ABSTRACT

AN EXAMINATION OF PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF
STANDARDS-BASED REPORT CARDS

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Report cards and standards-based assessing, grading and reporting continue to be relevant

topics of focus for educators. This qualitative study is based on a problem of practice in a school

district in northern Illinois that recently implemented standards-based report cards (SBRCs). This

study developed while I was a principal of an elementary school during initial implementation of

SBRCs. This dissertation expanded from the initial focus on understanding parental perspectives of

SBRCs to better understanding the communicative value of SBRCs and professional development

that could help parents and teachers.

The research question that informed this qualitative study is: How do parents perceive the

strengths and weaknesses of SBRCs? The parents in this study provided insight about strengths and

challenges of SBRCs and explained why different teacher communication during the SBRC process

provided them with a more comprehensive understanding of their child's academic performance in

school. Effective implementation of SBRCs should maximize comprehensive communication

throughout the entire process to enhance parent understanding. Findings from this study can be

used by school districts to focus their efforts, knowledge, and professional development on

standards-based assessing, grading and reporting that will directly impact the teaching, learning, assessing and communicating in schools.

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AN EXAMINATION OF PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF

STANDARDS-BASED REPORT CARDS

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Amber and my three amazing daughters, Anika, Tessa and Fiona. Thank you for the sustained support and inspiring me to persevere throughout the dissertation process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF APPENDICES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Our society believes in grades. We look for four-star movies, five-star restaurants, top-10 colleges, and even Grade A eggs. Although we tend to think of these ratings as objective, we know that it's important to read the full reviews—and look for cracks in the shells. (Scherer, 2011, p. 7)

Introduction

This qualitative study is based on a problem of practice in a school district in northern Illinois that recently implemented standards-based report cards (SBRCs). This study developed while I was a principal of an elementary school during initial implementation of SBRCs. This dissertation expanded from the initial focus on understanding parental perspectives of SBRCs to better understanding the communicative value of SBRCs and professional development that could help parents and teachers.

Background of the Problem

Report cards are a vehicle to communicate student grades with students and parents. The process teachers utilize to determine grades is not always understood or consistent. SBRCs can

help parents understand grades. The movement to new learning standards promoted grading

changes, which impacted what and how grades were communicated while also enhancing usage

of SBRCs in school districts.

According to Henderson, Yerushalmi, and Kuo et al. (2004), grading practices may have

a greater impact on student behaviors and future than any other teacher action. For example,

Seeley (1994) acknowledged that report card grades are considered for promotion, retention,

participation in activities, and placement in programs. Similarly, Olson (2005) recognized that

good grades determine honor roll, provide criteria for "proud" bumper stickers, symbolize family

pride when report cards are celebrated, and impact eligibility for athletics and car insurance

premiums. Grades also have a profound impact on students' future opportunities, as grades are

used to determine academic honors, class rank, and merit scholarships as well as to compare

college applicants (Reeves, 2011). Changes to grading practices also directly impact teaching

and learning. Hefelbower, Hoegh, and Warrick (2014) referred to effective grading as a high-

leverage strategy that has the potential to improve student achievement over time and to enhance

other components of teaching and learning. Similarly, Reeves (2008) contended, "If you wanted

to make just one change that would immediately reduce student failure rates, then the most

effective place to start would be challenging prevailing grading practices" (p. 85).

Stanley and Baines (2001) identified that purposes of report cards include rewarding

student compliance, increasing students' self-esteem, allowing parents to pay their children for

good grades, and producing positive feelings between teachers and parents. According to

Guskey (1996, 2015), one of the primary purposes of grades on report cards is to inform parents

about their child's achievement in school. Parents depend on feedback from the teachers to

determine how their child is performing academically in school. Feedback that provides insight

about learning could be written in response to assignments or assessments, discussed during parent teacher conferences, or viewed on report cards. Regardless of the method of transmission, feedback needs to be accurate, meaningful and easy for parents to understand.

Reeves (2011) proposed that effective teacher feedback to parents should foster realistic expectations, attitudes and understanding for their child's grades by informing students and parents in a timely manner how students performed and how students can improve. According to Brookhart (2008), parents need to understand what grades mean and the purpose of the feedback so they can track progress, compare student work to criteria, have meaningful conversations about their child's academic strengths and weaknesses, and participate in their child's learning. Therefore, when analyzing report cards, it is important to understand parent perspectives because they are the first consumers of information contained in repot cards. Reviewed research about standards-based assessment, grading and reporting typically focus on teachers and students. The audience that has not been understood in depth is the voice of parents.

All of these findings place high stakes on report card grades even though this area of school outcomes and grading practices is seldom studied in research. Regardless of the importance of report card grades to students, teachers and parents, researchers such as Wiggins (1994), Guskey (2006, 2009, 2015), Marzano (2000), O'Connor (2007, 2009, 2011), Wormeli (2006) and Reeves (2008) continue to question the accuracy and validity of current grading practices, as well as the perceptions of parents who are the primary audiences of report cards.

Statement of the Problem

Aspects of grading imprecision link directly to different types of grading processes typically associated with traditional report cards. O'Connor and Wormeli (2011) caution that "despite advances in grading and reporting, imprecision and lack of meaning persist" (p. 40). Green and Emerson (2007) describe grading as the "least understood, least liked, and least considered facet of teaching" (p. 495). Further, according to Randall and Engelhard (2010, p. 1380), it can be "time consuming," "frustrating," and "anxiety-provoking." DeBoer, Anderson, and Abdulaziz (2007) described traditional grading as a tradition "fraught with emotion" (p. 61) and with negative connotations about the "complexities," "inconsistencies," "inadequacies" and "flaws" of the grading process (p. 57). Stanley and Baines (2001) describe grading as an "irrelevant" (p. 230) process that results in a sense of entitlement by certain types of students. As Guskey (2015) urged, educators should recognize parent requests for meaningful grades by providing them with fair, meaningful and reliable information that is useful to students, teachers and parents. A specific context to understand parent perspectives is needed to understand if school districts are achieving the desired results of more meaningful, accurate and reliable grades and report cards when they change from traditional report cards to SBRCs.

The current research has focused mostly on student and teacher perceptions about assessments or report cards. However, it is important to review literature on the entire process that includes standards-based assessment, grades and report cards to build a complete SBRC framework.

Report cards and standards-based grading and reporting continue to be topics of focus for education and legislation. This study is a problem of practice that solicited feedback to better

understand parental perceptions of recently adopted standards-based assessment, grading and

reporting for kindergarten through fourth grade students in an elementary school district in

northern Illinois. Findings from this study will guide educators in making parents more informed

by enhancing their understanding and building on strengths of SBRCs while also addressing the

weaknesses of SBRCs by supporting and scaffolding support. Findings from this study can be

used by school districts to focus their efforts, knowledge and professional development on

standards-based assessing, grading and reporting that will directly impact the teaching, learning,

assessing and communicating in schools.

Purpose of the Study

This is a dissertation of professional practice focused on issues and characteristics in the

school district I work in. Collected information will help my district communicate with parents

via report cards and support their understanding via professional development. Traditional and

standards-based grading and reporting continue to be topics of focus for education books,

journals and legislation. However, research should also focus on parents' perspectives, as they

are the primary target and who are reading report cards, to assess effectiveness of education of

their children. Therefore, this study sought to investigate parental perceptions of recently

adopted SBRCs for kindergarten through fourth grade students in an elementary school district in

northern Illinois. Despite recommendations and research about traditional and standards-based

grading and reporting, a larger scope of analysis of the entire grading process focusing on

parents' perceptions of the entire grading process for traditional report cards and SBRCs is

needed. Findings should provide educators with a more thorough understanding of effective

implementation of SBRCs that maximize comprehensive communication and professional development throughout the entire process to enhance parent understanding.

<div align="center">Research Question</div>

The research question grew in complexity during research. This study initially focused on determining if parents preferred traditional report cards or SBRCs. However, as the study evolved, so did the research question. Morgan and Harmon (2000) suggest evolving research questions are a common characteristic of qualitative research. The researcher thought the interview questions would guide investigation in a certain direction, however, findings evolved in a different direction. Interview questions were malleable and the researcher was willing to make questions open to conversation. In the end, some questions had nothing to do with the findings thus something that was learned involved asking the correct research and interview questions.

This qualitative study began as inquiry into if parents preferred traditional report cards or SBRCs because my district recently changed from traditional report cards to SBRCs and I wanted to know how parents negotiated the shift. My research question evolved from being a question of how parents viewed SBRCs to focus on how parents think about strengths and weaknesses of SBRCs. Therefore, the research question that informs this study is: How do parents perceive the strengths and weaknesses of SBRCs? The methodology that was used to explore this research question involved qualitative interviews.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for two reasons. First, there are scholarly implications of the proposed research to summarize parent perspectives of collective effectiveness of standards-based assessment, grading and reporting so educators can clarify context and scaffold support to enhance parent understanding of SBRCs. This study examines the components of standards-based assessment, grading and reporting that previously were only reviewed in isolation. Findings from this study can serve as a frame of reference for school districts to effectively transition from traditional report cards to SBRCs.

Second, this study is significant because the topics of assessment, grading and reporting have become common educational language. Topics explored in this study are common because educators are discussing accountability for public schools and transitions to teaching, learning and grading that are aligned with Common Core Standards for math and reading. Deeper understanding of these issues is vital for providing insight and guidance to inform change in assessment, grading and report card practice and policy.

Assumptions, Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This study is based on two primary assumptions. The first assumption is that parents possess basic background knowledge about the traditional reports cards used prior to the SBRCs being implemented in 2011-2012 in a northern Illinois suburban district. The second assumption is the participants will answer honestly. However, I was a principal in the school district, and this could have an impact on what interviewees share (Maxwell, 2005). I was careful not to impose

researcher bias about my values or expectations by asking open-ended questions that allowed

interviewees to accurately reflect their thoughts (Maxwell). I also purposely interviewed parents

from the school at which I was principal at as well as parents from three different schools.

There are delimitations for this study. This study is restricted to 1) being parent to more

than one child and 2) having at least one child in fourth or fifth grade. Justification for these

restrictions are explained in Chapter 3 in the "Description of Sample" section.

There are also limitations for this study. There are limitations to the proposed ideas. A

possible limitation of this study may be constraints on the ability to generalize findings.

Research findings may or may not reflect the parents' feelings in other school districts. In

addition, this research purposely only interviewed eight parents to gain in-depth information

about their perspectives with assessment, grading and report cards. Limitations could be

overcome in future by replicating this research with a larger sample sizes in different school

districts in America.

