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A Suggested Four-Point Pupil Progress Reporting System for the Eastmont Elementary Schools

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A SUGGESTED FOUR-POINT PUPIL PROGRESS REPORTING SYSTEM
FOR THE EASTMONT ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

A Research Paper
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington College of Education

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Richard E. Allstot
July 1961

THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING THE
PLAN 2 REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COMPLETION
OF A RESEARCH PAPER.

Dr. Del G. Peterson
FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

I. INTRODUCTION

Educators have become increasingly aware that the home as well as the school is an educational institution, that parents share equally with teachers the responsibility for insuring optimum growth of children. The school and the home must learn to plan cooperatively for the child. Educators must assume the leadership in encouraging both parents and teachers to abandon the protective isolationism that has existed between the two. Parent-teacher conferences might well be the significant factor in bringing about the readjustment of the traditional pattern (5:298-300).

II. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The purpose of this study was (1) to develop a suggested pupil progress reporting system for the Eastmont School District and (2) to survey the literature of acceptable progress reporting systems which may be adjustable to the elementary schools of the Eastmont School District.

Importance of the study. Our school district contains

five elementary schools. At this time we have five different ways of reporting pupil progress. From careful study of the more acceptable practices, our district plans to develop a more uniform practice. This study will be submitted to the Superintendent of schools and his administrative staff. After they have reviewed and accepted the unified program, it will be submitted to the P.T.A.'s and teachers for their evaluation.

Limitation of the study. The materials used in this study were obtained through a critical review of leading periodicals and books, most of which are on file in the library at Central Washington College, Ellensburg, Washington. Only those practices which can be adapted to the Eastmont Elementary Schools are used.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Parents' night. It is the gathering of the mothers and fathers of a particular classroom at the first of the school year to help give them more insight into the program that will be carried on in the child's classroom during the ensuing school year.

Parent-teacher conference. This is a conference that provides an opportunity for the teacher, the child, and the parent to subjectively evaluate the child's work in the school. The conference will aim to bring the representatives

of the child's two environments into closer harmony. The focal point of the conference will be: "What is Best For the Development of the Child?"

The four-point program. The program consists of Parents' night, two conferences, and a written report.

CHAPTER II

SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE

I. NEED FOR AND VALUE OF CONFERENCING

It has been said that once an idea has been expressed it will take from thirty to fifty years before it will be accepted by enough people to be tried. This seems to be so with reference to the parent-teacher conferences replacing the report card. With more education on this matter, parents are beginning to see the value of the face-to-face report. The following quotation clearly states the importance of the parent-teacher conference:

. . . having the teacher and parent talk together serves to bring the two parts of the child's living closer together than when teacher and parents do not know how they agree and differ in their ways of looking at the youngster, his background, and his school activities. The more the teacher and parents understand each other the less the child is pulled this way and that between people who do not know what difference there is between the two lives they are asking him to live (6:4-5).

The school needs to know certain areas of the child's behavior in order to better inform the parent of the pupil's needs. In the brochure So You Are Having a Conference, designed by the Wenatchee Public Schools, the following areas are mentioned: (1) the child's reaction to school, (2) the responsibility he assumes at home, (3) the evidence of initiative at home, (4) how the child spends his time out of

school, (5) where the child prefers to play--alone or with other children, (6) the child's reaction to family and neighbors, and (7) the child's responses to rules and regulations at home. . . (11:3). These seem to point out some of the significant needs for an effective conference.

It is not uncommon for the child to participate in the conference. If plans and decisions are made that will affect the child, he should be a partner in the development of such plans.

The so-called "three way conferences" in which older children meet with teacher and parents have not been used widely, but most of the schools where it has been tried are convinced of its value (9:38).

The following references establish an additional need for a conferencing program. Patent-teacher conferences,

. . . make for good will for parents to know what goes on, to feel that there is a willingness that they should know what happens in their child's room, to know that the teacher is ready to take the time and trouble to tell them and to listen to what they have to say about it (6:14).

At best even a well-prepared written report is one-way communication. The word report itself is relatively cold, connoting an official obligation formally fulfilled. It can only partially convey the school's desire for cooperative teacher-parent effort to provide high-quality education (7:303).

