Parental Support for and Understanding of the Outcome-Based Report Card:

A Case Study of the Yellowknife Education District No. 1

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DEBORAH JANE REID (MAGUIRE)

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ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

Approval Page

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By

Deborah Jane Reid (Maguire)

Approved by:

Patrick McNamara 12-17-14

Chair: Patrick McNamara, Ph.D. Date

Certified by:

Kelley Walters 12/20/2014

Dean of School: Kelley Walters, Ph.D. Date

Abstract

Outcome-based report cards represent teacher judgments about student progress as determined by comparing the student's work against curricular outcomes. The outcome-based report card has become an important tool for student assessment, evaluation, and reporting. Because parents have an important role to play in supporting student learning, parental support and understanding of this new educational tool is critical. In 2009, the Yellowknife Education District No.1, in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in Canada implemented the outcome-based report card to report assessment data of students in kindergarten to Grade 8. This qualitative research single case study explored parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card in this rural Canadian educational district. Data was collected using four focus groups, each made up of 4-6 parents of students in Grades 4-8. To confirm and validate the results, data from focus group process was triangulated with relevant historical/archival descriptive summaries and qualitative data retrieved from parent surveys in Yellowknife Education District No.1. Results of this study show that parents have a desire to know about the outcome-based report card and how it connects to formats of which they were more familiar (like the letter grade or percentage systems). Parents described a need for plain language alternatives for complex educational terms, phrases, and references. Parents expressed the need for personalized comments to describe individual student capabilities, and they desired grading level system that indicates student progress. Results from this study converge on a number of recommendations, including one that encourages leaders within the Yellowknife Education District No.1 to support additional research on the parental acceptance of the outcome-based report card once the recommendations for the practical

applications of this case study have been acted upon. Further research could focus on the application of the outcome-based report card to engage students in self-assessment, increase motivation, and goal setting. This case study on the topic of parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card could be considered the starting point for future studies around how to realize the full benefits of formative assessment as it relates to grading and reporting.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the late 1990s, scholarly research into student assessment has changed the way that educators think about student learning (Chow, 2010; Frohbieter, Greenwald, Stecher, & Schwartz, 2011; Simon, Tierney, & Charland, 2011). The traditional testing and examination culture of the past has slowly transformed into a culture that has re-conceptualized assessment as a way to satisfy a range of goals, like supporting learning, providing accountability, and informing instruction (Gipps, 1999; O'Connor, 2009). As part of this educational transformation, the outcome-based report card has been introduced to allow teachers to express judgments about student progress by comparing the student's work to curricular outcomes. The outcome-based report card has become an important tool for student assessment, evaluation, and reporting because the goals for learning are made explicit (O'Connor, 2009; O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011).

The shift to the outcome-based report card has represented a movement away from the traditional report card that had used letter grades to communicate student learning. On a traditional report card, students received one grade for each subject area as determined by a combination of achievement, effort, growth, attitude, homework, and participation (Cross & Frary, 1999). Determining this grade involved a process of averaging and weighting of scores, and a compromise of various factors (O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Ross & Kostuch, 2011). The traditional report card briefly summarized a wide variety of assessments and did not provide critical or specific information to parents and students about the students' strengths and areas needing improvement (O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Ross & Kostuch, 2011).

In contrast, the outcome-based report card provided a forum for teachers to provide specific details about student progress using the teacher's professional opinion of the student's

work against curricular outcomes (O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011). To provide accurate information about student learning, non-academic factors were eliminated judgments so that pure measures of student achievement against curricular outcomes could be communicated (Guskey & Bailey, 2009; O'Connor, 2009; Simon et al., 2011). Teachers looked for patterns of student growth over time, using the most recent and most consistent student performance to determine levels of current student achievement (Guskey & Bailey, 2009; O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011). Parents were provided with information about specific learning strengths and needs, and teachers described explicit academic targets for students to meet (Lawson, 2011; Parsons & Taylor, 2011; Stiggins, 2008). As a result, the outcome-based report card became a valuable tool to facilitate student-parent conversations about learning and academic goals (Adrian, 2012; Deslandes, Rivard, Joyal, Trudeau, & Laurencelle, 2009; Mathura, 2008; McMunn, Schenck, & McColskey, 2003; Schmidt, 2008; Stiggins, 2008; Yun, Singh, & Singh, 2008).

This chapter will review the background, the importance and current knowledge concerning parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card. By providing background information on this topic, the problem and purpose statements will be placed in context. The author will provide critical research questions and show how these questions are relevant to the problem statement. Prior to ending the chapter with a summary, details regarding the nature and significance of the study will be conveyed and key terms will be explained.

Background

Experts have described formative assessment as the use of assessment to further student learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Marzano, 2006). Because the outcome-based report card has served the purpose of informing instruction, many educational experts have considered it a

natural extension of formative assessment theory (Marzano, 2006; Marzano, Pickering, & Heflebower, 2011). Given the consensus among scholars and educational experts that formative assessment practices have increased learning, it would be expected that parents would support the outcome-based report card, but the available data on this topic has not supported this claim (Deslandes, et al., 2009; Patel & Stevens, 2010; Schmidt, 2008). Due to parental resistance, many schools that had made the move towards the outcome-based report card had to revert to the traditional grading practices of the past (Guskey, 2004; Guskey & Jung, 2006; O'Connor, 2009; Reeves, 2011). Research describing why parents may feel resistant to this shift in reporting has been limited to sources that have not undergone scholarly review (Anderson, 2011; Balkissoon, 2012; Festel, Simpson, Martine, & Schools, 2012; Greene, 2013; Hammer, 2012; McCarthy, 2012; Tennant, 2012). Some parents misunderstand the outcome-based grading system because the numerical code used to review the level of progress does not resemble or align with the traditional, and perhaps more familiar, letter or percentage system (Festel et al., 2012). Because some parents are more familiar with a grading system that compared student progress against one another rather than against learning outcomes, they reported that the outcome-based report card does not reflect personal student achievement and does not encourage students to perform at any higher level other than one that meets expectations (Greene, 2013). Almost all of these reports made it appear that schools failed in providing parents with sufficient information to fully understand and appreciate the value of the outcome-based report card system (Festel et al., 2012; Greene, 2013; McCarthy, 2012). Based on the information provided in these available reports, it appears that parental support is low because understanding is low, and that is why it was important to study these elements together. Without the support of parents, it seems unlikely that more school systems will choose to adopt the outcome-based report card, missing out on an

opportunity to use an innovative tool to support student achievement (O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Reeves, 2011; Schmidt, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

The outcome-based report card has become a valuable way to convey formative and summative assessment information about student learning (Guskey & Bailey, 2009). Teachers have used the outcome-based report card to communicate information about academic gaps and explicit learning targets to parents and students (Lawson, 2011; Parsons & Taylor, 2011; Stiggins, 2008). However, available research has suggested that parents do not consistently support or understand the shift from the traditional report card format that uses the letter grade or the percentage scale to the outcome-based report card (Deslandes, et al., 2009; Hayward & Spencer, 2010; Massell, 2008; Mathura 2008; O'Connor, 2009; Reeves, 2011; Schmidt, 2008; Stiggins, 2008; Sutton, 2009). Many of these available reports made it appear that schools neglected to provide parents with adequate information to fully understand and appreciate the value of the outcome-based report card system (Festel et al., 2012; Greene, 2013; McCarthy, 2012). In essence, it appears that parental support is inconsistent because understanding is variable, and that is why it was important to study these elements together. Without parental support for the outcome-based report card, any benefits to student learning associated with its use cannot be realized to the fullest extent possible (O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Reeves, 2011). Although parents have not consistently supported use of the outcome-based report card it has not been clear what concerns or reservations they might have had regarding the report card. The proposed study queried parents directly about their concerns, support levels, and understanding of the outcome-based report card.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this qualitative methods single case study was to investigate parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the schools of the Yellowknife Education District No.1, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in Canada. The secondary purpose of this study was to determine the types of resources or strategies to increase parental understanding and use of the outcome-based report card. Research on formative assessment prompted the implementation of the outcome-based report card within the schools of the Yellowknife Education District No. 1 in 2006 (Black & Wiliam, 2009; O'Connor, 2009; O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Marzano, 2006). After eight years of use, leaders within the Yellowknife Education District No.1 expressed the need to identify parental perspectives on the outcome-based report card (M. Pardy, personal communication, November 10, 2010). The proposed study needed to be conducted so that data about parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card might inform debates and policy discussions on the use of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1. Using focus groups of 4-6 subjects each, data was collected from parents of students in Grades 4-8 to gain information about parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card. Transcripts and notes of focus group interviews were analyzed via author identification of emergent themes and Computer Assisted/Aided Qualitative Data AnalysiS (CAQDAS). To verify the focus group interview data, the author triangulated primary interview data with historical/archival survey data in the form of descriptive summaries of parent responses to the small number of questions on the surveys that concerned the new report card format.

Research Questions

The outcome-based report card has been found to be an innovative tool to support student achievement (O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Reeves, 2011; Schmidt, 2008). For this reason, it is important that educational leaders within the Yellowknife Education District No. 1 gain insight into parental support for and understanding of outcome-based report card. Without this information, it is unlikely that resources or strategies to inform parents about the benefits of the outcome-based report card will be identified. Parents need to understand how the use of the outcome-based report card acts as a formative assessment instrument for improved student achievement (Sutton, 2009). Four research questions were used to investigate parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1.

Q 1. What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?

Q 2. How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card?

Q 3. What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?

Q 4. What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?

Nature of the Study

A qualitative single case study research design was been selected to explore parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1. Because it is possible that parental support for the outcome-based report card is low because parental understanding is low, it was important to study these elements together (Mathura, 2008). In addition, the case study solicited information about the

types of resources or strategies that would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card. Focus group participants included parents who had concerns as well as those who did not have concerns around the outcome-based report card. To gather data from parents of students in Grades 4-8, four structured focus groups of 4-6 parents each were used.

Approval for the use of historical/archival parent survey data (2006-2011) was granted for the purpose of triangulation with data collected through the focus group interviews (M. Huculak, personal communication, August 10, 2012). These historical/archival records include data concerning a variety of school-related topics regarding effective home-school communication (including, but not limited to data regarding parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card) (Yellowknife Education District No. 1, 2006). Analysis of historical/archival data facilitated triangulation of the primary interview data and in addition provided insight into the degree and history of parental understanding/misunderstanding and support for the outcome based report card in the Yellowknife District Education District No. 1.

Significance of the Study

Report cards serve as a valuable way to communicate student progress and achievement to parents and students. The shift to the use of the outcome-based report card represents a significant change in how this information is presented. To date, parents have not been included in research on the strengths and weaknesses of these new report card formats. As a result, they have been largely excluded from contributing their thoughts and ideas about a public matter that has a direct personal impact on their children. Because parental support is crucial for optimizing the benefits of these report card formats, their input is needed for an evaluation of the effectiveness of these report cards. To remedy these deficiencies, this study uncovered

information about parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card. If the study had not been conducted, then data about parental perceptions around the outcome-based report card would not be available to inform debates and policy discussions on the implementation of the outcome-based report card. The significance of this study is that the research informed decisions about the use of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1 and into other regions of the Northwest Territories where changes in assessment and reporting procedures have been forthcoming.

Definition of Key Terms

Assessment. Assessment is a process, and through this process, data are collected relative to a goal or outcome (Kizlik, 2012). Educators identified three purposes of assessment: assessment for learning (known as formative assessment), assessment as learning (known as self-monitored learning), and assessment of learning (known as summative assessment) (Alberta Assessment Consortium (AAC), 2009; Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Education (WNCP), 2006).

Computer Assisted/Aided Qualitative Data AnalysiS (CAQDAS). CAQDAS is the use of a computer program to assist with the analysis of qualitative data (that is, text from interviews, focus groups, and narrative responses). For this study, NVivo software (QSR International Pty, 2012) was the program used.

Criteria. The term *criteria* describes a group of standards or requirements upon which a judgment or decision has been based (AAC, 2006; Benitez, Davidson, & Flaxman, 2009).

Evaluation. In the field of education, the term *evaluation* describes the judgment or appraisal of student progress towards learning outcomes (Kizlik, 2012; WNCP, 2006).

Exemplars. The term e*xemplar* describes an example of quality work. Exemplars have been used to model or illustrate specific attributes of the required criteria of a project or assignment (Hendry, Armstrong, & Bromberger, 2012).

Feedback. Within the educational context, the term *feedback* describes the communication of information for the purpose of influencing, improving, changing, or reinforcing learner behavior, skills, knowledge, or attitudes (Shute, 2007).

Formative assessment. The term *formative assessment* describes an instructional process first discussed by Bloom, Hastings and Maddaus in 1971 (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008). During the process of formative assessment, assessment-based feedback is provided to students so that specific instructional adjustments can be made for the purpose of improved student achievement of curricular targets (Popham, 2008a). The formative assessment process results in an ongoing exchange of information between students and teachers about student progress toward clearly specified learner outcomes (Alberta Assessment Consortium, 2006). The term *formative assessment* is also known as 'assessment for learning' (Alberta Assessment Consortium, 2006). Strategies that support the use of assessment for learning include the sharing of criteria with students, the use of effective feedback, the provision of self- and peer assessment opportunities, and the development of exemplars that illustrate to students how to meet educational outcome goals (AAC, 2006).

Outcome-based report card. (see Appendix A) The outcome-based report card has provided a way for teachers to describe student achievement as compared to curricular outcomes (O'Connor, 2009). Within the outcome-based report card, student achievements are identified according to grade level and subject area and assessed on a continuum from 1-4 (Yellowknife Education District No. 1, 2009). At the lowest end of the continuum, a number 1 indicates that

the student has not yet met grade level for the given outcome. The number 2 indicates that the student has approached but not achieved grade level expectations. The number 3 indicates that the student continually worked at the required grade level for a specific outcome. A number 4 indicates that the student has exceeded expectations for the given outcome. In addition, the letter U denotes that there exists a lack of evidence of student learning. Because the outcome-based report card communicates information about student progress toward clearly specified curricular outcomes through the sharing of achievement criteria, this type of report card is an extension of formative assessment (Guskey & Bailey, 2009; O'Connor, 2009).

Parent. The term *parent* refers to a child's biological or adoptive parent, a person who is legally presumed to be a child's parent, or a person or government organization that has legal custody of the child though guardianship (Education Act of 1996).

Peer assessment. The term *peer assessment* identifies the process of gathering information about the strengths and weaknesses of a peer as compared to the set criteria or pre-determined goals (O'Connor, 2009).

Self-assessment. The term *self-assessment* identifies the process of gathering information about one's own strengths and weaknesses as compared to set criteria or pre-determined goals (O'Connor, 2009).

Summary

As described, this case study research design addresses the complex research problem surrounding parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card. Educators and poly analysts have presented convincing evidence for the value of the outcome-based report card in terms of benefits to student achievement. What has been needed now is an exploration of why parents do not yet see the value of these report card formats. The results of this study have

contributed to the body of knowledge about the outcome-based report card. By triangulating the primary interview data gathered through focus groups with historical/archival survey data, the case study captured multiple viewpoints and perspectives over time. The data-driven inferences provided information to contribute to the continuous improvement of student achievement within the Yellowknife Education District No. 1. Finally, recommendations were made to inform the use of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this case study was to investigate parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the schools of the Yellowknife Education District No.1, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in Canada. After eight years of use, leaders within the Yellowknife Education District No.1 expressed the need to identify parental understanding of and support for the outcome-based report card (M. Pardy, personal communication, November 10, 2010). Such an investigation could be used to inform decisions about the continued use of the outcome-based report card within this district. Understanding the perceptions parents have about educational initiatives is critical because student achievement has been demonstrated to improve when parents possess an accurate understanding of curricular outcomes (Bailey, 2010; Cherniss, 2008; Chow, 2010; Kalianna, Chandran, & Devi, 2012; O'Connor, 2009; Popham, 2008b; Ross & Kostuch, 2011; Stiggins, 2009; Volante, 2007).

In the first section of this literature review, the author will summarize the research that connected the formative uses of the outcome-based report card with changes in student engagement and grading practices. The second section of the literature review will describe the background associated with outcome-based education, and explore the debate that has existed due to the shift to the use of the outcome-based report card. In the third section, this researcher will investigate available research on the use of the outcome-based report card to provide parents with information about student achievement. This section will explore available research that has suggested that parents do not reliably support or understand the shift to the outcome-based report card. A literature map was included as a way to organize the summary of available research in a visual way (see Appendix B). Through this literature review, it will be shown that

there exists a need for a systematic study of parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card

Documentation

Databases available through the Northcentral University Library were used to uncover research on the topics related to the parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card. Over 150 articles were reviewed within the databases of Education Research Complete, ERIC, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, ProQuest Education Journals, and SAGE journals. Full-text, scholarly/peer reviewed journal articles published since 2008 were located using date filters and key word searches (like *outcome-based, standards-based, student engagement, report cards, grading, assessment, parents*, *parental engagement, involvement in school*, etc.). Frequent use was made of the Canadian version of Google (www.google.ca) and the specialized search function called Scholar. By using the additional advanced search operators (like using the tilde to search using like terms), scholarly articles published since 2008 were located. The clear way that results were listed made the Google search engine very functional. It was also possible to uncover additional related articles using Google's links. The Google search engine offered an opportunity to browse and read text from books with content that contained a match for the search terms. Access to quality literature through the Internet was critical for the completion of this literature review.

Methods Used to Study Parental Support, and Understanding of New Report Card Formats

This project addresses the complex interplay of several factors, including student assessment, parental involvement in education, and parental cognitions about student assessment issues and formats. Research at the intersection of these complex realities relies on a range of

sometimes innovative, but always, interdisciplinary methodologies that are worth reviewing upfront so that the reader can better evaluate individual papers in the field. To select an accurate tool for capturing and measuring concepts like 'parental support' or parental cognitions about the assessment of their children required, among other things, clear definition of these concepts (Dunleavy, 2007; Mathura, 2008). Similarly, the operationalization of the concept of formative assessment made it possible to measure key elements of parental cognitions about student assessment in terms of empirical observations (Wiliam, 2011).

There are unique methodological issues involved in capturing accurate and reliable data on such multi-dimensional and complex concepts. To investigate perceptions of educational initiatives (like changes to grading and assessment), researchers need to solicit information from a variety of stakeholders including, at a minimum, students, their parents and teachers. A wide variety of methods are available to researchers to get a true picture of the situation.

For example, student surveys have been used to sample motivational, cognitive, and affective experiences of students in elementary mathematics settings (Dunleavy, 2007; Schweinle, Meyer, & Turner. 2008). Surveys have also been used to collect data about parental perceptions of their child's elementary report card and the extent to which individual and family characteristics (including beliefs, knowledge, and understanding) impact the level of satisfaction with the teachers' assessment practices (Deslandes, Rivard, Joyal, Trudeau, & Laurencelle, 2009).

Despite the popularity of the survey method, potential problems of this method can lead to errors that impact the results of the study. One of the most common difficulties faced by researchers who depend on the survey method are threats posed from non-response (Fowler, 2014; McInnis, 2006). In educational studies, non-response bias may occur if sub-groups of the

student/parent population do not complete the survey and the researchers moves forward in forming estimates that may not adequately represent the student/parent population at that school (Fowler, 2014; McInnis, 2006). As an error of non-observation, non-response bias can put at risk the validity of questionnaire results (Ygge & Ametz, 2004). As well, inadequate representation of the population may be the result of a poor sampling frame or when individuals refuse to respond or cannot be contacted (Russell Sage Foundation, 2013; Fowler, 2013; Ygge & Ametz, 2004). Survey questions become inaccessible when the questions include vague language that may have different meanings to the respondents (Fowler, 2014). These inferential errors pose additional challenges to researchers who study cross-cultural and/or cross-generational populations (Harzing, Reiche, Pudelko, 2012).

Given the limitations of survey methodologies in this field other methodologies have been pursued to probe contributing factors to student assessment such as student engagement. Despite the fact that the survey method tends to be versatile, efficient, and have generalizability, a survey is not the ideal method for learning about every educational issue or process (Schutt, 2012). Because the participant does not have direct access to the researcher, question clarification is not possible, and questions may not be answered in the intended order (Rea & Parker, 2012). More importantly, the survey method does not allow the researcher to probe for elaboration, gain insight from the discussion, or clarify personal understanding through summarization of answers (Krueger, 2009; Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, Zoran, 2009; Rea & Parker, 2012).

To gauge perceptions of multi-dimensional concepts like parental support and understanding, study methods must be able to probe more deeply and gather rich data. For example, one-on-on interviews, in class observations, and journal analysis were used to collect

in-depth data from teachers they transitioned from a traditional report card to a standards-based reporting system (Schmidt, 2008). In another qualitative research study, data on the topic of student intellectual engagement in the assessment process was collected through classroom observation, teacher interviews, and student focus groups (Chow, 2010). Many researchers have opted to study concepts related to this topic using focus groups and interviews that gathered complex data, acknowledging the value of personal stories and related underlying beliefs and attitudes (Cherniss, 2008; Conner, 2010; Guskey, 2004; McMunn, Schenck, & McColskey, 2003).

Instead, qualitative methods of data collection, such as interviews and focus groups, may be preferable when studying complex concepts, like those related to the study of parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report cards. When choosing to use an interview method, researchers need to consider a variety of factors. Interviews take time and are often labor intensive as they involve a number of logistical and data analysis elements (Seidman, 2012). As well, researchers need to determine the degree to which the interview is structured and directed (Brinkmann, 2013). Structured interviews are well planned, making it possible to compare answers from the respondents while reducing ethical issues that might arise from spontaneous unstructured interviews (Brinkmann, 2013). In directive interviews, the interviewer has an agenda, asking questions to solicit information about what they wish to know (Brinkmann, 2013). Unfortunately, researchers who use strict interview types may end up missing important details of an interviewee's story or individual consciousness that might arise spontaneously (Brinkmann, 2013).

The difficulties that exist in the use of the focus groups include issues around recruitment, participation, confidentiality, and recording of data (Krueger, 2009). Overcoming

these challenges should realize the benefits of using a focus group method to gather rich, descriptive data around the complex, multi-dimensional concept of parental perceptions of the outcome-based report card.

Understanding Formative Assessment

The outcome-based report card was found to be an extension of formative assessment process intended to monitor student learning and provide ongoing feedback (Brookhart, 2011; Chan 2009; Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Marzano, Pickering, & Heflebower, 2011). Since the 1990s, research into student assessment sparked a paradigm shift that changed the way that educators think about student learning (Black et al., 2004; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gipps, 1999). The traditional testing and examination culture of the past has been transformed into a culture that re-conceptualized assessment to satisfy a wide range of purposes, including supporting learning, providing accountability, and informing instruction (Gipps, 1999, O'Connor, 2009). The use of formative assessment has been critical to school improvement and improved student achievement (Black et al., 2004; Black & Wiliam, 1998). The targets for student learning were made accessible to students once teachers had a clear understanding of curricular outcomes and were able to communicate these learning intentions to students clearly (Bailey, 2009; Cherniss, 2008; Chow, 2010; Donnelly, 2007; Stiggins, 2008). Student achievement was improved when students were given opportunities to self-assess their work in relation to course outcomes (Campbell, 2010). By using formative strategies, teachers helped students to identity areas of personal strengths and weaknesses (Edwards, Turner, & Mokhtari, 2008). Teachers maximized student learning by using rubrics that clearly described learning expectations and by allowing students a choice of assessment methods (Gallavan & Kottler, 2009; Van Horne, 2009).

With their extensive literature review of 250 research articles on the topic of assessment, Black and Wiliam (1998) became widely known for initiating a shift in thinking about the purposes of assessment. Alongside their earlier work, Black and Wiliam (2009) uncovered strong evidence that formative assessment practices could raise student achievement. While Black and Wiliam (2009) acknowledged that formative assessment was a central feature of teaching pedagogy and critical to the development of quality learning experiences, their earlier work did not distinguish the concept of formative assessment from a general theory of teaching and learning (Wiliam, 2011).

Even though there was growing agreement among educators and researchers that formative assessment benefits students learning, pressures to increase scores on external accountability tests overshadowed the true implementation of formative assessment in many classrooms (Carless, 2008; Clark, 2011; Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). In some cases, educators were led to believe that formative assessment was a particular type of assessment tool rather than the embedded practice of teaching and learning (Clark, 2011). On the other hand, many educators who believed in the value of formative assessment were caught in an environment that was politically inhospitable for classroom-based assessment-driven reform (Stull, Jansen, Varnum, Ducette, & Bernacki, 2011). In light of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, it was not surprising that the regime of testing within the United States has not supported formative assessment practices (Clark, 2011). Even in Canada, educators were influenced in part by the thoughts and ideas of those south of the border (Cooper, 2007; Dunleavy, 2007; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). For that reason, it was not surprising that some Canadian teachers might have struggled with the implementation of formative assessment practices as well.

Because of the political and social environment, the resulting model of education conflicted with one that fostered formative assessment practices (Clark, 2011). Under the pressure of external accountability tests, the model of education was largely based on knowledge transmission with formative assessment practices considered superfluous (Clark, 2011; Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). Because formative assessment was a social practice, dependent on the teacher-student-peer interaction, it was bound by sociocultural rules that identified power roles and dictated what content was considered legitimate knowledge (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). When theory was faced with conflicting political pressures, the application of theory was challenged (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). The deficit of a theoretical foundation for formative assessment resulted in a lack of credibility for formative assessment within the educational community and contributed to the lack of a commitment to formative assessment to withstand political pressures (Carless, 2008; Taras, 2010). A barrier to the application of the formative assessment to classroom practice was this lack of clarity with regards to the purpose, process, and product definitions (Taras, 2010).

The complexities of the theory of formative assessment were revealed when this theory was put into practice. The lack of a theoretical basis for formative assessment at the onset resulted in additional challenges for initial implementation (Taras, 2010; Wiliam, 2011). The original theory of assessment as presented by Black and Wiliam (1998) did not explore the integration of the process and product components of formative assessment. For that reason, formative assessment became a set of practical teaching tips rather than a theory-driven approach to teaching and learning (Taras, 2010). It was found that many teachers talked about appropriate strategies and discussed the philosophy of formative assessment long before actual changes happened in their classroom practice (Webb & Jones, 2009). It was found that the effective

implementation of the theory of formative assessment needed transformative professional development and practical training support for teachers (Webb & Jones, 2009; Winterbottom, 2010).

Although the implementation of the formative assessment within classrooms was desirable, it was difficult to put into practice on a consistent basis due to many factors (Carless, 2008; Olson, Slovin, Olson, Brandon, & Yin, 2010; Webb & Jones, 2009). Teachers who were experts in the use of formative assessment with one group of students were challenged to reach same level of use when faced with a different class (Webb & Jones, 2009). As with most changes, confusion and a lack of commitment contributed to negative feelings about the new way of thinking, and this was especially true when intervention was initiated abruptly without the required time to ensure that all involved had ownership in the process (Webb & Jones, 2009). Without a solid understanding of the philosophy underlying formative assessment, implementation of formative assessment lacked substance, and this resulted in frustration and confusion for teachers, students, and parents (Olson et al., 2010; Webb & Jones, 2009).

This unsupported implementation of assessment theory highlighted the complexities of applying theory to practice. It should be noted that Black and Wiliam (2009) attempted to rectify earlier problems in application of assessment theory by formulating a clearer and more focused theory of formative assessment in their later work. The revised theory of formative assessment stated, "formative assessment is concerned with the creation of, and capitalization upon, *moments of contingency* in instruction for the purpose of the regulation of learning processes" (Black & Wiliam, 2009, p.8). Black and Wiliam used the phrase *moments of contingency* to refer to times when teachers made on the spot adjustments to their teaching. The term also

referred to strategically planned actions and decisions about lessons that were informed by the student data, student insights, or both (Black & Wiliam, 2009).

Instructional leaders cannot ignore the strong theoretical and empirical evidence supporting the use of formative assessment (Wiliam, 2011). As a formative assessment tool, the outcome-based report card supported the ongoing use of formative assessment to improve student achievement (Craig, 2011; Guskey, 2004; Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Guskey & Jung, 2006; Kalianna, Chandran, & Devi, 2012; Mathura, 2008; McMunn, Schenck, & McColskey, 2003). The outcome-based report card provided students and parents with effective feedback describing what students are able to do and how they can move forward. The available research on formative assessment provided a strong case for the formative use of the outcome-based report card.

Understanding Student Engagement

As a formative assessment tool to describe students' strengths and weaknesses, the outcome-based report card was used to foster student engagement in learning activities that target areas that needed improvement (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Cherniss, 2008; Cooper, 2011; Crespo et al., 2010; Frohbieter et al., 2011; Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Hendry, 2012; O'Connor, 2009; Stiggins, 2008). When assessment and reporting practices contributed to improved student learning, connections were made between student engagement and assessment (Earl, 2013; Lawson, 2011; Parsons & Taylor, 2011; Stiggins, 2008). Understanding student engagement became necessary in this investigation of parental support for the outcome-based report because parents with intellectually engaged are more likely to support the source of this engagement. Because parental support and understanding is crucial for optimizing the benefits of the

outcome-based report card it became important to establish the link between increased student engagement and the formative use of the outcome-based report card.

To understand why students perform as they do has led to an exploration of a variety of theories related to engagement and motivation. Because personalities were inherently different, research into student engagement uncovered many reasons why one student was engaged in an activity while another student was not (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Emerson, Fear, Fox, & Sanders, 2012; Finlay, 2006; Guilloteaux, 2007). In this quest for understanding, a connection between educational psychology and instructional design was made through the investigations of student engagement and motivation.

It has been crucial that instructional leaders consider this connection between student engagement and student achievement because disengagement and work-avoidance were found to be negative predictors of student achievement (Atweh et al, 2007; Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Kitsantas, Winsler, & Huie, 2008; Lawson, 2011; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Parsons & Taylor, 2011). Educational theories associated with student engagement and motivation shed light on different facets of the learning process. These understandings have guided decisions within the areas of educational leadership, curriculum, and instruction. These decisions have impacted student achievement directly (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Cooper, 2011; Crespo et al., 2010; Guskey & Bailey, 2009; O'Connor, 2009; Stiggins, 2008).

Available research on student engagement has often been limited to factors associated with students' personal background and demographic factors, like social and economic status and parental educational attainment (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). However, when student engagement was measured using the interrelated aspects of social, academic, and intellectual engagement, it provided critical information that showed that quality teaching and learning

impacted student engagement (Finlay, 2006; Willms et al., 2009). Within this context, the term *intellectual engagement* was defined as "a serious emotional and cognitive investment in learning, using higher order thinking skills (such as analysis and evaluation) to increase understanding, solve complex problems, or construct new knowledge" (Willms et al., 2009, p. 7).

Teachers fostered student engagement by developing lessons that allowed students to be active participants within the classroom (Conner, 2010; Munns, 2004; Ponitz, Rimm-Kaufman, Grimm, & Curby, 2009). Achievement improved when students were provided with opportunities to develop rich, positive interaction with their peers and with the learning activities (Conner, 2010). Engagement levels were impacted not only by factors that were beyond the control of the students (that is, how the project is implemented), but also by factors that students were able to control (that is, the cohort culture) (Conner, 2010). The connection between student intellectual engagement and instructional practices provided the foundation for a study of assessment practices, including determining levels of support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card.

