



# Evaluation Brief

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Department of Shared Accountability

## Second-year Evaluation of the Implementation of the Montgomery County Board of Education Grading and Reporting Policy: Findings From the Spring 2007 Elementary School Parent Survey

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### Background

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is implementing the Montgomery County Board of Education Grading and Reporting (Policy IKA) districtwide. In addition to implementing the policy, 19 elementary school administrators volunteered to field-test a new electronic standards-based report card for students in Grades 1 and 2.

The Department of Shared Accountability (DSA) is conducting a multiyear evaluation of the policy implementation. As part of the evaluation for the 2006–2007 school year, a survey was administered in spring 2007 to parents of students in field-test schools. The purpose of this survey was to gather input from parents on their understanding and perceptions of the policy and the standards-based report card, as well as their thoughts on ways to improve the report card. Additional evaluation activities included interviews and surveys of teachers in Grades 1 and 2. This brief summarizes key findings from the parent survey.

### Methodology

Survey items, developed with input from members of the Grading and Reporting Evaluation Advisory Committee, focused on major components of implementation. Some survey items were the same as last year's parent survey, as there were no major changes in implementation at the field-test schools.

Parents of students from the following 19 schools were surveyed: Ashburton, Beall, Bells Mill, Brookhaven, Cloverly, Darnestown, East Silver Spring, Flower Valley, Forest Knolls, Fox Chapel, Galway, Great Seneca Creek, Kemp Mill, Spark M. Matsunaga, Monocacy, Rock Creek Valley, Roscoe R. Nix, Summit Hall, and Whetstone. A survey was

sent to all parents at each of these schools. Staff from DSA worked with the grading and reporting contact at each school to distribute paper copies of the survey via student backpacks. Surveys were provided in multiple languages for parents who needed them.

A total of 807 surveys were received during the five-week data collection period (May 2007 – June 2007), for an overall response rate of 26%; the response rate by school ranged from 17% to 32% (Table A1). About half of the responses were from Grade 1 parents (45%) and a little more than half from Grade 2 parents (51%) (Table A2). Ninety-two percent of completed surveys were in English, and about 10% of the translated surveys were in Spanish (Table A3).

### Summary of Major Findings

According to parent survey findings:

- MCPS is doing a good or excellent job with implementation.
- Parents are satisfied with opportunities to ask questions about the grading and reporting policy.
- Parents are satisfied with opportunities to provide feedback about the grading and reporting policy.
- Parents want teacher comments on the report card.
- Parents need a clearer understanding of the standards-based report card.

## Discussion of Findings

### *Implementation of Grading and Reporting Practices*

Overall, survey respondents indicated that they found most of the grading and reporting practices very helpful in promoting student achievement (see Table A4 for a summary of responses). The practice rated as most helpful was *Learning is evaluated using varied tasks/assignments* (74%). *Teachers give feedback in different ways* (71%) was also rated as very helpful by parents. At least half of parents also identified the following practices as helpful: *Teachers assess student learning in a variety of ways* (69%); *Grades reflect what students know and are able to do based on their grade level* (68%); *Learning skills include behavior and effort* (68%); *Grades are based on multiple measures over time* (65%); *Homework for practice is reported as a learning skill* (62%); and *Learning skills are reported separately from academic grades* (62%). Only about one third of respondents thought that the following practice promotes student achievement: *Lateness and attendance are not part of the grade* (Table A4). Between 18% and 27% of parents reported finding the aforementioned practices somewhat helpful in promoting student achievement. These findings are similar to those reported by parents on the 2006 survey (Innocent, 2006).

When asked how well they thought MCPS was doing in implementing the policy procedures, nearly 79% of respondents said MCPS was doing an excellent (30.6%) or good job (48.6%), nearly 14% rated MCPS as doing a fair or poor job, and about 7% were unsure or had no opinion (Table A5). The majority of parents (50.6%), however, reported that the most meaningful information on how their child is doing in school may be obtained from direct teacher communication (Table A6).

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with opportunities at their child's school to ask questions and provide feedback on the Grading and Reporting Policy and procedures. The majority of parents responded that they were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with opportunities to ask questions (86%) and provide feedback (82%). (see Tables A7 and A8).