The conference method has been most successful when included as a regularly scheduled part of the full reporting program--although additional special conferences whenever needed are, of course, always in order. When parents are called in only for special conferences--when a problem arises or when a child is failing in his work--it may be too late to help the child or to secure parent cooperation (10:25).

An important part of a successful program is the organizational pattern. One would not want to assume that the organization of a program would be without problems. It is well to plan in advance to meet problems that will arise sooner or later. Following are several questions the planning staff may ask:

(1) What are the purposes in reporting pupil progress, (2) what are the areas of growth in which reporting will be made, (3) what criteria will be used to determine the kind of growth to be reported, (4) how can parents and children best participate in reporting procedures, (5) what steps should be taken to help teachers, parents, and children participate effectively in the program, (6) what are the community problems that will influence the nature of the program and how can these be met. . . , (7) what criteria should be used in setting up over-all procedures and in the selection and use of techniques and devices for reporting pupils' growth, (8) to what extent should the reporting program reflect the over-all philosophy of the school, (9) what should be the relationship between the instructional program and reporting procedures and devices, (10) what provisions should be made for continuous reappraisal of reporting procedures (4:24).

Having established values and needs by documentation, a feasible plan is suggested. Successful conferencing requires careful planning. Our present plan required the teacher to make four written reports in addition to planning two "face-to-face" parent conferences. The survey of literature suggests that our present plan is not wise utilization of the teachers' time.

To do the conference thoroughly, it is suggested that we have only two conferences annually. No written reports will accompany the conferences.

Dr. Ruth Strang recommends planning the conference around the following areas:

1. Dated samples of the pupil's work, including standardized and informal tests.
2. Dated anecdotal records of significant behavior observed in class or elsewhere.
3. Record of conversation with pupil and his parents.
4. The cumulative record which should give some information on home background, intelligence, school achievement, and other pertinent items.
5. The pupil's own appraisal of his progress.
6. Periodic summaries of this detailed information showing trends in physical, intellectual, and emotional development, and progress toward the accomplishment of developmental tasks (10:27-28).

To gather such complete data and to analyze it requires a large amount of the teacher's time. It appears, then, that two conferences per year are all that are practical.

II. LIMITATIONS OF THE WRITTEN REPORT

Most studies of children have shown that a child fares best in an environment that places the greatest emphasis on cooperation rather than competition, and where he is respected and commended for achieving the best he can, whether he has one talent or many talents. These studies indicate that ideally every child should be given an education geared to his particular capacity. By the same token, he should receive recognition for his efforts and the progress he has made even though his actual achievement falls short of grade standards (10:17).

Written reports are limited in many different ways. The exchange of many ideas is limited or prohibited,

the inter-exchange of ideas is difficult, and the written words are usually small in number. When you talk privately with their parents, you can exchange from twenty-five hundred to four thousand words (8:1).

William L. Wrinkle points out several fallacies in the use of the A-B-C-D-E-F marks:

(1) It is impossible to tell what an A-B-C-D-E-F mark based upon local school standards of achievement means, unless the achievement or ability level of the school giving the mark is also known, (2) A student can achieve any mark he wishes--if he is willing to make the effort, (3) The student's success in his after-school life compares favorably with his success in school, (4) The student's mark is favorable to the worker's pay check, (5) The competitive marking system provides a worth-while and justifiable introduction to competitive adult life, (6) School marks can be used as a means to an end without their becoming thought of by the students as ends in themselves (12:36-49).

The written report is an inferior tool for communicating to the parents the progress, development, and needs of the pupil. The face-to-face" method is supported by many, both parents and teacher, as the most satisfactory way to communicate.

Regardless of the form in which routine pupil progress reports are made, it is difficult to convey their purposes and spirit to all parents (10:302).

There can be little doubt that the quality of teaching would be greatly improved through the abandonment of traditional marking procedures (3:66).

The quotations just cited substantiate the opinion of the writer concerning the inadequacies and limitations of the written report. At best, it is difficult to convey understanding about the program of the school to the parents of the school community. It is especially difficult to

relate the progress of the pupil through written symbols such as the traditional A-B-C-D-E-F written report card.

The traditional A-B-C-D-E-F card is limited because (1) the meaning behind the symbols used are not completely understood by the parents or students, (2) the symbols receive varied interpretations and connotations by the individual family unit, (3) emphasis is placed on the symbol rather than subject content and educational values, (4) false educational security is formulated on the part of the student because an acceptable grade symbol has been received, (5) it may encourage the student to cheat in order to obtain grade status, (6) it encourages parents to pressure their children for grade status, which in turn is believed to give the parent added prestige, and (7) since standards vary from school to school and teacher to teacher, there is really no constant value attached to the symbol.