Conclusion

Report cards and standards-based grading and reporting continue to be pertinent topics

for educators. Parental understanding of traditional and standards-based assessment, grading and

reporting will be explored in this study through the lens of variables such as purpose, validity,

reliability, accuracy and meaning. This study sought to understand parents' perceptions of

SBRCs for kindergarten through fourth grade students in an elementary school district in

northern Illinois.

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction to the

study that establishes the need for further research into parent perspectives of SBRCs. Chapter 2

will discuss literature relevant to assessment, grading, report cards and SBRCs. Chapter 3

describes the methodology of the research project. Chapter 4 presents the findings, and Chapter

5 analyzes the collected data and provides suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction and History

This review presents studies that examine and frame the topics of assessment, grading, report cards, standards-based report cards (SBRCs), and parental feedback regarding elementary school report cards. This literature review is divided into areas that will create the foundation to answer the research question: how do parents perceive the strengths and weaknesses of SBRCs.

Aspects of imprecision have long been linked directly to different types of grading processes and are typically associated with traditional report cards. In 1957, Dressel proposed that "a grade is an inadequate report of an inaccurate judgment by a biased and variable judge of the extent to which a student has attained an undefined level of mastery of an unknown portion of an indefinite amount of material" (p. 6). More than fifty years later, O'Connor and Wormeli (2011) caution that "despite advances in grading and reporting, imprecision and lack of meaning persist" (p. 40). Green and Emerson (2007) also describe grading as the "least understood, least liked, and least considered facet of teaching" (p. 495), paralleling Randall and Engelhard (2010), who note that it can be "time consuming," "frustrating," and "anxiety-provoking" (p. 1380). DeBoer, Anderson, and Abdulaziz (2007) have described traditional grading as a tradition "fraught with emotion" (p. 61) and with negative connotations about the "complexities," "inconsistencies," "inadequacies," and "flaws" (p. 57). Stanley and Baines (2001) described

grading as an "irrelevant" (p. 230) process that results in a sense of entitlement by certan types of students.

Grading and report cards continue to be a major component of the educational process that teachers and parents depend on for communication of student progress. Grading and report cards research have focused on the traditional five category scale of "A," "B," "C," "D" and "F"; grading on a curve; standards-based grading; or eliminating grades so they do not distract from teaching and learning (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). Gronlund and Linn (1990) and Laska and Juarez (1992) acknowledged that traditional letter grades were the most popular format to communicate student achievement and progress in school to parents and students in the 20th century. The focus of this study was the change from traditional report cards that most schools have historically used to standards-based report cards (SBRCs) that more school districts are changing to (Guskey, 2015; O'Connor, 2009).

Grading practices for traditional report cards typically use a 100-point scoring system and combine different sources of evidence such as behavior, academics, effort and participation (Guskey & Bailey, 2010). These long-standing practices and beliefs are entrenched and unquestioned because parents and teachers typically have experienced the same grading system and can relate to the process. For example, O'Connor (2009) identified traditional grading practices such as 100-point grading scales; averaging grades to determine a final grade; assigning zeros for incomplete work, and combining grades for behavior, participation, academics and extra credit when determining final grades are practices that teachers and parents know well without questioning their validity. However, Guskey (2009) reports that overall grades currently used for each subject in the traditional report cards are lacking, as some educators and parents have found that the report cards do not provide specific feedback essential to improving student

learning. In general, research has documented how teachers utilize "hodgepodge" (p. 53) traditional grading practices that combine academic achievement, effort, and attitude to determine student academic outcomes rather than following established measurement principles (Cross & Frary, 1999; McMillan, 2001; McMillan, Myran & Workman, 2002; Reeves, 2006) that focus on grades that are accurate, consistent, meaningful and guide learning (O'Connor, 2009).

Reviewed research also documented why the varied interpretations of what grades actually mean lead to confusion (Guskey, 2015; Randall & Engelhard, 2010). DeBoer, Anderson, abd Abdulaziz (2007) and Marzano (2000) argue that traditional grading practices are imprecise, inflated, inconsistent, and almost meaningless. Guskey states that "despite the popularity, percentage grades are the most difficult to justify or defend from a procedural, practical, or ethical perspective" (p. 23). As O'Connor (2009) explained, traditional report cards have too little meaning because academics, behaviors, participation and extra credit are combined into one grade, while at the same time they also have too much meaning because of their importance and status given by educators and parents. Vatterott (2015) explained that with traditional grades, all grades are permanent so students believe they will be penalized by mistakes and grading can be less accurate if behavior is combined into the grade. For example, a high achieving students with bad behavior may get a low-grade, while a low achieving students with good behavior may get a better grade than their performance reflects. Despite the controversies or misunderstandings about traditional grading, there is general agreement that academic achievement grades should be separated from effort, attendance, and behavior factors to foster valid grading outcomes and practices (Cross & Frary, 1999; Brown, 2004; Winger, 2005, 2009; Jung & Guskey, 2007; Scriffiny, 2008).

Standards-based grading is one alternative to traditional report cards that schools have been changing to (Guskey, 2009, 2015). Standards-based grading rates students on specific tasks and exit-level standards rather than assigning overall letter grades of "A," "B," "C," "D" or "F." A numbering system typically is a scale of 1-4, with 1 being significantly below standards and 4 being above standards. O'Connor (2009) proposed that standards-based grading shifts the focus of grades to communication rather than competition and uses criterion-referenced grades instead of norm-referenced grades to compare grades against established standards and criteria rather than peers. A basic comparison of the differences between standards-based report cards and traditional report cards is described in Table 1.

Standards-based grading practices typically incorporate solutions to problems that have been associated with traditional report cards such as separating grades for academics and behavior and determining grades differently. For example, rather than averaging different types of grades that may have different values for traditional grades, Guskey (2015) explained standards-based grading provides alternatives to averaging grades such as emphasizing comprehensive recent evidence related to the critical learning standards. Guskey also encourages teachers to continue to use evidence such as behavior and homework on standards-based report cards (SBRCs) but to report the grades separately so the meanings of the academic grades are clarified and communication is enhanced.

Table 1

Comparison Chart of Differences between SBRCs and Traditional Report Cards

Traditional Report Card	SBRC
Subjects are listed by name.	Major subjects are defined by curriculum or content standards.
Grades reflect an averaging of scores to determine a letter grade for a subject area. Letter grades A-F reflect an individual teacher's expectations, student effort and achievement. Letter grades do not indicate if students are working at grade level or specify the expected standards.	Grades reflect the level of proficiency on various standards for each subject area. Numerical and/or proficiency levels indicate mastery of the grade level standards. Achievement and effort are reported separately.
Based on assessment methods	Based on learning goals/standards
Labels a child's performance and often includes such things as extra credit, work habits, and attitude.	Gives concrete information to assist your child, and separates academic performance from work habits and personal characteristics.
Curriculum and instruction are teacher centered, textbook driven, and not consistently aligned to the state standards.	Curriculum and instruction are aligned with national, state and district standards.
Often Norm-referenced where students are rank ordered and some students fail.	Criterion-referenced where student's performance is compared to the "standard" rather than to other students.
Teacher decides and announces grades.	All aspects of assessment is discussed with and understood by students
Most adults understand this type of grading system from their experiences as students.	Adult's understanding will evolve as they get acclimated with SBRC vocabulary and process.

(Adapted from O'Connor, 2009)

SBRCs provide more consistent accountability than traditional report cards because grade-appropriate standards and skills on which students are graded are clearly communicated to the students and parents. SBRCs provide complete information about student achievement based on standards, predictions as to achievement on specific standards for future standardized tests, and clear information about when teachers should accelerate, enrich, re-teach, accommodate, or remediate students (Guskey, 2015). Standards-based report cards identify areas of strengths and areas needing development compared to standards. They also establish targets for students to

achieve, emphasize what is learned rather than what is taught, assess development of academic and non-academic skills over time, help teachers adjust their teaching, and improve communication with parents (Guskey, 2015).

Vatterott (2015) explained that SBRCs can change how and what is taught and learned by changing how grades are used and the way learning is "defined," "experienced," and "structured" (p.26). Vatterott (2015) proposed critical components of standards-based grading include "non-threatening" (p. 55) feedback, opportunities to re-do work, and reporting behavior separately from academics so grades more accurately reflect learning rather than compliance or working hard. Assessment during instruction facilitates differentiation opportunities that support struggling students or challenge students who demonstrate an understanding of the content being learned (Vatterott, 2015). According to Vatterott (2015), a positive outcome of students being empowered when teachers focus on learning, provide feedback, allow for multiple opportunities to demonstrate understanding, share learning targets with the students and parents, and grade learning based on mastery of standards. SBRCs can enhance the consistency and precision of assessing, grading and reporting, but this study will examine how parents interpret and understand these changes. Variables such as purpose, validity, reliability, accuracy and meaning collectively define some parents' understanding of standards-based assessment, grades and report cards.

This review presents studies that examine and frame the topics of assessment, grading, report cards, standards-based report cards (SBRCs), and parental feedback regarding elementary school report cards. This literature review is divided into areas that will create the foundation to answer the research question: how do parents perceive the strengths and weaknesses of SBRCs. The first areas focus on the search description, theoretical framework and history of grading and

reporting as it relates to this study. The second analyzes current research regarding the validity and accuracy of assessments. The third compares the reporting systems to facilitate understanding of the similarities and differences in how grades are reported on a report card. The next three areas focus on SBRCs, reasons school districts are considering SBRCs, and recommendations for implementing SBRCs. The literature review concludes with a description and analysis of teacher, student and parent perspectives as well as the methodologies employed in studying the assessment/grading process at the elementary school level.

Search Description

The following search process helped answer the research question: How do parents perceive the strengths and weaknesses of SBRCs. Topics were developed by identifying and reviewing the main concepts and keywords. The identified topics included standards-based report cards and parents' perspectives of report cards, grading and report cards. Primary sources were found using advanced searches via the Educational Information Resource Center (ERIC) database from the Northern Illinois University library website. Books, articles and journals were also found via the internet and purchased when possible. The topics were narrowed by critically analyzing and evaluating the reliability, appropriateness and usefulness of information.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework based on the constructivist theory of learning was used to explore the parents' perspectives of standards-based assessing, grading and reporting. The purpose of the framework is to understand perceptions because they provide clues to how parents construct meaning and make sense of report cards, so educators can help parents make sense of

report card grades by scaffolding the information and support. Support is a key concept of constructivism.