### *Standards-based Report Card*

*Understanding the report card.* Overall, about half of parents gave high ratings to their understanding of key components of the standards-based report card (Table A9). A little more than 60% reported being able to understand the reading level graph very well. Similarly, almost 60% reported they understood the learning skills and the reading targets very well.

Slightly more than half of parents reported understanding the following components very well: 1) the essential learnings for reading and language arts, 2) the learning skill codes (I, LP, FP, R, NI), 3) the essential learnings for mathematics, and 4) the grading codes for overall academic performance and essential learnings (1, 2, 3, 4, NE, NEP).

*Information obtained from the report card.* A survey question asked about the information obtained from key components of the standards-based report card. The response options were "too much," "just enough," "not enough," and "not sure or no opinion." Most survey respondents said the level of information they received was just enough (Table A10). Responses ranged from 68% for learning skill codes (I, LP, FP, R, NI) to 71% for essential learnings for mathematics and reading level graph. About 15% (ranging from 14% to 17%) reported not receiving enough information from the components, while 10% indicated receiving too much information.

Survey respondents also were asked about the usefulness of the information they receive from the report card. A little more than half of parents indicated that the following components are very useful: *Reading level graph* (59%), *Reading targets* (56%), *Essential learnings for mathematics* (56%), *Essential learnings for reading and language arts* (55%), *Grading codes for overall academic performance in ESOL and essential learnings* (54%), *learning skills* (53%), and *learning skill codes* (52%) (Table A11). Thirty to thirty-seven percent of parents reported the information they receive from the report card as "somewhat useful."

*Addition of teachers' comments.* Although parents reported getting "just enough information" from the standards-based report card, the majority overwhelmingly reported wanting teachers' comments added to the report card (Table A12). Almost 90% of respondents replied "yes" to the question.

Thirty-five percent of the 508 open-ended responses from parents indicated that teachers' comments would be useful and helpful. Reasons cited include additional clarity, better understanding of how to help their children, and more personal interaction with the teacher. Twenty-two percent ( $n=110$ ) of parents who provided open-ended responses replied that teachers' comments would provide them with not only more details about their child in general, but also provide clarity and help explain changes in achievement from one marking period to the next. Typical parent responses included "Comments help especially when grading codes from every marking period tend to decrease in trend at least there's an explanation to it"; "It can provide more detailed information about why

a certain grade is given”; and “Teacher’s comments can provide an overall picture of the student at school, including something that may not be captured in the standard report card.”

Parents also responded that teachers’ comments on the report card would help them understand how to help their child at home (8%,  $n=41$ ), and show progress gained and strengths or weaknesses (17%,  $n=88$ ). Ten percent ( $n=50$ ) of parents replied that teachers’ comments would allow them to know specific areas in need of improvement. Typical parent responses included “Comments are very helpful to parents and offer suggestions to support and enhance classroom learning”; “It would add value to the evaluation and assist the parent with reinforcing skills at home”; and “Comments give much more specific and advanced information concerning the students strengths and weaknesses.”

Fourteen percent ( $n=72$ ) of parents replied that teacher comments would make the report card more personal. As one parent replied, “It’s always good to know from the teacher’s own words what they think of my child’s behavior/learning level/daily reactions to certain classroom incidents.” As summarized by another parent, “A teacher’s comments add a personal touch to the grading experiences. I feel that the teacher knows my child and that he is not just a grade.” Another recurring theme among parent comments included gaining behavioral information about the child (5%,  $n=27$ ).

#### *Additional Comments*

Parents were asked to share any additional thoughts in open-ended format and 315 (39%) did so. Almost a quarter of these parents (24%,  $n=74$ ) indicated they liked the report card or were happy with MCPS. As stated by one parent, “I enjoy the new report card which is very easy to follow in regards to understanding the grading system.” On the other hand, 11% ( $n=33$ ) reported they did not like the report card or the grading system. As summarized by one parent, “I prefer the old report card with more detail added to it rather than the new format. While it is helpful to see the areas where my child excels and/or needs help, the traditional report card is less confusing and more straight forward.”

