating Student Learning was released in August 2008.

- The first report of results from the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) regarding 13-year-olds was released and result highlights were sent to schools.

2009-2010 - The 3-year cycle of assessment conversations with school divisions continued. Staff met with one-third of school divisions to gather information and provide support on the use of assessment data to support student learning.

- A Profile of Student Learning and Performance in Manitoba, 2006–2010 published. It is an examination of assessments of learning. It presents the results from a number of different

assessments at the provincial, national, and international levels.

2010-2011 –MEAL published Towards Inclusion: Supporting Positive Behaviour in Manitoba Classrooms

-MEAL published Provincial Assessment Policy, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Academic Responsibility, Honesty, and Promotion/Retention mandating divisions to develop assessment an policy that matched the ideas set out by this document.

-Premier Greg Selinger announces the introduction of a parent-friendly report card to ensure that parents get the information they need to be full partners in their children’s education.

Education minister Nancy Allan introduced the Preparing Students for Success Act, which requires students to stay in school until they are 18.

2011-2012 - Manitoba collaborated with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to pilot iPISA for schools, an instrument intended to be available for school use as a way to assess knowledge and skill levels in relation to OECD benchmarks. It will be piloted in three Manitoba schools.

- Development work for the provincial report card. Templates of the new report card were piloted in some schools.

2012-2013 – Voluntary implementation year for the new provincial report card.

-Professional development was delivered to support school divisions planning and work to implement the report card.

Appendix 2:

Parental Perceptions of the Manitoba Provincial Report Card

PARENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Thank you very much for agreeing to talk to me about the new Manitoba Report Card. I have a set of questions that I would like to ask but mainly I am interested in having a conversation with you about what you think of the new report card. This won't take more than an hour and as you have seen in the Consent Letter you are totally free to choose not to answer any of my questions, or should you wish to stop the interview at any time. **Do you have a copy of a report card handy? I have a blank one here that I may refer to from time to time. OK, can we get started? Can I turn on my recorder?**

QUESTION #1: Can we start by you just telling me what is done with the report cards in your home – what happens when (_____'s) report card comes home? How important is it? That sort of thing.

PROBES

- How does it get delivered?
- Who in the family reads it?

- How long do you (and others) spend reading and talking about it?
- What is the typical follow-up action after reading a report card?
 - i. Do you follow-up with your child
 - ii. Do you follow-up with other adults/parent
 - iii. Do you follow-up with the school
 - iv. Do you follow-up with others?
 - v. Is this follow-up any different than what you did with the previous report card?
- What impact does the report card have?
 - i. Making student strengths/challenges/next steps clear
 - ii. Building positive school-parent relationships
 - iii. Improving learning
 - iv. Improving consistency
 - v. Is the impact of this report card different than the impact of the previous report card?

QUESTION #2: Can you look at your child's report card and show me what you see as important? Talk through the things that draw your attention – what you like and dislike.

PROBES

- Do you find that this report card is clear and easy to understand?

- Does this report card clearly give you the information you want to know about?
- What other information would you like to know about?
 - i. Rank in class
 - ii. Comparison to other schools
 - iii. Grades on specific assignments
 - iv. List of missing work

QUESTION #3: What is your understanding of the difference between the categories of Academic Achievement and Learning Behaviours?

PROBES

- Is this distinction important to you?
- Do you want to know both pieces of information?
- Does a child's behaviour impact his/her grade?
- Which category is more important to you?

QUESTION #4: What impact does the Teacher Comment section have on your understanding of the report card?

PROBES

- Have you found the language easy to understand?

- Does it focus on curricular achievement?
- Do you find the comments personalized and meaningful?
- Has the nature of the comment changed from the previous report card to this one?
- Does it focus on your child’s curricular achievement or on behaviour?
- Do you think that the comments agree with what the grade tells you?

QUESTION #5: Do you see a difference in the meaning between the grade scales of 1-4 and percentage scale?

PROBES

- What does the scaled score mean?
- How do teachers move from that scaled score to a percentage score?
- Are the Essential Skill categories weighted evenly?

QUESTION #6: Are you more likely to follow up with your child and the school regarding a grade of “1” or a learning behaviour of “S”?