Constructivism recognizes that learning is a process in which the learner constructs his/her own personal understanding through personal experiences and reflection on these experiences (O'Connor, 2009). Much of the constructivist theory is based on child development theories by Vygotsky (1962) and Bruner (1966, 1986) about the adaptation and organization used during intellectual growth. Bruner (1966) focused on the mental schemas learners use to understand new content. Vygotsky (1978) proposed that learning is a contextual social activity and that the learners' "zone of proximal development" means people learn only if new content is within the range they can understand. The constructivist learning theory expanded Bruner's concept and is founded on the premise that learners need to understand why they are learning new content and to create a path to learning based on their previous knowledge (Resnick & Klopfer, 1989).

When examining assessing, grading and reporting, the constructivist view of learning can point toward different ways to understand the parents' perceptions. Extending Vygotsky's (1962) notions, new information should be communicated in formats and words that are within the parents' range of understanding. Communication includes criteria used to determine grades and vocabulary that helps them understand student performance, progress and expectations. Explanations of grades for parents should take into account the parents' prior knowledge and experiences with traditional grades. The constructivist model provides a lens with which to understand the parents as they encounter new information about standards-based assessing, grading and reporting that may be in conflict with previous experiences with or knowledge of traditional grading. The parents' perceptions of assessing, grading, and reporting focus on

knowledge being actively constructed by the parents in the process of creating personal meaning from new information integrated with previous experiences.

Scaffolding can support parents through the process of understanding new SBRCs. Scaffolding is inspired by Vygotsky (1978) who described benefits of an expert helping a novice learner while decreasing support as the learner becomes more proficient. In this study, scaffolding was used to describe the way teachers provide parents with the tools they need to understand SBRCs (Jacobs, 2001).

<div align="center">History of Grading and Reporting</div>

A historical examination of assessment and grading in the United States uncovers processes and debates that have long been discussed by educators. The history provides a foundation to contextualize parents' understanding of assessments, grades and report cards. For the purposes of this study, the history of assessment and grading is broken into the three categories: 1) early history of assessment and grading in America, 2) historical questions about grading, and 3) recent legislation and initiatives that focus on accountability and consistency.

<div align="center">Early History of Assessment and Grading in the United States</div>

The early history of assessment and grading in the United States has been documented in published diaries and books authored by college educators. In 1785, Yale President Ezra Stiles assigned grades to 58 seniors that sorted them into three different categories similar to great, very good, and not sufficient (Pierson, 1983). The 1817, the College of William and Mary faculty reports indicated students were graded on behavior under the category of "orderly, correct, and

attentive" (William and Mary College, 1817, p. 5). Grading criteria for students at Yale and Harvard Universities included attendance at chapel and class (Peabody, 1888).

Throughout the early 1800s, most teachers taught multiple grades of students and reported learning progress orally to parents (Guskey, 2015). The original use of the 100-point scale began in the 1830s when an average grade was a 50 and grades either above 75 or below 25 were rare (Smallwood, 1935). According to *An Historical Study of Examinations and Grading Systems in Early American Universities*, the 100-point grading scale was used in mathematics and philosophy classes at Harvard in 1837, and a passing mark of 60 was part of the grading criteria for Cornell's College of Law (Finkelstein, 1913).

Moll (1998) noted that research in 1911 questioned the validity of the grading process, and Starch and Elliott (1912 and 1913) conducted two separate studies that resulted in findings of widely varied percentage grades that teachers assigned to identical English papers and geometry papers.

Finkelstein (1913) also discussed grading variability. Finkelstein (1913) drew diagrams of and discussed flaws in the "curve of error," "probability curve," and "Gauss's Curve" (p. 11), which resembles the Bell Curve that educators continue to discuss. Finkelstein (1913) recognized that grades can impact students' careers as he proposed questions about grading that are still being discussed one hundred years later. These questions focused on fairness, consistency, variability, reliability, and meaning of grades as well as if grades should be based on ability, performance or participation? Finkelstein also specifically noted that the 100-point scale was "in all probability not the best system" (p. 6). Finkelstein also expressed concerns about grades practices employed in American universities when he acknowledged the following:

When we consider the practically universal use in all educational institutions of a system of marks, whether numbers or letters, to indicate scholastic attainment of the pupils or students in these institutions, and when we remember how very great stress is laid by teachers and pupils alike upon these marks as real measures or indicators of attainment, we can but be astonished at the blind faith that has been felt in the reliability of the marking system. School administrators have been using with confidence an absolutely uncalibrated instrument. (p. 1)

Moll (1998) found that in the 1930s and 1940s universities and schools changed from numerical percentages to letter grades that represented groups of percentages; some changed to pass/fail grading systems in the 1960s. Guskey and Bailey (2001) identified schools that did not provide grades but instead provided either verbal descriptions and narrative reports or based grades on evidence of mastery of skills and content. However, researchers and educators continue to analyze the inadequacies of the grading process without changing the grading practices that were used in the 1800s and 1900s. Guskey and Bailey (2001) recognized that a lack of consensus about grading systems continues but note that more elementary schools are switching from traditional report cards that assign "A," "B," "C," "D" and "F" grades to SBRCs that communicate students' learning of academic standards as "Beginning," "Developing," or "Proficient" (p. 28).

Recent Legislation and Initiatives

Recent legislation and initiatives have impacted assessment, grading and report card processes that ultimately could impact the parents' understanding of grades. Stiggins (2006) described that up until the 1980s, the role of schools focused on accountability by assessing students to identify successful and unsuccessful learners. However, the 1990s saw a major shift when most states created mandatory standards that identified what students will know and be able to do (O'Connor, 2009). Recent conversations among educators and researchers have

focused on the clarity of the learning standards, the effectiveness of instruction and assessments, accountability, and the inadequacies of grading practices and report cards (Guskey & Bailey, 2010).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), has been the subject of debate between educators and legislators as school districts try to comply with mandates. NCLB focuses on increasing the accountability of schools, school districts and states by mandating that every U.S. public school district create a plan for improving student math and reading performance, for closing achievement gaps among all students, and by identifying school districts that are not making adequate yearly progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). NCLB focused on accountability, student equity and achievement gaps but also created an intense focus on standardized testing and incentives for states with lower standards (The Executive Office of the President in Cooperation with the U.S. Department of Education, 2014). NCLB enhanced accountability for schools by requiring increases in student achievement (Nagel, 2015).

Race to the Top (RTT) is another recent federal initiative focused on accountability for student learning. On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (AARA) into law. This Act was designed to stimulate both job creation and the economy by investing in education (Race to the Top, 2014). The AARA allocated $4.35 billion in the form of competitive grants called Race to the Top to encourage states to demonstrate educational reform and innovation, close academic achievement gaps and enhance college and career readiness (Race to the Top). The competitive RTT grant process financially rewards states that facilitate initiatives related to improving assessments and

standards and improving schools with low student academic performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

The Common Core Standards, another recent federal initiative, focuses on consistent expectations for all students. The Common Core Standards are part of a standards, assessment and accountability initiative that focuses on transformative changes designed to prepare every student and school for future challenges and opportunities (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014). The intent is to create standards that convey rigorous expectations assessed by comprehensive assessments and facilitate policies and practices that foster accountability for every students' success (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014).

Between 2010 and 2014, school districts began aligning teaching, assessment, and grading practices with the Common Core Standards for Math and Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies. Two new national assessments were developed to evaluate third through eighth grade student performance relative to these new standards starting in 2014. The two primary methods created to assess student understanding of Common Core Standards were the "Smarter Balanced" and "Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers" (PARCC) assessments. Both assessments provide students, parents and educators with accurate information about whether students are on track for college and career readiness. The assessments facilitate comparison of student achievement among schools, school districts and states (PARCC, 2014; Smarter Balanced, 2014).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) of December of 2015 was the most recent version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The ESEA maintains accountability and ensures high state standards by empowering state and local decision-makers and targeting reform, resources, opportunities and outcomes for struggling schools and subgroups of students.

Understanding historical discussions about assessment and grading and current accountability and consistency initiatives helps frame the study of parents' perceptions of assessment, grading and reporting practices. Subsequent sections will analyze what has been published regarding assessment, grading and report cards/SBRCs to provide justification for the need to understand parents' feedback about assessment, grading and report cards.

Validity and Accuracy of Assessments

Analysis of current research regarding validity and accuracy of assessment provides understanding of the first major component of the report card process that directly impacts parents' understanding of their children's performance in school. Parents' ongoing understanding of their child's performance on assessments will guide their support and understanding of their child's report card grades. O'Connor (2009), Wiggins (1998) and Brookhart (1994) acknowledged assessment validity problems and grading inconsistencies among teachers, schools, grades, school districts, and states. O'Connor (2009) and Davies (2000) explained how assessments vary in format and purpose. O'Connor identified commonly used student assessments such as paper-and-pencil exams, self-evaluation, peer evaluation, teacher evaluation, portfolios, projects, presentations, performance assessments utilizing checklists or rubrics, anecdotal records, written assignments, response journals and conferences. Wiggins (1994), O'Connor (2009), Marzano (2000) and Guskey and Bailey (2001) found that validity and accuracy of grades are impacted by averaging assessment grades, assigning zeroes on a hundred-point scale, not separating academic grades from behavior grades, and offering extra credit . Additionally, assessment is inherently subjective.

However, learning and assessment are becoming more authentic as teachers focus on making learning relevant to students and the real world. O'Connor (2009) proposed that authentic assessment of student knowledge, skills and learning styles emphasizes performance rather than rote knowledge generally measured by traditional paper-and-pencil assessments and can facilitate ongoing exchange of information between students and teachers. Similarly, Davies (2000) proposed that, when properly extended, evaluation supports more effective learning, better informs parents, and increases educator and parental confidence about evaluation when evidence is collected over longer periods of time. Learning should be the focus of assessment to increase accountability and standards of learning. Cross and Frary (1999) acknowledged that assessing and grading can objectively communicate stages of educational attainment in different subjects if emphasis is placed on assessments having valid measurements of academic achievement that do not rely on bell curves or quotas. Rather than merely auditing student performance, Wiggins (1998) and O'Connor (2007) described how assessments should educate, support and improve student performance and foster student self-assessment by being accurate, meaningful and consistent. Supportive assessment occurs while observing students in safe and caring learning environments. Furthermore, Kohn (1994) recognized that supportive assessment engages students in assessment criteria and progress and focuses on quality curricula.