Throughout the additional comments, a number of common themes emerged regardless of respondents’ satisfaction with the policy. Sixty-nine percent of those parents commenting ( $n=217$ ) expressed their dissatisfaction with the format of the report card. Thirty-seven percent ( $n=117$ ) of the responses related to report card format were requests for additional information (e.g., teacher comments, behavioral aspects of child). Seventeen percent ( $n=53$ ) related to

the report card being “too complicated and too hard to understand.” Some parents indicated that the report card is “very impersonal” and it does not inform parents about the strengths or weaknesses of the child.

One quarter of parents (25%,  $n=79$ ) reported that they need help understanding the grading system, interpreting the report card, and their inability to explain it to their children. As one parent summarized, “Explaining to a first grader that they are a ‘4’ in an area is difficult. Parents need help in interpreting where they are and where they should be.” Parents also mentioned that having parent-teacher conferences beyond receiving the initial report card would be helpful. As iterated by one parent “It would be nice to have parent-teacher conferences twice a year to check-in and talk with the teachers about my child’s progress.”

Other recurring themes among the additional comments section included thoughts on homework ( $n=5$ ), grading procedures (5%,  $n=16$ ), students’ need for understanding the system (2%,  $n=7$ ), and the amount of assessments conducted by teachers (4%,  $n=12$ ).

#### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the findings from the surveys:

- Provide comments on the report card and/or opportunities to have face-to-face parent/teacher conferences with teachers after the first quarter. Parents expressed interest in receiving more opportunities to talk with teachers shortly after report cards are received to, for example, gain an understanding of changes from one report card to the next.
- Increase parents’ understanding of grading and reporting practices. Provide parents with clear information about the meaning and use of grading codes and provide support to help them understand them.
- Reformat the report card to make it more readable and understandable by parents.
- Continue to solicit feedback from parents on the implementation of the policy to enhance implementation practices.

**Reference**

Innocent, M.A. (2006). *Implementation of the Montgomery County Board of Education grading and reporting policy: Findings from the spring 2006 elementary school parent survey*. Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools.

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**Appendix**

Table A1  
Survey Response Rate by School (N=807)

Field-test schools	(%) Response Rate
Ashburton	29.3
Beall	29.3
Bells Mill	32.4
Brookhaven	27.0
Cloverly	27.4
Darnestown	20.7
East Silver Spring	22.8
Flower Valley	28.9
Forest Knolls	24.4
Fox Chapel	17.7
Galway	19.2
Great Seneca Creek	29.9
Kemp Mill	21.7
Spark M. Matsunaga	28.9
Monocacy	28.6
Rock Creek Valley	22.3
Roscoe R. Nix	21.6
Summit Hall	16.5
Whetstone	20.4
No school identified <sup>a</sup>	3.7
Overall	25.7

<sup>a</sup> 30 surveys did not include the school name

Table A2  
Percentage of Respondents  
by Student Grade Level (N=807)

	(%) Distribution
Grade 1	45.4
Grade 2	51.3
Both	1.7
No response	1.6

Table A3  
Percentage of Surveys Received by Language (N=807)

	(%) Surveys Received
English	92.2
Spanish	7.3
French	0
Chinese	0
Korean	0
Vietnamese	0.5

Table A4  
Percentage of Respondents Finding the Policy Procedures Helpful in Promoting Student Achievement (N=807)

Policy Procedure	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not at all Helpful	Not Sure/No Opinion	No Response
Grades reflect what students know and are able to do based on their grade level.	67.8	25.8	3.0	1.4	2.1
Teachers assess student learning in a variety of ways.	68.9	23.5	2.4	3.3	1.9
Grades are based on multiple measures (many “snapshots” of performance) over time.	64.7	25.4	3.2	4.8	1.9
Learning is evaluated using varied tasks/ assignments such as paper/pencil, oral explanation, drawing, using objects to show understanding, demonstrating reading skills, completing charts or tables.	74.2	18.5	1.6	3.2	2.5
Lateness and attendance are not part of the grade.	37.9	22.2	11.4	23.9	4.6
Homework for practice is reported as a learning skill.	61.6	24.5	4.2	7.2	2.5
Teachers give feedback in different ways – for example, in writing or by talking with students.	71.3	18.3	3.6	4.5	2.4
Learning skills are reported separately from academic grades.	62.2	27.1	3.7	5.1	1.9
Learning skills include behavior and effort.	67.7	23.8	2.7	4.1	1.7