Theories of engagement and motivation. Although the terms *engagement* and *motivation* have often been used interchangeably, they did not mean the same thing within the research. In essence, the term *motivation* described a personal drive, inclination, energy, direction, or reason to do something (Baumeister & Vohs, 2011; Russell, Ainley, & Frydenberg, 2005). One who was motivated described intentions, made plans, set goals, and had the expectancy of success. Both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards were found to foster motivation (Brophy, 2010).

In contrast, the term *engagement* described the quality of the relationship between a person and an activity (Russell et al., 2005). Behavioral engagement was evident when students followed school rules, attended to lessons, and participated in school activities. Indicators of

emotional engagement included affective reactions in the classroom, like interest, happiness, and positive feelings towards the teacher, school, or both (Ladd & Dinella, 2009). In comparison, cognitive engagement was shown when students used self-regulated approaches, metacognitive strategies, and had a deep investment in their learning (Wang & Eccles, 2011). The complexities of engagement and motivation made it difficult to explore one facet without considering the other. In many ways, theories of motivation and theories of engagement were found to have some bearing on student learning.

Also evident in educational discourse on student learning and teaching were the three dominant paradigms of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism (Lopes, 2010). Discussing these three dominant paradigms contributed to an understanding of how student motivation and engagement in learning could be fostered through clear feedback based on curricular outcomes. For example, a behaviorist may measure student engagement by observing a student's time on task, pro-social behaviors, rate of absenteeism, or amount of participation in school activities (Lawson, 2011). In contrast, a cognitivist's slant on student engagement may highlight the extent to which a student makes a psychological investment in the learning activity (Lawson, 2011). Educators concerned with the constructivist aspect of student motivation and engagement would investigate the design of the learning environment and the extent to which students had opportunities to construct their own learning (Opedenakker & Minnaert, 2011). Rather than treat students as passive receivers of knowledge, constructivist theorists characterized students as being active participants in the learning process (Csíkszentmihályi, 2008; Harris, 2008; Opedenakker & Minnaert, 2011). Despite specific philosophical differences, theories of student engagement or motivation were not categorized purely into one of the three paradigms. Instead,

interacting elements of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism were evident within many of the theories employed in twenty-first century schools.

Theories of student engagement and motivation provided scholarly justification for the conscious implementation of strategies (like the outcome-based report card) to adapt school programs to meet students' needs. These theories aided instructional leaders in finding well-researched solutions for the problem of student disengagement. Important theories included the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000), the theory of engagement (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998), the self-regulated theory (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994; Zimmerman, 2008), a model of engagement (Marzano et al., 2011), and the theory of optimal experience or flow theory (Csíkszentmihályi, 2008). A comparison of theories of engagement and motivation revealed how the underlying paradigms of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism interacted.

To begin, the self-determination theory accounted for the social and environmental factors that impact motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2008). Within an educational context, the self-determination theory was based on the assumption that students are inherently curious and innately eager to be engaged in their learning (Ryan & Deci, 2008). Implications of the self-determination theory took into consideration the social and environmental factors within the school that can either foster intrinsic motivation or hinder it (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). The basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy must be fulfilled for a high level of intrinsic motivation to be experienced by a student (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to the self-determination theory, when students experienced intrinsic motivation, learning was satisfying, enjoyable, and engaging (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). If external controls like reward or punishment systems, close supervision, or monitoring were

introduced into the learning environment, these controls undermined the natural engagement that students had in high-quality, learning activities (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). As the self-determination theory explains, the combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation influenced behavior and impacted the quality of learning results (Ryan & Deci, 2008).

Autonomy in and control over one's learning process are also critical aspects of the self-regulation theory. In his work on social learning, Bandura (1971) considered both behavioral and cognitive paradigms to describe how people are able to regulate their behavior. According to the self-regulation theory, metacognitive skills could be developed through well-organized classroom activities and assessment tools (like the outcome-based report card) that fostered self-regulation through self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reactions (Bandura, 1971; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Zimmerman, 2008). By incorporating advances in cognitive science, the self-regulation theory provided support for efforts to foster student engagement and motivation within the classroom.

As pioneers of the self-regulation theory, Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons (1992) described the interaction between personal, environmental, and behavioral process. The self-regulation theory was described as a proactive process to guide the identification of personal strengths and needs for gaining additional knowledge, skills, or both (Zimmerman et al., 1992; Zimmerman, 2008). Students were found to become masters of their own learning by developing personal initiative and perseverance (Harris, 2008; Zimmerman, 2008). Proponents of the self-regulation theory believed that students could be taught to use specific processes and strategies independently (Zimmerman, 2008). In this way, students were not only metacognitively, but also motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their learning (Zimmerman, 2008).

Similarly, an increase in student engagement was fostered through the careful planning of interactive learning activities (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998). Meaningfully engagement occurred as students were interacting with others to complete authentic tasks (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998). Students became engaged in learning through three principles: relate, create, and donate (Huang, 2010). Engagement in learning was nurtured when students related to one another through trust and connection (Huang, 2010). Levels of engagement were heightened when students perceived learning activities as having innovative value that involved creative imagination and problem solving (Huang, 2010). Students became engaged in activities when it was believed that the results of their efforts contributed to the greater good of society (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998).

In addition, levels of intellectual engagement were impacted by students' perceptions of personal goals and self-efficacy (Marzano et al., 2011). A model of engagement proposed by Marzano et al. (2011) described the elements associated with significant emotional and cognitive commitment to learning. This theory by Marzano et al. (2011) supported the critical link between student engagement and the use of the outcome-based report card. For example, when a student perceived that a task or content was linked and relevant to a personal goal, they were more likely to attend and be engaged in the activity (McCombs & Marzano, 1990). Similarly, students who felt that they had the capacity to learn or perform at the desired level were more likely to persist in the activity or task (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002).

The model of engagement outlined by Marzano et al. (2011) was based on cognitive learning theories. Application of this cognitive theory shifted the emphasis from academic content to student self-awareness and personal theories of competence (Marzano et al., 2011). With this in mind, this engagement model proposed that the psychological phenomenon of

engagement was within the control of the teacher (Marzano et al., 2011). To lead students to the belief that learning was important, Marzano et al., emphasized the role that teachers played in designing activities and assessments that were relevant to students' lives, ambitions, and the application of personal knowledge.

Given that outcome based reporting cards have the capacity to facilitate student engagement, it is possible that this capacity is supported by the elements of self-efficacy, relatedness, and relevance as explicitly addressed within these background theories. Because self-efficacy is the belief in one's capacity to achieve specific goals, it plays an important role in how one thinks and behaves in certain situations (Schweinle, Turner, & Meyer, 2008). Self-efficacy is a context-specific construct, and it was shown to impact task choices and play a role in academic self-efficacy. Self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of grade point average when compared to other factors like general self-concept and academic related skills (Kitsantas et al., 2008).

Another common theme running throughout the theories of engagement and motivation presented was the notion of *relatedness*. Within an educational context, self-regulation for and engagement in learning were fostered when students' basic needs for relatedness were met (Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009). Proponents of the self-determination theory believed that motivation and engagement were enhanced when students had a sense of connectedness with others (Niemiec et al., 2009). Positive academic motivation occurred when students experienced high quality interpersonal relationships with significant others within the school (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Niemiec et al, 2009).

As an extension of relatedness, the concept of *relevance* was highlighted through the engagement model proposed by Marzano et al. (2011). Accordingly, student engagement was

increased when new learning was relevant to past experiences; students made sense of new knowledge by accessing background knowledge (Marzano et al., 2011). The importance of making connections (whether they were through making connections with others or making connections with the course content) was a common theme in the theories of motivation and engagement.

For educators, this investigation of engagement and motivation theories helped to refine the use of assessment to enhance achievement through increased student engagement, motivation, or both. Through the examination of these theories, different elements of student perception were uncovered, and each demanded slightly different strategies to foster engagement. For example, the model presented by Marzano et al. (2011) illustrated how students could reflect inward upon their personal goals and abilities. Marzano et al. (2011) encouraged teachers to use strategies and assessment tools that developed self-reflection and taught self-efficacy. Similarly, the self-regulation theory explained how the ability to change one's behavior resulted in an increased ability to pursue personal goals, including those related to academic achievement (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). In their work to develop the self-determination theory, Neimeic et al. (2009) found that academic functioning hinged on the internalization of extrinsic motivation. Again, these theories showed that student learning was enhanced when students were encouraged to look inward for personal goal attainment. In contrast, the theory of engagement as described by Kearsley and Shneiderman (1998) explained how engagement increased when students projected their energies outward by collaborating with others to complete tasks that added value to society as a whole.

Understanding the link between student engagement and student achievement is critical for educators in the field of leadership, curriculum, and instruction. The knowledge gained from

understanding student engagement and motivation informed decisions to use assessment tools, like the outcome-based report card, to foster student achievement. Despite differences, the overall message gleaned from the combined work in this field was that student engagement impacts learning. The theories and models of engagement and motivation provided a foundation upon which educators could design strategies to enhance student engagement and motivation for the benefit of increased student achievement.

Parent Reactions to their Children's Report Card

Investigating parental reactions to their children's report card may foster an understanding of why some parents continued to have an attachment to the traditional report card format. Because there exists relational ties that can support or restrict institutional change (Daly, 2010; Woodward, 2009), probing parental reactions once receiving their child's report may provide critical information about how well parents understand and appreciate report cards in general. Family and parental involvement have long been considered critical factors that affect children's school success so parental reactions to their children's report can influence future learning (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009). In many cases, a parent's reaction to their child's report card is informed by how well the parent is able to comprehend and value the information in the report card as it relates to their child's progress. When presented with information about their children's strengths and needs, parents have many choices about how to respond. A parent's understanding of their child's report card contributes to the nature of the response (Brophy, 2010). Thus, exploring parental reactions to their children's report may shed light on how well parents understand and appreciate report cards in general.

Parental reactions to the report card were either punitive or celebratory depending on what was gleaned from the information given about the child's achievement in the report card by

the parent (Alderman, 2013; Brophy, 2010). Some parents used the report card as a way to spark discussion with their children about homework and attendance, while other parents reacted by paying their children based on the number of good grades they achieved (Butler, Kennedy, & Kennedy, 2010; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Fryer, 2011; Harris, 2008). However, a greater change to student behavior was noted when money was given for something every student could do (like reading books, following school rules, or attending class) rather when the incentive was given for tasks like achieving better grades (Contis, 2011; Fryer, 2011).

A parent's reaction to his or her child's report card exerted a controlling effect that provided incentive or pressure for future learning (Alderman, 2013; Fan & Williams, 2010; Harris, 2011; Hattie & Anderman, 2013). When children were unsuccessful, mothers experienced disappointment, worry, and guilt, and fathers experienced the additional negative emotion of anger (Cichy, Lefkowitz, Davis, & Fingerman, 2013). Such emotions may be at the root of decisions of parents who impose arbitrary systems of reinforcement. It was found that parents may gain compliance to reinforcement systems, but later this initial compliance shifts to resistance (Harris, 2011). Even the gender of the child was found to make a difference to how rewards were perceived where males responded to reinforcements more strongly than females (Davis, Winsler, & Middleton, 2006). Children were found to hold externally regulated concerns, like avoiding punishment or getting rewards from parents, when they were motivated to meet parents' expectations (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). Children who were motivated by parent-oriented reasons were likely working very hard to overcome the emotions of guilt and anxiety in exchange for feelings of pride and self-worth attached with parental approval or their academic achievement (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009). Young people were found to suffer achievement overload (or an addiction to success)

when they misread their parents' support of achievement as being more important that parents' concern about them as a person (Elkind, 2001). These scholarly sources confirmed the connection between parental comprehension of student information as presented by the report card and the corresponding parental reactions to this information as it impacted future student learning and progress.

Furthermore, a review of non-scholarly resources supports the recent peer-reviewed sources, and it vividly depicts the hurdles schools face when introducing new report card formats. For example, the issue of providing monetary incentives to students for getting good grades on the old report card format has received more attention in the popular press than in the academic community, yet this and similar issues may be fueling parental and student attachment to the old report card format. Although there is merit in getting good grades, many online articles and editorials support the use of monetary rewards for academic achievement (Flam, 2013; Gallegos, 2013; KMSP-TV, 2013). Such articles cited the power of extrinsic motivation for some students who need an extra boost to try harder (Flannery, 2014; KMSP-TV, 2013). According to these articles, parents were justified in their pay-for-grades response to report card information because it prepared children for a world where most people worked harder and performed better when they were compensated for doing a good job (Birken, 2011; Tempesta, 2013). Other non-scholarly reports recommended that parents de-emphasize the actual grades in favor of praising effort and concentration (McCready, 2013; Williams, 2014). These reports predicted that well-meaning intent of incentive programs might provide students with a lasting loss of motivation in learning for its own sake (Barber, 2010; Peterson, 2005). Because a parent's reaction to his or her child's achievement may influence motivation (Cheung &

Pomerantz, 2012; Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009) the decision to offer rewards for good grades should not be taken lightly.

By investigating the range of reactions that parents have had to their children's report card sheds light on the reasons parents have continued to have an attachment to the traditional report card format. Such relational ties could be at the root of why parent either support or restrict a change from the traditional report card (Daly, 2010). This exploration contributed to an overall understanding of parental support for and understanding of report cards in general. This review also provided insight into understanding parental perceptions of the outcome-based report card. For example, parents who believe in the benefits of extrinsic motivation and use money-for-grades practices may struggle to align their beliefs to a different grading system. The format of the outcome-based report card may require parents to reconsider their reactions and responses given changes in reporting information. With respect to the current study, this review sets the stage for further research to determine why parental reactions to the outcome-based report card has not been consistently supportive.

Research Connecting Formative Assessment, Student Engagement, and Grading Practices

There have been many advantages cited for the continued use of formative assessment practices to inform instructional decisions and grading practices (Black et al., 2004; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Campbell, 2010; Chow, 2010; Crespo et al., 2010; Edwards et al., 2008; Frohbieter et al., 2011; Stiggins, 2008). Teachers helped students identify personal areas of academic growth by developing a shared vision of success with students, providing students with descriptive feedback, and encouraging self- and peer assessment, (Cooper, 2009; Koehn, 2008; O'Connor, 2009; Popham, 2008a). Results indicated that there was an increase in student achievement when teachers consciously used formative assessment strategies like providing

feedback through grading and the formative use of summative tests (Black et al., 2004; Chow, 2010; Hayward & Spencer, 2010).

When designed with the goal of increased student engagement, grading and assessment practices were found to foster intense concentration, promote absorbed involvement, and cultivate complete enjoyment in learning activities (Carl III, 2009; Csíkszentmihályi, 2008; Shin, 2006). The use of formative assessment strategies empowered and motivated students to take control and ownership of their learning (Edwards et al., 2008; Gallavan & Kottler, 2009). Student engagement and motivation increased when students had opportunities to select assignment types (Van Horne, 2009). Student-involved assessment strategies improved student learning and enhanced metacognitive knowledge (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Chow, 2010). The use of formative peer assessment resulted in enhanced learning experiences (Vickerman, 2009). In addition, student engagement was fostered when students were active participants in the assessment of well-articulated learner outcomes (Campbell, 2010; Conner, 2009; Ponitz et al., 2009). Despite student diversity, it was found that students adopted deep learning approaches when exposed to outcome-based practices (Wang, Su, Cheung, Wong, Kwong, & Tan, 2011).

To reflect the link between formative assessment and student engagement, grading practices have had to change so that student achievement can be reported accurately (Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Ross & Kostuch, 2011; Tierney, Simon, & Charland, 2011; Wormeli, 2006). Despite expressing frustration about learning new techniques, teachers were pleased that the outcome-based report card separated academics and behavior (Schmidt, 2008). Research shows that formative assessment was critical to school improvement and improved student achievement (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Students who were involved in the assessment process were empowered to take ownership in their learning (Chow, 2010). With formative assessment

strategies like the use of outcome-based rubrics and portfolio assessment, students gained control over their learning (Chow, 2010; O'Connor, 2009; Popham, 2008b). Student achievement increased when teachers made a conscious plan to include formative assessment strategies (like feedback through grading, peer and self-assessment, and the formative use of summative tests) within their instructional practice (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Chow, 2010; Wiliam, 2011).

As well, student intellectual engagement in course content was increased when students were given opportunities to self-assess their work in relation to course outcomes (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Chow, 2010; Wiliam, 2011; Willms et al., 2009). Learning was a reciprocal process by which the teacher used strategies that helped student to learn with understanding and become intellectually engaged in their studies (Willms et al., 2009). By using formative assessment strategies, like the outcome-based report card, students learned to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses, thereby increasing the motivation to improve (Chow, 2010; Willms et al., 2009). It is apparent that student self-assessment played an important role in increasing student engagement and fostering improved student achievement (Chow, 2010; Willms et al., 2009). Given the wealth of research on the topics of formative assessment and student engagement, teachers within the Northwest Territories and the Yellowknife Education District No.1 have been compelled to adjust personal grading practices that benefit the learning of all students (Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Education, 2006).

Despite the benefits, challenges were associated with implementation of formative assessment into classrooms. Barriers existed when using the outcome-based report card to communicate student progress. The lack of a clear theory of formative assessment resulted in confusion for teachers, and the multidimensional definition of formative assessment created a barrier for implementation (Wiliam, 2011). Even though there was a natural connection between

formative assessment and the outcome-based report card, many teachers lacked the skills to ensure that reporting was consistent and accurate (Schmidt, 2008). Because outcome-based reporting required a shift in thinking about how to grade student work, a clear understanding of the process was needed for all stakeholders, including parents (Deslandes et al., 2009). Although parental support and involvement was crucial for student achievement (Deslandes et al., 2009; Yun et al., 2008), research is lacking regarding effective strategies for gaining this support. Consequentially, more research was needed to uncover strategies to obtain parental support for the implementation the outcome-based report card.

Outcome-based Education

More often than not, large-scale educational reform required significant resources to reorganize an entire school system (Canadian Council of Learning, 2009). Barriers to change have to be identified and addressed. Initially, outcome-based or standards-based education was introduced as a movement towards a "method of designing curriculum and teaching strategies to facilitate content outcomes or what students should know and be able to do in a specific subject area" (Brooks, 2010, p. 7). However, numerous controversies have arisen since the inception of outcome-based education. The debate pitted the proponents of outcome-based education who believe in the value of continuous and nontraditional evaluative measures, against the critics who argue that this process is a costly and unsubstantiated practice (Killen, 2000).

In the case of the shift to outcome-based education, teachers complained of undue stress as they struggled with newer assessment protocols based on an outcome-based curriculum rather than a sequentially-based syllabus (Berlach & McNaught, 2007; Donnelly, 2007). Teachers have expressed frustration when faced with the challenge of addressing numerous content outcomes while retaining flexibility and creativity in their practice (Massell, 2008). As a result, the

implementation of the outcome-based report card as a way to document student achievement within an outcome-based educational system has been faced with uncertainty and hesitation (Guskey, 2011; Reeves, 2011; Ross & Kostuch, 2011). Although, outcome-based education has promoted a "true assessment of students' knowledge and skills as well as accurately measuring what a student is capable of doing" (Brooks, 2010, p. 9), there existed a negative perception of outcome-based education.

Although, the outcome-based report card can be considered a natural extension of the process to align standards to student achievement, a level of apprehension and hesitation often accompanied this change in approach (Brooks, 2010; Cherniss, 2008; Schmidt, 2008). Once teachers were given opportunities to collaborate with one another, feelings of resistance subsided, and teachers began to embrace a reporting system that separates academic and behavioral aspects of student performance (Schmidt, 2008; Guskey, 2006). Because teachers found it particularly challenging to determine a fair assessment for students with special needs, an accurate assessment system was needed to report goals of product, progress, and process separately (Guskey, 2006; Jung & Guskey, 2007). The tension that surrounded the original implementation of outcome-based education has continued to cloud future attempts to initiate associated school reform in this area (Berlach & McNaught, 2007; Killen, 2000; Massell, 2008). Because of this controversy, the public and parental perceptions of educational reform involving outcome-based education concepts have often been shaped by uncertainty. Such is the case within the Yellowknife Education District No.1, and reason that this study on the topic of parental perceptions of the outcome-based report card is especially important to the success of the educational reform of that district.

The Outcome-based Report Card: The Debate

Deficiencies of the traditional report card. The use of the outcome-based report card was born out of a need to respond to the deficiencies of the traditional report card. Percentages and letter grades used within the traditional report card were not accurate representations of what a student knows and have learned (Schimmer, 2013). Letter grades and numbers focused on the product rather than the process of learning (Stiggins, 2008; Schimmer, 2013; Wormeli, 2006). When determining grades using a traditional method, teachers combined elements of academic achievement with non-academic factors like effort and attitude (Cross & Frary, 1996; Wormeli, 2006).

Such "hodgepodge grading practices" (Cross & Frary, 1996, para. 2; Webster, 2012) are contrary to current research about assessment. This grading practice resulted in a muddy collection of information that was difficult to interpret and did not provide information that could be used to improve student learning (Guskey, 2004). When teachers included a mix of student characteristics (like talent, ability, effort, attitude, behavior, participation, and attendance), the resulting grade was almost meaningless (O'Connor, 2009). The quality of communication about student achievement was reduced even further when teachers included late marks, homework completion, and other non-academic factors that have nothing with the achievement of the learning outcomes (O'Connor, 2009; Schimmer, 2013; Stiggins, 2008; Wormeli, 2006).

Often parents were confused by the report card and assessment results, and there existed negative relationships between parents' perceptions of the report card and their beliefs about the teachers' ability to explain assessment processes (Deslandes et al., 2009). When teachers did not have a clear or transparent way to grade students, letter grading became a bewildering combination of subjectivity and cumulative assumption (Craig, 2011). Reliance on averaging

and other such number crunching activities have led to discrepancies between teacher-awarded marks and standardized assessment scores (Craig, 2011). Feeling mislead and misinformed, some parents made allegations of grade inflation because these discrepancies negatively impacted their children's future (Craig, 2011).

The traditional report card does not reflect elements related to challenging curricula and practices of differentiated instruction. It is not possible for a single letter or number grade to communicate student achievement of multiple learning outcomes (Brookhart, 2011; Cooper, 2011; O'Connor, 2009; Simon et al., 2010). The traditional practice of grading stands in opposition to the goal of informing parents about learning (Dean, 2006). Letter and number grades only motivate students who have been previously successful at getting good marks (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Low grades resulted in students being less willing to attempt new learning activities, being unmotivated, and often withdrawing from learning (Black & William, 1998; Webster, 2012). Students with poor grades often felt like failures, and this perspective frequently defined their future life goals (Webster, 2012). The traditional passive approach to teaching and learning must change to an active, result-oriented approach where students and teachers focus on the outcomes of what students should know and be able to do (Brooks, 2010; Loyola, 2010). To meet the learning needs of diverse students, we must continue to refine and reform the educational system so that we do not continue to use an outdated reporting system that is incapable of preparing the bulk of our students to face 21st century issues and realities.

The implementation of the outcome-based report card. Researchers confirmed that formative assessment tools, like the outcome-based report card, drive instruction and foster student learning (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2004; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Chow, 2010; O'Connor, 2009; Popham, 2008a; Vickerman, 2009; Wiliam, 2011). The move

away from communicating information about student learning using letter grades can be considered revolutionary in nature (Stiggins, 2008; Wormeli, 2006). Rather than crunching scores according to mathematical calculations, teachers have developed ways to determine achievement levels by considering the most recent, most consistent evidence of achievement (Wormeli, 2006). In addition, teachers have separated academic from behavioral aspects of student performance (O'Connor, 2009). This shift towards an outcome-based assessment approach has helped students to rise to the challenges that resemble those found in the professional careers where outcome completions become key measures of success (Crespo et al., 2010).

Controversies have arisen since the inception of an outcome-based educational focus and the resulting implementation of the outcome-based report card (Morcke, Dornan, & Eika, 2012). The debate has pitted those who believe in continuous and nontraditional evaluative measures against critics who have argued that this change has been made at a costly and unsubstantiated price for education (Killen, 2000; Morcke et al., 2012). Personal experiences played a considerable role in how key stakeholders perceived the change to the outcome-based report card (Adrian, 2012; Cherniss, 2008; Gregory, 2005). Although the stimulus for an outcome-based focus came from political, economic, and educational sources (Killen, 2000; Morcke et al., 2012), a negative perception has emerged. This perception has been fueled by the belief that an outcome-based focus was "primarily driven by fiscal accountability and secondly by improvement in the quality of education" (Brooks, 2010, p.12).

Because a main function of the outcome-based report card has been to provide feedback to students and parents about how to improve student learning, this type of reporting has aligned with the goals of formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Crespo et al., 2010; O'Connor,

2009; Popham, 2008a; Stiggins, 2008; Wormeli, 2006; Willms et al., 2009). Although the outcome-based report card has been considered a natural extension of formative assessment practices, confusion and anxiety have accompanied this shift away from letter grade reporting (Brooks, 2010; Cherniss, 2008; Guskey & Jung, 2006; Schmidt, 2008).

Home-School Communication and the Outcome-based Report Card

A key purpose of a report card has been to communicate to parents about their child's performance. It has become essential that parents understand the information that the outcome-based report card communicates (Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Guskey & Jung, 2006; Mathura, 2008). There has been a tendency for parents to link the outcome-based progress labels with traditional letter grades (for example, Level 4 or 'Outstanding' means an 'A'; Level 3 or 'Satisfactory' means a 'B', etc.) and to interpret the labels from a norms-referenced perspective (Guskey, 2004). It is suggested that information about student learning should be communicated using parent-friendly language (Anderson, 2011; Balkissoon, 2012; Deslandes et al., 2009; Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Graham-Clay, 2005). Parents needed clarification to truly understand the rationale behind the changes to the outcome-based report card (Craig, 2011; Deslandes et al., 2009; Festel, 2012; Guskey, 2011).

Researchers suggested that parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card was crucial for its success, and strategies were needed to foster clarification and acceptance (Brookhart, 2012; Mathura, 2008; Reeves, 2011). Available information describing parental perceptions about report cards have not undergone peer review (Block et al., 2009; Craig, 2011). From sources like newspapers and popular magazines, it has been reported that parents have found the outcome-based report card difficult to decode and frustrating to understand (Anderson, 2011; Balkissoon, 2012; Festel, 2012; Greene, 2013; Hammer, 2012;

McCarthy, 2012; Tennant, 2012). The language used to describe student learning needs to be clear, concise, and accessible to build public confidence, foster parental involvement, and increase student ownership in the learning process (Guskey, 2004; Roeber, 2003; Steinmann, Malcolm, Connell, Davis, & McMann, 2008). When successfully implemented, support for the outcome-based report card resulted in increased student learning, the development of quality programs, and improved public confidence in educational programs (Guskey & Bailey, 2009). In order to truly understand the issue at hand, a systematic study of parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card is needed.

Benefits of the outcome-based report card for parents. Because parents are the child's first and most important teacher, they need to be involved in their child's education as the learning shifts from the context of the home to the context of the school. Their responsibility is to support their children productively while simultaneously acting as a well-informed advocate (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2002; Schere, 2009; Urich, 2012). In order to fulfill this role, parents need and want to have understandable, accurate, and significant information about their child's learning (Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Ramirez, 2011).

Numerous benefits for parents have been associated with the implementation of the outcome-based report card. The implementation of the outcome-based report card clarified and reinforced high expectations for parents and provided specific feedback on progress. Because the outcome-based report card was developed with the goals of transparency and explicitness, it became a useful tool for providing parents with detailed and specific information (Adrian, 2012; Cherniss, 2008; Deslandes et al., 2009; Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Mathura, 2008; McMunn, Schenck, & McColskey, 2003; O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Schmidt, 2008; Stiggins, 2009; Yun et al., 2008). Unlike the traditional report card that often incorporated non-academic factors

within the final grade, the outcome-based report card clearly differentiated information for parents about their children's behavior and academic ability (Guskey & Bailey, 2009).

Parents indicated that the outcome-based report card showed them what their child knew and could do (Craig, 2011). Because student achievement was described using learning outcomes, it was possible to provide parents with information that described future goals for learning (Coleman & McNeese, 2009; Guskey & Bailey, 2009). The outcome-based report card provided a comprehensive picture of student learning so that parents were able to support learning at home (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2002; Schere, 2009; Vatterott, 2011). Student progress could be easily tracked over time, and parents could celebrate their child as a learner (Craig, 2012). By sharing data about student learning through the outcome-based report card, parents were guided in taking appropriate action to support the achievement of their child and close gaps in learning achievements (Baldwin & Wade, 2012).

In parent-teacher conferences, the outcome-based report card became the object of discussion that formed the foundation for a focused conversation on student learning (Redding, Murphy, & Sheley, 2011; Markstrom, 2011). Parents reported wanting an opportunity to learn about their child's knowledge and ability through detailed descriptions and artifacts of teaching and learning (Webber & Wilson, 2012). The information provided by the outcome-based report card helped teachers and parents to set meaningful goals for improvement (Ramirez, 2011). In lieu of learner outcomes, teachers struggled to convey developmental information to parents (Redding et al., 2011). The outcome-based report card became a tool that fostered the use of a common language about learning and became a starting point for parent-teacher discussions (Redding et al., 2011; Dusenbury, Zadrazil, Mart, & Weissberg, 2011).

Positive home-school partnership developed when parents were meaningfully informed about their child's learning (Craig, 2012; Redding et al., 2011). Parents became advocates for their child when the information they received was written in parent-friendly terms that offered suggestions for ways to support learning at home (Ramirez, 2011; Guskey & Bailey, 2009). Parents benefited when detailed information about academic proficiency was shared through the structure of the outcome-based report card (Craig, 2011; Ramirez, 2011). The outcome-based report card fostered parent involvement and made parents active in the assessment process (Markstrom, 2011).

Factors related to parental engagement. Parental engagement has been found to significantly impact student academic attainment (Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird, & Kupzyk, 2010; Van Voorhis, 2011; Broderick, O'Connor, Mulcahy, Heffernan, & Heffernan, 2012). Some estimates went so far as to say that the relative influence of home on student achievement accounts for 60-80% of the total recorded factors associated with student achievement (Emerson, Fear, Fox, & Sanders, 2012). Parental education expectations, homework help, and school involvement had the strongest effects on self-regulated learning for students (Xu, Benson, Mudrey-Camino, & Steiner, 2010). When parents were engaged in their children's education, increases were found in student grades, rates of enrolment and course completion (Emerson et al., 2012). Studies of parental engagement showed a positive impacted on student attendance rates, social skills, behavior, adaptation to school, and self-efficacy (Emerson et al., 2012). Parental engagement has taken the activity of education beyond the walls of the classroom and made learning a shared experience between home and school.