Black and Wiliam (1998) identified students as the ultimate consumers of assessment feedback and recommended that teacher feedback should focus on enhancing student learning rather than on grading, ranking, competing or rewarding. Brookhart (1994) cautioned that using classroom assessments as rewards may impact behavior and increase order in the classroom, but it may not be conducive to engaged student learning. Brookhart et al. (2008) argued traditional assessment facilitates competition and judges students' answers as correct or incorrect.

Conversely, formative assessment provides students with a sense of control and facilitates an exchange of information between students and teachers as teachers try to understand how students are thinking. Other researchers also discussed benefits for formative assessment. Black and William (1998) defined formative assessment as assessment that occurs during learning that fosters students' understanding of their learning and facilitates application of assessment information by the teacher to improve instruction. Shepard (2001) added that assessment should happen during instruction rather than at the end of instruction so that insights from assessments can be used to modify teaching and learning. McDaniel (2010) also recommended finding meaningful ways to integrate assessment into the learning process to provide specific and timely feedback to students, involving students in the assessment process, communicating clearly about the assessment process and re-assessment opportunities. Similar to McMillan (2002), Marzano and Heflebower (2011) recommended enhancing assessment options to include probing discussions, unobtrusive assessments where students might not realize they are being assessed and student-generated assessments that demonstrate understanding of standards. McMillan et al. (2002) and Stetcher et al. (1998) found that understanding additional specifics about effective assessment was essential. Ultimately, researchers propose that effective and supportive assessments occur frequently throughout the learning process and foster self-assessment that encourages improvement. However, comparing recommendations from researchers with research findings from elementary schools in the United States will provide additional insight about assessment.

Black and Wiliam's 1998 meta-analysis showed how essential formative assessments are to effective teaching by describing how they can increase standards of learning and achievement. Black and Wiliam examined how to maximize learning via assessments that occur throughout

the teaching and learning processes. Their work defined formative assessment as evidence utilized to modify teaching to meet student needs. Black and Wiliam found many countries treated the classroom as a "black box" in which the focus was on input from the outside. They found providing ongoing formative assessment and feedback to students and teachers can be beneficial when the gathered assessment information is used to meet students' needs through modified teaching.

Black and Wiliam (1998) concluded there is room for improvement in regard to assessments that 1) overvalued superficial learning, 2) fostered negative impacts of competition, 3) focused on grades rather than feedback, and 4) focused primarily on managerial functions. They also concluded improved formative assessment helped low achievers most, decreased the range of achievement scores, and increased student achievement. They recommended improving assessment processes by 1) focusing on students' untapped potential rather than assessing students as though they have a fixed, inherited intelligence, 2) facilitating discussions that included all students to facilitate discovery of understanding, 3) teaching students how to self-assess, and 4) monitoring and improving student progress by providing feedback about strengths and weaknesses rather than making comparisons between students. Black and Wiliam contended effective formative assessments could increase standards of learning and achievement.

In a follow-up analysis, Wiliam (2014) scrutinized on-the-spot informal assessments that involve an "initiate-respond-evaluate cycle" (p. 16). Wiliam noted that teachers typically check students' understanding by asking a question, calling on a student with a raised hand, and indicating whether the answer is right or wrong before proceeding with the lesson. Wiliam cautioned educators about the aforementioned approach because student participation is voluntary and the responses are typically only from one student. Wiliam recommended

enhancing informal assessment by 1) asking the question first, pausing to allow students to think and then calling on a student, 2) calling on students at random, 3) formulating effective questions that appropriately challenge students and vary in difficulty 4) checking every student's understanding multiple times throughout the lesson and 5) utilizing exit slips to understand students' misconceptions and understandings.

Similar to Black and Wiliam (1998), McMillan, Myran and Workman (2002) analyzed studies about assessment and grading while also conducting research about assessment and grading practices in elementary schools. McMillan et al. found literature specific to assessment and grading in elementary schools was limited, focused more on grading rather than assessment, and did not focus on the relationship between the kinds of assessments used and students' grades. McMillan et al. examined variations among teacher grade level and years of experience, assessment competency, training, values and beliefs. They found grading practice differences were more apparent between individual teachers than among schools and that most third through fifth grade teachers used multiple factors when grading students. Different types of assessments included performance assessments, alternative assessments, completion and short-answer questions, constructed-response tests and rubric-scored assessments and portfolios.

Stetcher et al. (1998) conducted case studies to analyze how recent statewide assessment modifications impacted classroom practices to improve assessment in math and writing. Stetcher et al.'s study found that teachers from schools where students had improved math test scores increased use of extended investigations, rarely used multiple choice questions and typically assessed students with problems that were more challenging than problems that were practiced in class. These teachers also increased the frequency of performance tasks that were included in grading and decreased the value of class participation, homework and mid-year and final

assessments in the grading calculus. Stetcher et al. concluded teachers spent an increased

amount of time assessing students' math knowledge compared to writing knowledge and

believed portfolios had a positive impact on instruction but demanded more teacher time.

Stetcher et al. found that there was no consistent relationship between improved assessment

scores and specific teaching practices and that differences among teachers were related to

content and organization of schools rather than classroom practices. Furthermore, the teachers'

beliefs were closer to standards-based approaches than the traditional teaching approaches.

Summary of Assessment Research

Assessments can provide key communication to parents about their children's

performance in school. Reviewed research studied and proposed recommendations about how

meaningful and effective assessment enhances feedback, differentiation, validity and accuracy.

Loeb et al. (2008) found that assessments help teachers provide timely and accurate feedback so

teachers can adjust their instruction accordingly and differentiate instruction to meet students'

different needs. Reeves (2004) extended the thought about the benefits by acknowledging that

assessments help students and parents when clear expectations are communicated regarding

knowledge and skills. However, rather than creating assessments that focus on grading, ranking,

competing, or rewarding (Black & Wiliam, 1998), teachers should create assessments

that educate, support and improve student performance and foster student self-assessment by

being accurate, meaningful and consistent (Wiggins, 1998 and O'Connor, 2007). Teachers

should also include students in formal and informal assessments and grading and consider recent

summative assessments when grading (O'Connor, 2007; Wiliam, 2014). Black and Wiliam

(1998) highlighted the benefits of formative assessment that occur during learning that facilitates

feedback to enhance learning. McMillan et al. (2002) argued it was critical for teachers to align assessment and grading with suggestions from testing and measurement specialists. Similarly, Cross and Frary (1999) found that assessing and grading can objectively communicate stages of educational attainment in different subjects if emphasis is placed on assessments having valid measurements of academic achievement that do not rely on bell curves or quotas.

The reviewed assessment literature provided a foundation for this research. However, shortcomings of viewing the assessment literature in isolation were noted. For example, Black and Wiliam (1998) focused on assessment and did not analyze grading and report cards. Furthermore, Cross and Frary's and McMillan et al.'s studies fall short of examining the integration of assessment with learning and do not account for parent perspectives. Additional information about grading and reporting was reviewed next to enhance understanding about parent perspectives of standards-based grading and report cards.

<center>Meaning, Purpose, Accuracy and Validity of Grading and Reporting</center>

Researchers such as Reeves (2011), Brookhart (1993), Messick (1989, 1990), and O'Connor (2010) have focused on the meaning, purpose, accuracy and validity of grading, and reporting. These components can help understand how parents perceive grades when they review their child's assessments and report cards. If letter grades are to be an effective way of communicating student performance to parents, then the meaning of grades should be clear and consistent (Waltman & Frisbie, 1993). As Brookhart (2011) cautioned, educators should not assume that everyone has the same perspective on the meaning of grades. Brookhart (1993) also defined relevance as what grades mean when assigned to a student. Pertinent to this study will be an examination of the parents' perceptions of the meaning and relevance of grades.

Teachers, students, and parents should establish and understand a common purpose for assessment, grading, and report cards. Guskey (2012) recommended that reports cards explicitly state the purpose on the report card for teachers, students, and parents to see. O'Connor (2010) and Wormeli (2011) encouraged school districts to strive for grading consistency in all of their classrooms and schools, respectively, by communicating the primary purpose of grading and by defining performance expectations, policies, and procedures. Reeves (2011) defined purpose as feedback to improve student performance. Guskey (1996) also summarized that the purpose of grading includes evaluating the effectiveness of the instruction as well as serving the additional purposes of communicating, providing students with incentives or information for self-evaluation, and/or for selecting students. However, according to Guskey (2006) and Brookhart (2004), the primary purpose of report cards should be to inform parents and students about progress and future skills for mastery. Guskey (2015) also recommended "method follows purpose" (p. 15) and suggested that changes in grading policies and practices can be based on the selected purpose statement. This study investigated the parents' perceptions of the purposes of feedback on traditional and standards-based assessments, grades and report cards.

Accuracy can help understand how parents perceive grades when they review their child's assessments and report cards. To better understand the subject of grading, Reeves (2011) identified four areas of focus by questioning, "How can we make grading systems more accurate, fair, specific and timely?" (p. 1). Reeves defined that grading systems were accurate when based on "evidence" and "reason" (p. 1), fair if based on academic performance and context of that performance rather than influenced by other factors, specific if detailed information on student performance provided feedback to improve," and timely when ongoing feedback was provided. Reeves applied these four characteristics of accurate, fair, specific, and timely to

teacher feedback. Reeves (2011) proposes that "we can claim that grades are accurate only when grades reflect what students know and can do when the grade is awarded" (p. 45). He states we can significantly enhance the accuracy of grading "through the frequent use of reality checks, collaborative scoring, and the avoidance of unintentional mathematical distortions in our grading practices" (p. 45).

Books such as *A Repair Kit for Grading: Fifteen Fixes for Broken Grades* have also focused on enhancing grading accuracy. In the book, O'Connor (2007) explains how and why teachers should fix traditional grading methods by stopping some of the following grading practices: 1) combining academic, behavior, and attendance grades; 2) reducing grades on work submitted late; 3) offering extra credit; 4) including group scores for grades; 5) assigning grades based on comparisons with other students; and 6) averaging scores. Similarily, Guskey (2015) describes why traditional grading systems that classify one hundred different levels of performance are not accurate or reliable and are subjective because of the large number of grade categories and the high level of discrimination needed to determine differences between categories. Guskey also explains why SBRCs with four grades rather than one hundred different levels of performance provide parents with more meaningful, accurate, and useful information about their children's academic performance in school.

