

POINTS OF VIEW

Parent can't pass school's new grading system

Would someone please tell me what is wrong with elementary students getting actual grades on their report cards?

The new K-5 report cards arrived recently, along with a handbook to help parents interpret them. It is ludicrous to have a report card that requires 14 pages of explanation.

The new report cards have three possible codes for the evaluation of academics:

3 ("exceeds") — It means the child is "beyond grade level." If a child has many exceeds, I would think an immediate change in grade level is indicated.

2 ("demonstrates grade level skills") — It doesn't answer the question, "To what degree does my child work at grade level?" Perfect or almost perfect work? Some errors? Has the basic concept but doesn't work with accuracy?

1 ("developing grade level skills") — The parent has no idea if the child is just a couple of months behind or more than a year.

In other words, with this new report card you have no idea exactly how your child is doing.

Is there anyone who doesn't understand:

"E" means your child isn't doing the work required and parental intervention is needed. It's very hard to get an "E."

"D" means even with doing work, your child doesn't understand the concept and needs more instruction.

"C" means your child has a basic grasp of what is being presented in the classroom.

"B" means your child has a better-than-average grasp of the curriculum and/or has worked extra hard to improve his/her scores.

"A" means your child totally understands the curriculum and/or put forth extraordinary effort to exceed expectations.

Now what is so hard about using these instead of 1, 2, 3?

No explanation is needed for letter grades. Grades tell the parent, the student, and the teacher the degree to which a student has or hasn't learned what he was supposed to learn. They also reveal to the teacher the degree to which the curriculum is effective.

There is no reward for harder work if you're at a "2" now and spend the next marking period improving your handwriting or memorizing your math

GUEST COLUMNIST



PATRICIA ALSOPACH

facts. There are no consequences for not trying to bring the "1" up to a "2."

Many sixth-graders just got their first report-card letter grades. It must be a shock for last year's "high achievement" student to get a "C."

It must be rewarding for a "needs more time" student to get a "C" and learn what is necessary to achieve that grade.

The "attitudes and behaviors" section is an elongated form for "conduct" and "effort." Part of this section evaluates work habits and proper classroom behavior.

Parts can be interpreted as an evaluation of a child's political correctness as well as a personality profile.

Many of the explanatory subsections evaluate certain innate personality traits in the negative. I.e. "is able to make transitions with ease" doesn't take into consideration the child who doesn't adapt well to change.

Other subsections leave out the child who is innately a loner or doesn't wish to rely on anyone else for his/her work product.

I only need to know if my child is behaving herself and that she is trying her best. For the school to decide what kind of person they want my child to be based on PC characteristics and then evaluate her progress in these areas with nebulous criteria, intrudes into the parent's private domain.

The K-2 stages of reading and writing section can't be accurate. How can a child go from the end of the fluent and phonetic stage last year, to only the beginning of these stages this year?

Either the criteria for deciding reading/writing levels is subjective or one of the teachers misjudged a measurable ability. Objective evaluations leave little room for error.

These new report cards tell me nothing I really need to know. There are no rewards for hard work nor consequences for slacking off. The comment section is a good addition, but if there were grades in the academics section, I wouldn't have to waste conference time asking, "But how is she really doing?"

If the lack of grades is supposed to promote self-esteem, it's a contrary way of going about it. The child who knows his material (whether from hard work or natural ability) deserves the recognition for that result.

The parent whose child is not working at grade level needs a measurable warning sign that help is needed. To hide academic failure as a "developmental problem" absolves student, parent, teacher, and curriculum from having to do anything about it.

Assistant superintendent Judy White is the contact person regarding report cards. If you believe as I do, make your wishes known to her.

Patricia Alsopach, a Farmington Hills homemaker, is a frequent critic of the local schools. Her two children attend the Farmington Public Schools.

Not by talent alone does a person become successful

There's something uncanny about the retirement of Bill Laimbeer and the death of Robert Hawkins — two athletes in their 30s living in different worlds except for basketball.

Laimbeer, 36, is the klutzy, ill-tempered Detroit Piston who retired from professional basketball last week after 14 years in the pros. Hawkins, 39, is the ex-Piston who died that same week, the apparent victim of a drug-related shooting, according to police accounts.

I've never written about either person. Most of my information comes from newspaper accounts. But the parallels — or lack thereof — are striking.

Laimbeer is a guy who made the most of his limited talents, becoming a star, if not a legend, and contributing to two world championship teams. He was short on skill, but long on desire, elbows and moxie.

Columnist Mitch Albom, commenting about Laimbeer never complaining about his salary, at least in public, wrote, "... if he learned anything from his privileged youth, it was not to bitch about being a millionaire."

Hawkins, it seems, had talent galore. He was an all-city quarterback and an all-state hoopsster at Detroit Pershing. He played basketball at Illinois State where he once scored 63 points in a game, a record that still stands.

Hawkins spent four years as an NBA pro, including his peak season when he led the New York Nets in scoring with a 19.3 point average. His final season in the NBA was 1978-79 when he played a few games as a Piston.

Close friends said Hawkins' demise was related to salary demands. Will Robinson, another former Pershing star who is currently a Pistons executive, said Hawkins put his faith in an agent who priced him out of basketball.



PAT MURPHY

Laimbeer is a guy who made the most of his limited talents, becoming a star, if not a legend, and contributing to two world championship teams.

Dissatisfaction with his lot in the NBA apparently had something to do with Hawkins' demise in the NBA.

There were many differences between Laimbeer and Hawkins, even their nicknames. Laimbeer had several, including "Lambs," ironic considering he was reportedly the most hated player in the NBA. Hawkins, generally smiling and effervescent, was known as "Bubbles."

So, what's the point? There are several, I think. Perhaps the most salient is the importance of discipline — for success in life as well as success on the basketball court.

When my son, Guyon, was in school, my wife and I sent him to numerous basketball camps. He went to the Five-Star Camp in Pennsylvania, a blue-chip camp in Kentucky and the Milwaukee Bucks Camp in Alabama. But the one that warmed my heart as a father was the Big Man's Camp at

Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo.

As my son explained it, the Big Man's Camp taught basketball skills. But it also stressed the importance of discipline and the work ethic. I remember Guyon quoting coach Vernon Payne — and bringing a smile to my heart — who said something like, "Some very talented players don't get to play if they don't have discipline."

The Big Man's Camp emphasized that having talent galore — like Hawkins — is wonderful, but not enough. It's equally important, Payne stressed, to show up for practice every day, work hard and use whatever ability you have — like Laimbeer.

Pat Murphy reports on West Bloomfield and Oakland County news — and is a big (6-foot 3-inch) basketball fan. You can reach him at 901-2571.

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