Available research on parental engagement explored many facets of parental engagement. The degree to which parents became engaged in their children's learning depended on levels of

parental efficacy and beliefs in their personal ability to help their children's learning (Emerson et al., 2012; Redding et al., 2011). Engaged parents were those that saw themselves as having the skills to be able to contribute meaningfully to their children's education (Emerson et al., 2012). Parents were more likely to be involved and engaged when they felt their role was as an equal partner in the educational process (Emerson et al., 2012, Jeynes, 2010). In addition, the extent to which parents were engaged in student learning was determined by the parents' personal beliefs, as some parents selected to be non-engaged because they wanted their children to be self-reliant and independent (Schnee & Bose, 2010).

Despite the quantity of research that describes the benefits of parental engagement, inconsistent definitions of parental engagement have existed. Parent engagement has been defined as the building of partnerships between families, schools, and communities when parents had an increased awareness of the benefits of engagement and the skills to become engaged (Emerson et al., 2012). Terms like *involvement* and *participation* were used interchangeably with the term *engagement* (Emerson et al., 2012). The differences in definition and the lack of standardized measures have made it difficult to quantify the relative influence of parent engagement (Emerson et al., 2012).

Research described many ways that parents were engaged in their children's education. Activities that demonstrated parental engagement included providing homework help, attending school functions, and setting rules at home to support school attendance and course completion (Jeynes, 2010; Mapp, 2003). Parents reported feeling engaged when they were given data about their children's learning and personalized messages that put this data into context (Broderick et al., 2012). Simple parental engagement activities, like dinnertime discussions about school activities and course content, had a greater effect on student achievement than other school-

related involvement, like attending school events or volunteering at school (Jeynes, 2010). Parents who demonstrated high levels of engagement were those who felt involved in school-based decisions and saw themselves as advocates for their children (Emerson et al., 2012). Often these highly engaged parents talked to their children about the value of learning, discussed learning strategies, linked school work to current events, set goals, and provided a stimulating home environment (Emerson et al., 2012). Parental engagement was shown to have benefits at all levels despite the different ways that parents were engaged in their children's learning, (Emerson et al., 2012).

Understanding the components of parental engagement and how it impacts student learning is critical in the study of parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card. The outcome-based report card has the potential to provide parents with an opportunity to become engaged about their children's learning. Whether parents become autonomously engaged or are invited to become engaged in their children's learning, the information provided within the outcome-based report card contributes to the conditions that support student learning.

Evidence that parents do not support or understand the outcome-based report card. Given the above reviewed evidence for the benefits of the outcome-based format it would have been expected that parents everywhere would welcome the introduction of this new report card, but that is not the case. Unfortunately, research describing why parents may feel resistant to this shift in reporting has been limited to sources that have not undergone scholarly review (Anderson, 2011; Balkissoon, 2012; Festel, 2012; Greene, 2013; Hammer, 2012; McCarthy, 2012; Tennant, 2012).

For example, *The Omaha World Herald* reported that parents in the district of Westside Community Schools, Nebraska objected to the introduction of a grading system that dropped the traditional letter grades for a 1 to 3 leveling system because it was believed that it compromised the district's mission of excellence by embracing mediocrity (Anderson, 2011; Schrad, 2012). The *Wyckoff Suburban News* reported that parents from Wyckoff, Bergen County in New Jersey lobbied school committee members to forbid the further use of the new grading system (Greene, 2013). It was reported that these parents were more familiar with a grading system that compared student progress against one another rather than against learning outcomes (Greene, 2013). In the *Southeast Missourian*, parents were reported as having concerns about depth of training teachers received using a new system without a proven history of success (Ragan, 2012).

In an online community-specific engagement platform, called *The Wakefield Patch,* parents from the Wakefield School District in Massachusetts demanded a return to the old report card (Festel, 2012). Many parents who participated in this online forum reported that they misunderstood the outcome-based grading system because the numerical code used to review the level of progress did not resemble or align with the traditional and the more familiar letter or percentage system (Festel, 2012). The same sediments were shared in the *Calgary Herald* by parents of students in Calgary, Alberta's public school board where the push-back from parents forced the school board to suspend a pilot project that would shift report cards from numerical grading to a word-based marking scheme (Howell, 2013). Similarly, the results from a survey of parents from Deer Meadow School in Olds, Alberta was published on the school website and revealed that many parents wished that percentages were included in the reporting of student performance (Chinook's Edge School Division, 2013). On the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

website, it was reported outcome-based report cards would simply be replacing one subjective measure for another, and would result unnecessary confusion for parents (Downey, 2010).

Almost of these reports made it appear that schools failed in providing parents with sufficient information to fully understand and appreciate the value of the outcome-based report card system (Festel, 2012; Greene, 2013; McCarthy, 2012). A popular Canadian parenting magazine, titled *Today's Parent,* reported that frustrated parents were upset by report cards that described student progress using teacher jargon and murky language (Balkissoon, 2012). *The Globe and Mail*, a major Canadian newspaper, reported that parents criticized the report card as being inundated with confusing formulaic feedback (Hammer, 2012). Similar news stories have emerged in other school districts such as those found in North Andover in Essex County, Massachusetts (Tennant, 2012; McCarthy, 2012), Pelham in Westchester County, New York (Hu, 2009), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, (Jablow, 2013), Durham District School Board in Durham, Ontario (Rushowy, 2010), and the Battle River School Division in Camrose, Alberta (Callsen, 2011).

Due to parental resistance, many schools that had made the move towards the outcome-based report card had to revert to the traditional grading practices of the past (Guskey, 2004; Guskey & Jung, 2006; O'Connor, 2009; Reeves, 2011). The *Lowell Sun* reported that parents in Billerica, Massachusetts successfully petitioned the school board to return to letter grades on the report card after a new standards-based numerical formula had been adopted (Sobey, 2013). Similarly, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that parents from the Valley View School District circulated a petition opposing the switch to a new standards-based report card, stating that the new system would impact entry into college (Ruzich, 2013). The *Henry Herald* reported that parents of the Henry school board in McDonough, Georgia successfully pressured school board

leaders to delay the implementation of a new standards-based report card (Jackson, 2012). Over the border in Canada, opinion articles were published in online news forums, like the *Vancouver Province,* promoting the continued use of percentage grades (Zwaagstra, 2013). These non-scholarly reports demonstrated the extent to which parents resist the adoption of the outcome-based report card and pressure school boards to revert to the traditional, more familiar report card system.

These non-scholarly reports capture many elements that contribute to a general understanding why parents may be hesitant to embrace the outcome-based report card. However, non-scholarly reports do not undergo rigorous review that ensures transparency of bias and the presentation of verifiable conclusions. Unfortunately, there exist limited sources of scholarly research around the topic of parental for and understanding of the outcome-based report card.

From these limited scholarly research sources, evidence was uncovered to prove that there were various levels of support for the outcome-based report cards from parents (Deslandes et al., 2009; Guskey 2004; Mathura, 2008; Schrad, 2012). Many parents feared that the changes to the traditional grading policies would result in lower achievement and grades since the former system allowed for additional points from extra credit projects and homework completion (Erickson, 2011). Parents worried that students would skip classes because the marks were not attached to levels of attendance (Erickson, 2011). Because many parents experienced a norm-based grading system, they valued a system that judged performance against that of other peers; these parents saw little need to change to a criterion-referenced or outcome-based system (Guskey, 2011). There was a tendency to see the change to outcome-based report cards as a fad that provided no benefit over traditional report card format (Schrad, 2012).

Grading reform has been hampered partly because many parents see report cards as serving a different purpose than that intended by teachers and school leaders (Guskey & Jung, 2012). Some parents have been found to alter their behavior based on the grades that their children receive on their report card (Grolnick, 2003). Research uncovered that parents of children with lower grades were more controlling of their children's learning (by taking over homework activities and managing behavior) than parents of children who achieve higher grades in the report card (Grolnick, 2003). Some parents resorted to offering their children with financial rewards for getting good grades (Fryer, 2011; Grolnick, 2003; Taylor, 2013). Despite any positive intent, research found that providing extrinsic incentives for good grades did not increase student achievement unless the incentive was linked to factors related to achievement like improvements in attendance and behavior (Bettinger, 2012; Fryer, 2011; Grant & Green, 2013).

For an effective use of the report card, educators and parents need to recognize that cooperation is essential to striking a balance between different needs and priorities. Parents desired precise yet understandable and useful information about how well their children were progressing (Brosseau & Fuciarelli, 2013; Guskey & Bailey, 2010). Parents wanted the report card to describe specfic information about their children's strengths and weaknesses within the written teachers' comments so that they know how to facilitate their children's learning (Chan, 2009). Teachers wanted report cards that provided data that connected and confirmed classroom-based assessments (Brosseau & Fuciarelli, 2013; Guskey & Bailey, 2010). School leaders needed report cards that illustrated the extent to which data was consistent between classrooms and grade levels (Guskey & Bailey, 2010). These school leaders wanted the report card to provide information about the effectiveness of educational programs (Guskey & Jung,

2012). Despite these differences, all stakeholders reported the need for data to be expressed in such as way that it promotes meaningful student growth and achievement (Brosseau & Fuciarelli, 2013; Guskey & Bailey, 2010).

Research described particular barriers to understanding the outcome-based report card for parents. For example, many parents reported being confused by the terms used within the outcome-based report card (Deslandes et al., 2009; Guskey 2004; Mathur, 2008). Parents preferred the familiarity of traditional letter grades to the use of outcome-based labels to describe student progress (Guskey & Jung, 2006). Parents had a tendency to relate the labels to letter grades (for example, 'Outstanding' means an 'A'; 'Satisfactory' means a 'B'), interpreted the labels from a norms-referenced perspective, and found many terms vague (Guskey 2004). A negative relationship was reported between parents' perceptions of the report card and their beliefs regarding the teachers' ability to explain assessment processes (Deslandes et al., 2009).

Based on the information provided in these available reports, one could speculate that parental support is low because understanding is low, and that is why it is important to study these elements together. Without additional research, parents may remain excluded from contributing their thoughts and ideas about a critical educational change that has a direct personal impact on their children.

Summary

A review of available research on the topic of current assessment and evaluation practices has demonstrated that the outcome-based report card has the potential to help students move forward in their achievement. In addition, Canadian-based research connected student intellectual engagement to instructional practices (Willms et al., 2009). There exists a consensus of scholars that a focus on outcomes has benefited student learning (Adrian, 2012; Cooper, 2011;

Crespo et al., 2010; Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Guskey & Jung, 2006; Hendry et al., 2012, Kizlik, 2012; Mathura, 2008; McMunn et al., 2003; O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Schmidt, 2008; Wang et al., 2011). Despite this consensus, parental support for the outcome-based report card has been lukewarm at best.

Although available scholarly studies have failed to explore why parents have tended to resist the change, this review uncovered a limited number of possible reasons why parents might not support the outcome-based report card and why they might not understand it. In many ways, the purpose of the outcome-based report has changed from that of the traditional report card in that the function of the outcome-based report card has been formative rather than summative in nature (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2004; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Chow, 2010; O'Connor, 2009; Popham, 2008; Vickerman, 2009; Wiliam, 2011). This shift has required parents to reconsider their parenting behaviors when presented with information about their children's progress (Butler, Kennedy, & Kennedy, 2010; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Fryer, 2011; Harris, 2011). A parent's reaction to his or her child's achievement may influence motivation (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009). For this reason, parents must also consider the links between student engagement, formative assessment, and grading practices (Black et al., 2004; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Campbell, 2010; Chow, 2010; Crespo et al., 2010; Edwards et al., 2008; Frohbieter et al., 2011; Stiggins, 2008).

Personal experiences played a considerable role in how parents and teachers perceived the change to the outcome-based report card (Adrian, 2012; Cherniss, 2008; Gregory, 2005). Unfortunately, anecdotal reports have indicated that some parents find the language and terminology used within the outcome-based report card challenging to understand (Black & William, 1998). Because grading practices have often included factors related to student

characteristics (like talent, effort, attitude, behavior, and attendance), some parents may be confused when newer grading practices separate academic and non-academic factors (Cross & Frary, 1996; Guskey, 2004; O'Connor, 2009; Webster, 2012). To compound problems, many parents relied on teachers to be able to explain assessment results, and some parents reported feeling mislead and misinformed when teachers did not have a clear way to explain their grading practices (Craig, 2011; Deslandes et al., 2009). More research is needed to address the complexities of implementing the outcome-based report card given the wide range of potential reasons that parents might not support the outcome-based report card and why they might not understand it.

Most sources of information describing why parents do not reliably support or understand the shift to the outcome-based report card have existed in publications that have not undergone scholarly review (Anderson, 2011; Balkissoon, 2012; Festel, 2012; Graham-Clay, 2005; Hammer, 2012; McCarthy, 2012; Tennant, 2012). This situation has meant that parents have been largely excluded from contributing their thoughts and ideas about a public matter that has a direct personal impact on their children. To remedy these deficiencies, this proposed study plans to uncover the perceptions that parents have around the implementation of the outcome-based report card. It is hoped that this research will reveal strategies to ensure that the outcome-based report card gains positive parental support throughout the Yellowknife Education District No.1 and into other regions of the Northwest Territories.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The outcome-based report card has become a valuable way to convey formative and summative assessment information about student learning (Guskey & Bailey, 2009). Teachers have used the outcome-based report card to communicate information to parents and students about academic gaps and explicit learning targets (Lawson, 2011; Parsons & Taylor, 2011; Stiggins, 2008). However, available research has suggested that parents do not reliably support or understand the shift to the outcome-based report card (Deslandes, et al., 2009; Hayward & Spencer, 2010; Massell, 2008; Mathura 2008; O'Connor, 2009; Reeves, 2011; Schmidt, 2008; Stiggins, 2008; Sutton, 2009). Without parental support for the outcome-based report card, any benefits to student learning associated with its use cannot be realized to the fullest extent possible (O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Reeves, 2011). The purpose of this case study is to investigate parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the schools of the Yellowknife Education District No.1, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in Canada. After eight years of using the outcome-based report card, educational leaders within the Yellowknife Education District No.1 believed that this case study was the next logical step in the implementation of the outcome-based report card (M. Pardy, personal communication, November 2010).

Four research questions investigated parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1.

Q 1. What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?

Q 2. How do parents understand the shift to outcome-based report card?

Q 3. What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?

Q 4. What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?

Because report cards serve as an important way to communicate student progress to parents and students, it is critical to ensure that parents are included in the discussion around the implementation of the outcome-based report card. A single case study with embedded units of analysis (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) was selected to systematically investigate parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1.

This chapter will outline specific details regarding this study's research method and design. The author will provide a rationale for the selection of a case study methodology using qualitative research design. The components of this case study will be conveyed, including the details of the sampling process and a description the site's population. The rationale and specifics of focus group procedures will be explained. The author will clarify how descriptive summaries of available historical/archival data were used for triangulation with the primary focus group data. Details regarding the reporting of the analysis and result will be explained. The author will end the chapter by acknowledging this study's assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and ethical assurances.

Research Methods and Design

For this study topic, the qualitative research design supports the intent of this author's constructivist worldview which is to interpret, explore, and understand the meaning the outcome-based report card has for the parents within Yellowknife Education District No. 1 (Creswell,

2013; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Unlike an experimental quantitative research design used to test object theories, the inductive style of qualitative research will capture the complexity of this topic with an interpretive character (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Although the process of triangulation within this case study will involve the use of historical/archival descriptive summaries data, triangulation is not synonym for mixed-methods (Bazeley, 2002; Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). For this case study, the purpose of triangulation is to confirm and validate qualitative results using descriptive summaries of selected survey questions that address parental concerns; triangulation is not being used for completeness purposes as it would in a mixed methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). No benefit can be seen in the use of a mixed-methods research design to address the research questions. The qualitative research design is best suited to investigate this topic.

This project will employ a case study design to address its four research questions. Case study design allows for the in-depth analysis of a unique situation (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). The Yellowknife Education District No.1 presents a unique case in that it is the only board within the Northwest Territories that is positioned to explore parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card after eight years of implementation of this type of report card. The selection of the case study research method will allow the author to capture the complexities of the organizational phenomena as it relates to the analysis of multiple parental viewpoints around the use of the outcome-based report card (Yin, 2009).

In accordance with the criteria outlined by Yin (2009), the case study method is the preferred strategy for this study. The key questions being posed include ‘how’ questions, the investigator has little control over the responses of the parents, and the focus of the study is contemporary within a real-life context (Yin, 2009). The case study model will provide a

descriptive and analytical way to gain rich insight into the perspectives of parents within Yellowknife Education District No. 1 about a public matter that has a direct personal impact on their children (Yin, 2009). In this study, the aim is to capture an understanding of the parental experience with the outcome-based report card, a task best suited to the use of the case study method (Stake, 1995).

To explore parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1, a single case study with embedded units of analysis has been used (Yin, 2009). Parents of students in Grades 4-8 were selected to share their thoughts around the outcome-based report card using four structured focus groups of 4-6 parents each. If more data were needed, additional sessions would have been scheduled. Data gathered from focus group interviews was triangulated with descriptive summaries of related data extracted from available historical/archival surveys. These historical/archival surveys from 2006-2011 investigated parental perceptions about the communication of student progress and learning goals, including but not limited to information provided with the report card (Yellowknife Education District No. 1, 2006).

Population

This case study on parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card took place within the Yellowknife Education District No.1 in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in Canada. Yellowknife is the capital of the Northwest Territories. This city is located on the northern shore of Great Slave Lake and approximately 400 km (250 mi) south of the Arctic Circle (City of Yellowknife, 2003). The Yellowknife Education District No.1 is one of three educational boards that serve a population of over 19,000 in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories (Statistics Canada, 2012). As of 2010, more than 51% of the population of the

Northwest Territories was identified as people of Aboriginal heritage (Inuvialuit, Indian, Inuit, and Métis) (Statistics Canada, 2010). The majority of non-Aboriginal people in the Northwest Territories has been reported to live within the capital city of Yellowknife, and Aboriginal populations make up 29% of the population of the Yellowknife Education District No.1 (Statistics Canada, 2010).

The Yellowknife Education District No.1 is a public school board (Yellowknife Education District No.1, 2013). It operates six schools and provides contract Superintendency Services to the nearby First Nations schools of Ndilo and Dettah. As the oldest and largest district in the city, the Yellowknife Education District No.1 provides a variety of programs to support over 2,000 students in preschool to Grade 12. Because parents in Yellowknife have a choice to send their children to a public or Catholic school, non-Catholics are often enrolled into the public schools found within the Yellowknife Education District No. 1.

Participants in this study included 17 parents of students who attend the one of four the schools in Yellowknife Education District No.1 that offer programs to students in Grades 4-8. These 17 parents represent 24 students enrolled within Grades 4-8. The Grades 4-8 range was selected for this study because the shift to the outcome-based report card format was the most significant for this population. At the primary level, the shift to the outcome-based report card was less severe because past report cards used terms like *good*, *satisfactory*, and *needs improvement* to describe academic and behavioral outcomes. At the secondary level (Grades 9-12), the shift to the outcome-based report has not yet been made within Yellowknife Education District No.1.

Parents of students in the target range (Grades 4-8) who are eligible for selection for the focus group process were asked to participate in the study through an initial telephone interview

or email exchange. After signing informed consent forms, they were asked to identify their thoughts or concerns about the outcome-based report card in a focus group interview format. Sampling procedures and inclusion/exclusion criteria are discussed below in the sampling section.

Sample

A plan for heterogeneous purposive sampling was created in order to study parental perceptions of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1. Purposive sampling was selected because this case study presented a circumstance where it was not feasible or practical to study the entire population or to initially select a random sample of parents (Castillo, 2009; Stake, 1995; Trochim, 2008). Because the shift to the outcome-based report card format was the most significant for parents with children in Grades 4-8, it was necessary to recruit these parents for the study's focus groups. The decision about the size of sample was made as a reflection of the number of case replications that are needed (Yin, 2009). Because this was a single case study with a specific context, the need for generalization and replication was limited.

Since the Yellowknife Education District No.1 student population within the target range (Grades 4-8) has been known to fluctuate, most current demographic information was accessed using the Yellowknife Education District No.1 student information system. Parent participation in the study was determined on the basis of an initial telephone interview or email exchange. To select parents for this telephone interview or email exchange, the entire population of parents in the target grades was stratified based on the grade level of the eldest child within grade range. A simple random sampling within the target grade range method was used to select 5-7 parents within each stratum. In addition to answering questions as to their availability for a focus group

session on the topic of the outcome-based report card, selected parents were asked the question, "We would like to invite you to participate in a brief focus group to discuss assessment at your child's school. Would you be interested in being involved in this discussion?" In the event that contact with the selected parent was not possible or the parent was not available or willing to participate in the focus group session, the next name listed alphabetically within the strata was called. From the results of the telephone interview or email exchange process, four focus groups were held.

While 25 parents agreed to participate in the focus session, overall attendance to the focus group session was 17 parents. The 17 parents represented 24 students in Grades 4-8 across schools in Yellowknife Education District No.1. Two focus groups were held for each of the grade level divisions: Grades 4-5 and Grades 6-8. Some overlap occurred due to the demands of parent schedules. Each of the four focus groups had over four parents involved.

Although it was proposed that more focus group sessions would be held if additional data were required, there was no theoretical reason to believe that more than 17 parents were needed in order to get valid results (Hennink, 2014; Krueger, 2009; Silverman, 2006). The methodology outlined within this case study suggested that it was necessary to search themes until saturation is reached. Because no new information emerged despite detailed review of the focus groups interview transcripts, it was determined that saturation was reached and the N value of 17 parents sufficed.

Historical/archival data in the form of descriptive summaries was accessed for the purpose of triangulation with data that received from the focus group interviews. This historical/archival data was collected during 2006-2012 through surveys completed on a nonrandom selection process based on participant convenience. In these surveys, parents were

asked general questions about home-school communication, including but not limited to their opinions about the outcome-based report card (Yellowknife Education District No. 1, 2006). The purpose of triangulation in this context is to obtain confirmation and to gain credibility of the results of the focus group process by establishing converging lines of evidence (Yin, 2011).

Materials/Instruments

Focus groups have been found to be useful in exploring perceptions and concerns of target groups, assessing needs, improving existing programs, and evaluating outcomes (Hennick, 2014; Krueger, 2009; Silverman, 2006; Yin, 2011). In this study, the focus group method was to explore parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card. The focus group data were analyzed via author identification of emergent themes and Computer Assisted/Aided Qualitative Data AnalysiS (CAQDAS). Historical/archival survey data in the form of descriptive summaries were used as a way to triangulate and verify the focus group interview data.

As a qualitative collection method, the value of the focus group interview lies in the way that it encourages group interaction (Krueger, 2099; Liamputtong, 2011; Yin, 2009). The focus group process assists participants to clarify and explore their ideas and concerns in a way that is not typically possible through the individual interview method (Liamputtong, 2011). The focus group setting also affords the researcher the opportunity to interact with participants more freely and to pursue follow-up questions on both expected and unexpected themes that emerge during the interview (Liamputtong, 2011).

In this case study, questions asked during the focus group interview process addressed the four research questions pertaining to levels of parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1. These dynamic

group conversations were used to collect information that might otherwise be inaccessible through individual interviews on the topic (Liamputtong, 2011). Because more than one focus group was involved in the collection of qualitative data, consistency between groups was needed to compare and contrast results (Schuh, 2011). The focus group protocol became the qualitative instrument that provided structure to this process by detailing the questions that were asked, the sequence of the questions, and the categories of the questions (Schuh, 2011).

In this case study, the focus group interview protocol (see Appendix C) provided a clear set of directions with a scripted beginning and specific assurances to the participants. Following this is a list of questions, each with a specific purpose in mind. It should be noted that the participants were provided with the list of interview questions in advance, but they were not provided with the purpose of the questions as written in parenthetical notation below. The targeted questions included:

- an icebreaker question: "Can you tell us about an experience, positive or negative, that you have had with assessment, evaluation, or both?" (Addressed the need for participants to get to know one another in a non-threatening way through a brief sharing of experiences related to the topic at hand.)
- an introductory question: "Can you describe your understanding of the outcome-based report card?" Probing questions: "How do you see the strengths and weaknesses of the card?" and "Can you read the report card in such a way as to identify your child's learning outcomes and progress?" and "What parts of the report card are difficult to understand?" (Addressed the research questions **"**How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card?" and

"What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?")

- a transition question: "Can you describe the discussions that you have had with your child about the information within his or her report card and how he or she could do better?" (Addressed the research question "How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card?")
- a focus question: "Can you tell us about your thoughts about the outcome-based report card?" (Addressed the research questions "What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?" and "What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?")
- a focus question: "What do you think would help parents understand the outcome-based report card?" (Addressed the research question "What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?")
- a summary statement: "Are there any last thoughts or ideas that you would like to share with lead educators in the Yellowknife Education No.1 about how well the outcome-based report card is supported by parents and what can be done to help for parents better understand the outcome-based report?" (Addressed the research questions "What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?" and "What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?")

This questioning route was sequenced, moving from general to specific questions. Suggested prompts for the questions were noted so that it was possible to probe deeper into the thoughts and experiences of the participants (Liamputtong, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2004). Explicit and matching instructions were provided to each focus group so that each focus group session followed the same standard procedure. Participants were required to sign a consent form (see Appendix D). Finally, the focus group interview protocol was tested with a group of individuals similar to the sample. This trial session ensured that this protocol was a valid tool, and it provided this researcher with practice in facilitation.

Historical/archival parent survey data. Data from the focus group process were triangulated with the historical/archival descriptive summaries retrieved from parent surveys in Yellowknife Education District No.1. From 2006-2012, the Yellowknife Education District No.1 distributed occasional surveys to parents to assess their support for and understanding of various school initiatives, including those related to assessment and reporting. Response rates varied from survey to survey. Although no firm numbers are available to know how many surveys were distributed, if the entire parent population of the district were targeted, that number would equal approximately 650 parents (Statistics Canada, 2012). In 2011, 181 responses were received for an estimated response rate of 25% (Yellowknife Education District No.1, 2011). The parent surveys investigated elements of parental support (that is, home-school communication, home support for learning, and parental support for learning at school). The questions regarding home-school communication of student progress appeared to be similar to those found in the focus group interviews protocol. Despite the similarities, it was important to consider the context of the survey question. For example, the Yellowknife Education District

No.1 2006 parent survey (Yellowknife Education District No.1, 2006) contained questions that directly addressed this project's research questions, as follows:

Q 1. What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?

The survey question that touches on this issue is stated as, "To what extent do you believe that you receive clear information about how well your child is doing at school?" However, it is important to remember that parents might be very satisfied with the report card but feel other information is not clear and thus rate this question low. As well, parents could have answered this question based on their experiences with a variety of communication methods used by teachers to relay information about student progress. Nevertheless responses to this question may reveal whether parents believe the information on the report card is clear with regard to their child's school performance. If parents think the information is largely unclear then it can be inferred that they may not fully support the report card in its current form.

Q 2. How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card?

The survey question that connects to this issue is stated as, "To what extent do you feel that your child's achievement is regularly monitored?" Because formative assessment is used to monitor ongoing student progress towards specific goals, the outcome-based report card serves the purpose of communicating feedback to students and parents for improved learning. It is noted that conclusions may be limited because this survey question does not address the outcome-based report card specifically. Although monitoring student learning is not limited to classroom activity, parents who responded in the positive to this survey question might have been responding to formative assessment within the classroom and not just use of report card to communicate suggestions for improvement.

Q 3. What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to the strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?

Although questions on historical/archival surveys were not posed for the sole purpose of gathering information about outcome-based report cards, this data served the purpose of providing foundational information regarding parental perceptions of home-school communication. That being said, caution was taken about generalizing the data from the historical/archival surveys in relation to the outcome-based report card. Because the outcome-based report card acts as a main communication link between parents and teachers, the survey questions around monitoring student achievement, grading practices, and clarity of information tapped into parental perceptions of reporting practices, including those involving reporting cards. By using of sources drawn from historical/archival survey, data triangulation it was possible to uncover deeper meaning from the focus group data and the increase validity of the results (Patton, 2008).

Interview protocol. As with any type of interview technique, the focus group interview required a clear plan or protocol to follow (Creswell, 2009; Trochim & Donnelly, 2008; Patton, 2008). In the context of this case study, the plan included instructions so that each focus group interview was tested during a practice session to provide evidence that the focus group was facilitated appropriately and that the interview protocol was a valid measure of collecting the desired data. To develop an effective interview plan, decisions were made regarding the wording, structure, and types of questions as well as the number of questions and prompts. A variety of structured questions and prompts were included, and close-ended questions were avoided. To build credibility for the focus group process, leaders within the Yellowknife Education District No.1 were able to review the interview questions.

In this case study, the author took responsibility for asking questions, prompting and probing answers, making sure that all participants had an opportunity to speak, and ensuring the participants stayed focused on the topic. In addition, logistical elements of the session were considered, including securing an appropriate time and location for the focus group sessions. The questioning route included a variety of questions types (Krueger, 2009; Liamputtong, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2004; Schuh, 2011). A list of questions specific to the research questions, an icebreaker question, and a concluding statement was included in the plan (see Appendix C). Suggested prompts for the questions were noted so that it was possible to probe deeper into the thoughts and experiences of the participants (Krueger, 2009; Liamputtong, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2004; Schuh, 2011). The focus group interview questions addressed the four research questions that investigated parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1

Data Collection, Processing, and Analysis

In this proposed case study, data collected from focus group interviews were analyzed. The interview data were reviewed using both the author's expertise and automated text analyses to identify emergent themes concerning parental perceptions of the outcome-based report card. Descriptive summaries of the historical/archival survey data were used to triangulate results from focus group interview data.

Focus group interview plan. Information was collected about parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card through focus group interview sessions. Due to a number of factors (including budget considerations, facilities use, and time constraints), two focus group sessions were held for each of the two grade level divisions: Grades 4-5 and Grades 6-8. Explicit and matching instructions were provided to each focus group so that each session

followed the same standard procedure. Although it was not necessary to convene focus groups more than once to reach data or thematic saturation, this possibility was discussed with study participants during the recruitment phase and was reflected in the consent forms.

The following interview plan includes an introductory question, transition questions, focus questions, and a summarizing question (Liamputtong, 2011). Probing, specifying, and follow-up questions were incorporated into the interview plan as a way to promote the expansion of thoughts and experiences in more detail. The questions within the interview plan addressed the study's four research questions. These interview questions solicited insight into parental perceptions around the strengths and weaknesses of the outcome-based report card. In addition, the questions sought ideas from parents about strategies or resources that would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card. With these four research questions in mind, a list of interview questions were created for use within the focus groups sessions (see Appendix C).

Through this focus group interview process, a wealth of information was generated. To gain a preliminary understanding of the results, initial themes were recorded as they emerged from the data. Interrelationships of these themes were identified using Computer Assisted/Aided Qualitative Data AnalysiS (CAQDAS) software. The software program NVivo provided an independent way to identify themes and manage large amounts of unstructured, narrative data (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2012). This software program facilitated the construction of relational networks by identifying the content and structure of respondents' opinions in a way that communicated meaning clearly (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2012). Use of this software program reduced the burden of data analysis, making it possible to identify additional meaningful inferences from the data.

