Provincial Report Card Survey
Summary of Results

Submitted to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development
By the Provincial Report Card Review Committee

August 2014

NOVA SCOTIA

Contents

Background

In response to concerns heard from parents and educators about the provincial report card, a Report Card Review Committee was created in January 2014 with the mandate to evaluate the strengths and challenges of provincial report cards. The committee included parents, students, teachers, school administrators as well as representatives from school boards and Education and Early Childhood Development. The report card review included an online survey.
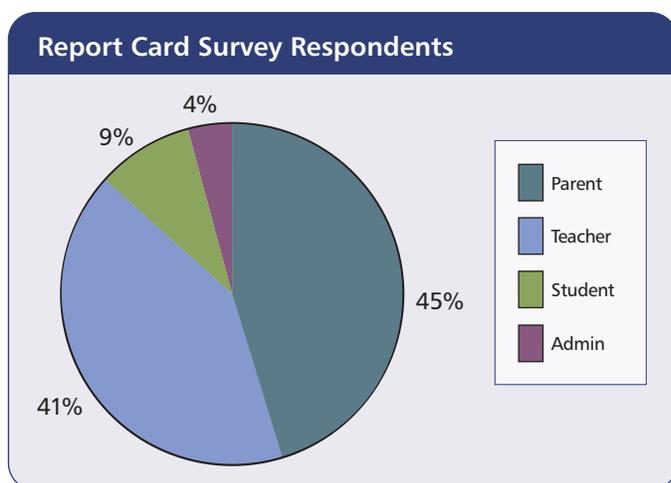
Survey Administration

The survey included separate questionnaires directed at four target groups identified by the Report Card Review Committee: parents, teachers, administrators, and students. Questions asked on each questionnaire were similar but were tailored to the specific respondent group as necessary.

The survey was administered online from March 19 to April 11, 2014 and was available in English and French.
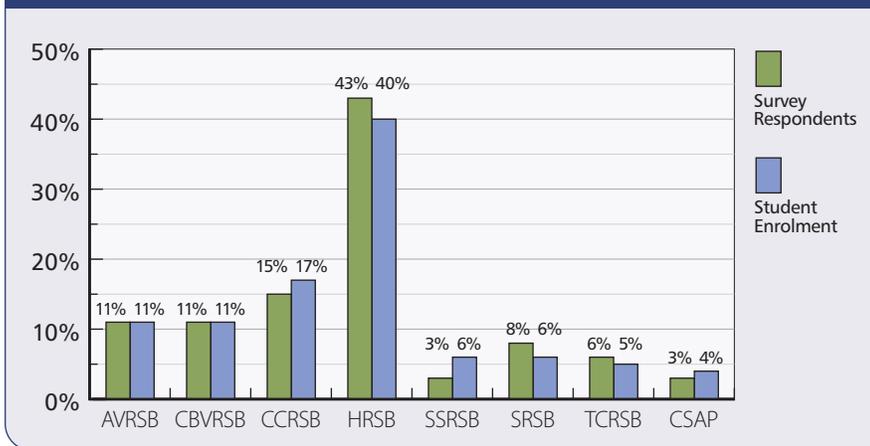
Survey Respondent Profile

A total of 5,811 people completed or partially completed the Report Card Survey. The majority of respondents were either parents (2,637) or teachers (2,374). There were 256 administrators and 544 students (grades 6 to 12) who responded to the survey.

The survey asked respondents to indicate the grades relevant to them. The majority of parent (68%) and administrator (70%) survey respondents identified grades primary to 6 as most relevant to them. Teacher respondents represented elementary and junior/senior high school grades about equally, with 49% of teacher respondents from grades primary to 6 and 51% from grades 7 to 12. Only students in grades 6 to 12 were able to complete the survey. A small proportion of student respondents were in grade 6 (16%), 39% were in grades 7 to 9 and 45% were in grades 10 to 12.

The distribution of survey respondents by school board is fairly representative of the distribution of student enrolment by school board.

Distribution of Survey Respondents by School Board

School Board	Survey Respondents	Student Enrolment
AVRSB	11%	11%
CBVRSB	11%	11%
CCRSB	15%	17%
HRSB	43%	40%
SSRSB	3%	6%
SRSB	8%	6%
TCRSB	6%	5%
CSAP	3%	4%

It is important to note that the results presented in this report represent the response of those individuals who responded to the survey and do not necessarily reflect the population of that group as a whole.