In brief, the written report cannot hope to achieve adequate teacher-parent understanding of the many facets of a student's educational and social progress and growth. This can be done most effectively through face-to-face parent-teacher conferences.

CHAPTER III

PROPOSED STEPS IN THE FOUR-POINT PROGRAM

In order to have a complete program of pupil-progress reporting, a four-point program has been developed. It sets the stage for succeeding steps. Each one is presented in sequence.

I. PARENTS' NIGHT

Parents' night programs can pay big dividends if parents are shown actual classroom instructional results and not a padded program. Programs for parents' night vary, but should always build understanding between home and schools. Tell parents what the school is doing for their children and why. Sometimes only parents are invited and the evening is educational or explanatory (5:311).

During the past few years many elementary schools have adopted the parent-teacher conference to partially replace report cards. The conferences tend to create better parental understanding of public education. However, teachers and administrators still have reason to feel the parents are getting insufficient insight into the program of their child's classroom.

The writer believes a group meeting of parents and teachers will further strengthen the parents' understanding

of their schools. This will help prevent serious misunderstandings and doubts of the total school program. To establish a sounder program of telling about the school, it is suggested that we use a parents' night program.

More explicit purposes of this program are (1) to get parents and teachers acquainted, (2) to give parents a chance to see the physical facilities of the classroom, (3) to explain the classroom program for the coming year, and (4) to answer questions raised by parents.

The organization of Parent-Night meeting must be well planned. The staff should hold discussions in order to define goals, objectives, and procedures. The teachers should familiarize themselves with the courses of study and guides for their particular level. The staff should then review the fundamental principles of human growth and development for the age group they are teaching.

Each teacher should plan his own group meeting in detail. A suggested outline for a Parent-Night meeting may contain the following points:

1. Make it an integrated part of the public relations program so that parents can depend upon it yearly for information.
2. Don't expect parents to understand all about the school program from one meeting.
3. Prepare very thoroughly with room mothers to insure a large and interested group.

4. There must be consistency between what the teacher says at Parent-Night and what she indicates at reporting time.
5. Plan so it is not a repeat of the conferences or report cards.
6. Keep the meeting interesting and short: suggest forty minutes.
7. Be friendly and positive in attitude, always.
8. Give special consideration in planning to new teachers and others who may feel less than secure in presenting such a program.
9. Hold the meeting some time in late September or early October.
10. Evening meetings seem best because of working parents.
11. Let parents know what they can do to help their children.
12. Summarize at end of meeting so all will know what has been accomplished.

II. THE CONFERENCES

The actual face-to-face conference is a vital part of the four-point program. This is done with two conferences. The first conference is scheduled to be held near the close of the first quarter of the school year. The

second conference is to be scheduled in the early spring near the close of the third quarter of the year.

The purposes of the first conference are as follows:

1. to build background understanding for both teacher and parents about the behavior patterns of the pupil.
2. to discuss the present behavior patterns of the pupil at home and school.
3. to establish good teacher-parent rapport.
4. to discuss instructional program of the school.
5. to evaluate the progress and growth of the pupil.
6. to plan together through the establishment of goals for the future growth of the pupil.

The National Education Association pamphlet It Starts in the Classroom points up the worth of the parent-teacher conference:

More and more teachers and schools are swinging into the rhythm of the parent-teacher conference system of reporting as a prime method of achieving this harmony. The parent-teacher conference begins where other reporting methods end. The parent brings to the conference his own special understanding of what the child is like at home. The teacher brings into light what the child is like away from home. Out of this, the desired outcome is "gain for the child" (8:1).

The second conference is not merely a repetition of the first, for it is scheduled for definite purposes. They are:

1. to determine between parents and teacher how effective the planning done last November.
2. to give further academic, emotional, and social progress reports.
3. to explain the written report to be issued in June.
4. to establish new goals that will be beneficial to your child between now and the end of the school year.
5. to consider new situations that need cooperative planning among parents, teachers, and youngsters.