Researchers have questioned the validity of grades for a long time (Starch & Elliott, 1912). Freidman and Frisbie (1995) examined how different report card elements skew report card validity, and Allen (2005) recognized that literature shows that teachers do not make valid grading decisions that result in less meaningful communication. Research on report cards has also focused on the validity of information communicated on report cards (Bailey et al., 1988; Mehring, Parks, Walter & Banikowski, 1991). Brookhart (1993), Messick (1989, 1990), and

O'Connor (2010) also discussed the meaning and validity of grades. Brookhart explains construct validity as what the grade means. Messick's (1989) theory of validity focuses on the meaning of grades by explaining the intended function of grades and justified evidence for assigning grades. Messick (1990) proposes that the critical components of validity include the "degree of generalizability" (p. 6), "variations" (p. 6), "correlation" (p. 12), "representativeness" (p. 10) and "content, criteria and consequences" (p. 1). Messick also emphasizes implications of interpretation and values as they relate to validity. O'Connor (2010) also referred to interpretation and values when recommending enhancing validity by basing grades on recent learning rather than averaging grades, assigning and reporting grades based on grade level standards rather than comparing students, and assigning an incomplete grade rather than assigning a zero. Validity is a critical area of focus for measurement and hence fundamental to classroom assessment, grading, and reporting (Allen 2005, Gallagher 1998; Gredler 1999). If letter grades are to be effective, educators should attribute the same meaning as well as understand the meaning parents perceive. Collectively the aforementioned variables of grading meaning, relevance, accuracy, and validity can better define parents' understanding of assessing, grading, and reporting. SBRCs can enhance the consistency and precision of assessing, grading, and reporting, but this study will examine how the parents interpret and understand these changes.

Parents, students, administrators and teachers recognize that grades are taken seriously and low grades have unintended consequences on students' motivation, attitude and self-esteem (Seeley, 1994), which can include fostering a fear of failure and depression of creativity (Kohn, 1994) and discouraging students from seeking or rising to challenges (Reeves, 2006). Researchers such as Guskey (2015) urge educators to recognize parent requests for meaningful

grades by providing them with fair, meaningful and reliable information useful for students, teachers and parents. Researchers such as Brookhart (1993, 1994) have written about the validity and reliability of grading while examining the consequences and uses of grades as well as the impact of grading practices on teachers' classroom management. In the earlier study, Brookhart (1993) evaluated whether teachers allowed mitigating issues to impact their grading. Findings about the meaning of grades included teachers describing how grades were earned as a reimbursement for student effort as part of classroom management.

In the second study, Brookhart (1994) analyzed how student effort and motivation were impacted by the social dynamics within classrooms. Brookhart reviewed nineteen studies from 1984 to 1994 that investigated teachers' grading practices by describing or identifying conformity with guidelines for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Brookhart compared studies based on theoretical or analytical frameworks, subjects, methods, findings and grade level for the studies (elementary, secondary or mixed). Brookhart determined that elementary teachers utilize informal information like observations while secondary schools focus more on written activities and found that while teachers strive to be fair, their views on the purpose and meaning of grades are not consistent.

A study by Randall and Engelhard (2010) highlighted research about measurement validity and reliability as recommended by Brookhart (1994) and discovered a pattern of assigning higher grades to students who demonstrate sustained effort and excellent behavior. Randall and Engelhard (2010) used a questionnaire with approximately 500 elementary, middle and high school teachers in a major metropolitan public school district to examine the implications of student achievement, ability, effort, and behavior grades. The questionnaire consisted of 53 scenarios of varying levels of behavior, effort, achievement or ability to which

teachers assigned a numerical and letter grade. The researchers found that the teachers appeared to reward students with a grade boost when they had low achievement and ability but demonstrated sustained effort and excellent behavior. Students who demonstrated appropriate behavior, regardless of ability or effort, also received higher grades, but students with inappropriate behavior did not receive higher grades, even if they displayed high levels of effort.

Summary of Grading and Reporting Research

Grades and report cards should be valid and reliable to be meaningful and accurate for parents. Research has shown that grading practices can impact teacher value-judgments (Brookhart, 1993), student motivation (Brookhart, 1994), teacher classroom management (Brookhart, 1994) and borderline grading decisions (Randall & Engelhard, 2010). These studies also illuminate the unintentional negative consequences that grading may have on students' fear, motivation, creativity and learning (Kohn, 1994 & Reeves, 2006). Winger (2005) questioned whether traditional report cards detracted from students' motivation to learn by interfering with learning and by not providing accurate feedback. Assigning grades to encourage certain behaviors or to punish a student did not accurately communicate achievement to parents and did not align with a standards-based educational system (Stiggins et al., 2006). Research about traditional report cards and SBRCs will be analyzed in the next section.

Comparison of Reporting Systems

Kohn (2011) agreed with Finkelstein (1913) by identifying that educators have discussed what is wrong with grading and noted that minimal changes have been made to improve the grading process. Comparison of reporting systems facilitates understanding of similarities and

differences with how grades are reported on a report card and ultimately how parents interpret and comprehend grades and report cards. The previous overview about traditional report cards and SBRCs will be enhanced in the following section with an analysis of studies that examined teachers', students' and parents' perspectives of report cards. Research about traditional report cards will be examined first and then SBRCs will be analyzed.

Understanding teachers' and parents' perceptions of traditional report cards establishes foundational knowledge so comparisons can be made to parents' understanding of SBRCs. Waltman and Frisbie (1994) acknowledged that parents should have a clear understanding of what grades represent in order for grades to effectively communicate their child's academic performance at school. Waltman and Frisbie also recognized that teachers and parents should agree on common meaning for grades. Studies by Waltman and Frisbie, Brigden (1998) and Tuten (2005) investigated parental perceptions of meanings typically attributed to grades. Brookhart (1993) noted that prior research indicated the meaning of grades assigned by teachers is inconsistent among teachers, while Waltman and Frisbie pointed out how the meaning of grades may not interpreted similarly by teachers and parents, noting that understanding the difference between parentally interpreted meaning and the teacher's intended meaning helps educators establish effective grading practices and reporting methods and determine if parents interpret their children's report card grades in the manner intended by the teacher (Waltman & Frisbie).

Waltman and Frisbie (1994) gathered information about the meanings attributed to grades via questionnaires from the teachers and parents of fourth grade students in Iowa. The researchers analyzed questionnaires from 285 parents of fourth grade students to determine if the parents interpreted math grades in the way intended by teachers. The parents and teachers were

asked about the meaning of report card grades, how grades were distributed among students in the class, and components used to determine grades.

Waltman and Frisbie (1994) summarized communication about grading between teachers and parents as "muddled" and described the inconsistency of how grades are interpreted by parents and teachers as "intolerable" (p. 237). The most significant difference between parent and teacher responses was about the distribution of grades. Half of the parents thought grades were compared to a relative standard. This is a problem if parents interpret a C grade for reading as meaning the student is performing at an average level. However, because the teacher may not be assigning D or F grades, the student's performance may actually be below average. Teachers and parents agreed on including factors like effort in a grade. However, Waltman and Frisbie found that less than half of teachers actually intend grades to reflect effort. Waltman and Frisbie recommended that school districts should create more detailed policies about meanings that report card grades should have and should communicate these policies to parents. The researchers also recommended that school officials help teachers adhere to grading policies by providing teachers with training about grading.

Waltman and Frisbie (1994) recognized the format of the questionnaire was "unable to capture the semantic differences among parents and teachers regarding the meaning of grades" and, therefore, recommended interviews be used in future studies "to assist parents and teachers in sifting through their perceptions and determining what they actually do and do not believe" (p. 238). Studies using parent interviews to gather information included Brigden (1998), Panchisin (2004) and Tuten (2005). Brigden, Panchisin, and Tuten acknowledged Waltman and Frisbie's (1994) identification of problems with the questionnaire, such as parents interpreting

questionnaire statements differently. As a result, Brigden, Panchisin and Tuten each added interviews as an additional method for collecting detailed information.

Brigden's (1998) study of ninth grade science grades offers insight into inconsistencies with how grades are perceived by parents, students and teachers. The purpose of Brigden's study was to examine practices and beliefs of students, teachers and parents about ninth grade science in two British Columbia school districts. Brigden used mixed-methods to quantitatively analyze questionnaires that students, teachers and parents completed and to qualitatively analyze answers from semi-structured interviews with the participants. Questions that guided Brigden's study focused on 1) student, teacher, and parental feedback about how teachers reported grades; 2) the grading components used for ninth grade science and student and parental feedback about these components; 3) what meanings students, teachers and parents ascribed to ninth grade science grades; and 4) what effects ninth grade progress reports had on students and parents.

Brigden (1998) acknowledged teachers, students and parents need to interpret grades similarly to improve learning and teaching. Brigden's analysis found teachers graded students based on their expectations for students in ninth grade science, how well they knew information at the end of the reporting period, and the student's perceived level of effort. However, student feedback concluded their expected science grade was based on how much they learned that reporting period, how they compared to standards, and how hard they had worked.

According to Brigden (1998), the teachers acknowledged having explicit and implicit expectations that guided what they taught and how they graded students and considered effort when students were on the borderline between two grades. The teachers also said they had mixed beliefs about whether letter grades showed how much a student improved by the end of the grading period. However, while 84% of students believed letter grades showed how much a

student improved by the end of the grading period, the parents did not believe letter grades reflected how much a student improved but stated they understood how much a student improved by comparing grades from different grading periods.

The parents believed their children worked harder to maintain a letter grade and that student confidence was impacted by letter grades, but the parents acknowledged not always being satisfied with the methods used for reporting their child's grades and progress and preferred written comments to be more informative and personal. The parents believed any paper a teacher marked along with non-achievement factors like effort and homework formally or informally determined the letter grades. When asked about how report cards impacted the parent/child relationship, Brigden (1998) found that 76 percent of the parents believed it did not. A negative impact reported by parents was trusting their child less. However, this negative could also be viewed as positive because of the increased level of parental involvement with their child's education.

Brigden's (1998) findings collectively highlighted how students, teachers and parents attributed multiple meanings to grades. Meanings were sometimes incompatible when students or parents thought a grade was based on a comparison to other students but not based on teachers' expectations or by attributing both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced meanings to the same letter grade.