Key Findings

All questionnaires asked respondents about key sections of the report card: Teacher Comments, Learner Profile, and Grades and Descriptors. The parent, administrator, and teacher questionnaire also included questions about the Grade Primary Report Card. The questionnaires were similar, however questions were tailored to the target group when necessary.

Parent respondents were asked two general questions about the report card. Overall, 61% of parent respondents agreed that report cards tell them how well their child is doing in school. Only 36% of parent respondents agreed that the Report Card Response Form was useful in communicating with teachers about their child's report card.

Below is a summary of the key findings from the survey for each section of the survey.

Teacher Comments by Subject/Course

All survey respondents were asked about the section of the report card where teachers provide comments on each subject or course.

Parent respondents *did not agree* that teacher comments help them to
- understand what their child has learned and can do well (47%)
- understand where their child may be struggling (57%)
- use the information to support their child at home (62%)
- understand grades and descriptors (63%)

Student respondents *agree* that teacher comments
- are about them and what they are learning (62%)
- help them understand what they have learned and can do well (58%)
- help them understand where they are struggling and may need support (55%)
- match the feedback they receive in the classroom (51%)

Teacher respondents *did not agree* that teacher comments
- help parents understand how well their child is progressing in each subject/course (52%)
- help students understand how well they are progressing in each subject/course (61%)

Administrator respondents *agree* that teacher comments
- are an important component of the report card (94%)
- help parents understand how well their child is progressing in each subject/course (66%)
- help students understand how well they are progressing in each subject/course (55%)

Responses to Open-Ended Questions

When asked for suggestions for improvements to teacher comments in report cards, the most common suggestions from all respondent groups were
- provide personal or individual comments to show the student's strengths and challenges
- include instructions on how students can improve and how parents can help at home
- use language that is less wordy and that parents and students can easily understand

Teachers also suggested
- that they should be able to comment on work habits, attendance, and behaviour in class
- that there should be more space made available for comments

Learner Profile

The Learner Profile section of the report card is designed to report on a student's social development and work habits separately from the reporting on courses or subjects. The survey asked all respondent groups about the Learner Profile section. Currently, the Learner Profile for grades primary to 6 includes a comment box. The Learner Profile for grades 7 to 12 does not include a comment box.[1]

LEARNER PROFILE: GRADES PRIMARY TO 6

Overall, the feedback on the Learner Profile for grades primary to 6 was positive. Most respondents reported that the grades primary to 6 Learner Profile is effective for communicating the student's development of social skills and work habits and is easy to understand.

Parent respondents (of students in grades primary to 6) *agreed* that the Learner Profile
- helps them understand their child's strengths in development of social skills (79%)
- helps them understand their child's strengths in development of work habits (80%)
- is easy to understand (82%)
- is equally important to them as academic grades (78%)
- helps them support their child's learning at home (68%)

---

1.   The Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) uses a different Learner Profile in their report card and were asked about this section separately. The responses received from the CSAP respondents were not large enough to report on. The results in this section therefore do not include responses related to the CSAP report card.

Student respondents (grade 6 only) *agreed* that
- the Learner Profile gives them a good picture of their development of social skills (89%)
- the Learner Profile gives them a good picture of their development of work habits (90%)
- the Learner Profile is written in a way that is easy to understand (85%)
- they talk with their teachers about the Learner Profile in their day to day work in the classroom (73%)

Teacher respondents *agreed* that
- the Learner Profile is effective for communicating a student's development of social skills and work habits (80%)
- the Learner Profile is easy for parents to understand (78%)
- the comment space in the Learner Profile (grades P–6) was valuable (68%)

Administrator respondents *agreed* that:
- the Learner Profile is effective for communicating a student's social skills and work habits (94%)
- the Learner Profile is easy for parents to understand (89%)
- the comment space in the Learner Profile (grades P–6) was valuable (87%)

LEARNER PROFILE: GRADES 7 TO 12

Feedback from survey respondents about the Learner Profile for grades 7–12 was more variable.

