



Parent tips for report card follow-up

Teachers communicate with parents in many ways to update them on their children's progress in school. One of the most important means of communication is the report card. Report cards are good indicators of student success and progress, and—along with other communications between the school and the home—can be of significant value in motivating students to achieve their full potential.

Teachers are often asked by parents how they can make the best use of the report card—what they can do to help their children in school. The answer to that depends on what information is on the report card. But, whether the report shows satisfactory or unsatisfactory achievement, it always provides a valuable opportunity to sit down and discuss school with your children. Start by recognizing your children's successes.

Recognizing the "good" report card

Often parents put too much emphasis on those areas of the report card that indicate unsatisfactory progress, rather than recognizing the success that has been achieved. All children need to feel good about their work at school and need to be encouraged when they require help. For a "good" report card:

1. Communicate directly to your children how pleased you are with their progress. Don't just assume they know you are proud of them—tell them! And remember, older children need as much positive reinforcement and praise as do younger children. An appropriate hug, pat on the back, or handshake is always appreciated by children of all ages.
2. Ask if your children would like to do something special in order to recognize their achievements. Depending on the age of the child, this will vary. The important thing is to ask what your children would like and then discuss its appropriateness. If this is done in a sincere, genuine manner, the value of the achievement and education will be reinforced.
3. Talk about setting goals for continued achievement at school. Ask how you can help your children achieve them.
4. Discuss what your children would like to do when they have completed school, and continue to reinforce the relationship of success in school and in life.
5. In general conversation, communicate to your children how education played an important role in preparing you for your adult responsibilities. Consider reminiscing about that teacher who really made you work hard and how much you appreciated it later on.
6. Continue to reinforce the notion that learning is a lifelong process. Model that belief in your home by having newspapers, books and magazines around that can stimulate family discussions and continuous learning.

According to research, the practice of rewarding good grades with money seems to have limited value. Of greater long term value to children is having parents who take an active interest in their education. In general, don't take success in school for

granted. Let your children know you're proud of them and help them feel a sense of pride in their own achievements.

Encouraging children to do better

When children receive an unsatisfactory report from the school, it is no surprise to them. Regardless of their ages, children know how well they are doing. They also know how other children—their peers—are doing. Children feel bad when they don't perform as well as their peers or up to the expectations of their parents and teachers. But they should never feel afraid or ashamed about sharing their report card with you—their parents.

The parents' reaction to the report card, and how the information on it is handled will have a direct and immediate impact on your children's feelings about their report card and any follow-up that might result.

When report cards indicate unsatisfactory progress, teachers suggest the following:

1. Begin with yourself. Have you done everything you can to emphasize the importance of learning and the value of an education?
 - A. Do you provide a quiet, suitable place for study?
 - B. Is education valued in your home? Is it considered a lifelong process?
 - C. Do you model this value by having books and magazines around your home that stimulate learning?
 - D. Do you ask what your children are learning in school and relate it to what's going on today or how it might be applied to the future?
 - E. Do you indirectly—not in a "lecture"—share your school experiences (both good and bad) and relate how they helped prepare you for adult life and a career?
2. When achievement is not satisfactory, let your children know that you are disappointed, not in them, but in their lack of progress.
3. Ask them if they know what the problems are and then listen to their responses. Problem-solve with them. Ask them what they are willing to do about it and how you can help.
4. Work with your children to establish new goals for the next reporting period. Try to make these goals reasonable and achievable so they will experience success.
5. Contact your children's teachers and share your perceptions and concerns. If necessary, set up a conference.
6. Don't be afraid to seek help and ask questions. Contact your children's teachers and get the answers you need.

In general, it is not unusual for children to do well in some subjects and not as well in others. The important thing is to always encourage your children to do the best they possibly can. This is an attitude that, if applied successfully in school, will last a lifetime!