Similar to Brigden (1998), Tuten (2005) also analyzed students' and parents' understanding of report cards. However, Tuten examined report cards that were not a traditional report card or an SBRC. Tuten analyzed students' and parents' understanding of a specific fourth grade report card format by reviewing school documents and interviewing parents,

students and teachers. Tuten acknowledged that most research about report cards focused on assessment documenting and communicating student performance.

Tuten evaluated one teacher's understanding of the specific report card, procedures for completing report cards, and use of narrative comments on report cards. After the teacher completed report cards, the researcher interviewed her again about the narrative comments she had written for six students. Students were then interviewed about their understanding of how they were assessed on their report card, and finally parents were interviewed about their understanding of report cards in general and more specifically about their child's report card. Tuten next examined the linguistics, vocabulary, key content words, meanings of words, and text structure on the report cards as well as the teacher's narrative feedback by looking at grammar, vocabulary, size of text and space available for comments.

Tuten's (2005) analysis of report card language disclosed a greater focus on the products of learning rather than the learning process and highlighted motifs and trends. A student who earned high grades had narrative comments that included praise of the student's accomplishments. In comparison, students with average performance received about fifteen additional comments focused on strengths about a product but acknowledging difficulties of consistency. Tuten (2005) counted over 80 additional comments for struggling students that focused on academic and emotional challenges.

All interviewed parents stated they valued learning more about their child from the report card. But Tuten (2005) suggested the report cards were incomplete because the parents and the teacher expressed the need to contextualize the report card by discussing it during a conference. Most parents acknowledged having limited experience with the format of the report card but indicated satisfaction with the format. However, the parents admitted they did not fully

understand the meaning of the numbers used to rate the different stages: i.e., 4 for exceeds

standards, 3 for meets, 2 for approaches and 1 for below standards.

Tuten's (2005) conclusions about the report card suggested general report card

descriptors did not fully address the teachers' perspective of the curriculum and that comments

focused on labeling or recommendations for changing behavior such as effort and participation.

Conclusions by Tuten about parents' perspectives included parents expressing greater interest in

understanding their child's progress rather than report card format and parents drawing on their

own experiences when reviewing their child's report card. Tuten found that parents had

questions about the numerical descriptors, inquiring how they could help their child

academically, and they asked questions about the math and reading tests. To address the parents'

concerns, Tuten (2005) recommended involving parents in the creation and implementation of

report cards or including portfolios as part of the report card process to enhance the reporting

process.

Similar to Brigden (1998) and Tuten (2005), Panchisin (2004) also focused on parents'

involvement in the report card process. Panchisin described how an elementary school district in

Delaware reported student progress to parents by providing information parents wanted to see

(i.e., what their children were learning about and how their children were performing relative to

what was expected of them) while still aligning with state and school district guidelines. After

gathering information from a parent survey, the Appoquinimink School District created a report

card committee to 1) determine if the current report card effectively measured student progress

compared to rigorous Delaware standards, 2) understand the extent to which parents perceived

the report card informed them of their child's progress, and 3) determine the extent teachers used

report card grades to plan instruction.

Appoquinimink's report card rated students on developmental stages and benchmarks for reading and math continua ranging from pre-conventional or developing for kindergarten through fourth grade (Panchisin, 2004). From the almost 300 parent responses to the questionnaires, the greatest level of agreement was 95% of parents finding the narrative section of the report card helpful and having a 90% satisfaction with the understandability of the report card. Seventeen phone interviews with parents gathered additional information about the research questions. Eighty-two percent of the parents interviewed thought the purpose of report cards was to include information relative to the progress of the students, while only 12% thought report cards should identify areas of improvement for their child. When asked how closely new report cards aligned with the parents' views of the purpose of the report cards, Panchisin found that 56% felt the new report card met their understanding of the report card's purpose. When asked how parents used information from the new report card, 65% of the parents said they used information to provide feedback to their child. When asked about identifying additional information to be included in the report card, three parents suggested the new report card included all the information they wanted to know. The remaining 14 responses focused on answers that could be categorized in the following five themes: plans for improvement, clarification, grade level equivalents, potential and socialization.

Panchisin's (2004) summary findings from the questionnaires and interviews with parents, students and teachers revealed the parents were satisfied with the report cards, while the teachers were not as satisfied. Parent, student and teacher responses suggested they understood the new report card. However, although the parents thought the amount of information was sufficient, the teachers thought the information was insufficient. Approximately half of the teachers used information on the report card as a basis for planning instruction.

Standards-Based Report Cards (SBRCs)

The Common Core Standards are currently guiding what information is learned in American classrooms, while standardized tests are being used to assess students and compare performance of students, schools, and even teachers (Adrian, 2012). Therefore, Adrian notes that a natural inclination in educational systems could be to assess students on their understanding of the standards through report cards that effectively communicate progress toward these standards to parents and students. However, the identified variation in grading (Guskey, 2010) as it relates to grades compared to performance on standardized assessments and the increased focus on standards make it important for grading systems to effectively communicate student performance to teachers, students and parents.

Guskey (2010) acknowledged school districts have implemented SBRCs to address concerns with grading accuracy and validity as they align with new standards. Review of SBRC research provides a foundation for better understanding the type of report card that parents in this study were asked to identify strengths and weaknesses for.

Researchers like McMunn, Schenck, and McColskey (2003), Tracy (2005), Berridge (2006), Abbott (2007), Chermiss (2008), Loeb et al. (2008), Mathura (2008), Schmidt (2008) and Guskey et al. (2010) have analyzed how effective these changes are for school districts moving from traditional report cards to SBRCs and discovered varying degrees of success in standards-based practices. Tracy's (2005) study provides insight into the general change process and impact administrators can have on grading and report card changes. Tracy conducted a qualitative descriptive case study to observe students and teachers, analyze assessments, and interview middle school math teachers. Although the intended result was implementation of

standards-based grading, Tracy was able to focus on the implications and impacts of the complex implementation process. Tracy also analyzed the change process, evolving leadership roles, building capacity, meaningful educational reform, and empowering authentic relationships. Findings from the interviews suggested the need for and importance of establishing respect and support for teachers so they feel comfortable taking risks while changing to standards-based grading. Findings from Tracy's study about authentic relationships and evolving leadership roles can be extended to implementation of SBRCs in elementary schools.

Berridge (2006), in her qualitative doctoral research, interviewed two principals, six parents, and six teachers from two rural elementary schools in northeast Indiana to better understand their perceptions of elementary school SBRCs. The principals and teachers were concerned that changing from traditional report cards to SBRCs would cause confusion for the parents because of the overall concept of an SBRC and the new descriptors being used. The parents described how they still tried to compare the standards-based grades to percentages and traditional grades. The principals described challenges the teachers faced, including wanting to use percentages and average grades. The teachers admitted they had challenges using and understanding the district's new SBRC and the significant amount of time standards-based grading takes. However, the teachers thought SBRCs facilitated better planning, assessment and understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses as measured by state standards. The teachers thought SBRCs made them more accountable for standards, facilitated increased coverage of different curriculum standards, and helped focus instruction on students who failed to meet certain standards. Berridge emphasized the importance of support and leadership from the administration, the inclusion of parents in the design and implementation of the new SBRC to enhance communication, and the acknowledgement that change is difficult for teachers.

Berridge also discussed how essential professional development is for teachers when implementing change.

Similar to Berridge (2006), McMunn et al. (2003) also described how staff members at the school and school district level could provide support for sustained success with teaching, learning, assessing and reporting. They conducted quantitative and qualitative studies in a Florida school district to assess if teachers' practices changed after the Bay School District provided professional development in standards-based assessment, grading, and reporting to teachers. Data were gathered via observations, reflection journals, interviews and focus groups. The school district analyzed why classroom-grading practices and district-reporting procedures should be changed, considering most current assessment practices emphasize grading rather that surveying learning. The volunteer group of K-12 teachers participated in professional development and evaluation sessions, shared evidence, field tested assessments, and provided feedback. McMunn et al. concluded that although the teachers modified their practices and assessments, they did not modify them to the extent the district had expected.

McMunn et al. (2003) also determined that institutional changes at the district level may be needed for substantial changes in practice to occur and that more research is needed to examine how to structure individualized and sustained assessment professional development. Results specific to parents indicated the teachers thought the students and teachers were better informed of the standards and expectations; however, the increased communication did not seem to extend parental understanding of SBRCs.

Similar to McMunn et al. (2003), Loeb et al. (2008) also discussed the importance of professional development. Loeb et al. surveyed 400 elementary, middle, and high school teachers to analyze the impact standards-based reforms had on teaching and learning in the classroom.

Loeb et al. focused on attitudes and actions of teachers and on socioeconomically diverse students to frame ideas for the study. Two surveys distributed in 2004 targeted responses about standards-based education reform, working with minority students, teaching strategies for diverse students and stability and mobility rates for teachers. Loeb et al. noted how the most frequently available training and professional development opportunities were not always the most useful and emphasized the need for more effective and frequent support and professional development.

Chermiss (2008), in his doctoral research, conducted a qualitative study to research teachers' feedback about the effectiveness of SBRCs for elementary schools. More specifically, Chermiss focused on the teachers' major successes and challenges when transitioning from traditional report cards to SBRCs and their perceptions of how teaching, learning and assessing are impacted when changing to SBRCs. Ten teachers and one principal from a southern California elementary school were interviewed to examine the challenges and successes of developing and implementing SBRCs, along with the purpose and intent of reporting grades. Results suggest that the changes to standards-based grading impacted students, teachers and parents.

Chermiss (2008) noted teachers mentioned their most pressing challenge of implementing SBRCs was either consistency or aligning assessments, time and scoring practices. However, six teachers identified parents as the most pressing challenge when implementing SBRCs. More specifically, the teachers who had challenges communicating with parents associated these challenges with parents of low-achieving students rather than high- achieving students. Alternately, many teachers specified that parents of high-achieving students appreciated how SBRCs provided more detail about performance levels for specific standards and made areas of

strength and weakness easier to understand. However, Chermiss also noted the teachers

frequently mentioned the former traditional report card motivated students more than SBRCs.

Loeb et al. (2008) and Olson (2005) described challenges when implementing SBRCs.

Olson investigated challenges teachers encounter when they begin the process of changing from

traditional report cards to SBRCs and identified a variety of personal and management concerns

while implementing SBRCs. Loeb et al. indicated the teachers were familiar with state standards

and adjusted instruction to align with standards, although the standards did not support diverse

populations. Loeb et al. also found that teachers reported unrealistic expectations for learning

and teaching and that accountability was not flexible. Loeb et al. recommended that teachers

should adjust curriculum and instruction to standards and students' needs and that school districts

should make appropriate professional development available to the teachers.