Parent respondents (of students in grades 7 to 12) *agreed* the Learner Profile
- helps them understand their child's strengths in development of social skills (69%)
- helps them understand their child's strengths in development of work habits (72%)
- was easy to understand (77%)
- is equally important as academic grades (67%)
- provides information they are able to use to support their child's learning at home (57%)

Student respondents *agreed* the Learner Profile
- gives them a good picture of their development of work habits (59%)
- gives them a good picture of their development of social skills (54%)
- is talked about in their day to day work in the classroom (16%)

Teacher respondents *agreed* that the Learner Profile
- is effective for communicating a student's development of social skills and work habits (52%)
- is easy for parents to understand (57%)
- should include a comments section (i.e., a comment space would be valuable) (65%)

Administrator respondents *agreed* that the Learner Profile:
- is effective for communicating a student's development of social skills and work habits (76%)
- is easy for parents to understand (74%)
- should include a comments section (i.e. a comment space would be valuable) (82%)

Responses to Open-Ended Questions

When asked to suggest improvements to the Learner Profile, all respondent groups asked for improvements to the explanation of the Learner Profile terms to improve parent and student understanding. Parent, teacher, and administrator respondents suggested that a comment section be included in the Learner Profile section of the Grades 7–12 Report Card.
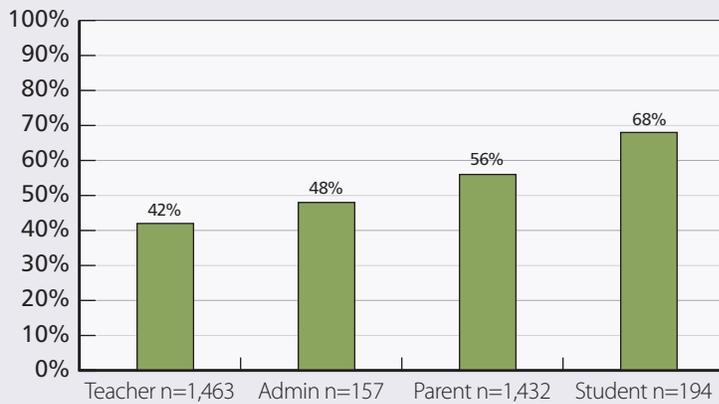
Grades and Descriptors

GRADES AND DESCRIPTORS: GRADES 1 TO 8

In 2013–14 a new way of describing letter grades (A, B, C, D) was introduced in the grades 1 to 8 report cards in fall 2013.
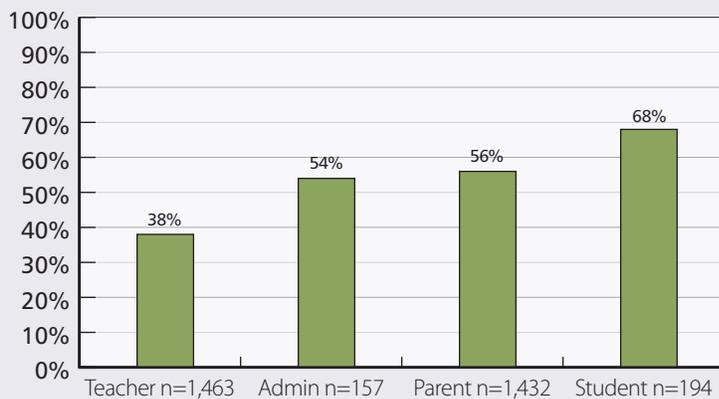
The new descriptors for letter grades are as follows:

A: The student demonstrates achievement with thorough understanding and application of concepts and skills in relation to expected learning outcomes.

B: The student demonstrates achievement with good understanding and application of concepts and skills in relation to expected learning outcomes.

C: The student demonstrates achievement with basic understanding and application of concepts and skills in relation to expected learning outcomes.

D: The student demonstrates achievement with limited understanding and application of concepts and skills in relation to expected learning outcomes. The student has not met expectations.

Agree / Strongly Agree Letter Grades Communicate Progress and Achievement (1–8)

	Teacher n=1,463	Admin n=157	Parent n=1,432	Student n=194
	42%	48%	56%	68%

Agree / Strongly Agree Descriptors Communicate Progress and Achievement (1–8)

	Teacher n=1,463	Admin n=157	Parent n=1,432	Student n=194
	38%	54%	56%	68%

The survey asked parents, students (in grades 6 to 8), teachers, and administrators about the letter grades and the descriptors. Generally, responses from parents, teachers, and administrators indicated dissatisfaction with the grades 1 to 8 letter grades and descriptors.