Content analysis. By identifying trends and specific commonalities, content analysis was an objective and systematic way to make inferences from messages (Stemler, 2001). Inferences made through content analysis were substantiated using other data collection and analysis methods. During the content analysis stage, the process of coding and categorization of data occurred, making the results of the analysis more meaningful than simply determining which words appeared most frequently (Stemler, 2001).

Historical/Archival data. For the purpose of triangulation, descriptive summaries of historical/archival survey data were used to confirm the information collected in the focus group interview sessions. Prior to 2010, the Yellowknife Education District No.1 distributed parent surveys that used a variety of Likert-type scale and open-ended questions to investigate elements of parental support (that is, home-school communication, home support for learning, and parental support for learning at school). The questions regarding home-school communication of student progress appeared to be similar to those in the proposed focus group interview protocol. For example, the survey question that addressed the research question Q1 "What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?" is similar to the parent survey question from the Yellowknife Education District No.1 that is stated as, "To what extent do you believe that you receive clear information about how well your child is doing at school?" The survey question that addressed research question Q2 "How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card?**"** related to the survey question, "To what extent do you feel that your child's achievement is regularly monitored?" The survey question that addressed research question Q3 "What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to the strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?" was similar to the survey question, "To what extent do you feel that the school's grading practices are fair?"

The historical/archival survey data were organized into simple descriptive summaries according to themes that a) appeared to match themes generated in the focus group interview sessions; b) appeared not to match those themes, but still address concerns around the report card, and c) were altogether new themes relevant to evaluation of the outcome-based report card. The process of triangulation increased the strength of the inferences made from the results.

Discussion. The results of the statistical data analysis were followed by specific quotes and relevant information as they applied to the themes of the study. This format made it possible to use the discussion section to highlight the results of the triangulation process. The results of the data analysis were provided in a summary format within the discussion section. The data were described in a narrative discussion format that used evidence to support thematic connections and quotes from the interviews. In addition, data were presented in tabular and graphic format, providing readers with multiple ways to access the information.

Assumptions

Although assumptions are often beyond the control of the researcher and may be taken for granted, they form the foundation of research (Dusick, 2014; Ellis & Levy, 2012). Assumptions are made at each step in the research process, often without concrete proof of truthfulness (Ellis & Levy, 2012). Unless these assumptions are explicitly documented, they can lead to a misunderstanding of the research results. In order to increase confidence in the reliability of the results, a number of assumptions were addressed within this study of parental perceptions of the outcome-based report card within the context of Yellowknife Education District No.1.

There existed an assumption that participants within the focus group answered honestly and openly. To address this assumption, steps were taken to gain voluntary informed consent of

the parents. Assurances were made to parents as a way to eliminate any elements of coercion (like risk of prejudice or ill feelings towards students) within the consent process (Girvan & Savage, 2012; Hicks, 2010a; Nutbrown, 2011; Northcentral University, 2010). Confidentiality will protect parents in the case that they openly criticize the school, teachers, the use of the outcome-based report card, or both. Although it is difficult to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity within the focus group setting (Hicks, 2010b; Moreno, Fost, & Christakis, 2008), parents were told the limits of confidentiality protection before proceeding with the data collection process (Krueger & Casey, 2009). These assurances, along with the opportunity to debrief after the group session, fostered open and honest answers from parents.

One of the biggest assumptions made in this case study is the ability of parents to articulate their thoughts and feelings about the outcome-based report card effectively. An assumption exists that parents will know why they support or do not support the outcome-based report card. For the results of this case study to be meaningful within the context of Yellowknife Education District No.1, parents had to express their perceptions of the outcome-based report card clearly. To attempt to address this assumption, a trial of the focus group interview session was held. Information gained from this trial session was used to make inferences about the question route and the way that the questions encouraged parents to express their thoughts and feelings openly.

By explicitly documenting the research assumptions in this way, potential for misunderstanding of the results of the research was minimized. Addressing the research assumptions demonstrated a thorough awareness of elements that would have otherwise been taken for granted. The questioning and justification of the significant assumptions enhanced the integrity and transparency of this research study.

Limitations

Threats to validity detract from the value and quality of the inferences that could be made from this study. A major threat to validity for this study was the social desirability effects of the interviews. Parents might have falsely claimed that they understood the outcome-based report card for fear that sharing any contrary statements about the policies of the district would negatively impact their child's progress through the school system. Such threats to validity were addressed by ensuring confidentiality to the best of this author's ability. To allay parent's concerns, comments shared by parents were not linked to individual names. The limits of confidentiality protection were described to parents prior to moving forward with the data collection process (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

Delimitations

To minimize the threats to validity in data collection issues, contradictory results were reexamined. Specific ways that the contradictions impact the inferences are noted in this final report. To increase construct validity in the category of translation validity through face validity and criterion-related validity, leaders within the Yellowknife Education District No.1 were involved in discussions regarding the results.

In order to ensure integrity, researchers must justify and state with conviction that the conclusions of their research are accurate and truthful. In this case, the research process was designed to capture a true picture of the parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card as used within the schools of the Yellowknife Education District No.1. Through the combined use of graphs, charts, and narrative dialogue, the author made every effort to communicate a clear and concise representation of the data analysis in the discussion section of the study.

Ethical Assurances

Doctoral research must have validity and integrity to have a meaningful contribution to the scholarship in the field (Delandshere, 2007; Fanelli, 2009). Any researcher who lacks integrity risks jeopardizing others and violates ethical standards. The quality of the research depends upon how well the research process leads to valid conclusions, inferences, or propositions (Delandshere, 2007; Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Although a number of social benefits have been gained through scientific research, scientific research has also presented troubling ethical concerns (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The basic ethical principles relevant to this case study on the topic of parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card included principles of respect of persons, beneficence, and justice (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

In this case study that explored parental perceptions of the outcome-based report card, informed consent of the parents was voluntary. Assurances to parents were made to eliminate any elements of coercion (like risk of prejudice or ill feelings towards students) within the consent process (Girvan & Savage, 2012; Hicks, 2010a; Nutbrown, 2011; Northcentral University, 2010). Since full disclosure of the research purpose could have resulted in a change of behavior in parents, a waiver of elements of consent was implemented to make it possible to omit select elements of information during the consent process (Girvan & Savage, 2012; Hicks, 2010a).

Over the last seven years, efforts by Yellowknife Education District No.1 to solicit information from parents using a survey process and town hall meetings have normalized the data collection processes. For this reason, parental permission and participation in a focus group

interview process was easily accepted. To ensure free choice and to comply with the principle of respect for persons, parents were informed that they may choose to stop participating at any time (Hicks, 2010a; Miller, Hayeems, & Bytautas, 2012).

Approval from the International Review Board (IRB) was gained before the data collection occurred. The IRB application process draws attention to numerous factors that must be assessed, including research procedure, informed consent, and debriefing (Miller et al., 2012; Northcentral University, 2010). It was found that this case study posed no more that minimal risk to parent subjects because discussions with parents about their feelings about educational initiatives falls naturally within the educational setting.

The researcher assured parents involved in the focus groups that their comments would be treated confidentially. Information divulged by parents through focus group discussions were not linked to the respondent's identifiers (Krueger & Casey, 2009). It was recognized that maintaining control of confidentiality would be challenging because it was impossible to guarantee that participants would not repeat comments outside of the group (Hicks, 2010b; Moreno, Fost, & Christakis, 2008). For this reason, participants were provided with information describing the limits of confidentiality protection prior to proceeding with the data collection process (Krueger & Casey, 2009). As part of this process, the participants were given an opportunity to debrief after the focus group session (Hicks, 2010b). This process made parents more comfortable about participating in the focus groups. Through the study, sound science was preserved, and human subjects were protected (Fiore, 2010; Nutbrown, 2011).

Although this study took place outside of the United States, only a few concerns regarding international research were relevant (Hicks & Simmerling, 2007). Every effort was made to ensure that the standards of research were upheld so that all persons were treated with

dignity and respect, embodying the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Given that Aboriginal populations make up 29% of the population of Yellowknife's school district (Statistics Canada, 2010), every effort was made to gain sufficient knowledge of the local Aboriginal cultural factors. This cultural knowledge influenced the research design, and it was beneficial to draw upon this researcher's personal knowledge and insight into the local research context, including local politics, customs, and cultural protocols.

Conflicts of interest are inescapable (Fanelli, 2009; Fiore, 2010), especially in complicated studies like this one on the topic parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card. By assessing conflict of interest issues early in the process, it was possible to reduce the likelihood of misconduct. It was important to address issues in managing conflicts of interest and minimizing conflicts that involved competing loyalties. The situation of competing interests could have arisen between the desire to meet the needs of the participants and the needs of the school board to whom this author's professional contractual duties are owed (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Any suspicion that the findings of this case study were shaped by predispositions and biases would be a barrier to the study's credibility and the integrity in the analysis (Kolb, 2012; Patton, 2002). Any existing perceptions that the case study was biased in favour of school board's decision to shift towards outcome-based reporting were addressed. To avoid potential conflict of interest concerns, circumstances that influenced conduct and actual misconduct were clearly distinguished. Any predispositions and biases were made explicit at the onset of the study, and negative suspicions were countered (Kolb, 2012; Patton, 2002).

Addressing ethical concerns effectively is important in the execution of sound research, even when the research is small-scale and localized to a specific school or classroom, as it is in

this case study (Nolan &Vander Putten, 2007). Inferences made from the results will have greater validity if the threats to conclusion validity can be dismissed as being unlikely (Nolan &Vander Putten, 2007). Ethical considerations are addressed within the following discussion section and that conclusions of this research were justified and stated with conviction. Sufficient details were included in this section to allow readers to assess the merit of the research on the topic of parental perceptions of the outcome-based report card (Northcentral University, 2010). Despite any personal beliefs about this topic, all information is included in the discussion so that readers can make clear judgments based on the data provided (Northcentral University, 2010). An effective representation of the data analysis communicated the results of the study in a clear, concise, and unbiased manner.

Because scientific research is about seeking innovative solutions to complex problems, the risk taking involved in completing research is susceptible to error (Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and Institute of Medicine (COSEPUP), 2009). The exploration of new ideas is challenging and researchers who partake in these activities should not be condemned as being misguided or negligent as long as quality research techniques and methods are used (COSEPUP, 2009). As a responsible researcher, every effort was made to reduce errors in developing the research design, recording of the data, and minimizing threats to validity. Fortunately, little to no human errors happen occurred in the execution this case style, and all honest mistakes were explained appropriately in the discussion section (Angell & Dixon-Woods, 2009; COSEPUP, 2009). Research on the topic of the parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card did not present life-threatening implications. Even so, the study was developed to

meet scientific standards, so that it did not jeopardize the public perception of the educational system through inappropriate interpretations of the data.

Scientific research can be validated by subsequent research by others who reproduce the study (Schmoch & Schubert, 2007). The later researcher may correct any mistakes that have been made earlier (COSEPUP, 2009). However, actual replication of this case study on parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card would be difficult because is it localized to a specific school district. Instead, any errors made have been noted and corrected in such a way that maintained the original intent of the research while protecting other researchers from using erroneous data in later research (COSEPUP, 2009). Because science is a social enterprise, the peer review process becomes another way that to reduce faults (Bornmann, & Daniel, 2008; Church, Jonathon, & Collyer, 1996; King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994; Schmoch & Schubert, 2007). The discussion section of the dissertation will identify any inaccuracies in the research process, thereby providing transparency and honesty to readers, including the major stakeholders who may be impacted by the inferences made from the data.

Summary

A case study research method was selected to explore parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1. The study explored the thoughts and concerns that parents of students in Grades 4-8 have around the outcome-based report card. The research plan employed four structured focus groups of 4-6 parents each. Descriptive summaries of historical/archival surveys were used to triangulate the primary interview data gathered through focus group interviews. Text and narrative data were analyzed via author identification of emergent themes and the use of the CAQDAS software program called NVivo (QSR International Pty, 2012). The results of the data analysis were

provided in a summary format within the discussion section. The data were described in a narrative discussion that used evidence to support thematic connections and quotes from the interviews. The discussion section highlighted the results of the triangulation process. Assumptions were identified and addressed in order to increase confidence in the reliability of the results. A number of ethical assurances were made to ensure that participants were not put at risk or subjected to harm. With these considerations in place, this research plan resulted in scholarly research that contributed to the field of knowledge in the area of parental perceptions of the outcome-based report card.

Chapter 4: Findings

The primary purpose of this qualitative methods single case study was to investigate parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the schools of the Yellowknife Education District No.1, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in Canada. The secondary purpose of this study was to determine the types of resources or strategies to increase parental understanding and use of the outcome-based report card. Research on formative assessment indicated that use of tools like the outcome-based report card enhanced student learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009; O'Connor, 2009; O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Marzano, 2010). At the same time, available research has suggested that the shift from the traditional report card to the outcome-based report card has not been consistently supported or understood by parents (Deslandes, et al., 2009; Hayward & Spencer, 2010; Massell, 2008; Mathura 2008; O'Connor, 2009; Reeves, 2011; Schmidt, 2008; Stiggins, 2008; Sutton, 2009). Without parental support for the outcome-based report card, any benefits to student learning associated with its use cannot be realized to the fullest extent possible (O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Reeves, 2011). In order to identify the barriers to acceptance and support, the proposed study queried parents directly about their concerns, support levels, and understanding of the outcome-based report card.

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative analysis performed on focus group interview data collected from parents of students in Grades 4-8 within the Yellowknife Education District No.1. The interview data were reviewed using both the author's expertise and automated text analyses in order to identify emergent themes concerning parental perceptions of the outcome-based report card. For triangulation purposes only, a presentation of the qualitative analysis of the historical/archival parent survey data as collected by Yellowknife Education

District No 1 has been included. Descriptive summary results relevant for triangulation of core data were used to triangulate results of focus group interview data. A summary of these results follows at the end of this chapter.

To form the focus groups, 26 of the 410 parents accepted the invitation to participate in a focus group. Seventeen of these 26 parents were present for the sessions, representing 24 students (11 students in Grades 4-5 and 13 students in Grades 6-8) from the total student population of 572 in Grades 4-8 (see Table 1). Because qualitative research methodology suggests that researchers need to continue to search themes until saturation is reached (Krueger, 2009, Liamputtong, 2011), data collection for this study was stopped when categories reached theoretical saturation and core categories emerged (Silverman, 2011). The N value of 17 was considered sufficient for this study, as there was no theoretical reason to believe that an N value more than 17 was required to get valid results Krueger, 2009, Liamputtong, 2011, Silverman, 2011). Table 1 provides a summary of the focus group recruitment and participation.

Data from the historical/archival descriptive summary results retrieved from parent surveys were analyzed for the purpose of triangulation. From 2006-2012, the Yellowknife Education District No.1 distributed occasional surveys to parents to assess their support for and understanding of various school initiatives, including those related to assessment and reporting. Response rates varied from survey to survey. Although no firm numbers are available to know how many surveys were distributed, if the entire parent population of the district was targeted, that number would equal approximately 650 parents (Statistics Canada, 2012). In 2011, 181 responses were received for an estimated response rate of 25% (Yellowknife Education District No.1, 2011). The results of two main surveys executed 2006 and 2011 were used for the purpose of triangulation.

Following a presentation of the results in Chapter 4, the author will provide an interpretation of the results as they apply to the research questions. This interpretation is found in Chapter 5. Four research questions were used to investigate parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1.

Q 1. What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?

Q 2. How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card?

Q 3. What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?

Q 4. What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?

The results of the study is presented logically and in a way that answers the research questions contextually and with attention to detail.

Results

Three major themes emerged from coding to saturation across four focus group interviews. From the four focus group interviews, 17 participants represented 24 students in Grades 4-8 across schools in Yellowknife Education District No.1. A presentation of the three thematic categories resulting from the data collected from the four focus groups follows. Due to the structure of the focus group questioning sequence, the themes addressed the research questions closely. These themes helped identify the reasons behind parental resistance to adoption of the new report card while also suggesting improvements to the format for increased acceptance:

Barriers to Understanding: *(Addresses two questions: 1)* ***Q 2.*** *How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card? 2)* ***Q 3.*** *What are the*

concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?)

- Language – How well do parents understand the language of the report card (that is, teacher jargon, confusing terms, phrases, etc.)?
- Grading Levels – Do parents understand what the grading levels mean? Do parents understand the range of achievement indicated by the grading levels? Are parents able to connect the grading levels to the familiar ranges of letter grades and percentages?
- Individualization – Do parents believe the report card is personalized to show their individual child's progress?

Barriers to Support: *(Addresses two questions: 1)* ***Q 1.*** *What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card? 2)* ***Q 3.*** *What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?)*

- Lack of Useful Information
  - Home Support – To what extent do parents find information in the report card useful in helping them support their child to learn at home?
  - Motivation -- Do parents believe the report card is useful in motivating their child to do better?
  - Indication of Progress – Do parents find the report card shows them student progress over the year?
  - Communication Tool—Do parents view the report card as an effective way to communicate information about their child or do parents rely on

face-to-face discussions, emails, and phone calls with teachers to find about their child's progress.

Needs: What do parents need from a report card? Recommendations. *(Addresses **Q 4.** What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?)*

Through the process of data analysis, the comments of the focus group participants were coded in conjunction with the thematic categories to provide conclusions for this study. It should be noted that not all comments were related to the focus group themes, and the transcription data may not capture participant opinions in the form of nonverbal communication, such as nodding in agreement, looking down, etc.

Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding

The first major category included data collected from all four focus groups and captured the parents' level of understanding of the outcome-based report card. Parents of students in Grades 4 to 8 need to interpret the outcome-based report card to have the same meaning as the teachers who provided the information. Major Category 1 was developed in such a way that three barriers to understanding were identified. These barriers represent three thematic categories: Language, Grading Levels, and Individualization.

Table 2 represents the number of sources (four focus groups) in which a specific response was given in relation to the major category of Barriers to Understanding (and the three related thematic categories: Language, Grading Levels, and Individualization) and the total number of the references within all focus groups. A review of Table 2 shows that there were 154 responses related to the major category of Barriers to Understanding. Table 2 addresses the following research questions: Q 2. *How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based*

report card, and Q 3. *What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?*

Results of the qualitative analysis of data collected within the major category of Barriers to Understanding is presented by reviewing misunderstandings around language, grading levels, and individualization.

Factors around language that impacted understanding. Results of the analysis revealed that references to the thematic category of Language made up 40% or 60 out of 154 total responses. The key question related to this theme of Language was: *How well do parents understand the language of the report card (that is, teacher jargon, confusing terms, phrases, etc.)?* The thematic category of Language included responses like this comment from a parent of focus group 3:

> Plain language, take it right down. Most of the time when they talk about any kind of pamphlets or anything that you're producing for general population, you should be taking it down to -- I don't know, what do they say, grade 6?

Parents described their understanding of the report card being hampered by the language used in the report card. These parents struggled with making sense of unfamiliar pedagogical terms and teacher-jargon used in the report card. One parent form focus group 2 advised:

> Whether it's teaching, whatever area that you have your career in, there's so much jargon and I think it's really important that we stay away from jargon, because we all have our own jargon in our own areas of life, but we can't expect other people to understand the acronyms in the jargon. I always worked really hard when I'm at meetings in that I do to not use acronyms and to not use jargon, because I think you exclude people really, really,

quickly that way, and I feel like there's so much jargon in the report card. There may be a really good word to exemplify what you're talking about, but if it's not at the grade four or to six level then most people would need help to interpret the reporting system.

During discussion about issues around misunderstanding language of the outcome-based report cards, two parents of focus group 2 talked about the need for accessible language for all parents regardless of education, race, or both. The dialogue followed:

Parent A: Even sometimes when they are they're using language or terminology that I'm finding difficult to understand for lack of -- yeah just kind of --

Parent B: So then my concern would be if we struggle with the terminology, maybe people that are less educated --

Parent A: Or English as a second language or whatever.

Parent B: Yeah exactly.

Parent A: That it would be even harder to interpret it.

Parent B: We have lots and lots of people now coming into our community that are that way, and we should make sure that everybody can understand for their child.

In this regard, parents recognized how a misunderstanding of language impacts understanding of the outcome-based report card.

Factors around grading levels that impact understanding. Responses on the topic of Grading Levels reflected 56% or 87 out of 154 total responses (see Table 2). Questions that related to the theme of Grading Levels included: *Do parents understand what the grading levels mean? Do parents understand the range of achievement indicated by the grading levels? Are parents able to connect the grading levels to the familiar ranges of letter grades and percentages?*

One example of a statement falling under the thematic category of grading came from one parent of focus group 1 who said that the grading levels " allows me to understand if there is an issue in a certain area because the curricular outcome is listed and . . . if it's a 3 or a 2." Other responses from parents revealed that the understanding of the outcome-based report card was due confusion around the meaning of the grading levels and how they relate to levels of achievement familiar to parents. One parent of focus group 3 described a feeling of confusion around the meaning of the grading levels:

> I don't know if it's because I need to take the time to learn the new system, but I found with the A, B, C's approach I at least knew where my child was. I understood what an A was and what a B was. I could see my child better on that continuum than I can with this type of terminology that they're using here. It could just be that parents haven't been educated about what those statements mean. Or using the grades like the zero to 100% is easier, as a parent, for me to understand where my child is. My child might be approaching or meeting expectations but are they meeting them well, or are they meeting them just barely?

Getting to the root of misunderstandings around grading levels used within the outcome-based report card should contribute to supporting parental understanding of this tool.

Factors around individualization that impact. Lastly, references to the thematic category of Individualization represented 19% or 30 out of 154 total responses in this major theme (see Table 2). The key question related to this thematic category was: *Do parents believe the report card is personalized to show their individual child's progress?* A parent of focus group 3 stated an example of a response falling within this thematic category:

> I wanted to make one comment about the bottom section on that first page, the goals. What I really appreciate in this year is I could see evidence that my child had talked with her teacher about ways that she could change. Things that she felt she needed to change and how she was going to try and do that. The comments that were made there were almost in my daughter's own words. I could recognize that's definitely her. I liked that she was involved in that part of it where I could see evidence of that.

Another parent of focus group 1 expressed a lack of individualization in the outcome-based report card:

> I find there's a few paragraphs that give you a little bit of insight about specifics about your child, but for the most part I found it very cut and pasted information about what they did. I found I didn't gain much from it.

Several parents expressed a need to see the characteristics of their child reflected in the report card. For example, one parent of focus group 3 mentioned that the outcome-based report card lacked individualization. When reading the outcome-based report card, this parent stated, “It doesn't even sound like the teacher sometimes knows who my kid is.” While other parents speculated that teachers had to “cut and paste” standard comments from one report to another in order complete the arduous task of report card writing.

Data derived from the analysis of the first major category of Barriers to Understanding can be used to determine parents’ level of understanding of the outcome-based report card. It is important that parents interpret the outcome-based report card to have the same meaning as the teachers who provided the information. To gain parental acceptance of the outcome-based report card, it is critical to mitigate the barriers to understanding, especially those related to issues around language, grading levels, and individualization.

Major Category 2: Barriers to support

The second major category included data collected from all four focus groups and captured the parents' level of support for the outcome-based report card. Because parental support is crucial for optimizing the benefits of the outcome-based report card format, their input needs to be collected for a thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of these report cards. Parents of students in Grades 4 to 8 need to interpret the outcome-based report card as a tool that provides useful information about their children's learning. Major Category 2 was developed in such a way that the four barriers to support were identified. These four thematic categories contributed to the barrier created by a lack of useful information: Home Support, Motivation, Indication of Progress, and Communication Tools.

Table 3 represents the number of sources (four focus groups) in which a specific response was given in relation to the major category of barriers to support (and the four related thematic categories) and the total number of the references within all focus groups. A review of Table 3 shows that there were 171 responses related to the major category of Barriers to Support (lack of useful information). Table 3 addresses the following two research questions: 1) Q 1. What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card? 2) Q 3. What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?

The results of the qualitative analysis of data collected within the major category of Barriers to Understanding were presented by reviewing a lack of useful information regarding home support, increasing student motivation, providing parents with an indication of student progress, and the outcome-based report card as an effective communication tool.

Useful information for home support. The results of the analysis revealed that references to the thematic category related to Home Support represented 8% or 13 out of 171 total responses in this major theme. The key question relating this theme was: *To what extent do parents find information in the report card useful in helping them support their child to learn at home?*

In connection to this theme, parents commented on the extent to which the information in the report card was useful in helping them support their child to learn at home. When asked about how the parent used the information in the outcome-based report card to help their child improve, one parent of focus group 4 reported:

> I usually go through and read it (the outcome-based report card) with each of them (children). I read it first, then I go through it with them. We talk about what they (children) got and especially in the areas where it shows that maybe they were progressing a year or more. Then I ask how they think they did. What I do like is what they do say a lot of times, that they set their own goals within the report card system, and so I ask them why they chose those goals and what they want from us and what can we do to help them with their goals. I find that those actually have been really helpful tools for them because they tend to follow through on them for the next report card.

One parent of focus group 2 expressed a need for the outcome-based report card to give information to support the child:

> Like really, truly where they're at and what we can do to help boost them along the way. My son's in grade four, we have until grade nine to get him to a point where he can be successful for high school when he has some areas that he struggles in. Like I said, he is definitely an outside-the-box thinker and it's hard in some areas when you're like that so a (letter or percentage) grade would definitely help.

Another parent of focus group 2 stated that the outcome-based report cards provided misinformation. This parent encountered information in the report card that conflicted with information provided through previous parent-teacher meetings:

> I visit my kids, teachers often. I'm not sure if I only relied on the report cards if I would believe anything they (the teachers) said. Because sometimes they (the children) brought their report card home, and I had read it and I had gone back to the teacher and said, "We've talked about spelling and we have a plan in place for improving spelling, so what you've written here doesn't make sense." Because my kids have student support and modified education plans, and the report card says they are meeting those plans, it looks like they're always doing well. So okay, the report card, it seems that no matter what, the report card is going to show that they're doing well. You're not giving me any real feedback, right? If I weren't into the school and was already understanding these support plans, and helping them with it at home, the report card would be meaningless.

Comments like these show that the lack of useful information for home support becomes an important barrier to overcome. Many parents expressed a desired to help their children at home. These parents look to the report card to provide the necessary information to guide their efforts at home.

Useful information to enhance motivation. References to the thematic category of Motivation represented 21% or 36 out of 171 total responses in this major theme. The key question relating to this theme was: *Do parents believe the report card is useful in motivating their child to do better?* Several parents expressed concern that the report did not serve the purpose of motivating their child to do better. Some parents described situations where their children were satisfied with getting a level 3, and they expressed the need for the report card to generate an incentive for

their children to improve. This parent of focus group 2 described her daughter's lack of motivation to improve after getting the outcome-based report card:

> There's no incentive there because you don't know where you are. My daughter comes home, she goes, "Well, I've got these fours and these threes." I said, "Well, how are you going to make these threes into fours?" "It's three. It's fine." There's no push. She thinks she's just smarter at that subject so of course the teacher is going to give her a four on it. As opposed to, you're going to work harder to achieve a four. That doesn't translate. These ones to fours don't translate as I'm going to work harder to do better, it just means, well, I'm just better at that subject, period.

Another parent of focus group 1 described a conversation with a teacher that resulted in the outcome-based report card grading system being discredited:

> When my daughter gets a 3 and she's upset about it and I go and talk to the teacher. I find out that the teacher just put her at 3 because the teacher wants to be able show some improvement over the next reporting period. At this point now, I just say to my daughter, "Well, you know you're going to get a 4 next term," and she does.

Although outcomes are listed on the report card, some parents described the report card as having a lack of useful and accessible information about ways to improve. Again, a parent of focus group 3 referenced the need for the report card to be a way to enhance student motivation to improve:

> I don't know how to motivate my daughter, based on that (report card) -- how to do better. Whereas when she shows me her English essay or she shows me her math score, we could go through the test, and those tests are graded. They're all graded. But we could go through that test and say, 'Well, could you understand this?' This issue. That I

> could do. I could help her with that. I could help her with a piece of paper where it says, 'This sentence lacks structure.' But to have all the stuff (outcomes) listed for a parent (on the report card) - it's much. It's a little much.

Useful information to indicate student progress. Results of the analysis also revealed that references to thematic category of Indication of Progress made up 43% or 73 out of 171 of the total responses (see Table 3). The key question that related to this theme was: *Do parents find the report card shows their children's progress?*

Due to the format of the report card, some parents struggled to find information that indicated learning progress over time. One parent of focus group 3 stated a desire to have a document that showed each session for comparison purposes:

> I really like report cards that have the three terms on it and it's one piece of paper. When you're trying to explain to your child how you did from this session compared to the last one, you have to find those papers. That's a lot of paperwork here, especially like the new ones now.

In contrast, another parent of focus group 1 found the meaning of the grading levels and the purpose of the outcome listings to be well articulated:

> For me, when I read the report card, it (the outcome stated) 'should be able to produce independent text at grade level' and then there is 1, 2, 3, or 4. My understanding of that is that my child should able to produce text at this level means that at the end of that term. At this point, they either were able to do that or they weren't able to do that. My understanding is if you get a 2, you weren't able to do it, but you're almost getting there. If you have a 3, you met the expectation, and if you got a 4, then you were able to produce text for a higher level of reading. I actually find that it's broken down very well.

At the same time, some parents expressed a desire for the outcome-based report card to indicate progress in a meaningful way for the student as well. For example, one parent of focus group 1 stated, "I really think we could do a better job in the schools, and probably as parents, too to help kids see how their skills are improving, and how much." When comparing the grading levels to the traditional percentage grades, a parent of focus group 1 stated:

> My son now said one of his favorite things about high school is that he knows where he is academically. He said he just never really had a sense of how he was doing, if he was getting better, if was slipping. Now, he knows what he can do.

Given the number of responses referencing the theme of Indication of Progress, a need for the outcome-based report card to provide accessible information to parents on their children's learning progress exists.

Useful information as a communication tool. Of the four thematic categories, the theme of the outcome-based report card as a communication tool had the highest level of references at 47% or 80 out of 171 total responses. The question that related to this theme was: *Do parents view the report card as an effective way to communicate information about their child or do parents rely on face-to-face discussions, emails, and phone calls with teachers to find about their child's progress?*

When asked if parents viewed the report card as an effective way to communicate information about their child, many stated that they still relied heavily on face-to-face discussions, emails, and phone calls with teachers to find about their child's progress. One parent of focus group 2 stated, "I just have to say, meeting with the teacher -- I got more out of setting the goals, having the conference with the child and the teacher than ever I got in the report cards, that's for sure."

At the same time, several parents appreciated the anecdotal comments provided within the written portion of the outcome-based report card. Another parent of focus group 1 stated, "I like the outcomes part - one thing I like about them is that it gives you language to talk about what they're learning and what they're good at."