Researchers also commented on assessments as they relate to SBRCs. McMunn et al.

(2003) noted most current assessment practices emphasize grading rather than learning.

Marzano (2000) identified potential negative impacts of standards-based grading and assessing

that included having too many standards, administering excessive assessments to students, and

fostering perceptions of standards as "hoops for students to jump through" (p. 55). Similarly,

Chermiss (2008) found challenges with standards-based grading, leading to more assessments

from teachers that were more difficult for parents to understand. Despite the challenges teachers

described with SBRCs, Chermiss reported many teachers still recommended the SBRCs because

of the increased awareness teachers and students had about standards and increased specificity in

the delivery of instruction and assessments.

Reasons School Districts are Considering SBRCs

Research has examined reasons why school districts are changing from traditional report cards to SBRCs. Understanding why school districts change from traditional report cards to SBRCs can facilitate a comparison to see if reasons are congruent with parent perceptions from this study. To better understand SBRC assessment strategies and beliefs, Abbott (2007) surveyed and interviewed 38 elementary teachers from southern Wisconsin who had implemented SBRCs for three years. Abbott's findings indicated the teachers agreed on the increased amount of time spent on assessments, but they differed about whether this was positive or negative. The teachers referenced curriculum pacing and time as primary limitations in the use of the meaningful assessment tools, but they believed their assessments appropriately specified student learning, favoring informal assessments like daily question and answers, and described how assessments impacted teaching, establishing goals and planning follow-up instruction. The teachers also believed that a variety of assessments should be used and overwhelmingly embraced SBRCs that had been adopted three years earlier. Although some teachers expressed some concerns, Abbott found that the majority of teachers embraced the new SBRC and recognized continued work on using consistent assessments to maximize benefits of SBRCs.

Whittle (1997), Aidman, Gates and Sims (2000), Olson (2005) and Schmidt (2008) also discussed assessments as they analyzed SBRCs. Whittle described the process school districts went through as they used parent feedback about insufficient information on traditional report cards to create new report cards for elementary schools. Whittle described how a Pennsylvania school district modified grade reporting for kindergarten through fifth grade students. Whittle found the reasons for reviewing the grading process included teachers recognizing difficulty in

consistently and accurately assessing students and parents asking clarifying questions about expectations and performance to better understand their children's progress and achievement. Whittle acknowledged the benefits of including parents in the decision-making and feedback process. A committee was formed of parents, teachers and administrators to review research, explore ideas, discuss beliefs and create a new report card. The committee agreed on a common philosophy and guiding beliefs and decided final grades would be determined by multiple grades for process, product and performance. The committee went through a design and review phase before implementing the new progress report. During the third year, the report card was refined based on survey feedback from parents and teachers.

Like Whittle (1997), Aidman, Gates and Sims (2000) described how an Austin, Texas, school district created a new first grade report card. The school district distributed surveys to parents, teachers and administrators that helped identify a need to revise report cards. Reasons for changing the report card included improving consistency among grade levels and alignment with new state goals. A committee reviewed samples of report cards and identified beliefs about the purpose of grading. The committee agreed effective report cards should communicate accurate student progress toward standards in formats that are easily interpreted. Content area committees created descriptions of exit-level standards as they created a developmental report card similar to the district's kindergarten report card. Input was sought throughout the revision process from parents, teachers and administrators. The parents' input was valued by the school district as it facilitated changes to help parents understand the report card. Aidman et al. found that parents appreciated being involved in the process. The new report card facilitated dialogue about common assessments and grading practices among teachers and provided more specific information about student growth. Aidman et al. acknowledged additional work like developing

more effective assessments was needed but contended that teachers, parents, and students benefitted from the new report card.

Olson (2005), in his mixed-methods descriptive case study doctoral research, analyzed the challenges and opportunities of instituting and evaluating an SBRC by focusing on math grades for third through sixth grade students. Olson identified the need for research in the district he worked in because the end of social promotion in California increased the impact of teachers' judgments when determining grades and promotion. A pre-post quantitative analysis of grades and standardized test scores had validated the potential of using SBRCs as part of the accountability process. Olson analyzed 97 students' traditional grades and standards-based grades. He also interviewed and surveyed eight teachers to address questions about how SBRCs impacted alignment of teachers' beliefs about the purpose of grades, alignment of assessments with grades and how teachers' concerns changed while implementing SBRCs. After administering a survey modified from a format Marzano (2000) used, Olson interviewed teachers as well. Olson acknowledged he did not discover new knowledge about SBRCs; however, his data suggested the time teachers spend collaborating has a positive impact on consistent beliefs about the purposes of grading. Olson's findings also described progress on the alignment of the teachers' views of the purpose and basis of grades and an improved correlation between students' standards-based grades and their standardized test scores.

Similar to Olson (2005), Schmidt (2008) also discussed the increased accuracy of SBRC grades. Schmidt (2008) discovered teachers reported the positive aspects of SBRCs, such as being able to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and evaluate students by separating behavior from academic grades. Schmidt interviewed and observed four elementary school teachers and read personal journals to analyze their experiences as they transitioned from

traditional report cards to a SBRC. Schmidt's findings included positive feelings about the separation of academic and non-academic grades, better understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses, and enhancement of consistency and alignment of grading with standards. Schmidt also reported improved organization and recordkeeping, more defined assessments, greater involvement of students in the learning experience, and overall buy-in by the interviewed teachers. Teacher concerns noted by Schmidt included difficulty grading with a four-point rubric, the format of the pilot progress report, the overwhelming amount of time involved, the general process of change, and grading consistency among teachers.

Guskey et al. (2010) investigated creating an SBRC for the entire state of Kentucky. Information gathered from the survey was used to plan professional development, create a state implementation plan, and support other states and provinces in creating an effective plan for SBRCs. Parents and teachers who completed the survey commented that the SBRCs provided more information and were a better quality than traditional report cards. Parents also indicated they preferred grading that averaged scores from multiple academic indicators rather than traditional letter grades. The teachers identified time as a barrier for implementing SBRCs. Based on feedback from the parents and teachers, a revised SBRC was created, additional training was provided to teachers, and report cards were shared with other Kentucky school districts in the hope of facilitating state-wide implementation in three years. Guskey et al. also recommended additional training for teachers to help clarify misunderstandings about assessments used for learning and assessments meant for determining grades.

Recommendations for Implementing SBRCs

Schmidt (2008), Wormerli (2006), Paeplow (2011), Adrian (2012), Scriffiny (2008), and Mathura (2008) shared recommendations for school districts that had implemented SBRCS. These recommendations can be compared to insight provided by the parents interviewed in the current study to ultimately help guide educators in how to make parents more informed by enhancing their understanding and building on strengths of SBRCs while also addressing the weaknesses of SBRCs by supporting and scaffolding support. The recommendations focused on the importance of communicating clear standards that add meaning to grades and facilitating collaboration among teachers by increasing teacher capacity through professional development and involvement in the process. Recommendations from Schmidt concentrated on helping teachers understand the need for change by aligning to clear standards that can be assessed and reported on and by creating a report card that is user-friendly for teachers inputting data and for parents reading it.   Schmidt recommended administrators sustain support by providing guidance and praise, differentiated materials, and increasing teacher capacity through professional development.

Wormerli (2006) also focused on professional development and acknowledged there was no perfect grade book format. Wormerli recommended teachers should constantly assess whether their grade book reports achievement clearly and accurately, is responsive to students' learning differences, focuses on essential learning standards, and is easy to manage and navigate. Wormerli described how administrators can support changes in grading practices via discussions with colleagues, instructional roundtables, monthly meetings, book study groups, research groups, peer observations, mentoring, school visits or common plan times. Administrators can

also foster reflective practitioners by facilitating risk-taking, creating a culture of expectancy, and using technology resources to share examples and non-examples via shared intranet folders, wikis and blogs.

Paeplow's (2011) study indirectly extended Olson's (2005) focus on alignment of assessment and grades. Paeplow conducted a mixed methods study to examine the implementation and application of North Carolina's Wake County Public School System's (WCPSS) standards-based grading. Quantitative portions included examining correlations between grades and end of grade test scores with SAS Software and investigated the equity among grades of different subgroups. Qualitative data were collected via document analysis of school district policies and procedures and focus groups that explored the teachers' understanding of standards-based grading and how their understanding impacted their application of grading practices. Paeplow identified the benefits of standards-based grading that included the potential for grading equity and the capacity to incorporate a predictive tool to identify struggling learners. The study also identified a correlation between grades and test scores that facilitated prediction of students' scores on standardized tests and acknowledged how standards-based learning opportunities and assessments provided students with opportunities to demonstrate deeper understanding than required with traditional grading. Like Schmidt (2008) and Wormerli (2006), Paeplow also recommended a focus on professional development for teachers and recommended 1) updating and communicating professional development resources, 2) facilitating collaboration among teachers via common planning times, and 3) developing sharing extension activities through which students can demonstrate that their knowledge extends beyond what was taught in class.

Similar to Paeplow (2011), Scriffiny (2008) and Adrian (2012) also identified how SBRCs facilitate the potential for grading equity by adding meaning to grades. Scriffiny, a high school math teacher in rural southwestern Colorado, shared her perspectives and recommendations for standards-based grading by synthesizing its benefits. After three years of standards-based grading in her high school math classes, Scriffiny proposed several reasons to change to standards-based grading, including 1) communicating descriptors that add meaning to grades, 2) changing homework so students are accountable for knowing the standards homework assignments are connected to, 3) not grading homework, and 4) separating attendance and effort from achievement grades so that grades are indicative of achievement of identified standards. Although high school is not the focus of this dissertation, Scriffiny's (2008) recommendations align with researchers' (Paeplow, 2011; Schmidt, 2008; Wormerli 2006) recommendations for elementary schools and provide evidence of high school grading recommendations.

Adrian's (2012) research findings aligned with Paeplow's (2011) and Scriffiny's (2008) recommendations about adding meaning to grades by not grading homework and separating effort from achievement grades. Adrian analyzed the grading beliefs, concerns and practices of 90 elementary school teachers in Tacoma, Washington, who were preparing to change from traditional report cards to standards-based grading and reporting. The mixed-methods study gathered qualitative and quantitative information from teachers via stages of concern surveys, questionnaires about current teaching practices and via ongoing action research by the researcher, who was also an elementary principal involved in the change to SBRCs. Teachers participated in a required book study with O'Connor's (2007) book, *A Repair Kit for Grading: Fifteen Fixes for Broken Grades*, to establish common vocabulary and encouragd changes in grading. The teachers had the option of participating in research studies about standards-based

grading practices. They reviewed the six fixes of grading, discussed effective assessments and involving students in the grading process, and practiced grading procedures that emphasized more recent achievement with their own classroom data.