Parent respondents *agreed* that grades and descriptors
- help in communicating progress at school (56%)
- are useful to support their child's learning at home (46%)

Student respondents *agreed* that grades and descriptors
- help them to understand how well they are doing in school (68%)

Teacher respondents *did not agree* that
- grades are effective for communicating the progress and achievement of a student (58%)
- descriptors are effective for communicating the progress and achievement of a student (62%)
- parents understand letter grades and descriptors (80%)

Administrator respondents *did not agree* that
- grades are effective for communicating the progress and achievement of a student (51%)
- descriptors are effective for communicating the progress and achievement of a student (46%)
- parents understand letter grades and descriptors (71%)

Responses to Open-Ended Questions

All respondent groups were asked to suggest improvements to the letter grades and descriptors for grades 1–8.

Teachers commented that the letter grades (A, B, C, D) are confusing for parents because they associate these letter grades with a percentage and not with the descriptors associated with the letters as described in the report card. Some teachers requested more information to explain the new grades and descriptors to parents.

Parents, teachers, and administrators also commonly suggested improving the explanation for the descriptors to clarify terminology.

The most common suggestion from parents, teachers, and administrators, was to replace the ABCD grades. The suggestions for replacing letter grades included numbers, percentages, letter grades with + or –, and other codes such as E/VG/G.

GRADES AND DESCRIPTORS: GRADES 9 TO 12

The survey asked all respondent groups about the grades 9 to 12 percentage grades and descriptors. The Grades 9–12 Report Card grades and descriptors are reported as follows:

90–100%	demonstrates excellent or outstanding achievement in relation to expected learning outcomes
80–89%	demonstrates very good achievement in relation to expected learning outcomes
70–79%	demonstrates good achievement in relation to the expected learning outcomes
60–69%	demonstrates satisfactory achievement in relation to the expected learning outcomes
50–59%	demonstrates minimally acceptable achievement in relation to the expected learning outcomes
Below 50%	has not met minimum requirement in relation to expected learning outcomes

Overall, the respondents to the survey were positive about the effectiveness of percentage grades and descriptors in the Grades 9–12 Report Card. (80%)

Parent respondents with students in grades 9 to 12 *agreed*
- the grades and descriptors help them understand how well their child is doing at school (84%)
- they are able to use the information from the grades and descriptors section to support their child at home (75%)

Student respondents *agreed* that the percentage grades and descriptors
- help them understand how well they are doing in a course (81%)
- help them understand what they need to do to improve their learning (52%)

Teacher respondents *agreed* that
- percentage grades and descriptors are effective for communicating how well a student is doing in school (81%)
- students understand the grades they received on the Grades 9–12 Report Card (84%)
- parents understand the grades their child received on the Grades 9–12 Report Card (80%)

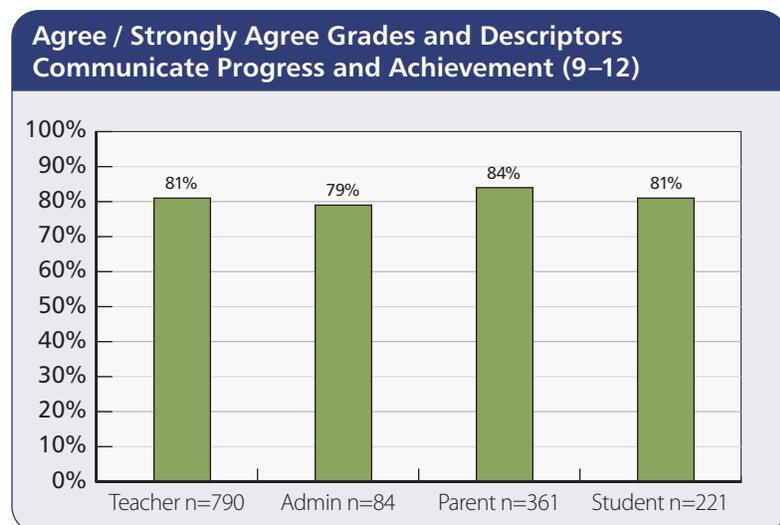**Administrator respondents** *agreed* that
- percentage grades and descriptors are effective for communicating how well a student is doing in school (79%)
- students understand the grades they received on the Grades 9–12 Report Card (76%)
- parents understand the grades their child received on the Grades 9–12 Report Card (74%)

Responses to Open-Ended Questions

All respondent groups were asked to suggest improvements to the grades and descriptors for grades 9–12. The most common comment received from teachers, parents, administrators, and students was that they like and understand percentage grades.