By exploring thoughts and ideas around the effectiveness of the outcome-based report card to provide effective communication, foster motivation, indicate progress over time, and guide home support, this thematic category captured parents' level of support for the outcome-based report card.

Major Category 3: Needs

Major category 3, Needs, identified resources or strategies recommended by parents to improve the understanding of the outcome-based report card. Table 4 represents the number of sources (four focus groups) in which a specific response was given in relation to the major category of needs and the total number of the references within all focus groups. Table 4 addresses the following research questions: *Q 4. What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?* Eighty-two responses were related to this major category. The questions that related to this theme included: *What can be done to help for parents better understand the outcome-based report? Can you tell me more about the needs of parents?* In summary, the 82 responses related to this category represented 20% of the total responses provided within the focus groups that investigated the levels of parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card.

Many parents expressed the need for a plain language version or a glossary to be included with the report card. One parent of focus group 3 asked, "Is there any way we could get the one,

two, three, four better explained? I still don't get it." Parents of focus group 4 discussed the effectiveness of workshops and information sessions. One parent of focus group 1 suggested:

> Written examples, and even a page of the text they should be able to read without making more than five mistakes, whatever the teachers feel right. Right on the website, the kids could look at that and go, 'No I can't do that yet.' It's something to work towards rather than just sort of amorphous statements.

One parent of focus group 1 suggested that it would be helpful if teachers shared the curricular outcomes at the beginning of the year so that parents and students have a definite idea of their end goal for each term. This parent stated:

> I think that the idea of having the curricular outcomes communicated to the parents and students at the beginning, so that parents and students have a definite idea of their end goal for that term is really helpful because it also informs parents of whether or not it seems like the class work is reflective of the curricular outcome.

In addition, parents in all four focus groups recommended changes to the outcome-based report card that they believed would improve the effectiveness of this form of communication. Although not directly related to the research questions of this case study, these ideas may contribute to the creation of resources and strategies to mitigate barriers to parental understanding of and support for the outcome-based report card. Parents in all four focus groups expressed the desire for the report card to more of a snapshot of student learning. One parent of focus group 3 stated:

> It is way too much information. I find that I just want a snapshot. If I need to find out what my kid is doing in school, I talk to their teacher. If whatever, but the snapshot for

them, just needs to go. Math - pass or fail, go through and then they can see how they did from the first report card, the second report card, and the third report card.

Another parent in focus group 3 suggested that the report card be shortened: "We don't need a lot of writing because that's what the parent-teacher interview is for, as far as I'm concerned. You just need a quick overview."

Multiple parents stated that the outcome-based report card needed to show past term results so that student progress from term to term was easily seen. One parent in focus group 1 wanted a way to see an "incremental difference between how they (the student) did last time and how they're doing this time. Whether it goes up or it goes down." Despite the fact that this type of data does not directly answer the research questions of this case, these suggestions may contribute to the generation of strategies and resources that address parental needs.

Data derived from the analysis of the third major category of Needs can be used to determine resources or strategies recommended by parents to improve the understanding and support of the outcome-based report card. From the responses within this major category, it is possible to provide Yellowknife Education District No.1 with recommendations for continued implementation of the outcome-based report card. This discussion of the recommendations derived from parental responses within the category of Need will answer the question, "What do parents need from a report card?" and addresses ***Q 4.*** *What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?*

Interlocking themes

Because focus group responses were coded according to the themes they addressed, there were many instances where responses addressed more than one theme. Through the process of data analysis these responses were coded to identify interlocking themes. These interlocking

themes revealed new and useful information that contributed to the overall understanding of parental perceptions of the outcome-based report card within Yellowknife Education District No. 1. In this sense, a parent may describe a misunderstanding of the language, but unless the response was coded appropriately, the opportunity to explore the root of the misunderstanding would be lost. For example, this response from a parent in focus group 4 interlocked the themes of Grading Levels and Motivation:

> For me, I don't like the grades one, two, three, four in the report cards. It doesn't give them any incentive. My kids, they do well in school, but a three is easy to come by - not a big deal - because not anything there tells me where are they sitting in a three. A three can be like a 65 to an 85, and there's just nothing there that makes them go, 'Oh, I can move this from a 70 to a --' you know what I mean? There's just nothing there. Because it comes easy to them, it's not giving them the motivation to improve.

By placing this response as referencing both the themes of Grading Levels and Motivation, it is possible to conclude that the reason behind the parent's misunderstanding the grading levels is because there is a lack of information to enhance motivation. A richer understanding of the data is gained by identifying interlocking themes.

An overview of Table 5 revealed 75 responses that related to both major categories of Barriers to Understanding and Barriers to Support. Thirty-five responses referenced barriers related to both grading levels (*Questions: Do parents understand what the grading levels mean? Do parents understand the range of achievement indicated by the grading levels? Are parents able to connect the grading levels to the familiar ranges of letter grades and percentages?)* and indication of progress (*Questions: Do parents find the report card shows them student progress over the year?*).

In addition, Table 5 shows the frequency of focus group responses that overlap the related thematic categories within Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding and Major Category 2: Barriers to Support Lack of useful information. Responses of the focus group participants were coded in conjunction with the thematic categories to provide conclusions for this study. Table 5 shows the frequency of total focus group responses (462) with interlocking themes. The percentage of the total focus group responses is placed in parenthesis beside the number of referenced responses. For example, there were 12 responses, representing 3% of the total 462 responses, categorized within the themes of Grading Levels and Motivation. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the highest incidences of responses found within Table 5. For example, a review of Figure 1 shows a double-ended arrow between the themes of Grading Levels and Motivation, and beside the arrow is placed the number 12, indicating the number of responses referencing the interlocking themes, and the percentage of the total responses (3%).

Although Table 5 shows the interlocking themes related between the two major categories, it was possible to identify interacting themes within each major category as well. Tables 6 and 7 show the frequency of focus group responses that interrelate within the three major categories. For example, one parent of focus group 3 referenced a need that related to the theme of Home Support and the theme of Motivation:

> I've got to keep six pages every term, and then flip through that and try to explain this to my kids --- that it's more than just getting 20 fours on your report card. 'Here's what this means,' and I can't even explain that to my children.

Another parent of focus group 3 made a comment regarding both the theme of Language and the theme of Grading Levels as barriers within Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding. This parent stated:

> It's what you said about the too much information. I need to know how they did in math. I don't need to have to try to remember a list of ten things they did in math this term, which is different from the list of seven things they did in math next term. I need to know how they did in their numeracy, if they are going up the chart or are they coming down the chart.

Responses that reference more than one theme provide deeper insight into parental perceptions of the outcome-based report card.

Furthermore, Table 8 shows the frequency of focus group responses with interlocking themes within Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding, Major Category 2: Barriers to Support (Lack of Useful Information) and Major Category 3: Need. From this table, one can see that the frequency of responses referencing more than one theme range from zero to 35. For example, a response from one parent of focus group 1 referenced the theme of Grading Level from Major Category 1: Barrier to Understanding and the theme of Indication of Progress from Major Category 2: Barrier to Support:

> I guess a 3 could be the very bottom end of performing at expected outcome, or it could be at the very top end. I don't know. I just get a 3. I don't know if my daughter needs to work a little harder to get up to the 4 or if she's already just about there.

As Table 9 shows, each interlocking thematic combination addresses associated questions as they relate to the research questions. For example, the parent's response directly above provided a response to the question, "Does the grading level system let parents know their child's progress?" and relates to **Q 2.** *How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card?* Of all of the interlocking themes, the one that had the highest frequency of responses involved grading levels and indication of progress.

A review of Table 8 shows the highest frequency of responses that interact with the Major Category 3 - Need reference the themes of Language, Indication of Progress, and Grading Levels. With respect to the Major Category of Need, 82 responses or 18% of the total focus group responses (462) contribute to answering **Q 4.** *What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?* These responses overlap almost all of the themes identified through the analysis of the other two other major categories.

A number of parents referenced a need to have a report card that is readily understood. For example, one parent of focus group 1 made a comment referencing the Major Category 3 - Need and the theme of Language. This parent said, "I think that it needs to be plain language because I think that if you need a glossary or a dictionary to accompany your report card, then it is too complicated." With respect to interlocking themes, Table 9 illustrates how this statement responses links to **Q 4.** *What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?* and to the Language-Need question: *What types of language do parents need in order to understand the report card?*

With a statement that referenced Major Category 3 Need and the theme of Indication of Progress, a parent of focus group 1 responded to the interlocking question from Table 9: *What do parents need from the report card to see their child's progress?* This parent stated:

> How about linking it to-- not the kid's program, but I mean a link so you can go to a website where it has different levels of written, what kind of writing your child should be able to do at each grade level. And also, what kind of problems your kids should be able to solve in Math and just that, so that it's more concrete.

Among others, one parent of focus group 1 expressed a need related to the theme of Grading Levels, “What if they had ten numbers instead of four? That would give you more detail? Maybe it's how big the categories are.” A review of Table 9 identified that this statement related to the interlocking question: *What do parents need from the grading levels?* Upon further analysis, comments that reference Need will form the basis of answering **Q 4.** *What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?*

The following section describes the how triangulation using historical/archival can enhance the understanding of the four major findings.

Triangulation using historical/archival data

For the purpose of triangulation, a presentation of the results of the occasional surveys distributed by the Yellowknife Education District No.1 from 2006-2011 is included in the findings section. Two main studies, one from 2006 and one from 2011 form the basis of the historical/archival data used in the triangulation process. These surveys were distributed in order to assess parental support for and understanding of various school initiatives, including those related to home-school communication and the reporting of student progress. In order to validate the results of the study, data from historical/archival surveys were analyzed. In this case, the triangulation process validated many of the findings of the study. This next section is structured according to the four main findings of the study, aligning data from the triangulation process to each of the four findings:

1. Parents actively evaluate opportunities associated with learning about outcome-based report card. Parents expressed a desire to know about the outcome-based report card and how it connects to formats of which they were more familiar (like the letter grade or percentage systems). Data from the historical/archival data that aligned to this

finding from the study referred to parental perspectives of home-school communication and the extent to which parents expressed a need to know about the educational system as a whole, including assessment processes used by the school.

2. Parents actively seek plain language alternatives for educational terms, phrases, and references. Parents expressed a need for plain language alternatives for complex terms, phrases, and references in order to understand the information about student achievement as provided within the outcome-based report card. Data from the historical/archival data that aligned to this finding from the study connected to the extent that parents to readily understand the information provided from the school about the educational system.
3. Parents actively seek personalized comments and individualized report cards. In order to support and understand the outcome-based report card, parents require report cards that provide personalized comments that describe individual student strengths and needs. Data from the historical/archival data that aligned to this finding from the study linked to the need of parents to have specific and personal information about their children's achievement.
4. Parents actively seek grading levels that indicate student progress. Parents communicated the desire for clearly understood grading levels system so that they would know their children's progress. Data from the historical/archival data that aligned to this finding from the study referred to the extent to which parents were able to receive clear information about how their children was doing using the grading levels.

To start, a variety of responses from the historical/archival data align with the findings of the study regarding the extent to which parents actively evaluate opportunities associated with learning about assessment and evaluation, including but not limited to the outcome-based report card. From a survey of parents completed in 2006, a total of 20.4% of the parents indicated that their child's school communicated achievement expectations to them "always", 59.1% "most of the time", 13.1% "some of the time" and 2.2% "rarely" (Yellowknife Education District No.1 2006). As well, just over 50% of the responding parents indicated that they were aware of the school plan and indicated that the plan was shared with them. These results show that a majority of parents were receptive to information about school initiatives and aware of school plans for improvement.

However, a review of the 2011 parent survey revealed comments that showed a misunderstanding of change in the grading system, and the educational system as a whole. Comments like the one below validated the results of the case study in that found that parents desired information about the current assessment process and how the new information connects to formats of which they were more familiar:

> The marking system needs a complete overhaul. The idea that children are not held to a higher standard than just "meeting expectations" is not realistic and doesn't jive with the real world. Also, teachers don't seem to be on the same page about how to utilize the marking system. Most teachers will tell you that no student will receive a 4 until the end of the year at best, however, then there are teachers who give 4's in the first reporting period. My daughter received a 3 for her reading level, yet at parent/teacher meetings I was told she tested 2 levels above where she should be reading??? I am not sure I understand then how she could only have received a 3, the current system is NOT

> reflective of the student's actual performance and isn't trusted by parents. With this system you have no idea where your child is academically until they enter high school and actually start receiving marks. School isn't supposed to be about being fair and ensuring that the poor performers aren't singled out - school should be about preparing children for their academic/work future and the real world, professors/employers want ambitious results driven people so should we not be preparing our children to face the realities of the world we actually live in?

Misunderstandings like the one cited above were echoed in the current study, validating the study's finding that parents are actively seeking information about the school system, including assessment.

In addition, two parents who responded to the 2011 survey indicated that "parents are not always dealt with appropriately when requesting information or following up with students' work plans" and that "teachers are waiting till report time to state students are not completing class projects, or not doing homework, the first missed assignment should be when a parent is informed." A third parent described frustration when trying to find information about the assessment system:

> I find there is never enough communication between parents and teachers. Yes, we can go check the websites for homework, but unless I am constantly at the schools or talking to teachers I would have no idea my child was failing until report card time and quite frankly that seems too late for me.

Although that the surveys of 2006 and 2011 do not reference the outcome-based report cards specifically, comments like these confirm the findings of the study in that they show that parents

expressed a desire to know about student assessment and how it connects to formats of which they were more familiar (like the letter grade or percentage systems).

The triangulation process also confirmed the results from the study that parents actively seek plain language alternatives for educational terms, phrases, and references. Although Over 75% of the respondents of the 2006 parent survey indicated that they received clear information about how their child was doing "always" or "most of the time", one parent expressed the need for parents "to be better informed about what is happening with their children on both an education and social level." Another parent requested the report cards to be more understandable. Parents who responded to the 2011 parent survey echoed this need for plain language alternatives for the report card. One parent wrote, "Report Cards - number or letter marks are needed. The descriptions don't make it clear what the mark is so the feedback parents and students get is also muddled and unclear." Another parent stated dissatisfaction with the way the school communicated information about what the curriculum entails. Although both the 2006 and 2011 surveys were general in nature, these statements showed that parents were in support of plain language alternatives for educational terms and phrases when receiving information from the school about their children's educational experiences.

The study found that parents actively seek personalized comments and individualized report cards. Although a review of the 2006 parent survey revealed that approximately 80% or more of the respondents indicated "always" or "most of the time" to questions relating to their children being told how well they are doing, data from survey of 2011 referenced a number of parent concerns about the individualization of the report cards. For example, a parent response from the 2011 stated:

> The new report cars have got to go!! I have yet to meet one person in this town who likes or agrees with them. Too generic. A few of us parents sat around comparing with completely different children and all 6 were the exact same. Sort of ironic, don't you think?

Another parent who responded to the 2011 survey stated, “I wish the teachers would know more about the students.” While another parent expressed concern about how his or her child’s achievement was stated in comparison to the success of other children in the class rather than measured as an individual according to the curriculum:

> Having 3 children in YK 1 I find it concerning when one is particularly not doing well and I am told repeatedly by the teachers - "Well, she's not the worst in the class." Why is that always ok for everyone? Why would my teachers not expect her to learn to her potential and not coast through? It is always passed to the parents to emphasize the importance of doing better because the teachers don't care. Their just happy she's passing?? When your child comes home with 18% overall mark on her AAT's (Alberta Achievement Tests) - I'm not ok with that!

The triangulation process confirmed the need of parents to received personalized information that spoke directly to the needs of their children as individuals.

Finally, the triangulation process was used to validate the results of the study that showed that parents actively seek grading levels that indicate student progress. Over 75% of the respondents of the 2006 parent survey indicated that they receive clear information about how their child was doing “always” or “most of the time”. The 2006 survey results also revealed that over 70% of the respondents replied “always” or “most of the time” to questions relating to the school keeping them informed about programs, expectations, rules and classroom routines and

being informed quickly about any concerns about their children. Although the 2006 parent survey collected data from parents regarding school programs in a general way, the triangulation process showed that some parents were in need of clear information about their children's educational experiences, including achievement.

The triangulation process uncovered data retrieved from respondents to the 2011 parent survey that clearly confirmed the results of the study addressing concerns around the outcome-based report cards. For example, one parent questioned the existence of common grading practices among teachers:

> Why do some years my kids come home with great math marks to have crappy marks the next year? So it cannot ALL be my kid's fault. Some of it has to be the lack of consistency in teaching and grading.

Another parent referenced the need for the outcome-based system to indicate student progress as a way to improve student learning and prepare students for the future:

> The way the system - even the Report cards - are set up, it does not encourage these children to push themselves. They look at it like hey I am a "3" if I get 65% - 90% so why try harder. A "4" may not be obtainable for them - but we have lost the incentive for kids to push themselves. We seem to have moved into a direction when "feelings" are taking precedent over education. I want and need our school system to prepare them for the future and they need to learn that it matters if you try harder. They also need to learn that sometimes it's okay to lose - these are life skills and I am afraid we are creating a generation that cannot cope.

Similarly, this parent stated:

> They (students) feel they are just a number being shuffled through. I don't agree with the numbers game . . . in never failing children or even giving low grades. Sure a bad mark or failing a grade can discourage a child but what about mine who put the extra effort into their assignments or grades only to be the same as another child who didn't even hand in their assignments or did but was terrible. Usually in this case, an extension is not given. That destroys my children! What message do you think your sending them? I cannot go to my boss and ask for an extension every time my work isn't complete, on time or accurate.

With respect to the use of the grading levels, one parent requested that Yellowknife Education District No.1 revert to the traditional, and more familiar, numeric report card that described student learning using a percentage (for example, 80% versus '3'). Another parent stated:

> I do not believe in "no child left behind" or this 1-4 grading system. The real world doesn't work like that. I want to know where my child stands and how to help out - where he needs it. And if teachers choose not to give 4's -- take them off the report card. This doesn't give the child much to aim for.

When triangulated with data from the study, comments like these from the 2011 parent survey confirm that parents look for grading levels that indicate student progress.

This brief overview of the results presents data of this qualitative methods single case study on the topic of parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the schools of the Yellowknife Education District No.1, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in Canada. The data analysis in this section presented data in a logical way to answer the four research questions related to this investigation. For the purpose of triangulation, a presentation of the results of the occasional surveys distributed by the Yellowknife Education

District No.1 from 2006-2011 was included in findings section. The following section will report this author's interpretation of the data in light of current theories and research related to formative assessment that initially prompted the implementation of the outcome-based report card within this district.

Evaluation of Findings

Report cards serve as a valuable way to communicate student progress and achievement to parents and students. Within Yellowknife Education District No. 1 the decision to move to an outcome-based report card format was based on research on the benefits of formative assessment and the use of formative assessment in the grading and reporting procedures (Black & Wiliam, 2009; O'Connor, 2009; O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Marzano, 2006). The shift to the use of the outcome-based report card represents a significant change in how information about student learning and progress was presented to parents within Yellowknife Education District No.1. Even though there was growing agreement among educators and researchers that formative assessment benefits students learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009; O'Connor, 2009; O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Marzano, 2006), research has been lacking regarding effective strategies for gaining parental support for this change. As a result, parents have been largely excluded from contributing their thoughts and ideas about a public matter that has a direct personal impact on their children.

Because parental support and understanding of the report card is critical for the continued implementation of this report card format, leaders within Yellowknife Education District No.1 must address any barriers to acceptance by listening to the voices of parents who are directly impacted by decisions made around their children's education. The results of this qualitative case study provided insight into parental perspectives of the outcome-based report card after

more than five years of its original implementation in Yellowknife Education District No.1. This project investigated the complex interplay of several factors (including student assessment, parental involvement in education, and parental cognitions about student assessment issues and formats) that impact the parental acceptance of the outcome-based reporting format.

The following section provides this author's interpretation of the results as they align with current theories on formative assessment, how they compare to other studies, and how they contribute to the field of study on this topic. This discussion also describes how the four research questions that were used to investigate this important topic have been address through the results of the study. Through this discussion, data about parental perceptions around the outcome-based report card will be available to inform debates and policy discussions on the implementation of the outcome-based report card within Yellowknife Education District No. 1 and into other regions of the Northwest Territories where changes in assessment and reporting procedures have been forthcoming. In light of research on formative assessment and student engagement, the results of this study have uncovered barriers to understanding and support that must be mitigated for the benefit of student achievement. In addition, the results revealed recommendations for possible resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card.

Parents actively evaluate opportunities associated with learning about outcome-based report card. Findings from the study show that parents actively evaluate opportunities associated with learning about the outcome based report card. This finding addressed research questions **Q 2.** *How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card?*. and **Q 4.** *What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?* Of the total number of responses (462), 151 or 34% of the

comments referenced the Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding. Parents expressed a desire to know about the outcome-based report card and how it connects to formats of which they were more familiar (like the letter grade or percentage systems). When asked to explain their understanding of the outcome-based report card, some parents responded with accurate information. For example, one parent of focus group 4 stated:

> I do like in the core subjects where they do have the list of this is what we expected this term, with the math and the language so then there are some specific measurables there. That gives you a little bit more detail of a breakdown of this is what we (students) covered this term. This is what we expected of them.

Another parent of focus group 1 described the benefits of the outcome-based report card grading levels over the letter grade system. This parent stated:

> For English, if he (the student) would get an A, B or C in English, it wouldn't actually reflect (his skills). He might sit at a C because his vocabulary and understanding of language is really, really high, but his ability to write is really, really low. So, the breakdown and the outcomes tell me that he's above grade level, at a 4 in vocabulary and comprehension, and then it tells me that he's below grade level in the written work. I can see exactly where he's doing really well, and where he is not. I don't think that kind of combining it into just one A, B, or C for English would really give a sense of that.

However, some parents described confusion about the outcome-based system because it differed from what was familiar. These parents were puzzled about the outcome-based (or criterion-referenced) system as it compared to the norms-referenced system of assessment. This resulted in a convoluted understanding of the meaning of grading levels on the report card. One parent of

focus group 3 described a need to know where their child ranked and how their child compared with students in the rest of the class:

> I use more our conference when we meet with the teacher - where we are class wise and target wise for my kid in comparison to everybody else. I just don't find that I can get that information on the report card. I guess, it kind of comes back to (the idea) that they are both (students) being graded the same, but yet their spectrum of reading differs and when the teacher says, "Well, you know, one's just on the low end of the two and the other one's on the high end of the two." That is where I see the (outcome-based) spectrum might be a little bit too broad. Where if you have a mark, you know, this child gets a 50, where this child's getting a 60. You can then say, well okay, maybe it was just a couple of tests that made the difference.

It is believed that this parent was trying to align the outcome-based system (that measures student achievement against curricular outcomes) with the more familiar traditional system that measures student achievement against other students. Adding to the confusion, this parent referenced the traditional practice of weighting marks, stating: "maybe it was just a couple of tests that made the difference." This parent's understanding of the grading system may be based on the traditional method that calculates grades by averaging together the points that students have achieved on tests and assignments over the course of a term. A grading practice of this sort runs contrary to current research in assessment, as it is unfair and likely to distort the student's true academic accomplishments (Hanover Research, 2011).

By investigating research questions **Q 2.** (*How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card?)* and **Q 4. (***What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card),* it was possible to identify the

current understandings and determine ways to enhance parental knowledge around the use of the outcome-based report card. Upon analysis of parents' comments about their knowledge of the outcome-based report card, it became evident that parents have a desire to understand the system. In a lengthy discussion during focus group 4, one parent tried to come to terms with the grading system using an analogy associated with the measurement of temperature as it relates to weather. This parent stated:

> But in the sense of measurement, like the other people have already said, the report card doesn't say much. If you use an illustration like measuring temperature and weather, and when we switched from Fahrenheit to Celsius, Fahrenheit is a much more finite degree of measurement, so the difference between one degree in Fahrenheit is minor compared to the difference in one degree of Celsius. But if you changed how we measure weather to this kind of system, then what we'd really have is comfortable, warmer than comfortable, and colder than comfortable. What would that tell us about how to dress? We would understand comfortable and would dress like this, but outside of comfortable, what is the measure other than it's not comfortable or less than comfortable? It's like if we change the measurement of the weather, to me, going through this kind of grading system and be part of with my children because it's such an age stretch in our relationship with each other. It's a chasm because my middle daughter had As, Bs and percentages, so I'm sure she always likes to measure herself against others and so what does a grading level 3 equate to in a sense of A or B or things like that? I find the report card an inadequate informational tool, just like the others say. It doesn't give you much information of where they are hypothetically.

Unfortunately, several parents described their struggle with understanding the outcome-based report card and how their continued frustration with understanding resulted in a helplessness of sorts. This parent of focus group 3 stated:

> A lot of people, here, around the table, are saying it's too much information, and I agree with that in part. Again, it's not information that I can-- that I really understand. Like yourself, I consider myself a decently educated individual, but I do find I'm at a loss. I take the approach my kids do, 'Okay, you've got all fours. Great.' I don't pay attention to what it-- well I can't, because I just don't understand the level of detail they're telling me in there.

Another parent confided to others in focus group 3 and stated, "so, when you take educated people and my husband and I looking at this thing saying, 'What does this mean?' We don't understand it. We've stopped reading it. We know our child is a good child and does her work, and she shows us her tests, and that's fine with me."

Comments like these show evidence that parents actively evaluate opportunities associated with outcome-based report card. Parents have a desire to understand their children's report card, but are struggling to come to terms with the current assessment and grading practices. This finding related directly to research questions **Q 2.** (*How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card?)* and **Q 4. (***What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?)* This information is important for leaders in Yellowknife Education District No. 1 to hear. The results of this study showed that parents may well be in a position to understand and support the outcome-based report card once they are educated about the how to interpret the information

provided and the formative uses of the outcome-based report card that can benefit their children's learning.

Parents actively seek plain language alternatives for educational terms, phrases, and references. Results from the study showed that parents actively seek plain language alternatives for complex terms, phrases, and references often used within the field of education. Not only does this result address research questions **Q 2.** (*How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card?)* and **Q 4. (***What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?),* this finding also relates to research question **Q 3. (***What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?)***.**

A review of Figure 1 and Table 8 showed two interlocking themes that referenced parental understanding of the language used in the outcome-based report card: Grading Levels and Indication of Progress. Of the total overall responses (462) responses referencing the themes of Language and Grading Levels represent 3% and responses referencing the themes of Language and Indication of Progress represent 2%. A review of Table 9 shows that the associated question linked to the interlocking themes of Language and Grading Level is *Does the grading level system let parents know their child's progress?* The associated question linked to the interlocking theme of Language and Indication of Progress is *Does the language used in the report card let parents know their child's progress over the year?* The analysis of data related to these interlocking themes of relating to the theme of Language represents both Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding and Major Category 2: Barriers to Support. The interpretation of the data related to this interlocking theme will address research questions: ***Q 1****. What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?* and ***Q 3.*** *What are the concerns and*

opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?

In the focus group conversations about how well parents can read and interpret the information in the report card, one parent of focus group 2 commented on the challenges associated with understanding the technical language used in the outcome listing. This parent stated, "I was trying to read through the categories. It was like, 'Used pre-established criteria to write own text.' It's so specific, but yet you could apply that in so many ways that particular sentence that it doesn't mean much to me honestly." Another parent of focus group 3 stated, "my comment is about it being in teacher talk. The report card is really in teacher talk and it's really hard as a parent to, say, 'Oh, well, for English language arts I can see where that has been met.'" Many parents called for a report card that is plain and simple to understand.

Several parents described a need to see examples of the outcomes. For example, this parent of focus group 3 stated:

> Okay, how has my child done that? Give me an example or what you're looking for in, say, if they're writing an essay? How do they show that outcome? How do they show that they've met that? Or how do they show that they actually-- how do you know they haven't met that? Is it based on this one thing? Or, what are you looking at to see that they've met that outcome and what does that outcome mean in plain terms?

Another parent of focus group 1 described a need for better exemplars so that outcomes are explained:

> It does come down a little bit to the plain language piece. With the outcome: "reads fluently at grade 3 level" --- If that was written in a way that made the parent understand more . . . Well, what does that mean? What am I seeing when I'm seeing a child -- my

> child read fluently at grade three? What does reading fluently at grade four look like? Written in a more descriptive way. It might take more paper, but you could get, perhaps, more information about your child. You would see that side of your child that you wouldn't necessarily see at home. For some of those outcomes that are really only quite academic in that context.

Despite the fact that several parents of focus group 1 and 3 agreed that teachers provided descriptive and clear anecdotal comments, parents from all focus groups described a need for an alternative to complex technical terms. For example, one parent of focus group stated, "They should do a glossary on the report card or plain language in which is the other option." This finding directly related to research question **Q 4. (***What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?)* It is clear that there is a need for leaders within Yellowknife Education District No.1 to consider ways to provide parents with plain language alternatives for educational terms, phrases, and references used within the outcome-based report card.

Parents actively seek personalized comments and individualized report cards. In order to support and understand the outcome-based report card, parents require report cards that provide personalized comments that describe individual student strengths and needs. This third finding addressed research questions **Q 1.** (*What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?)* and **Q 3. (***What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?)*

Of the total focus group responses related to the theme of Individualization reflected 19% the total responses related to Major Category 1: Barriers of Understanding (154). When comments were too general, research showed that parents concluded that the teacher did not take

the time to get to know their child well (Hanover Research, 2011). Several parents described the lack of information given in the report card when it did not provide individualized and personalized comments. For example, a parent of focus group 1 stated:

> I find there's a few paragraphs that give you a little bit of insight about specifics about your child, but for the most part I found it very cut and pasted information about what they did. I found I didn't gain much from it.

Another parent noted the value of personalized comments, but also mentioned that how the lack of individualization degrades the usefulness of the report card:

> I like to see where my kid sits on the continuum so that I can assist or back-off where it might be appropriate. I do like the personalized comments. To be honest, I can put my kids' report cards - they're in grade three and six right now - sometimes I put the report cards side-by-side and I see the exact same comments. It's like, 'Well, there was what - five options? - and teachers picked option three for both my kids?' I understand why they may do that sometimes - time and that sort of thing - but I find that that takes away from the usefulness of the report card.

Although several parents referenced the need for an individualized report card, parent of focus group 2 were concerned with teachers reporting individualized comments on elements of social-emotional development. One parent of focus group 2 stated:

> Its just that sense that maybe teacher's shouldn't be evaluating all those aspects [social-emotional] of a child because, number one, it's not always positive and even if it is, I just I'm not sure that's a teacher's place necessarily. I guess that's my feeling around that.

Another parent of focus group 2 agreed and stated, "I wish they were specific on the academics. I don't want you to be specific on that stuff (social-emotional). I'm not as interested in that stuff

on a report card. I'm happy to talk to you about it, face to face, or even by e-mail, but I'd rather it is specifics about her academics."

By the interpretation of the results, the findings were able to address research questions **Q 1.** (*What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?)* and **Q 3. (***What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?)* From the results of this study, there is a need for parents to have a personalized report card for their children that reflects their children's individual strengths and needs.

