

In October, *The Gazette Newspapers* published an article with several inaccurate statements about elementary standards-based grading and reporting (below). The MCPS public information office corresponded with the editors to point out the errors. MCPS responses are in red bold below. This document, with MCPS responses, was distributed as a handout to Grading and Reporting Implementation Team members at the October 29, 2009 meeting.

Questions persist on report cards

Administrators working to simplify grading system for parents

by Marcus Moore | Staff Writer

Martha Crews recently attended a meeting to get a better understanding of the school system's modified report cards that are used in elementary schools.

Even after the meeting, Crews was confused about how to interpret the grades of her two children who receive the modified cards.

"It's still a hard system to understand, a whole shift in thinking," said Crews, PTA president at Whetstone Elementary School in Montgomery Village. "It's a whole different way that we're still trying to fully understand."

Meanwhile, Bob Murphy, a parent at Great Seneca Creek Elementary School in Germantown, said the modified report card was easy to read.

Some parents and school board members are concerned that the county school system is moving forward with the rollout of the modified report cards in elementary schools, even though the documents are difficult to understand.

With the modified report cards, teachers are supposed to give grades based on students' learning skills ***This is incorrect. Since 2004, all elementary schools have expressly separated learning skills (behaviors and attitudes) from academic grades. That was the first step in implementing the revised policy.** — not just on how well they do on assignments. The report cards are part of a plan to overhaul the grading system, a process in the sixth year of implementation.

Under the new grading system, teachers do not give letter grades to students. Instead, they use numbers to explain how well students did in class. **This is incorrect. They are not reporting on how well they did in class. They are reporting on students' demonstrated proficiency of clear learning goals in specific subjects.**

For example, students who do well in a certain subject would get a "4" instead of an "A." **This is incorrect. We said at the Board table and showed on the powerpoint that an A is not equivalent to a 4. In the presentation we stated that a 3 and a 4 indicate proficiency and a 1 and 2 indicate a student is progressing toward proficiency. Teachers have been provided rubrics with specific criteria for each area reported that marking period.**

"We've given up the letters A, B, C, D, and E at the elementary level," Betsy R. Brown, the school system's director of curriculum and instruction, told the school board during its Sept. 21 meeting in Rockville.

Also gone are the days when a report card simply would list a letter grade beside a subject. Teachers now are asked to provide more thorough details on grades.

Reading teachers, for instance, are asked to give separate grades on students' word structure and how well they comprehend information and vocabulary, among other factors. **Traditional report cards also provide information in sub-areas within reading.**

Math teachers grade their students on how well they collect and organize data, and how they solve problems. **Traditional report cards also provide information in sub-areas within mathematics.**

A copy of the modified report card shows 17 factors in which math teachers have to assess their students. Social studies teachers now have to assign grades in 11 categories, including students' knowledge of culture and government. **These are not all reported in the same marking period. Two years ago, we applied feedback we received from teachers and parents to reduce the number of areas reported on each marking period. We reduced the number per marking period again last year.**

"There are a lot of things trying to be crammed into this one document," said school board member Laura V. Berthiaume (Dist. 2) of Rockville, who has seen the modified report card. "I wonder if we're doing too much. It's the end result that matters to me more than the itsy-bitsy details."

School board member Michael A. Durso worries that teachers are being asked to do too much, which is a problem because the current budget eliminates much of the support staff they once had. **He was speaking of secondary schools, not elementary.**

"We're really pushing teachers to the point where they might be overloaded," said Durso (Dist. 5) of Silver Spring, a former principal of Springbrook High School.

Doug Prouty, president of the county teachers union, acknowledged that the lack of resources is "an ongoing concern," but said that teachers are adjusting to the modified grading system.

Durso recalled when the grading system was changed in secondary schools three years ago and the confusion that ensued with the rollout. **Elementary schools have been implementing the policy for longer than the secondary schools and with less teacher anxiety.**

"I don't want to repeat that," he said. "Everybody's kind of in a different state and I don't want to move forward with something we haven't thought all the way through."

The modified report cards are being used in the fourth and fifth grades this year; last year, they were unveiled in the first, second and third grades. Twenty-five of the school system's 131 elementary schools are using the cards.

Parents have told Betsy Brown that they want simplified language on the report cards. Therefore, officials are working to simplify the report cards from last year's version, Brown said.

The current marking period ends Oct. 30; the report cards will be mailed Nov. 11.

The intent of the report cards is to "give parents and students more concrete information of how well they're doing," Prouty said. Still, "the number of indicators that teachers are being asked to grade on is a significant increase."

Amanda Dali, staff development teacher at Beall Elementary School in Rockville, disagreed. While the workload was tough when the school first got the report cards in 2004, teachers now are more receptive to the documents, she said.

"I think the report cards are great, as it really does enable the teachers to have a detailed representation of what students know and are able to do in the classroom," said Dali, who was a first-grade teacher at Beall when the cards were unveiled.

"If teachers were told that they had to go back to the old grading system, they would be up in arms."