QUESTION #7: If your child is identified as EAL or as having an IEP:

a) What does EAL or IEP mean to the course content?

b) Do you know what the course content is?

QUESTION #8: Does the new report card contribute to improvement in your relationship with the school?

PROBE

- What interactions have you had with the school over the last 12 months?
- Has the new report card changed the relationship you have with your child's school?
- Does the new report card make communication with the school easier?
- Are there ways other than the report card that you get information about your child's learning?
 - a) online records b) phone calls c) emails d) agenda books e) demonstration of learning days f) parent teacher meetings

QUESTION #9 Does the school your child attends provide any additional help (such as....) interpreting the meaning of your child's report card?

QUESTION #10: Finally, what would you say is the most important function the report card has for you?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

Appendix 3:

Manitoba Grades 7 and 8 Provincial Report Card



[division name]
Grades 7 and 8 Report Card



[school name]

Grade	Student:	Provincial Student #:
Report Card	Homeroom Teacher:	Date Issued:

Attendance	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Total
Days Absent:				
Times Late:				

Academic Achievement of Provincial Expectations		Learning Behaviours	
Grade Scale	Descriptor	Scale	
4 80% to 100%	Very good to excellent understanding and application of concepts and skills	Scale C: Consistently – almost all or all of the time U: Usually – more than half of the time S: Sometimes – less than half of the time R: Rarely – almost never or never	
3 70% to 79%	Good understanding and application of concepts and skills		
2 60% to 69%	Basic understanding and application of concepts and skills		
1 50% to 59%	Limited understanding and application of concepts and skills; see teacher comments		
ND Less than 50%	Does Not yet Demonstrate the required understanding and application of concepts and skills; see teacher comments		
Additional Codes		Personal management skills	Uses class time effectively; works independently; completes homework and assignments on time
NA	Not Applicable	Active participation in learning	Participates in class activities; self assesses; sets learning goals
IN	Incomplete: not enough evidence available to determine a grade at this time	Social responsibility	Works well with others; resolves conflicts appropriately; respects self, others and the environment; contributes in a positive way to communities
		[Local option]	[Up to 2 local options may be added]
		[Local option]	[Up to 2 local options may be added]
One of the following codes is used if the expectations for a student are different from the grade-level curriculum in a subject.		IEP (Individual Education Plan): This code is used if behaviour ratings are based on expectations that reflect special learning needs.	
EAL (English as an Additional Language)	Achievement is based on expectations that focus on English language learning.		
IEP (Individual Education Plan)	Achievement is based on expectations that reflect special learning needs.		

Student:

English Language Arts					Teacher:			
<input type="checkbox"/> EAL <input type="checkbox"/> IEP					<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Academic Achievement		Term 1	Term 2	Final	Learning Behaviours	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Comprehension	Reading				Personal management skills			
	Listening and viewing				Active participation in learning			
Communication	Writing				Social responsibility			
	Speaking and representing				[Local option]			
Critical thinking					[Local option]			
Overall grade		%	%	%				
Comments:								

Mathematics					Teacher:			
<input type="checkbox"/> EAL <input type="checkbox"/> IEP					<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Academic Achievement		Term 1	Term 2	Final	Learning Behaviours	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Knowledge and understanding					Personal management skills			
Mental math and estimation					Active participation in learning			
Problem solving					Social responsibility			
Overall grade		%	%	%	[Local option]			
					[Local option]			
Comments:								

Student:

Science				Teacher:			
<input type="checkbox"/> EAL <input type="checkbox"/> IEP				<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Academic Achievement	Term 1	Term 2	Final	Learning Behaviours	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Knowledge and understanding				Personal management skills			
Scientific inquiry process				Active participation in learning			
Design process and problem solving				Social responsibility			
Overall grade	%	%	%	[Local option]			
				[Local option]			
Comments:							

Social Studies				Teacher:			
<input type="checkbox"/> EAL <input type="checkbox"/> IEP				<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Academic Achievement	Term 1	Term 2	Final	Learning Behaviours	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Knowledge and understanding				Personal management skills			
Research and communication				Active participation in learning			
Critical thinking and citizenship				Social responsibility			
Overall grade	%	%	%	[Local option]			
				[Local option]			
Comments:							