The value of the parent-teacher conference is clearly stated in the following quotation:

We have often said and frequently implied that we firmly believe that interviewing should be for all of the parents of all the children, not merely those whose youngsters are beset with "problems." We want to give emphasis again to that belief and to set forth our feeling that every child is entitled to the benefits that come to him when his teacher and parents are working together; that teaching is bettered thereby; that living for everyone concerned is therefore immeasurably enriched (9:335).

There is a certain sequence of procedure for implementing and evaluating the conferences. The forms used are contained in the appendixes. Appendix B, sent home to

the parents prior to the first conference, is for their consideration for conference preparation. Appendix C is the form sent to the parents to ascertain the appointment with the parent. Appendix D is a check list prepared for use of the teacher during her conference preparation. Appendix E is the form used by the teacher to evaluate the parent-teacher conference. This form when properly filled out is given to the principal for his examination. It is then returned to the child's teacher, who files it in the pupil's work folder.

III. THE FINAL WRITTEN REPORT

The conclusive step of the four-point program is the written report formulated by the parent and teacher. The progress made, the extent of the goals accomplished, and additional suggestions will be recorded.

Duplicate copies of the written reports are made. One is the parent's copy. The other copy is placed in the pupil's permanent folder. If the parents have a copy in their possession, it can serve not only as a reminder of what was discussed at the second conference, but as a record of progress.

The school will use its copy of the written report as a reference for future planning for the good of the pupil. The written report is necessary for inquires about the child several years after he has graduated.

Our system requires a letter or a symbol marking on each child as he is advanced to the junior high school. Until this policy is re-evaluated, we must make a written report. The written report following the two conferences seems to agree with a report by Dr. Strang:

We need to learn more about the effect that different kinds of reports actually have on children's achievement. All that we know now is that both low marks and high marks stimulate some children to do better, discourage others, and decrease their interest and effort, and have little or no effect on still another group. We do not understand the unique combination of conditions that give rise, in individual cases, to either increased or lessened achievement.

Until educational research can define more clearly the effect of grades on motivation of learning, the school can only do its best by combining the most favorable aspects of various methods of reporting. It can include those aspects that contribute to the student's self-understanding and will enable him to make the most of his intellectual abilities (10:10-11).

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

A very important aspect of the school's program of appraisal is the way it reports and interprets information regarding the growth and progress of pupils. The four-point pupil progress system suggested in this paper is tied in closely with practices of studying the emotional, social, physical, and mental characteristics of children. This plan also considers promotional policies, provision for individual differences among pupils, evaluation, and public understanding of modern educational practices.

From the standpoint of a modern concept of appraisal, the important question is, of course, "What is the purpose of reporting to parents?" This question should be decided by parents, staff, and students before any final decision can be made as to how reporting should be done or how frequently reports should be made. The study indicates that the purpose of reports to parents is to inform them as clearly as possible of the progress and status of their child. The worth of any system of reporting should be judged squarely on this basis and not some other.

A formalized structure such as the four-point system is not always sufficient to meet the needs of children with problems of a more serious nature. Occasionally additional

conferences for some pupils may be necessary.

The broader concept of appraisal presented in this study indicates that the heart of a plan for reporting to parents should be to report to every child's parents individually on the total growth of their child, in as far as the school is able to define it. The report should be concerned with such matters as intellectual, physical, emotional, and social development.

It is very important that parents and teachers feel that it is advantageous to all to share knowledge concerning the child. Research clearly indicates that personal face-to-face meetings are more apt to insure good communication and clarity of meaning.

To fully profit from the proposed four-point program, the following should be emphasized:

1. Plan thoroughly for your conference by using concrete evidence as much as possible in determining the growth of the children.
2. Communicate specific, intelligible information concerning the status of a child and avoid overgeneralizing.
 - (a) Two great difficulties with conference method of reporting stem from the fact that teachers talk in too general terms,
 - (b) and often use language that is incomprehensible to parents. The information

should be given in plain English. Anything you have to say to parents can be put in clear, uncomplicated language.

Worthwhile communication depends on it.

3. Take care that whatever is communicated has a solid basis in fact. This is one compelling reason for adequate record keeping.
4. Be objective in your attitude and avoid the use of parental contacts as a means of threatening or punishing a child.
5. Avoid giving an impression of defensiveness or hostility.
6. Keep in strict professional confidence anything of a personal nature communicated by parents.
7. Refrain from dominating the interview so that the parents are able to make little or no contribution.
8. Keep brief, concise records of the conference (2:95-97).