Table A5  
Respondents’ Ratings of How Well MCPS is Doing With Implementing the New Grading and Reporting Policy (N=807)

	(%) Rating
Excellent	30.6
Good	48.6
Fair	9.8
Poor	4.2
Not Sure/No Opinion	5.0
No Response	1.9

Table A6  
Percentage of Respondents Indicating Which Method Provides the Most Meaningful Information on How Their Child is Doing in School (N=807)

	%
Report card	33.7
Direct teacher communication (e.g., e-mail, phone, face-to-face)	50.6
Feedback on grades on my child’s work	13.0
Not Sure/No Opinion	1.2
No Response	1.5

Table A7  
 Respondents' Ratings of Their Satisfaction With Opportunities to  
 Ask Questions About Grading and Reporting Policies and Procedures (N=807)

	(%) Rating
Very Satisfied	36.6
Satisfied	49.1
Dissatisfied	5.1
Very Dissatisfied	1.9
Not Sure/No Opinion	6.4
No Response	1.0

Table A8  
 Respondents' Ratings of Their Satisfaction With Opportunities to  
 Provide Feedback About Grading and Reporting Policies and Procedures (N=807)

	(%) Rating
Very Satisfied	32.1
Satisfied	50.3
Dissatisfied	6.9
Very Dissatisfied	2.1
Not Sure/No Opinion	7.3
No Response	1.2

Table A9  
 Percentage of Respondents' Understanding of Report Card Components (N=807)

Component	Very Well	Somewhat Well	Not at All Well	Not Sure/ No Opinion	No Response
Essential Learnings for Reading/ Language Arts	52.0	38.2	6.7	1.7	1.4
Essential Learnings for Mathematics	55.9	33.8	6.8	1.7	1.7
Grading Codes for Overall Academic Performance & Essential Learnings (1, 2, 3, 4, NE, NEP)	56.3	31.0	8.3	2.0	2.5
Learning Skills	58.7	31.4	5.7	1.7	2.5
Learning Skill Codes (I, LP, FP, R, NI)	57.0	30.9	7.6	2.7	1.9
Reading Level Graph	62.9	26.6	7.3	1.6	1.5
Reading Targets	58.4	29.5	8.3	2.5	1.4



Table A10  
Percentage of Respondents' Ratings of the Level of Information They Receive  
From Report Card Components (N=807)

Component	Too Much	Just Enough	Not Enough	Not Sure/ No Opinion	No Response
Essential Learnings for Reading/ Language Arts	10.8	68.8	15.1	3.5	1.9
Essential Learnings for Mathematics	10.8	71.3	13.6	2.7	1.6
Grading Codes for Overall Academic Performance & Essential Learnings (1, 2, 3, 4, NE, NEP)	10.2	70.0	14.3	3.6	2.0
Learning Skills	10.0	68.9	15.4	3.0	2.7
Learning Skill Codes (I, LP, FP, R, NI)	9.7	67.5	16.0	4.8	2.0
Reading Level Graph	9.0	71.0	15.4	3.0	1.6
Reading Targets	8.4	69.5	16.7	3.7	1.6

Table A11  
Percentage of Respondents' Ratings of the Usefulness of Information They Receive  
From Report Card Components (N=807)

Component	Very Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not at all Useful	Not Sure/ No Opinion	No Response
Essential Learnings for Reading/ Language Arts	54.6	35.9	4.1	2.7	2.6
Essential Learnings for Mathematics	55.5	35.6	4.3	2.4	2.2
Grading Codes for Overall Academic Performance & Essential Learnings (1, 2, 3, 4, NE, NEP)	53.8	34.4	6.1	3.0	2.7
Learning Skills	53.2	36.9	5.0	2.5	2.5
Learning Skill Codes (I, LP, FP, R, NI)	51.9	34.7	6.9	4.0	2.5
Reading Level Graph	59.2	30.0	5.7	2.7	2.4
Reading Targets	56.1	31.4	6.2	4.2	2.1

Table A12  
Percentage of Respondents Indicating Whether They Would Like  
Teachers' Comments Added to the Report Card (N=807)

	(%) Rating
Yes	88.7
No	5.5
Not Sure/No Opinion	3.0
No Response	2.9