Parents actively seek grading levels that indicate student progress. Of the seven themes emerging from the data analysis, responses referencing parental understanding of the outcome-based grading levels and indication of student progress were most frequently cited. Of the total number of responses (462), 35 or 8% of the responses referenced these interlocking themes (see Figure 1 and Table 8). The analysis of data related to the interlocking themes of Grading Levels and Indication of Progress represents both Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding and Major Category 2: Barriers to Support. The interpretation of the data related to this interlocking theme addressed research questions: ***Q 1****. (What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?)* and ***Q 2. (****How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card*?)

A review of Table 9 shows that the associated question linked to these interlocking themes is: *Does the grading level system let parents know their child's progress?* For example, one parent of focus group 1 stated, "I don't really know what a 3 means. Does that mean they got 75%? Does that mean they're at 80%? If they get a 3 next time, did they go down a little

bit? Did they go up? I find it very vague and confusing." Another parent agreed with the link between grading levels and indication of progress:

> "Yeah, because there is so much -- for lack of a better way to describe it -- kind of fluff in there and I agree about the grade -- because 2's or 3's or 4's why not just go with 100 and then we get a better sense of where they are, why do we need to move away from that? I don't quite understand because it does give you more gradations in between . . . I do think a more specific grading system would be more helpful, and less fluff because I don't read most of it anyways, I don't find it helpful."

Several parents indicated that they required the narrative in order to understand how their children were doing because the grading levels were too confusing. One parent of focus group 3 stated:

> I very much rely on that narrative to put things together, because ticks in the box - I question those ticks and what we're trying to achieve by using a bunch of ticks in the box. Yeah, we're moving these kids through, and yes, they matter. They're striving to meet, but we're moving them on. There's really no feedback gotten that worked from that piece.

For another parent of focus group 1, understanding the grading levels as they relate to student progress was compounded even when talking to the teacher:

> I guess, I do not like getting a 1, a 2, a 3, or a 4, at all. My kids find it very vague. I know I've spoken to teachers and said, "Why is my daughter-- she thought she was getting a 4, but she got a 3? What could she be doing better?" (and the teacher responded by saying,) "Well, she's actually a 4, but I still have one more report card to

> write, and I want to show improvement. I'm going to give her a 3 now, but she'll get a 4 on the next one." I find this very confusing.

Another parent of focus group 4 described a need to know the status of achievement, but felt that the report card did not provide this information. This parent stated:

> I find report cards are very socially acceptable that they just make you feel good as opposed to really tell you what you want. I'd rather know if my kid-- because I don't know what a 3 is - and if it's a low 3 or a high 3 - if he's having trouble in a particular subject, I don't think I would pick it up from the report cards. Because the thing is, if he is having trouble in a particular subject might be someone else's doing really well. It's the same mark, whereas I would think, Oh gosh, he's maybe not understanding that concept and even though he's getting a 3, it might be if you add a little bit more work, you would get a much higher mark in it. But this thing doesn't tell me that.

From this interpretation of the data related to this interlocking theme, research questions: ***Q 1****. (What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?)* and ***Q 2.(*** *How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card*?) have been well addressed. From the results of this study, it is clear that parents seek grading levels that indicate student progress.

The secondary purpose of this study is to determine the types of resources or strategies to increase parental understanding and use of the outcome-based report card. To this end, this author's interpretation of the data collected of focus group sessions provides a number of recommendations. For example, leaders from Yellowknife Education District No.1 should consider ways to reduce the amount of teacher jargon and complex educational terms used within the outcome-based report card. From the study, it was found that parental understanding of the

outcome-based report card would be enhanced by the use of plain language and easy access to illustrative examples of grade level literacy and numeracy material. Parents referenced the Yellowknife District Education No. 1 website and how this medium could be used to provide parents with information to show the continuum learning (for example, leveled reading and writing samples, examples of leveled mathematical problems, etc.). It was suggested that such a resource would provide to be quite useful for parents and would result in increased levels of understanding of the outcome-based report card.

A number of parents commented that the length of the outcome-based report card negatively impacted the ability to understand the information. By consolidating key outcomes into developmental milestones, parents would be provided with basic yet explicit information that can be expanded upon through conversations with the teacher and student. To show academic growth over time, from term to term, parents suggested the use of graphs and charts. Because visual perception is used in all forms of communication, the benefit of graphic representations of student achievement would lie in its power to explain complex ideas with an immediate visual message (Lester, 2013). At the same time, parents expressed the desire for the continued use of personalized comments of individual achievement within the written portions of the report card. It is suggested that these sections reference the visual representation to provide the parent with multiple ways to understand their child's progress.

Finally, results of the study show that parents actively seek ways to support their child's learning. In this regard, parents expressed frustration with the lack of support provided by the outcome-based report card. To enhance the usefulness of the outcome-based report card, leaders within Yellowknife Education District No. 1 should consider including a section of the outcome-based report that outlines ways parents could help at home. It may be that a separate document

or resource is needed that would help parents talk to their children about progress and to guide their efforts to support learning at home.

Parents reported that talking to the teacher was the best way to find out about their child's progress. To get the most out of the parent-teacher interview, many parents need cues for how to ask the right questions of the teacher. Leaders within Yellowknife Education District No.1 should consider including a short section within the outcome-based report card for the teacher to indicate specific areas that should be discussed with the parent. A separate document or online resource was recommended by parents to guide the discussion in parent-teacher interviews (for example, 'questions to ask to find out if your child is happy and safe in school', 'questions to ask to find out how well your child is doing', etc.). Because the outcome-based report card format can be considered an object of discussion, parents would benefit having starting points for conversations with teachers. It is expected that parental understanding of and support for the outcome-based report card within Yellowknife Education District No.1 will increase when such resources and strategies are shared openly with parents.

Connection to other studies in the field

A deeper understanding of issues around parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within Yellowknife Education District No.1 is gained through the comparison of the findings of this qualitative single case study on the topic with other similar studies. By integrative analysis of the empirical data against the literature review findings, the results of the study will be placed in context. Furthermore, the contribution of this research work to the body of knowledge on the topic of outcome-based report cards has been developed from a synthesis of this case study analysis and the findings of the Literature Review.

To start, results of the study found that parents actively evaluate opportunities associated with learning about outcome-based report card. Within the focus group sessions, many parents expressed a desire to know about the outcome-based report card and how it connects to formats of which they were more familiar (like the letter grade or percentage systems). Parents who participated in a study by Webber and Wilson (2012) also reported wanting an opportunity to learn about their child's knowledge and ability through detailed descriptions. Similarly, other studies revealed that the outcome-based report card provided common language and a starting point for parent-teacher discussions (Redding et al., 2011; Dusenbury, Zadrazil, Mart, & Weissberg, 2011).

Data from case study found that parents requested more knowledge about the outcome-based reporting format. Numerous studies also revealed that without clarification, parents were unable to truly understand the rationale behind the changes to the outcome-based report card (Craig, 2011; Deslandes et al., 2009; Festel, 2012; Guskey, 2011). In addition, Carless (2008) and Taras (2010) found that any lack of credibility for formative assessment stemmed from the deficit of a clear and easily understandable theoretical foundation around the benefits of formative assessment. Comments from the focus group participants were very similar to those reported by Craig (2011) who found that parents distrusted the system when they felt misled and misinformed. Confirming the findings of the case study, other research found that parents were concerned about how negative impacts on their children's future, a similar comment made by parents who participated in this study's focus group sessions (Craig, 2011; Ruzich, 2013).

At the same time, related research contrasted with the findings of the case study. Many studies reported that the outcome-based report card was been found to be a useful tool because it provided parents with detailed and specific information (Adrian, 2012; Cherniss, 2008;

Deslandes et al., 2009; Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Mathura, 2008; McMunn, Schenck, & McColskey, 2003; O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Schmidt, 2008; Stiggins, 2009; Yun et al., 2008). Unlike the findings of this case study, other researchers who studied outcome-based report cards reported that parents used the outcome-based report card to support the celebrate and achievement of their children at home (Baldwin & Wade, 2012; Chappuis & Chappuis, 2002; Craig, 2012; Schere, 2009; Vatterott, 2011).

Many parents in this focus group study described various levels of confusion when talking to teachers about the outcome-based report card. Parents in this study reported that conversations about student learning during parent-teacher interviews used the outcome-based report card as the basis for discussion. Similar to the findings of Schmidt (2008) and Wiliam (2011), some parents participating in the case study reported that teachers seemed confused about the outcome-based report card and outcome-based reporting, and this lead to a lack of confidence in the outcome-based report card as a whole. Redding, Murphy, and Sheley (2011) and Markstrom (2011) also reported related results in their work on the topic of parent involvement and engagement in student assessment. Similarly, Deslandes et al. (2009) reported negative relationships between parents' perceptions of the report card and their beliefs about the teachers' ability to explain assessment processes. Comments from many focus group parents were found to be very similar to those described by Guskey (2011) and Schrad (2012) in that there was a tendency to see the change to outcome-based report cards as a fad that provided no benefit over traditional report card format that used a norm-based grading system. Because other studies also found that it was essential that parents understand the information that the outcome-based report card communicates (Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Guskey & Jung, 2006; Mathura,

2008), the purpose of this case study was validated and the results of this study has contributed to the body of research on this topic.

In addition, this case study expanded upon earlier research on outcome-based report cards and formative assessment. Although research from Brooks (2010), Killen (2000), Morcke et al. (2012) found that a negative perception about the outcome-based system stemmed from political, economic, and educational sources, these studies did not probe deeply into the feelings or perceptions of parents directly. Other studies that investigated social resistance of assessment reforms (including the implementation of outcome-based report cards) were limited in their discussion to factors around the political environment created by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Clark, 2001; Stull et al., 2011). Although Clark (2011) found that the regime of testing within the United States has not supported formative assessment practices, this case study probed deeper into the factors related to resistance. This case study expands upon earlier work as moves further by identifying attainable, realistic, and timely changes to remove barriers to parental understanding and support.

The findings of this case study were further placed in context within the larger field of research when reviewing related studies on the extent to which parents understand the information provided from schools. The results of this case study found a need for clear, succinct writing designed to ensure that parents understand the information about student learning quickly and completely. Other studies also reported that parents desired precise yet understandable and useful to indicate student progress (Brosseau & Fuciarelli, 2013; Guskey & Bailey, 2010). In both scholarly and non-scholarly studies, parents reported being confused by the terms used within the outcome-based report card, and many studies concluded that parent-friendly language should be used (Anderson, 2011; Balkissoon, 2012; Deslandes et al., 2009;

Festel, 2012; Greene, 2013; Guskey, 2004; Hammer, 2012; Mathur, 2008; McCarthy, 2012; Tennant, 2012). To increase public confidence in the shift from the traditional to the outcome-based report card, many researchers stated that the language used to describe student learning had to be clear, concise, and accessible (Guskey, 2004; Roebert, 2003; Steinmann, Malcolm, Connell, Davis, & McMann, 2008). Comments from parents in the focus group study were very similar in nature to that of other studies (Balkissoon, 2012; Black & William, 1998; Craig, 2011; Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Markstrom, 2011; Ramirez, 2011). Parents expressed a desire to be advocates for their children, but many were frustrated because experienced barriers due the use of unfamiliar language and grading terms within the outcome-based report card.

The results of the case study also found that parents required report cards that provided personalized comments to describe individual students' strengths and needs. To place this case study in context of related research on the topic, numerous studies were reviewed to determine the extent to which there existed a need for such specificity within the report cards. Research by Chan (2009) aligned to the case study as it was reported that parents requested specific information about their children's strengths and weaknesses within the written teachers' comments so that they could support their children's learning at home. As with the findings of the case study, Broderick et al. (2012) reported that parent engagement was higher when parents were given data about their children's learning and personalized messages that put this data into context within the larger body of knowledge on this topic.

Finally, an important finding of this qualitative single case study was that parents actively seek grading levels that indicate student progress. Participants in focus group sessions echoed reports by Guskey (2004) who described the tendency for parents to link the outcome-based progress labels with traditional letter grades for which they were more familiar (for example,

Level 4 or ‘Outstanding’ means an ‘A’; Level 3 or ‘Satisfactory’ means a ‘B’, etc.) and to interpret the labels from a norms-referenced perspective. Related research reported that some parents were confused when newer grading practices separated academic and non-academic factors (Cross & Frary, 1996; Guskey, 2004; O’Connor, 2009; Webster, 2012). Various non-scholarly reports also found that parents were more familiar with a grading system that compared student progress against one another rather than against learning outcomes (Callsen, 2011; Festel, 2012; Greene, 2013; Hammer, 2012; Howell, 2013; Hu, 2009; Jablow, 2013; McCarthy, 2012; Rushowy, 2010; Tennant, 2012). Although other studies confirmed that parents were confused about the grading levels, findings of this study reported a direct link between the barrier to understanding the grade levels and the extent to which parents were able determine their children’s level of progress. In this case study, parents communicated the desire for a clear grading level system so that they would know their children’s progress.

Unlike other scholarly and non-scholarly studies that reported that parents paid their children based on the number of good grades they achieved (Butler, Kennedy, & Kennedy, 2010; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Fryer, 2011; Harris, 2011), parent who participated in this case study did not mention the use of monetary rewards. Many parents discussed the need to use the outcome-based report card as a way to encourage and motivate student learning, but no references were made to extrinsic reward systems. By investigating elements associated with motivation beyond monetary rewards, the results of this study contribute to the field of study on this topic and may suggest areas for future research.

Earlier research found that a parent’s reaction to his or her child’s report card exerted a controlling effect that impacted future student learning (Alderman, 2013; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Cichy et al., 2013; Davis, Winsler, & Middleton, 2006; Elkind, 2010; Fan & Williams,

2010; Harris, 2011; Hattie & Anderman, 2013; Roth et al., 2009). These scholarly sources confirmed the connection between parental understanding of student progress information and the resulting influence on student progress. However, the findings of this case study did not reveal the same information around the use of arbitrary systems of reinforcement or any associated feelings of failure or success. Despite opportunities to discuss their reactions and their children's feelings, parents who participated in the focus group sessions did not reference these topics. It may be possible that participating parents did not speak of these topics because they reference parenting choices that are too personal in nature. Or possibly parents simply did not find that these topics represented pressing concerns for parents. In any case, it is recommended that this topic be considered for future research.

What is left unsaid is often as important as what is said. In this case, parents who participated in the focus group session did not speak of the outcome-based report card in terms that had been cited in earlier research. Although multiple studies described the outcome-based report case as a tool to foster student engagement (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Cherniss, 2008; Cooper, 2011; Crespo et al., 2010; Frohbieter et al., 2011; Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Hendry, 2012; O'Connor, 2009; Stiggins, 2008), parents involved in this case study did not speak of this feature. Although parents of the focus groups reported feeling confused, they did not make allegations of grade inflation, unlike those parents involved in a research by Craig (2011). Even though the outcome-based report card was developed with the goals of transparency and explicitness (Adrian, 2012; Cherniss, 2008; Deslandes et al., 2009; Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Mathura, 2008; McMunn, Schenck, & McColskey, 2003; O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Schmidt, 2008; Stiggins, 2009; Yun et al., 2008), parents did not describe the outcome-based report card in those terms. While research by Baldwin and Wade (2012) stated that information in the

outcome-based report card was used to guide home support, parents who participated in the current case study did not talk of this function in reference to the outcome-based report card. This information is inconsistent with, or may directly refute, claims that the outcome-based report card was more explicit or transparent. Although it is critical to consider deeply that which is explicitly stated, it is also important to attend to what has been left unsaid.

The emergent nature of this qualitative single case study resulted from comparing and contrasting the findings with other studies similar in nature. Many of the findings of this case study were aligned with the results of other scholarly and non-scholarly research. At the same time, the field of study has been affected by the inquiry and exploration of parental perspectives of the outcome-based report cards within Yellowknife Education District No.1. Specifically, the findings of this case study revealed that parents within Yellowknife Education District No.1 expressed a desire to learn more about the outcome-based report card in order to gain specific knowledge about their children's educational progress, so that they can support learning at home. Parents who participated in this case study reacted with similar levels of frustration when attempting to understand the language and grading levels as those studied by other researchers. In contrast to the findings of earlier researchers (Guskey, 2004; Guskey & Jung, 2006; O'Connor, 2009; Reeves, 2011) who reported that many schools had had to revert to the traditional grading practices due to parental resistance, findings from this case study showed that parents were more interested in improving the outcome-based reporting system so that it would be useful for parents. Many parents from Yellowknife Education District No. 1 discussed improvements to the outcome-based report card as opposed to the abandonment of the new format.

To this end, the results of this study moved beyond other earlier studies on this topic. Because this author acknowledged the connections between parental support for the outcome-based report card and parental understanding, this study advanced research in the field by studying these elements together. This case study questioned parents directly about their needs and asked them to identify ways that leaders within Yellowknife Education District No.1 can overcome specific barriers to support and understanding. Unlike other studies to date, this case study included parents in research on the strengths and weaknesses of the new report card format. The format of this case study allowed parents to voice their thoughts and ideas about a public matter that has a direct personal impact on their children. Because parental support is crucial for optimizing the benefits of these report card formats, their input is needed for an evaluation of the effectiveness of these report cards. With this in mind, this case study fills a gap in the field of knowledge on the topic of parental understanding and support of the outcome-based report card.

This author's interpretation of the results provides insight into parental perceptions around the use of the outcome-based report card within Yellowknife Education District No.1. By evaluating the findings against connected literature, it was possible to gain additional insight into the findings of this qualitative single case study. The analysis of data collected through the focus group sessions has uncovered four major findings that will be available to inform debates and policy discussions on the continued implementation of the outcome-based report card within this district and into other regions of the Northwest Territories where changes in assessment and reporting procedures have been forthcoming.

Conclusion

By querying parents in Yellowknife Education District No. 1 directly about their concerns, support levels, and understanding of the outcome-based report card, this qualitative methods single case study identified four major findings. A number of parents of all four focus groups voiced a desire to know about the outcome-based report card and how it connects to formats of which they were more familiar (like the letter grade or percentage systems). Parents described the need for plain language alternatives for complex terms, phrases, and references often used within the field of education. In order to support and understand the outcome-based report card, parents reported that report cards needed to provide personalized comments to describe individual student strengths and needs. Parents strongly expressed the need for a grading level system that indicated student progress. By identifying the barriers to understanding of and support for the outcome-based report card, the primary purpose of this study was achieved.

The secondary purpose of this study was also fulfilled. A number of resources or strategies were identified to increase parental understanding of and support for the outcome-based report card. Analysis of the data collected from the four focus group sessions suggested that plain language and illustrative examples should be used to describe student progress. It would be helpful for parents to have access to resources that describe the continuum of literacy and numeracy growth over time. A shorter version of the report card would be welcomed by parents, as would the inclusion of visual rather textual information. The outcome-based report card should continue to include personalized written comments about individual progress. Finally, parents not only expressed the desire for information on how to foster student learning at

home, but for guidance on how to get the most out of conversations through parent-teacher interviews.

This qualitative methods single case study is significant in that the research may inform decisions about the use of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1. The shift to the use of the outcome-based report card represented a substantial change in how student achievement information was presented to parents. This study provided parents within Yellowknife Education District No.1 with an opportunity to be included in research on the strengths and weaknesses of the outcome-based report card format. Parents contributed their thoughts and ideas about a public matter that has a direct personal impact on their children. This study uncovered information about parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card and will allow leaders within Yellowknife Education District No.1 the opportunity to use the results of the study to inform decisions about the continued use of the outcome-based report card.

Any benefits to student learning associated with the use of the outcome-based report card cannot be realized to the fullest extent possible without parental support (O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Reeves, 2011). By querying parents in Yellowknife Education District No. 1 directly about their concerns, support levels, and understanding of the outcome-based report card, this qualitative methods single case study fulfilled two purposes. Data collected through focus group interviews identified barriers to parental understanding and support of the outcome-based report card. The results of the study uncovered the types of resources or strategies that could increase parental understanding and use of the outcome-based report card. With parental support for the outcome-based report card, the benefits to student learning associated with its use will be realized to the fullest extent possible within Yellowknife Education District No. 1 and into other

regions of the Northwest Territories where changes in assessment and reporting procedures have been forthcoming.

Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Available research indicates that parents do not consistently support or understand the shift from the traditional report card format that uses the letter grade or a percentage scale to the outcome-based report card (Deslandes, et al., 2009; Hayward & Spencer, 2010; Reeves, 2011; Schmidt, 2008; Stiggins, 2008; Sutton, 2009). Without parental support for the outcome-based report card, any benefits to student learning associated with its use cannot be realized to the fullest extent possible (O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Reeves, 2011). The primary purpose of this qualitative methods single case study was to investigate parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the schools of the Yellowknife Education District No.1, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in Canada. The secondary purpose of this study was to determine the types of resources or strategies to increase parental understanding and use of the outcome-based report card.

In order to identify the barriers to acceptance and support, the proposed study implemented a focus group method to query parents directly about their concerns, support levels, and understanding of the outcome-based report card. To mitigate any limitations to validity associated with social desirability effects of the interviews, confidentiality has been ensured to the best of this author's ability. Informed consent of the parents was voluntary and information divulged by parents through focus group discussions was not linked to the respondent's identifiers.

In this chapter, the author will discuss the implications of the study, place the results in context, and describe the practical utility of the study's results in terms of application to the broader field of study. A presentation of recommendations for practical applications of the study and for future research will precede the conclusion.

Implications

It is critical to review the implications of this qualitative single case study by considering potential limitations and their possible effects on the interpretation of the results. To this end, logical conclusions can be drawn through a focused discussion of each of the four research questions that were used to investigate parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1.

Four research questions were used to investigate parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card within the Yellowknife Education District No.1.

Q 1. What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?

Q 2. How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card?

Q 3. What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to the strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?

Q 4. What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?

The first research question (**Q 1)** asked, "What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?" According to an analysis of the data collected through the four focus group sessions, a barrier to parental support is a lack of useful information in the outcome-based report card. Of the total responses (462), 37% or 171 responses referenced themes associated with the extent to which the outcome-based report card provides useful information for parents. Forty-seven percent of 171 responses were statements about how well the outcome-based report card functioned as an effective communication tool. The outcome-based report card was evaluated according to how well it indicated student progress (16% of 171 responses). Parents discussed the way that the outcome-based report card gave information that could be

used to motivate to learn (21% of 171 responses) and foster home support (8% of 171 responses).

The importance of these results is that they direct attention to the need of the report card to communicate clear information to parents. This study has generated a number of implications that should be of interest to leaders within the Yellowknife Education District No. 1. The results of the study show that it is essential that the outcome-based report card indicate to parents their child's level of achievement. This study is important because it provides new insights for how to improve the usefulness of the outcome-based report card in order to generate partnerships with parents in the learning process.

For example, further analysis of interlocking themes uncovered that factors that impacted the usefulness of the outcome-based report card included complexities involving language and confusion around grading levels (see Figure 1). By identifying these factors, this study moves closer to fulfilling its primary purpose, which is to investigate parental support for the outcome-based report card. Based on the interlocking themes, a number of questions were explored by parents as they relate to **Q 1.** research question (see Table 9):

- Does the language used in the report card let parents know their child's progress over the year?
- Does the grading level system let parents know their child's progress?
- Are the report cards an effective tool to indicate student progress?
- Do the grading levels provide useful information (so that I can support the report cards)?
- Do parents get useful information about their child's individual strengths and needs within the report card?
- Does the language used in the report give useful information?

These questions help to clarify and focus the recommendations so that they address the needs of parents and enhance parental support for the outcome-based report card.

Based on these research findings, logical conclusions can be drawn that respond to the study problem and fit with the dual purpose of the study. Because any benefits to student learning connected with the implementation of the outcome-based report card is dependent on parental support, leaders within Yellowknife Education District No.1 should consider strategies that will help parents use the outcome-based report card to support student learning. Parents need to see the outcome-based report card as a document that indicates student progress using parent-friendly language (that is, free of teacher jargon and complex educational terms) and easily understandable visual graphics (for example, charts, graphs, etc.).

For example the present report card uses the following jargon to describe unsatisfactory progress in math. Written in table form (see Appendix A), the report card states that the student is in grade six but is working at level two or "approaching grade expectations". The outcome statement is written: "Models that objects, numbers, and expressions can be show to be equal." Instead of the use of that jargon, the following language could be used instead, "Johnny is struggling to understand equalities, like 4 + 4 = 3 + 5." Parents of focus group 2 discussed another report card example from the subject area of English Language Arts. The outcome was stated as, "used pre-established criteria to write own text." The parent commented, "It's so specific but yet you could apply that in so many ways that particular sentence that it doesn't mean much to me honestly." Had the outcome been written in plain language it might be stated as "Johnny is able to write own text with interesting ideas, choosing the right words, having a beginning/middle/end, using both long and short sentences, using correct spelling and grammar, etc." When parents have access to such information about their children's learning they will be

better able to encourage their children to do better, provide home support, and become true partners in the learning process. The results of this study show that improving the usefulness of outcome-based report card is likely to remove barriers to parental support.

The second research question (**Q 2)** stated, "How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card? " According to an analysis of the data collected through the four focus group sessions, factors that contributed to the barrier to understanding included the misunderstanding of language and grading levels used in the report card. A lack of personalization of the report card added to this barrier to parental understanding. Of the total responses (462), 34% or 154 responses referenced themes associated with barriers to understanding. Fifty-six percent of 154 responses referenced statements about the meaning of the grading levels, the range of achievement indicated by the grading levels, how the grading levels connect to more familiar ranges of letter grades and percentages, or all of these elements. The outcome-based report card was reviewed according to how well it provided parents with personalized comments and indicated individualized student progress (19% of 154 responses). In addition, parents discussed the language of the outcome-based report card (like teacher jargon and complex educational terms and phrases) and how it impacted parental understanding of student progress (40% of 154 responses).

Because it is possible that parental support for the outcome-based report card is low because parental understanding is low, it was important to study these elements together (Mathura, 2008). To this end, further analysis of the data collected through the focus groups revealed a number of themes related to barriers to understanding connected to those barriers to parental support for the outcome-based report card. Factors that impacted support for the outcome-based report card included complexities related to the use of the report card to

communicate student progress effectively to parents (see Figure 1). By studying factors related to parental understanding alongside those identified as factors related to parental support, this study accomplished the primary purpose. Based on the interlocking themes, a number of questions relate to the **Q 2.** research question (see Table 9):

- Does the language in the report card make it an effective communication tool?
- How well does the language used in the report card describe the grading levels?
- Does the grading level system let parents know their child's progress?
- Do parents understand the report card so can help their child at home?
- Do parents understand the report card as a motivational tool for their children?
- Do parents understand where their child is at from reading the report card?
- Is the report card a good tool to give individualized information about the child's individual strengths and needs?
- What type of language do parents need in order to understand the report card?

These questions shed light on the needs of parents to ensure support for the outcome-based report card. Because the results of the study showed that parents do not really understand grading and that they do not think that there is enough personalization to their child's report card, leaders within Yellowknife Education District No.1 need to find ways to remedy the situation. Parents cannot truly support a document they cannot understand. To gain parental support for the outcome-based report card, leaders must teach parents about the function of the grading levels while also increasing personalization within the reporting document. Data collected in response to **Q 2.** formed the basis for subsequent recommendations that include by are not limited to, providing parents with illustrative examples and explanatory resources online.

The third research question (**Q 3.)** stated, "What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to the strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?" During the focus group session, parents were asked a number of questions in order to solicit responses to this third research question (see Appendix D). Data analysis revealed responses related to research question three (**Q 3.)** connect to each of the major themes. In fact, those interrelated themes with the highest frequency of responses were associated with **Q 3.** (see Table 9). A list of the interlocking themes and frequency of responses frequency associated with **Q 3.** follows:

- Eleven responses referenced the interlocking themes of Language and Indication of Progress. This represents 2% of the total overall responses.
- Fifteen responses referenced the interlocking themes of Language and Communication tool. This represents 3% of the total overall responses.
- Fifteen responses referenced the interlocking themes of Grading level and Language. This represents 3% of the total overall responses.
- Twelve responses referenced the interlocking themes of Grading level and Motivation. This represents 3% of the total overall responses.
- Fourteen responses referenced the interlocking themes of Indication of Progress and Communication Tool. This represents 3% of the total overall responses.
- Twelve responses referenced the interlocking themes of Grading level and Communication Tool. This represents 3% of the total overall responses.

Because the primary purpose of this study is to determine levels of parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card, it is important to consider questions related to

the interlocking themes as they are associated with **Q 3.** Table 9 provides a number of questions relate to the **Q 2.**

- Does the language used in the report card let parents know their child's progress over the year?
- Does the language in the report card make it an effective communication tool?
- How well does language used in the report card describe the grading levels?
- Does the grading level system increase motivation for my child to improve?
- Are the report cards an effective tool to indicate student progress?
- Do the grading levels communicate useful information to parents?
- Is the report card an effective communication tool that tells parents about their child's learning?
- Do the report cards indication the child's strengths and weaknesses so that it helps parents provide help at home?
- Do the report cards give information about the child's strengths and needs in such a way that it motivates students to do better?
- Does the language used in the report give useful information?
- Is the report card is a good tool to communicate ways parents can motivate their child?
- Does including a clear indication of progress on the report card increase student motivation?

Investigating the parental perspectives around the strengths and weaknesses of the report card is the key to determining levels of support and understanding of the outcome-based report card. Analysis of the data supports the need for leaders within Yellowknife Education District No.1 to review the way that parents are presented with information about their children's learning. For

example, results of the study showed that many parents report being confused by the language used in the report card. To mitigate these barriers to understanding, leaders in Yellowknife Education District No.1 should consider the use of plain language alternatives to educational terms and reduce the use of teacher jargon. Following this section, this author makes a number of recommendations that may enhance the strengths of the report card. To this end, the information collected in response to **Q 3.** contributed to the fulfillment of the secondary purpose of this study.

The fourth research question (**Q 4.)** stated, "What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card? According to an analysis of the data collected through the four focus group sessions, 82 references (or 18% of the total responses) connected to the theme of Needs. These references were associated with the themes of Barriers to Understanding (34 responses or 7% of the total) and Barriers to support (23 responses or 5% of the total). Of the total responses (82) in the Major Category of Needs, the highest frequencies of responses were associated with themes of language (18 responses or 22%), indication of progress (12 responses or 15%), and grading levels (11 responses or 13%). Based on these research findings, logical conclusions can be drawn that respond to the study problem and fit with the dual purpose of the study.

Because any benefits to student learning connected with the implementation of the outcome-based report card is dependent on parental support, leaders within Yellowknife Education District No.1 should consider strategies that respond to the needs of parents. The results of the study show that parents need a variety of supports that includes, but are not limited to, the creation of resources that explain grading level system, show curricular expectations at various levels, and define critical educational terms and concepts. Multiple instructional

methods should be considered when generating resources, so that the information is accessible to all parents as learners.

