

*An article from Parent Magazine...*

# What the Report Card Really Means

Find out how to read your child's report card — and respond to grades both good and bad.

A, B, C is no longer as easy as 1, 2, 3. Today's student report cards go way beyond the simple letter grades of years past. Now, many school districts send home detailed accounts of each subject's content, student progress, social behavior, work habits, learning skills, and more.

- **The Letter Lineup**
- Don't expect to see traditional letter grades until 3rd or 4th grade. Prior to that, schools usually describe progress with a scale such as D for developing, E for expanding, S for satisfactory, and N for needs improvement.
- The kindergarten report card can be likened to a **checklist of skills** crucial for early learning. Sharing and self-control are typically evaluated in a "social development" category. Holding a pencil correctly and using scissors competently are important motor skills. In your kindergartener's first public school report card, you'll learn how well she cooperates with adults, participates in group activities, follows direction, and forms upper- and lowercase letters.
- **The Right — and Wrong — Way to React**
- Even in a sea of As and Bs, disappointing marks always stand out. Mary Pat McCartney, elementary-level vice president of the American School Counselors Association, cautions against getting emotional about low grades. Here, her advice on how to handle the academic news:
  - **First, be enthusiastic about whatever's good.** Acknowledge the positive. Even if there's only one A, say something like, "Wow, you did really well in art."
  - **Deal with bad marks in a caring and calm manner.** Talk together about the report card, and help him come up with an improvement plan. Ask your child what he's going to do to bring up low marks, and support his efforts. They're his grades and he needs to take responsibility for them. His teacher didn't *give* him the D in math, for example. He earned it over the course of the marking period.
  - **Never use a report card to be punitive.** "I've known parents who ground their child for weeks at a time. That's really not effective discipline," warns McCartney.
  - **Instead, figure out what motivates your child and provide incentives.** Some parents get results by threatening to take away extracurricular activities or computer access. Others promise gifts or pay for achievement. A better approach is to establish some goals and reward improvement, not necessarily As. Your child may be more interested in your company than your cash. Acknowledging effort with an outing to the movies or a game of checkers might be all it takes. For students whose hard work still falls short, be sure to applaud the effort. Some children simply aren't capable of all As and Bs.

- **If you feel a grade is unfair, contact the teacher for more information.** Be matter-of-fact in your approach. Don't promise your child that you'll get the grade changed; instead, say that you'll help figure out what went wrong. Once you've discussed the situation with the teacher, the three of you can work together to put an improvement plan in place.
- **Consider including your child in a parent-teacher conference, if the teacher is agreeable.** For children in upper grades (3rd, 4th, and 5th), this can be an effective strategy. Expect the teacher to pull out samples of class work, tests, and quizzes and show you her grade book. Teachers today have lots of documentation; a conference that includes the student can have a powerful impact.
- **Finally, convey to your child that school is important.** Post her work on the refrigerator. Keep papers she is proud of in a portfolio. Explain that his report card makes a statement about him. Tell him that in your family hard work and good effort are valued most.

<http://www.scholastic.com/parents/resources/article/grades-report-cards/what-report-card-really-means>