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

HELPFUL QUESTIONS FOR THE PARENTS IN A PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE*

1. What does my child like best to do at school?
2. Is his school work as good as it ought to be--for him?
3. How does my youngster get along on the playground?
4. How does my child get along with the teacher?
5. Does he seem to worry about anything?
6. Do all children do it? (whatever children of that age do. In other words is my child behaving like other children?)
7. Does his health seem good to you? What does his health record indicate to you?
8. What can we do to help him at home?

*A form used by the Seattle Public Schools

APPENDIX C

APPOINTMENT FORM DEVELOPED BY:
WENATCHEE SCHOOL DISTRICT #246,
WENATCHEE, WASHINGTON

Dear Mr. and Mrs.

You are invited to _____ School to confer with the teacher concerning _____ progress in school.

Since the teacher has many conferences with other parents, it is necessary to schedule the time quite closely and to limit the conference to 20 minutes. Will you please come to room _____ at _____ o'clock on _____. It is important that both parents come for the conference.

We believe that the development of the child into a dependable, self-directed citizen is the joint responsibility of the home and the school. What happens to him in either place will affect his total behavior. It is, therefore, our aim to develop with the parent, ways which will result in maximum of success in individual growth for each child.

Sincerely,

_____Principal

_____Teacher

Please check one of the following, detach lower half, and return to the teacher.

____ We will be able to confer with you at the time suggested.

____ We will not be able to confer with you at the above stated time. Please suggest another date.

Signature of Parent

APPENDIX D

TEACHER PREPARATION CHECK LIST FOR CONFERENCE

I. Attitude

- A. Shows interest in work and class discussion.
- B. Cooperates in group work.
- C. Follows directions.
- D. Shows respect for school property.
- E. Kind and courteous to others.

II. Emotional Health

- A. Is he well adjusted to the group?
- B. Has he many friends?
- C. Does he meet stranger easily?
- D. Is he fearful of anything new?
- E. Does he day-dream?
- F. Does he have a good sense of humor?
- G. Does he seem happy?
- H. Is he friendly, helpful and show a wholesome curiosity?
- I. Does he seem insecure?

III. Physical Health

- A. Eyes.
- B. Teeth.
- C. Weight.
- D. Height.
- E. Hearing.
- F. Is he clean and neat?
- G. Does he eat a good lunch?
- H. Does he have good toilet habits?
- I. Does he tire easily?
- J. Is he free from physical defects?
- K. Does he have good muscular coordination?
- L. Are his general health habits good?
- M. Does he have good table manners?

IV. Scholastic Progress

- A. Reading.
 - 1. Comprehension.
 - 2. Phonics.

3. Dictionary skills.
4. Vocabulary.
5. Derives pleasure from reading.
6. Uses library.
7. Reads well to others.
8. Word analysis.

B. Language Arts.

1. Clarity of speech.
2. Organization of ideas.
3. Vocabulary.
4. Work written neatly.
5. Forms letters and figures well.
6. Spells well in written work.

C. Arithmetic.

1. Understands fundamental facts.
2. Acquiring habit of accuracy.
3. Acquiring satisfactory proficiency in solving written problems.

4. Understands fundamental processes.
5. Acquiring satisfactory proficiency in solving oral problems.

D. Social Studies and Science.

1. Contributes relevant and worthwhile thoughts to classroom discussions.
2. Enters into science and social studies activities.
3. Observes accurately.
4. Has a better understanding of people and the world through social studies.

E. Creative Ability.

1. Originality.
2. Do inhibitions hamper creative ability?
3. Ideas expressed in pictures.
4. Enjoys poetry.
5. Takes part in dramatic plays or creative dramatics.
6. Enjoys listening to music.
7. Enjoys singing.
8. Participates in creative writing.

F. Oral Expression.

V. Study Habits.

A. Works well independently.

B. Uses spare time effectively.

C. Completes assignments.

D. Wastes time.

VI. Special Ability

VII. Problems

APPENDIX E

WENATCHEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
REPORT OF PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

Name of Child _____ Date _____

Conference between _____

Teacher _____

Points Discussed

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Information received from parents

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Plans made with parents

- 1.
- 2.

Attitude of Parents

Additional notes or comments