By responding to these needs, it is hoped that barriers to parental understanding of and support for the outcome-based report card will be overcome. When parents understand and support the outcome-based report card, the full benefits for student learning can be realized. With increased understanding, parents will be better able to support learning at home, be aware of the gradual development of student skills, and become true partners in their child's educational growth and development. With parental support, leaders within the Yellowknife Education District No.1 can develop the outcome-based report card as a valuable formative assessment tool that involves parents in making conscientious decisions about their children's learning goals. Given the results of study, this author suggests that improvements to the outcome-based report card will foster parental engagement in their children's learning. Parental understanding of and support for the outcome-based report card will promote a positive learning home and school environment though ongoing communication and dialogue as educational partners.

Recommendations

This author's interpretation of the results provides insight into parental perceptions around the use of the outcome-based report card within Yellowknife Education District No.1. As discussed in Chapter 4, analysis of data collected through the focus group sessions has uncovered four major findings. These findings will be available to inform debates and policy discussions on the continued implementation of the outcome-based report card within this district and into other regions of the Northwest Territories where changes in assessment and reporting procedures have been forthcoming.

For practical applications of this qualitative case study, recommendations have been made to remove barriers to parental understanding of and support for the outcome-based report card. As discussed in Chapter 4, these recommendations were based on data analysis related to the Major Category of Needs. The practical application of this research for Yellowknife Education District No.1 would include plain language alternatives to complex educational terms (18 references or 22% of the total within the Major Category of Need), and illustrative examples of student progress (12 references or 15% of Need). Based on the number of references that fall within the interlocking Major Categories of Need and Barriers to Understanding (34 references or 7% of the total references), resources should be generated that describe the student literacy and numeracy learning over time. Twenty-three references or 5% of the total references was included within the interlocking categories of Need and Barriers to Support. In response to this data, it is recommended that leaders within Yellowknife Education District No. 1 reformat the outcome-based report card into a shorter version that includes visual rather textual information. Results supported the need for personalized written comments about individual progress (5 references or 6% of total references within the Major Category of Need). Finally, parents indicated that more guidance should be included to help parents get the most benefit of the parent-teacher interviews (8 references or 10% of the total references within the Major Category of Need).

Results from this study converge on the following recommendations. Leaders within the Yellowknife Education District No.1 should be encouraged to support additional research on parental acceptance of the outcome-based report card once the recommendations for the practical applications of this case study have been acted upon. It is recommended that the results of the current study form the baseline data to measure change. Other study areas related to the

implementation of the outcome-based report card could be considered. For example, further research could focus on the . This case study on the topic of parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card could be considered the starting point for future studies around how to realize the full benefits of formative assessment as it relates to grading and reporting.

Conclusions

This chapter presented a brief review of the problem statement, purpose, and method used to investigate factors related to parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card as implemented within the Yellowknife Education District No.1 in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada. Specific limitations and related ethical dimensions were discussed as they apply to this qualitative single case study. The implications of this study were reviewed in context and the practical utility of the study's results were explored as they apply to the broader field of study. A variety of recommendations were presented for the practical application of this study, as were recommendations for future research in this area.

Research showed that the outcome-based report card has become a valuable way to convey formative and summative assessment information about student learning (Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Lawson, 2011; Parsons & Taylor, 2011; Stiggins, 2008). Guided by research on the benefits of formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2009; O'Connor, 2009; O'Connor & Wormeli, 2011; Marzano, 2006), leaders within Yellowknife Education District No.1 moved from the familiar traditional report card format (that uses the letter grade or percentage scale) to the outcome-based report card (that uses a leveled achievement system). Although available research has not identified clearly what concerns or reservations they might have had regarding the report card, factors that contribute to parental resistance exist (Deslandes, et al., 2009;

Hayward & Spencer, 2010; Massell, 2008; Mathura 2008; O'Connor, 2009; Reeves, 2011; Schmidt, 2008; Stiggins, 2008; Sutton, 2009). Many of these available reports made it appear that schools did not provide enough useful information to parents so that they could fully understand and appreciate the value of the outcome-based report card system (Festel et al., 2012; Greene, 2013; McCarthy, 2012). For leaders within Yellowknife Education District No.1, the successful implementation of the outcome-based report card hinges on parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card. By identifying reasons for resistance, providing recommendations to remove potential barriers this study fulfills its dual purpose. Given parental acceptance, it is hoped that benefits to student learning associated with the use of the outcome-based report card within Yellowknife Education District No.1 can be realized to the fullest extent possible.

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Tables

Table 1: Summary of participants in focus groups

	Total number of students	Total number parents listed	Number of participants contacted	Number accepted invitation	Number participated in focus group	Number of consent forms signed	Number of students represented
Parents of students in grades 4-5	235	225	167	12	8	8	11
Parents of students in grades 6-8	337	303	243	14	9	9	13
Total number parents of students in grades 4-8	572	468	410	26	17	17	24

Note: Table 1 shows that 17 of the total number of parents (572) participated in the focus group sessions, representing 24 students in Grades 4-8.

Table 2: Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding

Number of responses related to:	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4	Total
Barriers to Understanding	37	41	56	20	154
Grading Levels: Do parents understand what the grading levels mean? Do parents understand the range of achievement indicated by the grading levels? Are parents able to connect the grading levels to the familiar ranges of letter grades and percentages?	27	13	32	15	87 (56% of the total responses)
Individualization: Do parents believe the report card is personalized to show their individual child's progress?	3	14	11	2	30 (19% of the total responses)
Language: How well do parents understand the language of the report card (that is, teacher jargon, confusing terms, phrases, etc.)?	13	16	27	5	61 (40% of the total responses)

Note. Table 2 shows the number of parent responses categorized according to themes related to Barriers to Understanding. (Note: Some responses have more than one theme to which it is coded.)

Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding addresses the following research questions:
Q 2. How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card and
Q 3. What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?)

Table 3: Major Category 2: Barriers to Support – Lack of Useful Information

Number of responses related to:	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4	Total
Barriers to Support Lack of useful information	38	36	55	42	171
Communication Tool: Do parents view the report card as an effective way to communicate information about their child or do parents rely on face-to-face discussions, emails, and phone calls with teachers to find about their child's progress?	17	22	24	17	80 (47% of the total responses)
Home Support: To what extent do parents find information in the report card useful in helping them support their child to learn at home?	2	4	3	4	13 (8% of the total responses)
Indication of Progress: Do parents find the report card shows them student progress over the year?	21	11	26	15	73 (43% of the total responses)
Motivation: Do parents believe the report card is useful in motivating their child to do better?	8	4	13	11	36 (21% of the total responses)

Note. Number of parent responses categorized according to themes related to Barriers to Support. (Note: Some responses have more then one theme to which it is coded.)

Major Category 2: Barriers to Support – Lack of useful information addresses the following research questions:
Q 1. What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?
Q 3. What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?)

Table 4: Major category 3: Number of responses per focus group related to Needs

Number of responses related to:	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4	Total
Barrier to Support Needs	18	22	31	11	82

Note. Number of parent responses categorized according to themes related to Needs. Some responses have more then one theme to which it is coded.

Major Category 3: Needs addresses research question **Q 4.** What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?

Table 5: Frequency of total focus group responses (462) with interlocking themes between Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding and Major Category 2: Barriers to Support Lack of useful information

	Major Category 1: Barriers to Understand-ing	*Grading levels	*Individual-ization	*Language
Major Category 2: Barriers to Support Lack of useful info	75 (18%)	49 (11%)	15 (3%)	26 (6%)
*Communication tool	29 (6%)	12 (3%)	6 (1%)	15 (3%)
*Home support	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0%)
*Indication of Progress	45 (10%)	35 (8%)	7 (2%)	11 (2%)
*Motivation	15 (3%)	12 (3%)	2 (0%)	4 (1%)

Note. Percentages of the total focus group responses are placed in parenthesis.

Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding addresses the following research questions:
Q 2. How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card and
Q 3. What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?)

Major Category 2: Barriers to Support – Lack of useful information addresses the following research questions:
Q 1. What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?
Q 3. What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?)

Table 6: Frequency of total focus group responses (462) with Interlocking themes within Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding

Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding	*Grading levels	*Individualization	*Language
*Grading Levels	x	5 (3%)	15 (10%)
*Individual-ization	5 (3%)	x	4 (3%)
*Language	15 (10%)	4 (3%)	x

Note. Total focus group responses referencing Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding = 154. Percentage of the total focus group responses referencing Major Category1: Barriers to Understanding in parenthesis.

Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding addresses the following research questions:
Q 2. How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card and
Q 3. What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?)

Table 7: Frequency of total focus group responses (462) with interlocking themes within Major Category 2: Barriers to Support Lack of useful information

Major Category 2: Barriers to Support Lack of useful information	*Commun-ication tool	*Home support	*Indication of Progress	*Motivation
*Commun-ication Tool	x	4 (2%)	14 (8%)	2 (1%)
*Home support	4 (2%)	x	3 (2%)	1 (1%)
*Indication of Progress	14 (8%)	3 (2%)	x	7 (4%)
*Motivation	2 (1%)	1 (1%)	7 (4%)	x

Note. Total focus group responses referencing Major Category 2: Barriers to Support Lack of useful information = 171. Percentage of the total focus group responses referencing Major Category 2: Barriers to Support Lack of useful information in parenthesis.

Major Category 2: Barriers to Support – Lack of useful information addresses the following research questions:
Q 1. What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?
Q 3. What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?)

Table 8: Frequency of total focus group responses (462) with interlocking themes within all three Major Categories

Total number of responses = 462 (% of total responses)	**Barrier to Support Lack of useful info**	Communication Tool	Home Support	Indication of Progress	Motivation	**Barrier to Understanding**	Grading Levels	Individualization	Language	**Need**
Barrier to Support - lack of useful info	171 (37%)	80 (17%)	13 (3%)	73 (16%)	36 (8%)	75	49	15	26	23
Commun-ication tool	80	80	4	14	2	29	12	6	15	8
Home support	13	4	13	3	1	1	0	0	1	0
Indication of Progress	73	14	3	73	7	45	35	7	11	12
Motivation	36	2	1	7	36	15	12	2	4	3
Barrier to Understand-ing	75	29	1	45	15	154 (34%)	87 (19%)	30 (6%)	61 (13%)	34
Grading levels	49	12	0	35	12	87	87	5	15	11
Individual-ization	15	6	0	7	2	30	5	30	4	5
Language	26	15	1	11	4	61	15	4	61	18
Need	23	8	0	12	3	34	11	5	18	82 (18%)

Note. Percentage of the total focus group responses in parenthesis.
Major Category 1: Barriers to Understanding addresses the following research questions:
Q 2. How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card and
Q 3. What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?)
Major Category 2: Barriers to Support – Lack of useful information addresses the following research questions:
Q 1. What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?
Q 3. What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?)
Major Category 3: Need address the research question:

Q 4. *What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?*

Table 9: Interlocking themes and associated questions as they relate to the research questions

- ***Q 1.*** *What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?*
- ***Q 2.*** *How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card*
- ***Q 3.*** *What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?*
- ***Q 4***. *What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?*

Interlocking themes	Associated question	Related Research Question
Language and Indication of Progress*	Does the language used in the report card let parents know their child's progress over the year?	Q 1 Q 3
Language and Communication tool *	Does the language in the report card make it an effective communication tool?	Q 2 Q 3
Grading level and Language *	How well does language used in the report card describe the grading levels?	Q 2 Q 3
Grading level and Indication of Progress*	Does the grading level system let parents know their child's progress?	Q 1 Q 2
Grading level and motivation *	Does the grading level system increase motivation for my child to improve?	Q 3 Q 4
Indication of Progress and Communication Tool *	Are the report cards an effective tool to indicate student progress?	Q 1 Q 3
Grading level and Communication Tool *	Do the grading levels communicate useful information to parents?	Q 3
Barrier of understanding and Communication Tool	Is the report card an effective communication tool that tells parents about their child's learning?	Q 3
Barrier of Understanding and Home Support	Do parents understand the report card so can help my child at home?	Q 2
Barrier to Understanding and Motivation	Do parents understand the report card so that it can motivates their child to do better?	Q 2
Barrier to Understanding and Indication of Progress	Do parents understand where their child is at from reading the report card?	Q 2
Communication Tool and Need	What forms of communication do parents need about their child?	Q 4
Grading Levels and Barrier to Support (lack of useful information)	Do the grading levels provide useful information (so that I can support the report cards)?	Q 1
Indication of Progress and Home Support	Do the report cards indication the child's strengths and weaknesses so that it helps	Q 3 Q 4

	parents provide help at home?	
Indication of Progress and Motivation	Do the report cards give information about the child's strengths and needs in such a way that it motivates students to do better?	Q 3 Q 4
Indication of Progress and Need	What do parents need from the report card to see their child's progress?	Q 4
Individualization and Barrier to Support (lack of info)	Do parents get useful information about their child's individual strengths and needs within the report card?	Q 1 Q 4
Individualization and Communication Tool	Is the report card a good tool to give individualized information about the child's individual strengths and needs?	Q 2
Individualization and Motivation	Are the report cards personalized so that it motivates my child to improve?	Q 3
Language and Barrier to Support (lack of useful info)	Does the language used in the report give useful information?	Q 1 Q 3
Motivation and Communication Tool	Is the report card is a good tool to communicate ways parents can motivate their child?	Q 3
Motivation and Home Support	Does the report card does help parents to motivate their child to be helped at home?	Q 4
Motivation and Indication of Progress	Does including a clear indication of progress on the report card increase student motivation?	Q 3
Need and Grading Level	What do parents need from the grading levels?	Q 4
Need and Motivation	What do parent need from the report card to motivate their child?	Q 4
Need and Individualization	What do parents need so that they feel that their child is being reflected in the report card?	Q 4
Need and Language	What type of language do parents need in order to understand the report card?	Q 2 Q 4
* Indicates interrelated themes with the highest frequency of responses.		

Figures

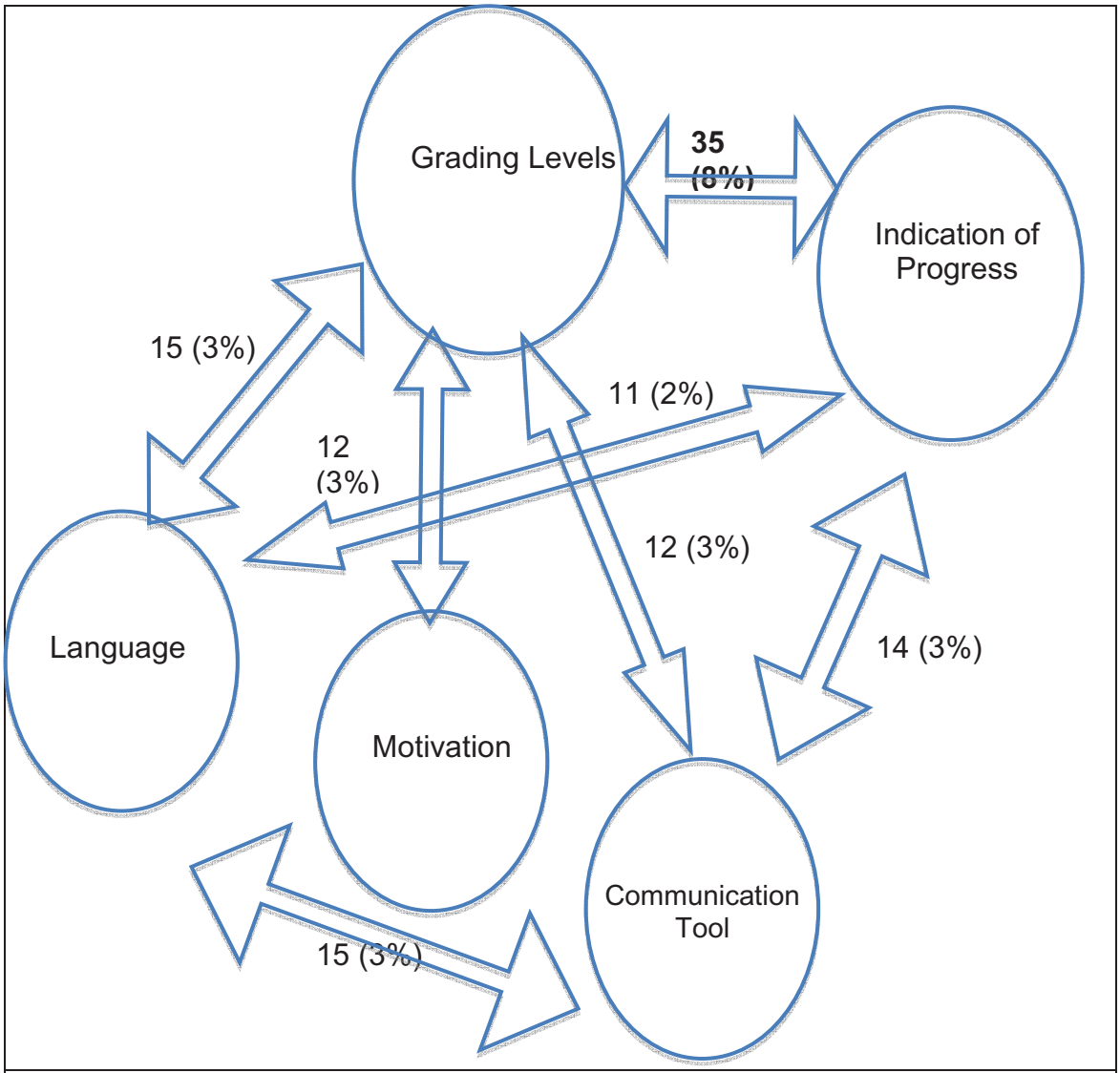


Figure 1. A visual representation of the highest incidences of responses that reference more than one theme.

The number of responses is provided beside each double-ended arrow. The percentage of the overall responses (462) is provided in parenthesis. For example, the number 35 provided beside the double-ended arrow between Grading Levels and Indication of Progress means that 35 responses referenced these two themes. This represents 8% of the total overall responses.

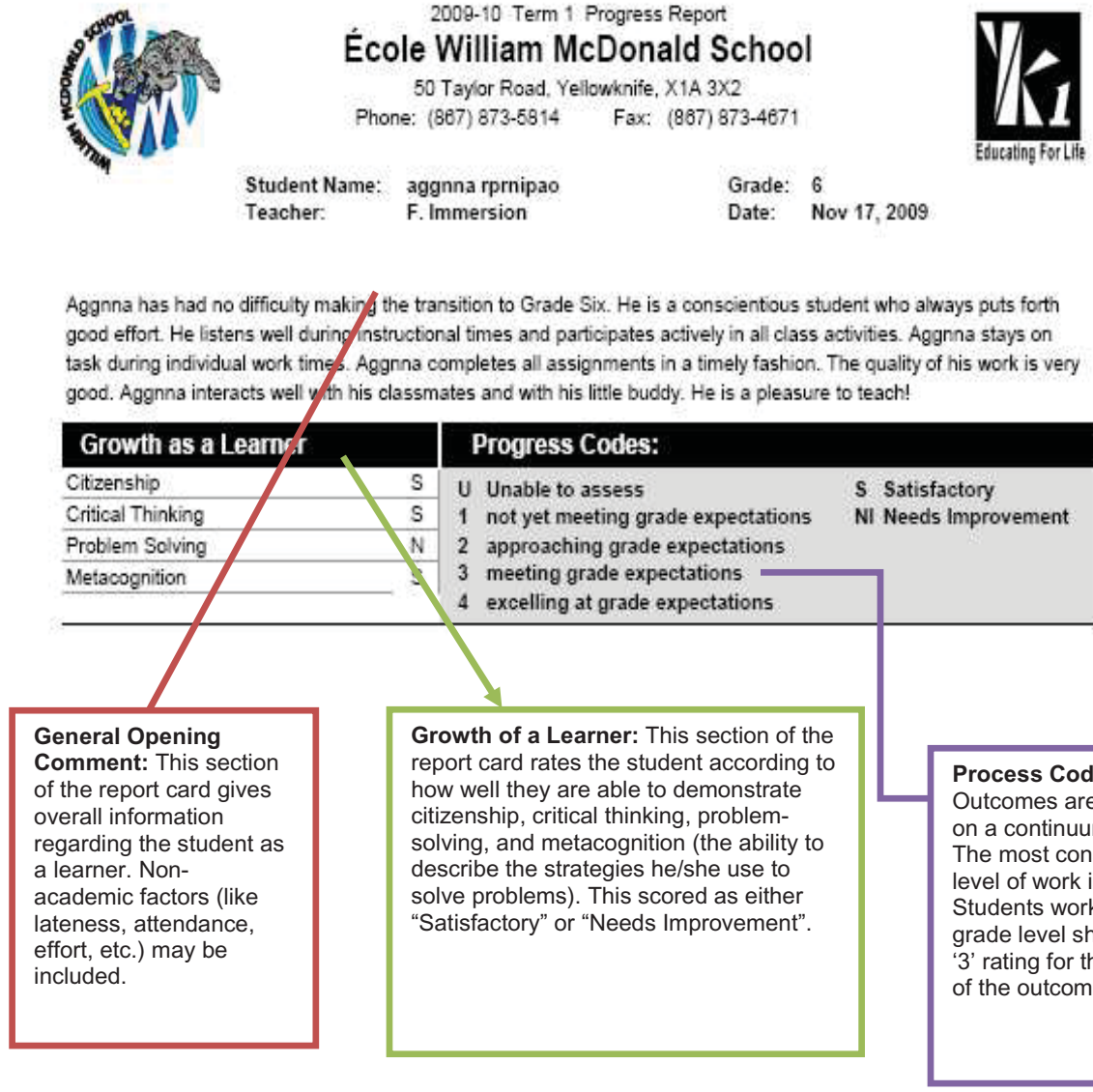
Appendixes

Appendix A: The Outcome-Based Report Card Samples

How to read the new report cards:

This year École William McDonald Middle School has a new report card. There are a number of sections. Below is a brief description:

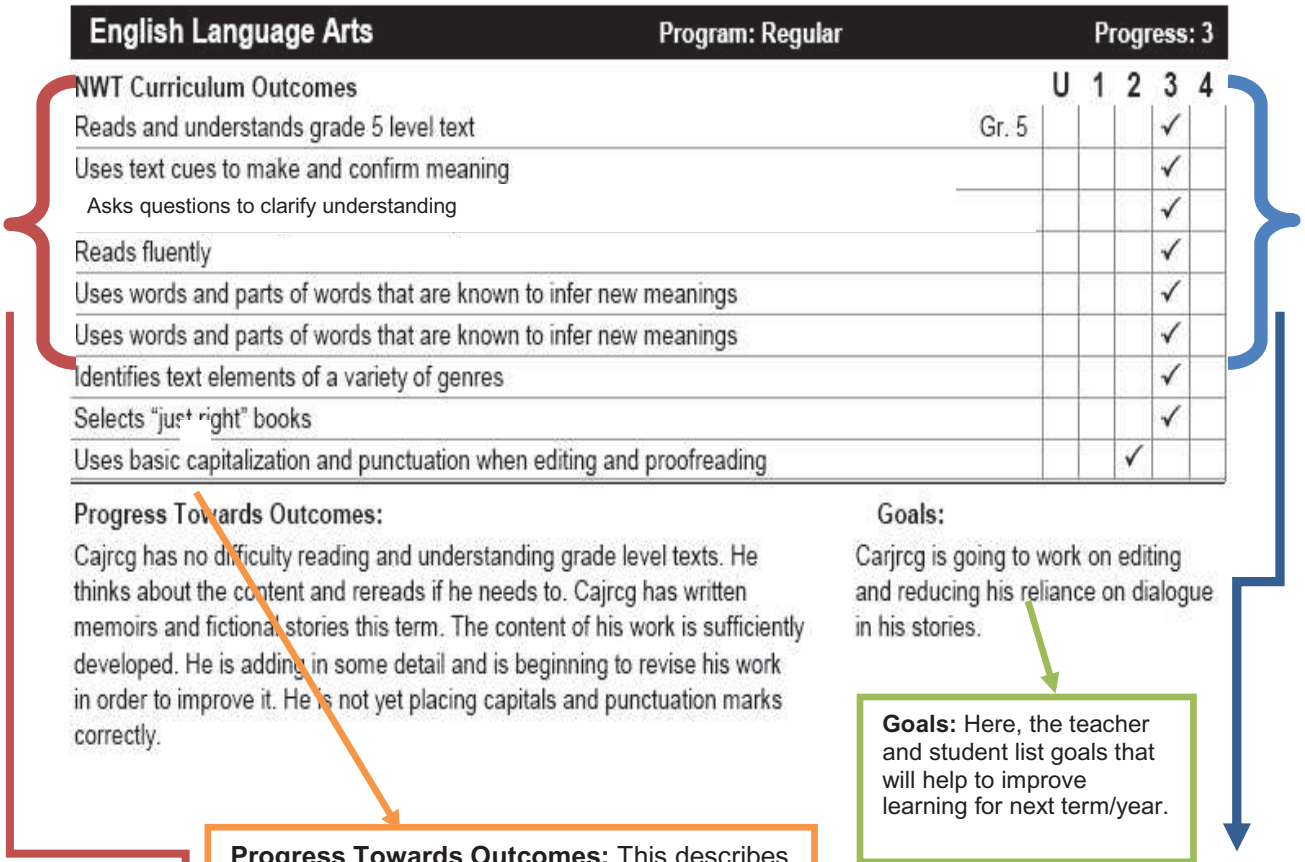
Parents, as we are basing this report on curricular outcomes for each discipline, student progress is determined by our teachers' professional opinion on your child's work against those outcomes, not by mathematical calculations. Teachers look at the pattern of achievement, including trends, not the average of data. Teachers have been trained in analyzing student products and performances against curricular outcomes and in finding evidence of that learning using a variety of methods. Please don't hesitate to inquire how grades for your child were determined if you are unsure.



Subject Areas:
For **English Language Arts, French Language Arts (immersion students), Mathematics, and Science,** the format is the same:

Program: The majority of students are in the regular program. Other options include: Regular with accommodations for difficulties,
Regular with accommodations for enrichment,
Modified program – working below grade level,
Modified program – working above grade level

Progress: This number indicates the overall progress in this subject area. It reflects the most recent, most consistent level of performance.



English Language Arts	Program: Regular	Progress: 3

NWT Curriculum Outcomes		U	1	2	3	4
Reads and understands grade 5 level text	Gr. 5				✓	
Uses text cues to make and confirm meaning					✓	
Asks questions to clarify understanding					✓	
Reads fluently					✓	
Uses words and parts of words that are known to infer new meanings					✓	
Uses words and parts of words that are known to infer new meanings					✓	
Identifies text elements of a variety of genres					✓	
Selects "just right" books					✓	
Uses basic capitalization and punctuation when editing and proofreading				✓		

Progress Towards Outcomes:

Cajrcg has no difficulty reading and understanding grade level texts. He thinks about the content and rereads if he needs to. Cajrcg has written memoirs and fictional stories this term. The content of his work is sufficiently developed. He is adding in some detail and is beginning to revise his work in order to improve it. He is not yet placing capitals and punctuation marks correctly.

Goals:

Carjrcg is going to work on editing and reducing his reliance on dialogue in his stories.

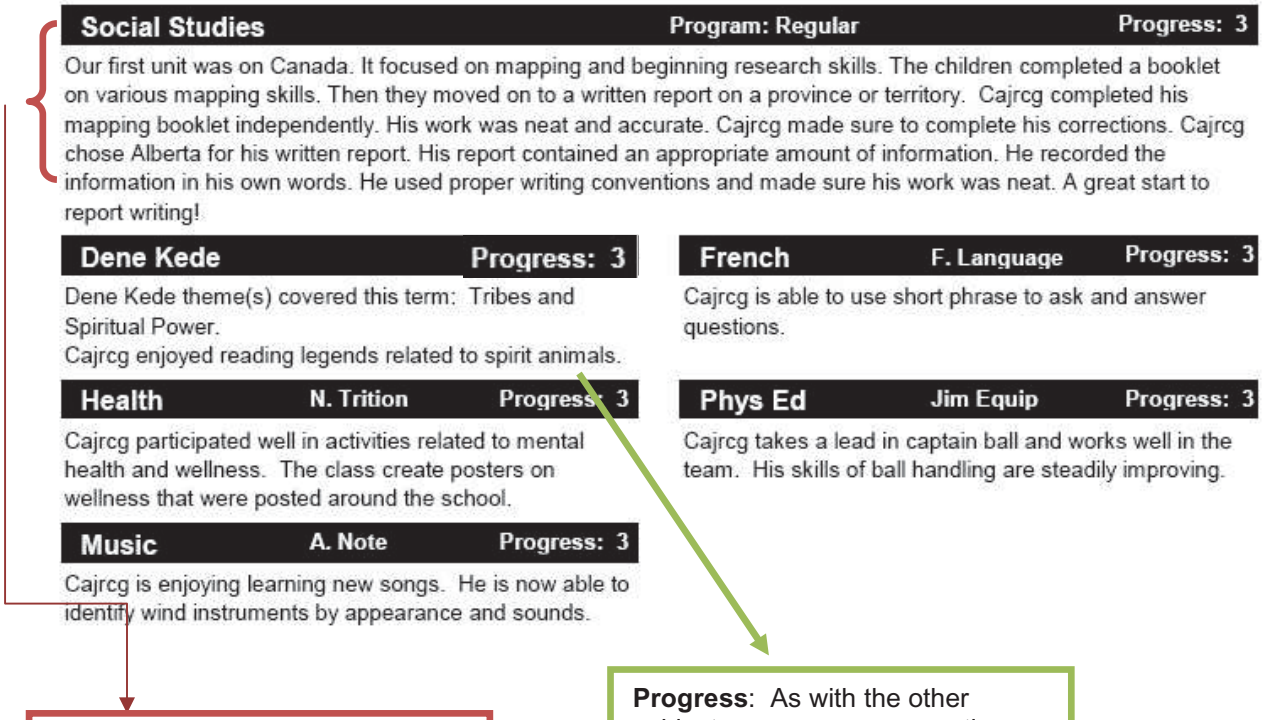
Goals: Here, the teacher and student list goals that will help to improve learning for next term/year.

Progress Towards Outcomes: This describes some of the strengths and challenges that the student faces in completing the outcomes by the end of the year. For those who remember past report cards, this part of the new report is very much like the narrative section provided by subject area.

Key outcomes: Outcomes that were worked on this term are listed. Think of these as year-end goals for each grade. Some of these outcomes will be worked on over the entire year whereas others are specific to a project from this term.

Progress codes: Each outcome has been assessed using a progress code. Think of this as a rating of how well the student is moving towards completing the outcome by the end of the year. A rating of '3' means that the students is moving along as expected and should be able to successfully complete the outcome by the end o f the year. A rating of '2' means that the student is not yet progressing up to the expectations and may need some support to complete the outcome by the end of the year. A rating of '4' means that the student is progressing very well towards completion of the outcome and may even be able to fulfill expectations before the end of the year.