Student:

[Arts subject]				Teacher:			
<input type="checkbox"/> EAL <input type="checkbox"/> IEP				<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Academic Achievement	Term 1	Term 2	Final	Learning Behaviours	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
[Category]				Personal management skills			
[Category]				Active participation in learning			
[Category]				Social responsibility			
[Category]				[Local option]			
Overall grade	%	%	%	[Local option]			
Comments:							
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <p>For detailed information concerning reporting on the Arts subjects, please refer to the <i>Manitoba Provincial Report Card Policy and Guidelines</i> document at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/report_cards/index.html</p> </div>							

Physical and Health Education				Teacher:			
<input type="checkbox"/> EAL <input type="checkbox"/> IEP				<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Academic Achievement	Term 1	Term 2	Final	Learning Behaviours	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Physical Education	Movement			Personal management skills			
	Fitness management			Active participation in learning			
Health Education	Healthy lifestyles			Social responsibility			
Overall grade	%	%	%	[Local option]			
				[Local option]			
Comments:							

Student:

French				Teacher:			
<input type="checkbox"/> IEP				<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Academic Achievement	Term 1	Term 2	Final	Learning Behaviours	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Oral communication				Personal management skills			
Reading				Active participation in learning			
Writing				Social responsibility			
Overall grade	%	%	%	[Local option]			
				[Local option]			
Comments:							

[Local option subject]				Teacher:			
<input type="checkbox"/> EAL		<input type="checkbox"/> IEP		<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Academic Achievement	Term 1	Term 2	Final	Learning Behaviours	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
[Category]				Personal management skills			
[Category]				Active participation in learning			
[Category]				Social responsibility			
[Category]				[Local option]			
Overall grade	%	%	%	[Local option]			
Comments:							

Student:

[Multi-subject grading box]				Teacher:			
<input type="checkbox"/> EAL		<input type="checkbox"/> IEP		<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Academic Achievement	Term 1	Term 2	Final	Learning Behaviours	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
[Subject]	%	%	%	Personal management skills			
[Subject]	%	%	%	Active participation in learning			
[Subject]	%	%	%	Social responsibility			
[Subject]	%	%	%	[Local option]			
[Subject]	%	%	%	[Local option]			
[Subject]	%	%	%				
Comments:							
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> Information on the multi-subject grading box is available in the <i>Manitoba Provincial Report Card Policy and Guidelines</i> document at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/report_cards/index.html </div>							

Principal's Comments

Next School Year (final report card)

Next school year, your child will be in Grade ____ .

Principal's Signature: _____

Full templates for all Manitoba report cards available at:

http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/report_cards/

Appendix 4:

Ontario Grade 7/8 Provincial Report Card



Ministry of Education

Elementary Provincial Report Card

Date: _____

Student:		OEN:	Days Absent:	Total Days Absent:
Grade:	Teacher:		Times Late:	Total Times Late:
Board:		School:		
Address:		Address:		
		Principal:	Telephone:	

GRADE IN SEPTEMBER ➔

Learning Skills and Work Habits		E – Excellent G – Good S – Satisfactory N – Needs Improvement			
Responsibility					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fulfils responsibilities and commitments within the learning environment. ▪ Completes and submits class work, homework, and assignments according to agreed-upon timelines. ▪ Takes responsibility for and manages own behaviour. 					
Organization					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Devises and follows a plan and process for completing work and tasks. ▪ Establishes priorities and manages time to complete tasks and achieve goals. ▪ Identifies, gathers, evaluates, and uses information, technology, and resources to complete tasks. 					
Independent Work					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Independently monitors, assesses, and revises plans to complete tasks and meet goals. ▪ Uses class time appropriately to complete tasks. ▪ Follows instructions with minimal supervision. 					
Collaboration					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accepts various roles and an equitable share of work in a group. ▪ Responds positively to the ideas, opinions, values, and traditions of others. ▪ Builds healthy peer-to-peer relationships through personal and media-assisted interactions. ▪ Works with others to resolve conflicts and build consensus to achieve group goals. ▪ Shares information, resources, and expertise, and promotes critical thinking to solve problems and make decisions. 					
Initiative					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Looks for and acts on new ideas and opportunities for learning. ▪ Demonstrates the capacity for innovation and a willingness to take risks. ▪ Demonstrates curiosity and interest in learning. ▪ Approaches new tasks with a positive attitude. ▪ Recognizes and advocates appropriately for the rights of self and others. 					
Self-Regulation					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sets own individual goals and monitors progress towards achieving them. ▪ Seeks clarification or assistance when needed. ▪ Assesses and reflects critically on own strengths, needs, and interests. ▪ Identifies learning opportunities, choices, and strategies to meet personal needs and achieve goals. ▪ Perseveres and makes an effort when responding to challenges. 					
Strengths/Next Steps for Improvement					