Other comments included the following:
- Improve consistency in reporting by teachers.
- Descriptors are too vague, are not helpful, and need to be easier for parents to understand.
- Some administrators said that percentage grades need to be better aligned with the descriptors in grades 1–8.

Agree / Strongly Agree Grades and Descriptors Communicate Progress and Achievement (9–12)

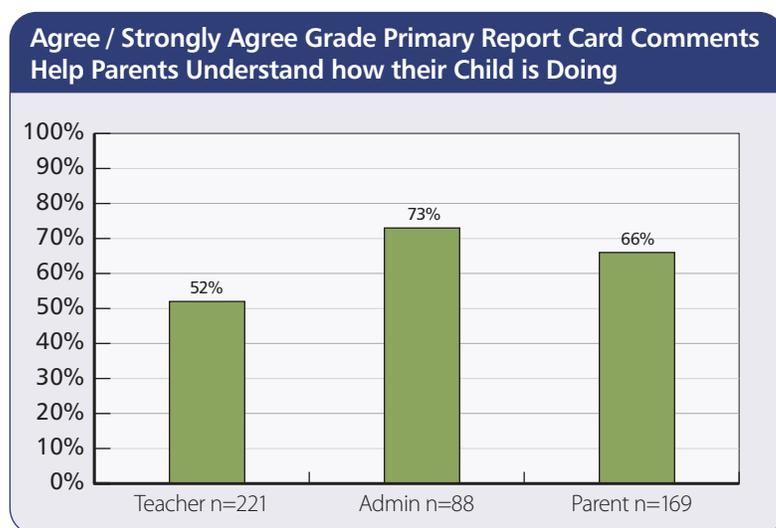|			
Teacher n=790	Admin n=84	Parent n=361	Student n=221
81%	79%	84%	81%

GRADE PRIMARY REPORT CARD

In all school boards the Grade Primary Report Card does not include letter grades. In English school boards the Grade Primary Report Card includes comments from the teacher about each subject. In the CSAP, the Grade Primary Report Card does not require teachers to provide comments for each subject. Instead, teachers provide overall comments. Because the report card template is different for CSAP, responses from the CSAP were summarized separately. Due to low response rates a detailed summary of results for CSAP is not possible.

Parent respondents (of students in grade primary) *agreed* that the comments
- describe how well their child is doing in school (66%)
- help them understand what their child has learned and can do well (65%)
- help them understand where their child may be struggling or may need support (51%)
- are useful to support their child's learning at home (48%)

Agree / Strongly Agree Grade Primary Report Card Comments Help Parents Understand how their Child is Doing

Respondent	Percent
Teacher n=221	52%
Admin n=88	73%
Parent n=169	66%

Only 52% of **teacher respondents** *agreed* that the Grade Primary Report Card comments are effective in helping parents understand how well their child is progressing in each subject, compared to 73% of **administrator respondents**.

Responses to Open-Ended Questions

Parents were asked to suggest improvements to the Grade Primary Report Card. Most commonly, parent respondents suggested that teachers provide comments that are specific and reflect a child's progress and challenges and move away from generic "cut and paste" comments that speak to what has been taught in class.

The survey asked teachers and administrators to identify their top strengths and challenges and suggest improvements to the Grade Primary Report Card. There were 228 teachers and 107 administrators who responded to these questions. Their most common responses are summarized below.

Strengths
- The Grade Primary Report Card is able to provide individualized comments on student progress.
- The Grade Primary Report Card removes the focus from letter grades and allows the teacher to explain how a student is doing.
- Teachers are able to outline strengths, challenges, and accomplishments in the Grade Primary Report Card.

Challenges
- Teacher comments are difficult for parents to understand. Parents do not understand the "outcomes language."
- Teacher comments can include too much jargon, be too vague, be too long, and include too much detail.
- Some teachers said they would like to be able to comment about students' work habits and behaviour.

Suggestions
- Move away from generic comments that speak to what is taught in class and provide comments that reflect a child's progress and challenges.
- Allow teachers more flexibility for providing comments and allow teachers to comment on a child's behaviour that is affecting learning.
- Use parent-friendly language.