Narrative-only sections
For **Social Studies, Health, Core French, Music (or Art), Physical Education, and Dene Kede (NEW):**



Social Studies Program: Regular Progress: 3

Our first unit was on Canada. It focused on mapping and beginning research skills. The children completed a booklet on various mapping skills. Then they moved on to a written report on a province or territory. Cajrcg completed his mapping booklet independently. His work was neat and accurate. Cajrcg made sure to complete his corrections. Cajrcg chose Alberta for his written report. His report contained an appropriate amount of information. He recorded the information in his own words. He used proper writing conventions and made sure his work was neat. A great start to report writing!

Dene Kede Progress: 3

Dene Kede theme(s) covered this term: Tribes and Spiritual Power.
Cajrcg enjoyed reading legends related to spirit animals.

French F. Language Progress: 3

Cajrcg is able to use short phrase to ask and answer questions.

Health N. Trition Progress: 3

Cajrcg participated well in activities related to mental health and wellness. The class create posters on wellness that were posted around the school.

Phys Ed Jim Equip Progress: 3

Cajrcg takes a lead in captain ball and works well in the team. His skills of ball handling are steadily improving.

Music A. Note Progress: 3

Cajrcg is enjoying learning new songs. He is now able to identify wind instruments by appearance and sounds.

Again, this is a written section that describes some of the strengths and challenges that the student faces in completing the outcomes by the end of the year. For those who remember past report cards, this part of the new report is very much like the narrative section provided by subject area.

Progress: As with the other subject areas, a progress rating has been included to indicate how well the student is progressing towards completion of the curricular outcomes by the end of the year.

Note: Dene Kede is new to the report card. Dene Kede and northern content is infused in all subject areas as a way to increase relevancy and build personal meaning to the content. In addition, each grade level has specific themes to incorporate over the year. Each theme has specific learning experiences and knowledge that will be taught, typically through the current subject areas (like Social Studies, ELA/FLA, Science, PE, etc.). Each grade level is provided with an Aboriginal cultural experience (like the Grade 8 Leadership camp or the Grade 7 Fish camp). Students are involved in lessons before and after the camp experience as a way to broaden and deepen the learning.

Supporting Continued Growth

Ways for Parents to Support Learning

-Encourage nightly reading.
-Talk to your child about what he/she is reading.
-Practice spelling and math facts with your child.
-Play games that contain mathematical concepts.
-Help your child memorize multiplication facts. They will be a focus next term.

Goals for Next Term

Cajrcg identified his own goals for next term. They are: 1.) To do his best work with all assignments. 2.) To add more detail to his writing.

Ways for Parents to Support Learning: This section describes some ways that the parent can be involved in supporting learning. The suggestions should be discussed at the parent-student-teacher interviews. We believe that parents play a huge role in support learning at school.

Goals for Next Term: Together, the student and teacher have selected goals for the student to work on over the next term.

Attendance:

	Total		Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Possible	**183**		21	22	18	15	20	17	11	20	20	19
Absent	**12.5**		0	.5	0	1	.5	4.5	2	4	0	0
Present	**170.5**		21	21.5	18	14	19.5	12.5	9	16	20	19
Late	**24**		2	1	1	4	3	3	2	1	4	3

Attendance is provided to the parent by month. The chart shows the number possible days per month that the student could attend if they were there every day. The second row shows the number of days that the student was absent (this includes: sick, truant, vacation, and other days that the student was away with parental permission). The third row shows the number of days that the student attended school. The last row indicates how many days that the student was late (AM and PM).

École William McDonald Middle School
50 Taylor Road
Yellowknife, NT X1A 3X2
Phone XXXXXX fax XXXXXX

Student	XXXXX	Grade	6
Teacher	XXXXX	Date	March 8, 2013

S = Satisfactory
NI = Needs Improvement

S	Social Intelligence
S	Critical Thinking
S	Problem Solving
S	Metacognition

Comments:

XXXXXX is always on time for class and usually comes to class prepared. He displays a positive attitude towards learning and mostly completes and hands in assignments on time. XXXXXX is always respectful towards his peers and the school staff. He is frequently able to stay on task and mostly does his best work. XXXXXX is sometimes able to work well with others, and can work well independently at times. He is generally a good listener, a conscientious student but needs to take on more responsibility for his learning.

Goals/Ways to Support Learners:

As a parent, you can ask your child what assignments, homework, and projects need to be completely daily. You can verify this information with our school website to avoid late assignments. Create a nightly routine for schoolwork completion and encourage your child to stay for homework club if they do not understand some of the content being covered in class.

Report Card
School Year: 2012-2013
School: École William McDonald Middle School

Reporting Period: T2
Principal: XXXXXX

Name: XXXXXXXX Grade: 6
Reporting Date: Mar 07, 2013

Daily Attendance

	Possible days	Days Present	Percentage Days Present	Late Arrivals
72	73	72.01	99%	0

Dear Parents/Guardians:

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment has introduced a new data information system for the NWT, Power School. Educational staff, in every school across the NWT, has been trained to work with this new program. The Department of Education, Culture, and Employment is working on a standard report card and common reporting process for the NWT, which is contained in the new program, Power School. To support the roll out of Power School, the Department is working together with our district to implement an interim report card. This report card will be temporary for the 2012-2013 school year. The report card will be outcome-based, however, you will notice other differences in the layout.

When you receive your child's report card, you will notice that the cover page will be your child's "Growth as a Learner" report. We are working together with the department to have this section placed where you are currently reading the Superintendent's message. The Department is working with Pearson, the supplier of Power School, to make this change sometime during the year.

It is important to remember the best communication around your child's learning can be had in face-to-face interviews with your child's teacher(s). YK1 staff looks forward to meeting with you to discuss your child's progress at the Parent/Student/Teacher interviews. Check with your school for exact dates and times.

We thank you for your patience as we work with the Department to standardize the report card.

Sincerely,
XXXXXXXX

Northwest Territories

Progress Scales

U- Unable to assess
1 – Not yet meeting grade expectations
2 – Approaching grade expectations
3 – Meeting grade expectations
4 – Excelling at grade level

Outcome Grade Level - Subject Area	**NWT Curriculum Outcomes**	**T2 Progress**
Core French	Academic Progress	3
ELA	Gr. 6 Asks questions to clarify understanding	2
ELA	Gr.6 Uses a variety of sources	3
ELA	Gr. 6 Uses a variety of strategies when conducting research	3
ELA	Gr. 6 Reflects on learning experiences	3
ELA	Gr. 6 Chooses from a variety of comprehension strategies	2
ELA	G. 6 Creates original grade 6 level text, considering purpose, audience, and content	2
ELA	Gr. 6.Uses evidence and/or details to support ideas	3
ELA	Gr. 6 Edits text for spelling, grammar, and punctuation	3
Health	Academic Progress	3
Dene	Gr. 6 Birth and Death	3
Math	Gr. 6 Understands Algebraic expressions and equations, and how they are manipulated	3
Math	Gr.6 Models that objects, numbers, and expressions can be show to be equal	2
Math	Gr. 6 Understands angles, their classifications, and how they relate to triangle	3
Math	Gr. 6 Uses ordered pairs to identify and plot points on a Cartesian plane	3
Math	Gr. 6 Represents and relates improper fractions to mixed numbers and mixed numbers to improper fractions	4
Math	Gr. 6 Demonstrates an understanding of whole number percentages concretely, pictorially, and abstractly	3
Math	Gr. 6 Produces and interprets patterns and relationships using graphs and tables	3

Outcome Grade Level - Subject Area	NWT Curriculum Outcomes	T2 Progress
Physical Education	Academic Progress	3
Science	Gr. 6 Investigates the relationships between the sun, Earth, and moon,	3
Science	Gr. 6 Understands that electrical energy can be changed to other forms of energy	3
Science	Gr. 6 Designed and builds electrical circuits that change electrical energy	3
Science	Gr. 6 Identifies uses of electricity in the home and community and evaluates the efficiency	3
Social Studies	Academic Progress	3

T2 Comments

Teacher XXXX **Core French**

XXX can compose and present a short paragraph about the topic of his choice in French to the class with some support. He usually makes an effort to speak some French in class and use some of the expressions we have learned in class. XXX usually tries to pronounce words and expressions carefully and effectively when speaking in French.

Teacher XXXX **Dene Kede**
Birth – Death
Spiritual and Land

XXX understands that the Dene believe that life is a gift from the Creator; therefore pregnant women are given special respect. He also learned that in Dene culture when a person dies they go back to the Creator. XXX was informed that birthing and taking care of babies is done in a traditional way for Dene people. He was able to compare and contrast present and past methods. XXX understands the role of the midwife in a Dene woman's life.

Teacher XXXX **ELA**
Program: Regular

XXX uses a variety of reading and comprehension strategies to comprehend grade level text. He completed a novel project on Dark Day in the Deep Sea by Mary Pope Osborne and a movie review of “The Mighty”. XXX was usually able to identify the text elements correctly. His published story, The Mystery of the Creepy Movie Theatre, demonstrated his ability to create an original grade level text. XXX sometimes organized his writing and somewhat created clear sentences that supported his main ideas. He is able to edit most of his work correctly for punctuation, spelling and grammatical errors. XXX is usually capable of reflecting on his learning experiences through written reflection.

XXX’s personal goals are: 1) To work hard at making my work neater; 2) To avoid leaving my work until the last minute.

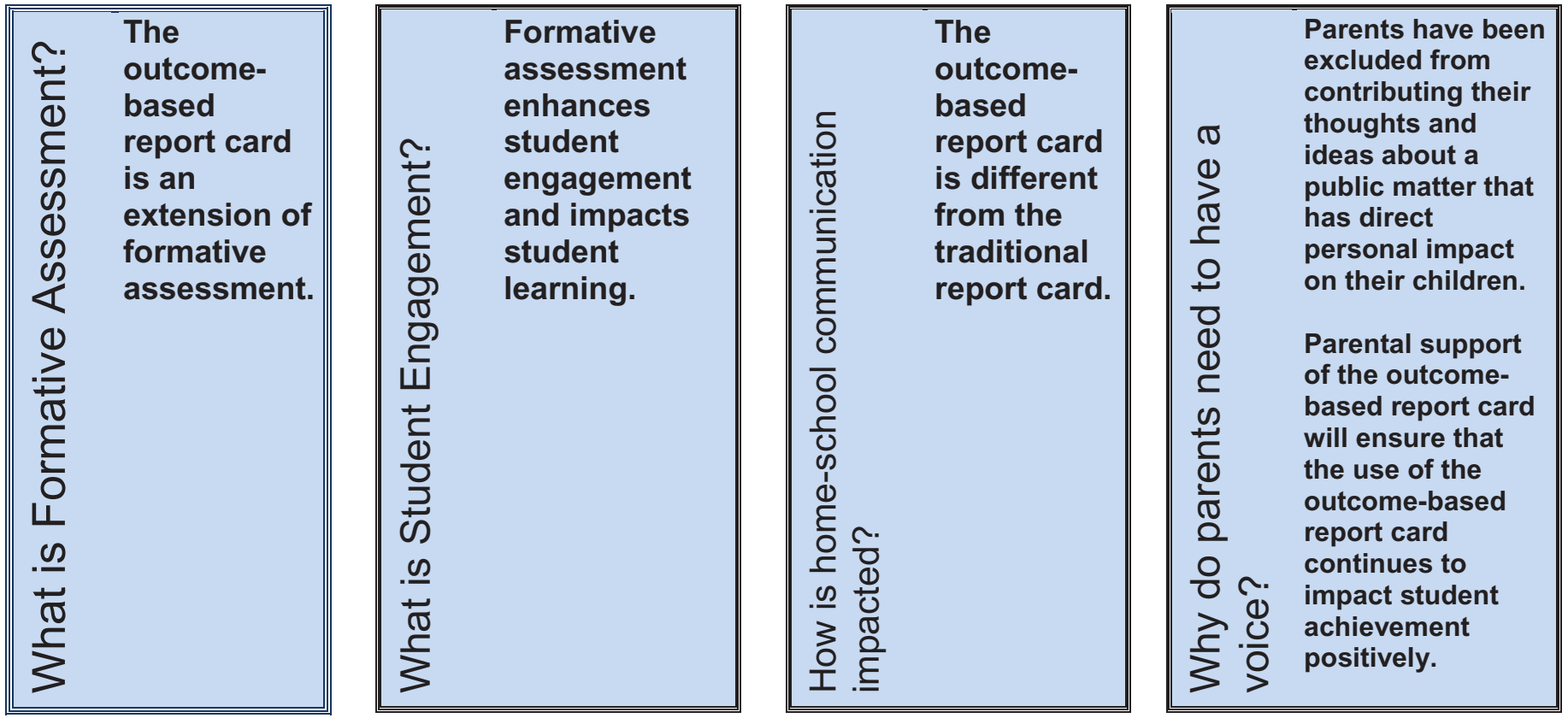
Teacher XXXX **Health**

XXX shows an understanding of the concept of the circle of bullying and can define everyone’s role in this situation. He can identify various forms of bullying, how to find support to prevent or stop bullying, and has identified solutions to have a bullying free zone at school. He was also able to examine and evaluate the risk factors associated with exposure to blood-borne diseases.

Teacher XXXX **Mathematics**
Program: Regular

XXX can consistently demonstrate an understanding of the relationships with tables of values to solve problems. He understands with some minor errors and omissions, the number relationships while using equations with letter variables. He is frequently accurate in using plot points in a Cartesian plane. XXX can representation and describe patterns and relationships using graphs and table. XXX is very accurate in relating improper fractions to mixed numbers. He can also demonstrate a good understanding of the relationship between fractions, rations, and percents.

Appendix B: Literature Review Map



Formative Assessment

•Formative assessment has been demonstrated to improve student learning (Bailey, 2010; Black, et al., 2004; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Cherniss, 2008; Chow, 2010; O'Connor, 2009; Popham, 2008; Stiggins, 2009; Marzano, 2010).
•How does formative assessment link to student engagement and grading to improve student learning?
• Developing a shared vision of success,, providing descriptive feedback, self- and peer-assessment, (Cooper, 2009; Koehn, 2008; O'Connor, 2009; Popham, 2008)
• Questioning, feedback through grading, and the formative use of summative tests (Black et al., 2004; Chow, 2010; Hayward & Spencer, 2010).
• Let students take control and ownership of their learning (Edwards, Turner, & Mokhtari, 2008; Gallavan & Kottler, 2009). Vickerman, 2009).
• Fostered intense concentration, promote absorbed involvement, and cultivate complete enjoyment in learning activities (Carl III, 2009; Csíkszentmihályi, 2008; Shin, 2006).
•Demystification of the learning outcomes helps students meet expectations (Bailey, 2009; Cherniss, 2008; Chow, 2010; Donnelly, 2007; Stiggins, 2008).
•Advantages cited for the continued use of formative assessment practices to inform instructional decisions and grading practices (Black, et al., 2004; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Campbell, 2010; Chow, 2010; Crespo et al., 2010; Edwards, Turner, & Mokhtari, 2008; Frohbieter, et al., 2011; Stiggins, 2008).
-The outcome-based report card was found to be an extension of formative assessment process intended to monitor student learning and provide ongoing feedback (Brookhart, 2011; Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Marzano, Pickering, & Heflebower, 2011)
- communicate student progress in reference to curricular outcomes (Kalianna, Chandran, & Devi, 2012; Ross & Kostuch, 2011; Popham, 2008; Volante, 2007)
•Barriers to formative assessment existed:
  - Political environment (Carless, 2008; Clark, 2011; Stull, Jansen, Varnum, Ducette, & Bernacki, 2011; Pryor & Crossouard, 2008)
  - Deficit of a theoretical foundation (Carless, 2008; Taras, 2010)
  - Teacher training and daily support (Carless, 2008; Olson, Slovin, Olson, Brandon, & Yin, 2010; Webb & Jones, 2009; Webb & Jones, 2009; Winterbottom, 2010)
  - Lack of a theory of formative assessment = confusion for teachers, (Wiliam, 2011).
  - Everyone needs an understanding of the process (Deslandes et al., 2009).
  - Need professional development, process needs demystified for parents (Deslandes et al., 2009; Schmidt, 2008; Yun et al., 2008).

Student Engagement

•Student engagement is important because disengagement and work-avoidance have been shown to be negative predictors of student achievement (Atweh, Bland, Carrington, & Cavanagh, 2008; Guilloteaux, 2007; Carni, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Kitsantas, Winsler, & Huie, 2008; Lawson, 2011; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Parsons & Taylor, 2011)
•How does student engagement work? Theories explain why efforts to increase student engagement resulted in increased achievement.
•- Self-determination theory: (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000);
•- The theory of engagement (Huang, 2010; Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998);
•- Self-regulated theory (Bandura, 1971; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Harris, 2008; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994; Zimmerman, 2008; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons; 992);
•- Model of engagement (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Marzano, Pickering, & Heflebower, 2011; McCombs & Marzano, 1990);
•Connections between theories:
  - Self-efficiency: (Schweinle, Turner, & Meyer, 2008; Kitsantas et al., 2008);
  - Relatedness: (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Niemiec et al, 2009);
  - Relevance (Marzano et al., 2011; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Neimeic et al., 2009; Kearsley & Shneiderman,1998

•The theories of student engagement and motivation provided scholarly justification for the redesign of schools to accommodate the needs of all students to be motivated and engaged in their learning (Csíkszentmihályi, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998; Marzano et al., 2011; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994)

-Advantages cited for the continued use of formative assessment practices to inform instructional decisions and grading practices (Black et al., 2004; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Campbell, 2010; Chow, 2010; Crespo et al., 2010; Edwards et al., 2008; Frohbieter et al., 2011; Stiggins, 2008)
-To reflect the link between formative assessment and student engagement, grading practices have had to change so that student achievement can be reported accurately (Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Ross & Kostuch, 2011; Tierney, Simon, & Charland, 2011; Wormeli, 2006)..

Outcome-based Education

•The outcome-based report card is an extension of formative assessment and formative assessment enhances student engagement. Student engagement impacts student achievement in positive way. These connections have meant that the traditional report card has had to change in order to communicate student achievement accurately.

•Advantages cited for the continued use of formative assessment practices to inform instructional decisions and grading practices (Black, et al., 2004; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Campbell, 2010; Chow, 2010; Crespo et al., 2010; Edwards, Turner, & Mokhtari, 2008; Frohbieter, et al., 2011; Stiggins, 2008).

•To reflect the link between formative assessment and student engagement, grading practices have had to change so that student achievement can be reported accurately (Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Ross & Kostuch, 2011; Tierney, Simon, & Charland, 2011; Wormeli, 2006). Example: Outcome-based report card separated academics and behavior (Schmidt, 2008).

•What are the deficiencies of the traditional report card?

- •- Numbers and letter grades of the traditional report card are not accurate representations of what a student knows and have learned (Swimmer, 2013).
- •- Letter grades and numbers focus on the product rather than the process of learning (Stiggins, 2008; Schimmer, 2013; Wormeli, 2006).
- •- "Hodgepodge grading practices" Cross & Frary, 1996; Webster, 2011; Guskey, 2004; O'Connor, 2009), allegation of grade inflation (Craig, 2011).
- •-Parent confusion (Dean, 2006; Deslandes et al., 2009)
- •-It is not possible for single letter or number grade to communicate student achievement of multiple learning outcomes (Brookhart, 2012; Cooper, 2011; O'Connor, 2009; Simon, Tierney, Forgette-Giroux, Charland, Noonan, & Duncan, 2010).
- •-Demotivation of grades (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Webster 2011)

•What are the issues around the implementation of the outcome-based report card?

- •Pro: Formative uses (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2004; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Chow, 2010; O'Connor, 2009; Popham, 2006; Vickerman, 2009; Wiliam, 2011).
- •Con: change has been made at a costly and unsubstantiated price for education (Killen, 2000; Morcke, Dornan, & Eika, 2012
- •came from political, economical, and educational sources (Killen, 2000; Morcke, Dornan, & Eika, 2012) and large-scale educational reform required significant resources to reorganize the entire school system (Canadian Council of Learning, 2009)

Parental Perspectives

•There exists a need to explore parental perspectives of the outcome-based report card.

•Reports are important for parental support of student learning (Brookhart, 2012; Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Guskey & Jung, 2006; Mathura, 2008; Reeves, 2011).

•But no quality research exists (Anderson, 2011; Balkissoon, 2012; Block, Lacina, Israel, Caylor, Massey, & Kirby, 2009; Craig, 2011; Festel, Simpson, Martine, & Schools, 2012; Greene, 2013; Hammer, 2012; McCarthy, 2012; Schrad, 2012; Tennant, 2012)

•Student achievement improved when teachers, students, and parents had an accurate understanding of curricular outcomes (Bailey, 2009; Cherniss, 2008; Chow, 2010; O'Connor, 2009; Popham, 2008; Stiggins, 2009).

•It became increasingly important for student progress to be communicated in reference to curricular learning outcomes (Kalianna, Chandran, & Devi, 2012; Ross & Kostuch, 2011; Popham, 2008; Volante, 2007)

• Lack of Canadian research exists (Wallner, 2012)

• Information regarding parental perceptions of the outcome-based report card have existed in publications that have not undergone scholarly review.

• Parents have been largely excluded from contributing their thoughts and ideas about a public matter that has direct personal impact on their children.

•Poor quality communication of the traditional report card: Confusion of traditional report card: (Deslandes, et al., 2009; Guskey, 2004; Guskey & Bailey, 2009; Graham-Clay, 2005) and language must be clear: Guskey, 2004; Roebert, 2003; Steinmann, Malcolm, Connell, Davis, & McMann, 2008).

•What are the benefits of the outcome-based report card for parents?

• Clearer understanding of students strengths and weaknesses.

• Indication of how to provide home support

Appendix C: Screening Protocol

A) Telephone Script:

Hello. I am calling for _____ (parent name). My name is Deborah Maguire and I am studying how parents understand and support the outcome-based report card that is used by Yellowknife Education District No. 1.

I would like to invite you to participate in a brief focus group to discuss assessment at your child's school. It is expected that the focus group session will not take more than 1 hour of your time. The group will include from 4-6 other parents with children in Grades 4-8 who attend one of the schools within the Yellowknife Education District No.1. If you agree to participate you will be asked to attend a group session Northwest Territories Teachers Federation (NWTTA) building (5018 48th Street). Beyond refreshments offered during the session, there will be no compensation offered.

The information collected within the focus groups will be used to inform decisions about the use of this tool to communicate student achievement to parents. Would you be interested in being involved in this discussion?

Note: A positive response to this question will result in additional information regarding time and place for the scheduled focus group. A negative response will result in a brief and respectful end to the conversation, thanking the parent for his or her time. Additional information regarding the focus group method may be provided upon request as a way to encourage parents to participate in the focus group session and minimize any anxiety or confusion about the process.

B) Sample Email Communication Script:

Greetings YK1 Parent!

As a parent of a child in Yellowknife Education District No. 1 (YK1), I would to like to invite you to take part in a study of how parents understand and support the outcome-based report card that is used by Yellowknife Education District No. 1.

I am a doctoral student working in conjunction with YK1 and NorthCentral University. I became interested in this topic when I was principal of Mildred Hall and École William McDonald Middle School (2008-2012). Currently, I am a principal in Inuvik at East Three Secondary School.

I am organizing a brief focus group to discuss assessment and outcome-based report cards. It is expected that the focus group session will not take more than 1 hour of your time. The group will include from 4-6 other parents with children in Grades 4-8 who attend one of the schools within the Yellowknife Education District No.1.

If you agree to participate you will be asked to attend a group meeting on May 26 at the Northwest Territories Teachers Federation (NWTTA) building (5018 48th Street) at 3:30-5:00 pm.

Beyond refreshments provided during the session, there will be no compensation offered.

The information collected within the focus groups will be used to inform decisions about the use of this tool to communicate student achievement to parents.

Please let me know if you are interested, and we discuss possible times for the session.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

Appendix D: Focus Group Interview Protocol

Script:

Hello my name is Deborah Maguire, and I would like to thank you for coming to this focus group session. The purpose of the focus group is to find out what you think about the outcome-based report card. A copy of the focus groups questions was sent to you last month. Another copy of the questions is in front of you now.

I will be facilitating the discussion and will serve as a recorder. I guarantee you that your responses will be analyzed after all identifying information are deleted. The summary presentation of the data derived from these interviews will not reveal your identity nor connect your identity to your personal responses. I would like to record the proceeding so that I do not miss any information. A consent form is provided for your signature.

Just so that everyone is clear about how this focus group works, let me explain what will happen. I expect this session to last no more than one hour. I will serve as the facilitator, asking questions, and acknowledging people as they offer to share their ideas. To ensure that everyone has a chance to speak, let's agree that only one person may speak at a time. Finally, as long as you don't disrupt the discussion, you may move around the room and help yourself to refreshments. Does anyone have any questions?

The questioning route:

Icebreaker question: "Can you tell us about an experience, positive or negative, that you have had with assessment, evaluation, or both?" (Addresses the need for participants to get to know one another in a non-threatening way through a brief sharing of experiences related to the topic at hand. Participants will be provided with the

definitions of assessment and evaluation. That is, the educational use of the term *assessment* refers to a process in which information is collected about student learning in comparison to a goal or outcome (Kizlik, 2012). In the field of education, the term *evaluation* describes the judgment or appraisal of student progress towards learning outcomes (Kizlik, 2012; WNCP, 2006).)

- Probing questions: “Can you say more about the experience?” and “What was it like for you?”
- Specifying questions: “Can you tell the group how this assessment-related experience impacted you in the long term?” and “How did you react afterwards?”
- Follow-up question: “Has anyone else in the group had a similar experience?”

2. Introductory question: “Can you describe your understanding of the outcome-based report card?” (Addresses the research questions: **“**How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card?” and “What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?”)
    - Probing questions: “Can you describe your understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the outcome-based report card?” and “Can you read the report card in such a way as to identify your child’s learning outcomes and progress?” and “What parts of the report card are difficult to understand?”

3. Transition question: “Can you describe the discussions that you have had with your child about the information within his or her report card and how he or she could do better?” (Addresses the research question: “How do parents describe their understanding of the outcome-based report card?”)
    - Probing question: “Can you tell us more about these conversations?”
    - Specifying question: “Can you tell us about the opportunities that you have had to sit with your child to discuss their work?”
    - Follow-up questions: “What were these experiences like for you?” and “Has anyone else in the group had a similar experience?”
4. Focus question: “As you know, schools within the Yellowknife Education District No.1 are using the outcome-based report card format to describe student learning. The outcome-based report card describes student learning using a continuum from level 1-4 rather than using traditional letter grades or percentages. Can you tell us about your thoughts about the outcome-based report card?” (Addresses the research questions “What are the concerns and opinions that parents express with regard to strengths and weaknesses the outcome-based report card?” and “What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?”)
    - Probing question: “How did you react when you read the outcome-based report card?”
    - Specifying question: “How well informed do you feel about your child’s progress?”

- Follow-up questions: “Can you tell us more about your support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card?” and “Has anyone else in this group had similar thoughts or concerns about the outcome-based report card?”

5. Focus question: “What do you think would help parents understand the outcome-based report card?” (Addresses the research question “What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?”)
    - Probing questions: “How have you become knowledgeable about the outcome-based report card?”
    - Specifying questions: “In what way does your school promote parental discussion about your child’s learning?” and “How do you think the school can help parents understand their child’s progress?”
    - Follow-up question: “Does anyone else in this group have suggestions for how schools can help parents understand the outcome-based report card?”
6. Summarizing statement: “The results of this study will help lead educators in the Yellowknife District Education No.1 make informed decisions about use of the outcome-based report card. Think about your experiences as a parent and our discussion today. Are there any last thoughts or ideas that you would like to share with lead educators in the Yellowknife Education No.1 about how well the outcome-based report card is supported by parents and what can be done to help for parents better understand the outcome-

based report?" (Addresses the research questions "What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?" and "What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?")

- Probing question: "Can you tell me more about the needs of parents?"
- Specifying questions: "What do you think parents appreciate about the outcome-based report card?" and "What do you think they find challenging about the outcome-based report card?"
- Follow-up question: "What does this group think the top three things that lead educators in the Yellowknife Education No. 1 need to know about parental support for and understanding of the outcome-based report card?"

7. Concluding question: "Is there anything else that anyone feels that we should have talked about but did not?" (Addresses the research questions "What is the level of parental support for the outcome-based report card?" and "What resources or strategies would be helpful for parents to understand the use of the outcome-based report card?")

Script: Thank you for your time. Please be assured that your thoughts and ideas will be used with respect.

Appendix E: Consent to Participate in Focus Group

Informed Consent Form

Parental support for and Understanding of the Outcome-Based Report Card: A Case Study from the Yellowknife Education District No. 1

What is the study about?. You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted for a dissertation at Northcentral University in Prescott, Arizona. The study is interested in your thoughts and opinions about how you understand and support the outcome-based report card used by Yellowknife Education District No.1. You were selected because you are a parent of a student within Grades 4-8 and you responded to a screening telephone call about the study. There is no deception in this study.

What will be asked of me*?* You have been asked to participate in a focus group supported by the Yellowknife Education District No.1. You will be asked to answer some prompting questions to spark group discussion about the outcome-based report card used by Yellowknife Education District No. 1. There is no right or wrong answer to a focus group question. We want to hear many different viewpoints and would like to hear from everyone. We hope you can be honest even when your responses may not be in agreement with the rest of the group. In respect for each other, we ask that only one individual speak at a time in the group. It is estimated that this session will last no more than one hour.

Who is involved? The following people are involved in this research project and may be

contacted at any time: Deborah Maguire and Dr. Patrick McNamara of the Northcentral University.

Are there any risks*?* Although there are no known risks in this study, some of the questions might be personally sensitive since some of the questions may trigger emotions related your experiences with school which can be distressing to some people. However, you may stop the study at any time. Your participation in this focus group session is voluntary, and you may choose to end your participation at any time.

What are some benefits*?* There are no direct benefits to you of participating in this research. No incentives are offered. The information collected within the focus groups will be used to inform decisions about the use of this tool to communicate student achievement to parents.

Is the study anonymity/ confidential*?* Although the focus group will be tape recorded, rest assured that your responses will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report. The data collected in this study are confidential. Your name or personal information is not linked to data. Only the researchers in this study will see the data.

Can I stop participating the study? You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You may choose not to speak about a topic if you wish.

What if I have questions about my rights as a research participant or complaints?

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, any complaints about your participation in the research study, or any problems that occurred in the study, please contact the researchers identified in the consent form. Or if you prefer to talk to

someone outside the study team, you can contact Northcentral University's Institutional Review Board at irb@ncu.edu or 1-888-327-2877 ex 8014.

We would be happy to answer any question that may arise about the study. Please direct your questions or comments to:

1. Deborah Maguire: Maguire.deb@gmail.com (867) 620-2297
2. Dr. Patrick McNamara: PMcNamara@ncu.edu (888) 327-2877 ext 6080

Signatures

I have read the above description for the study titled: Parental support for and Understanding of the Outcome-Based Report Card: A Case Study from the Yellowknife Education District No. 1. I understand what the study is about and what is being asked of me.

My signature indicates that I agree to participate in the study.

Participant's Name: _____ Researcher's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____