Student:

OEN:

Grade:

Subject	Report 1		Report 2		Strengths/Next Steps for Improvement
	% Mark	Median	% Mark	Median	
Language	<input type="checkbox"/> NA				
Reading	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD	<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Writing	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD	<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Oral Communication	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD	<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Media Literacy	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD	<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
French	<input type="checkbox"/> NA				
Listening	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD	<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Speaking	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD	<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Reading	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD	<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
Writing	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD	<input type="checkbox"/> IEP			
	<input type="checkbox"/> Core	<input type="checkbox"/> Immersion	<input type="checkbox"/> Extended		
Native Language					Oral Communication, Reading, Writing
<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD					
<input type="checkbox"/> IEP					
<input type="checkbox"/> NA					
Mathematics	<input type="checkbox"/> French				
Number Sense and Numeration	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD	<input type="checkbox"/> IEP	<input type="checkbox"/> NA		
Measurement	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD	<input type="checkbox"/> IEP	<input type="checkbox"/> NA		
Geometry and Spatial Sense	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD	<input type="checkbox"/> IEP	<input type="checkbox"/> NA		
Patterning and Algebra	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD	<input type="checkbox"/> IEP	<input type="checkbox"/> NA		
Data Management and Probability	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD	<input type="checkbox"/> IEP	<input type="checkbox"/> NA		
Science and Technology					Life Systems, Structures and Mechanisms, Matter and Energy, Earth and Space Systems
<input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD					
<input type="checkbox"/> IEP					
<input type="checkbox"/> French					

Student:

OEN:

Grade:

Percentage Mark	Achievement of the Provincial Curriculum Expectations
80–100	The student has demonstrated the required knowledge and skills with a high degree of effectiveness. Achievement surpasses the provincial standard. (Level 4)
70–79	The student has demonstrated the required knowledge and skills with considerable effectiveness. Achievement meets the provincial standard. (Level 3)
60–69	The student has demonstrated the required knowledge and skills with some effectiveness. Achievement approaches the provincial standard. (Level 2)
50–59	The student has demonstrated the required knowledge and skills with limited effectiveness. Achievement falls much below the provincial standard. (Level 1)
R	The student has not demonstrated the required knowledge and skills. Extensive remediation is required.
I	Insufficient evidence to assign a percentage mark

ESL/ELD – Achievement is based on expectations modified from the curriculum expectations for the grade to support English language learning needs.

IEP – Individual Education Plan

NA – No instruction for subject/strand for reporting period

Median – The percentage mark at which 50 per cent of the students in the grade have a higher percentage mark for the subject/strand and 50 per cent of the students have a lower percentage mark

To Parents/Guardians and Students: This copy of the report card should be retained for reference. The original or an exact copy has been placed in the student's Ontario Student Record (OSR) folder and will be retained for five years after the student leaves school.

Teacher's Signature	X	Principal's Signature	X
---------------------	---	-----------------------	---

⌂ Elementary Provincial Report Card *(Please complete, sign, and detach the form below, and return it to your child's teacher.)* ⌂

Student:	Grade:	OEN:	Teacher:
Parent's/Guardian's Comments			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My child has improved most in: 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will help my child to: 			
<input type="checkbox"/> I have received this report card.	Parent's/Guardian's name <i>(please print)</i>	Signature	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to discuss this report card. Please contact me.		X	
Telephone <i>(day)</i> : _____		Telephone <i>(evening)</i> : _____	