Adrian (2012) gathered feedback from teachers with questionnaires about grading practices highlighted in O'Connor's book. Common responses included 88% of respondents not reducing grades for late work, 90% indicating use of rubrics or scoring guides, and 81% not including homework when determining grades. When asking questions about grading practices, the questionnaire provided mixed answers about including students' behavior when determining grades, averaging grades, and weighing assignments differently than others. Additional factors teachers considered when determining grades included focusing on standards and skill mastery, student performance, and multiple assessments. Teachers reported grading student work to determine how students were achieving compared to learning standards and to inform future instruction. Teachers believed the purpose of report cards was to communicate with parents how students were doing compared to learning standards. Adrian recommended educating parents about SBRCs via informational documents both sent home and posted on the school website, facilitating informational meetings, and creating common vocabulary for teachers and principals. Adrian also recommended creating a Professional Learning Community protocol document, adding a "growth/progress" box for each subject on the online report card and adding a variety of professional development opportunities about determining grades, motivating students, involving students in the grading process, Easy Grade Pro training, and organization/time management.

Robinson and Timperley (2000) also focused on the importance of communicating clear standards that add meaning to grades. Robinson and Timperley examined the report cards of 11 schools in New Zealand to better understand the connections among state standards, state

ratings of schools and parents' interpretations of these evaluations. The researchers interviewed teachers and administrators about their assessment procedures and examined how student achievement was explained on elementary, middle, and high schools report cards. Robinson and Timperley discovered teachers and schools struggled with how to evaluate students and provided minimal information about the standards used to make the evaluation.

Along with grading symbols and the wording of standards Scriffiny (2008) and Robinson and Timperley (2000) analyzed, Mathura (2008) gathered additional feedback about the wording of standards, teacher comments, parent support and parent training. Mathura studied feedback from teachers and parents. In her qualitative doctoral research, she surveyed and interviewed kindergarten teachers and parents in Georgia to analyze what they felt about standards-based report cards. Mathura analyzed parents' and teachers' previous experiences with report cards, beliefs and attitudes about standards-based grading and reporting, and attitudes and relationships between parents and teachers. Mathura also analyzed teacher training, grading symbols, wording of standards, length of report card, teacher comments, parent support and parent training. Mathura found that parents and teachers both had strong feelings about SBRCs, including that some parents did not understand the SBRC. Parents' feedback focused on a lack of training for parents and staff, the report card being too long, and the lack of detail in the narrative comments on repot cards (Mathura).

Mathura (2008) proposed that parents' acceptance of SBRCs "rests in a conditional state" (p.118) and recommended enhancing parents' understanding and acceptance of SBRCs by providing initial training and continuous support for parents, simplifying language of the learning standards, communicating how to effectively understand SBRCs, and defining grading symbols. Mathura also recommended modifying the format of the SBRC to provide more space

for narrative comments that the teachers and parents wanted. Mathura advocated for effective professional development that focused on designing assessment rubrics aligned to standards, scoring assessments and communicating information to parents.

Summary of SBRCs

The reviewed studies allude to general positive feelings about SBRCs that provide separation of academic and non-academic grades (Adrian 2012; Schmidt, 2008; Scriffiny, 2008) and facilitate other reform of curriculum standards and formative assessments (Abbott, 2007; Adrian, 2012; Aidman et al., 2000; Olson, 2005; Schmidt, 2008; Scriffiny). Researchers suggest greater involvement of students in learning experiences (Schmidt), enhancement of the consistency and alignment of grading with standards (Adrian; Schmidt), and facilitation of better understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses as measured by state standards (Berridge, 2006; Schmidt). The reviewed studies also acknowledge that changing from traditional report cards to SBRCs caused some confusion because of the concept of SBRCs and the new descriptors being used (Berridge; Mathura, 2008). Researchers described the importance of support and leadership from administration (Berridge; Schmidt; Tracy, 2005; Wormerli, 2006) and acknowledged that professional development is essential because change is difficult for teachers (Abbott; Adrian; Berridge; Loeb et al., 2008; McMunn et al., 2003; Paeplow, 2011; Schmidt; Wormerli). While the reviewed research illuminated the importance of including parents in the design and implementation of new SBRCs to enhance communication and understanding (Adrian; Berridge) and the need for training for parents and staff (Mathura), research does not specify how to improve SBRCs. Another limitation in the research is that the majority of the informants had been teachers (i.e., Abbott, 2007; Adrian, 2012; Loeb et al., 2008;

Olson, 2005; Randall & Engelhard, 2010). Literature focusing on the parental perspective of grading is lacking.

Communication about Assessment, Grading and Report Cards

Brookhart (2003) and Popham (2008) recognized the interconnectedness between instruction, feedback, assessment and grades as well as how communication throughout the learning process generates evidence of learning that informs adjustments for teaching and learning. As Popham (2008) noted, teaching and learning involves communication of clear curricular expectations and evaluative criteria by which students can be judged as well as feedback throughout the learning process. Educators have referred to assessments that inform instruction as formative assessments. Popham (2008) defines formative assessment as a planned process in which teachers and students use assessment-based evidence and ongoing two-way communication to adjust teaching and learning.

Assessment results can be communicated to students and parents in different formats, one of which is through letter grades on report cards (Waltman & Frisbie, 1993). Brookhart (2003) identified that most of the information students, teachers and parents know about learning comes from classroom assessments through report cards. However, although report cards are not the only communication about grades, the formality of report cards enhances the significance of them (Guskey, 1996). To better understand how their child is doing in school, parents also receive other written and oral feedback from their child's teacher throughout the year. Communication that includes feedback about assignments and assessments and discussions during parent/teacher conferences enables parents to recognize their children's understanding, progress and grades throughout the school year.

Minimal reviewed research has discussed the communication between teachers and parents via assessments, grades and SBRCs within the same context or study. Research has focused on assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Brookhart, 1993, 2004, 2008; Loeb et al., 2008; McMillan et al.; Stetcher et al., 1998, 2002). Researchers have focused on grading and report cards (Guskey, 2006, 2009, 2015: Marzano, 2000: O'Connor, 2007, 2009, 2011; Reeves, 2008; Wiggins, 1994; Wormeli, 2006). Grading and report cards have also been a focus for research by Waltman and Frisbie (1994, 1998) and Tuten (2005). However, ongoing feedback, assessment and communication that are integrated within instruction helps keep students and parents aware of students' performance and grades. Thus, research about grades or report cards should also focus on the communication that occurs during the assessment process. Hence, this study will focus on communication via assessments, grades and report cards to better understand parents' perspectives of grades and report cards.

School Districts Changing from Traditional Report Cards to SBRCs

Changing to SBRCs requires educators to recognize the flaws in traditional grading that impede the grading process and negatively impact student motivation (Vatterott, 2015). Researchers such as Marzano (2006, 2010), Guskey (2006, 2010, 2015) and O'Connor (2009) recommend more effective grading practices such as standards-based grading. As O'Connor (2009) and Guskey and Bailey (2010) identified, more school districts are reviewing the effectiveness of their grading practices and are changing to SBRCs to enhance the meaning and reliability for grades. Brookhart (2011) noted that the SBRCs shift the focus from what grade students earn to what students learn by reflecting student achievement in regard to intended learning outcomes. Researchers like McMunn et al. (2003), Tracy (2005), Berridge (2006),

Abbott (2007), Chermiss (2008), Loeb et al. (2008), Mathura (2008), Schmidt (2008) and

Guskey et al. (2010) have analyzed how effective changes have been for school districts moving

from traditional report cards to SBRCs and have discovered varying degrees of success in

standards-based practices. Olson (2005) and Schmidt (2008) analyzed the accuracy of SBRC

grades; Schmidt (2008), Wormerli (2006), Paeplow (2011), Adrian (2012), Scriffiny (2008), and

Mathura (2008) shared recommendations for school districts that had implemented SBRCS; and

Guskey et al. (2010) investigated creating an SBRC for the entire state of Kentucky. Guskey

(2015) and Vatterott (2015) shared stories of teachers and administrators of districts who were

using standards-based report cards, acknowledging the challenges of the change process and also

highlighting the benefits of standards-based report cards. The aforementioned studies create and

justify the need for school districts changing from traditional grading and report cards to

standards-based grading and report cards to evaluate if the changes have resulted in more

meaningful, accurate, and valid grades and report cards.

Teachers', Students', and Parents' Perspectives

Reviewed research was selected to align with the previously communicated criteria and

focus that included elementary school teachers, students or parents. Guskey (2015) identified

traditional grading as an "enduring problem" (p. 3), and Brigden (1998) and Adrian (2012)

pointed out that few studies have examined parents' perspectives of the meaning of grades. Most

of the reviewed research presented recommendations to improve assessment, grading and

reporting based on research from the teachers' perspectives rather than the parents,' who are

reading and trying to understand (Abbott, 2007; Adrian, 2012; Brookhart, 1993, 1994; Chermis,

2008; Guskey et al., 2010; Loeb et al., 2008; Mathura, 2008; McMunn et al., 2003; Olson, 2005;

Robinson & Timperley, 2000; Schmidt, 2008; Tracy, 2005). However, Brookhart (2011) reminds

educators that rather than assuming educators and parents share a similar perspective about the

meaning, purpose, and process of grading, educators should anticipate a variety of perspectives.

A majority of the reviewed research that considered parents' perspectives of assessment, grading

and reporting gathered information from one specific educational context, such as the parents of

one targeted grade level. For example, Aidman, Gates and Sims (2000) focused on first grade;

Waltman and Frisbie (1994) and Tuten (2005) focused on fourth grade; and Brigden (1998)

focused on ninth grade. Studies by Waltman and Frisbie (1993), Brigden (1998), Panchisin

(2004), and Tuten (2005) investigated parental perceptions of meanings typically attributed to

grades. Additionally, all of the reviewed studies about assessment, grading, report cards, and

parents' perspectives have focused on one topic rather than on the entire assessment, grading,

and report card process. The reviewed studies illustrated components of assessment, grading and

report cards; however, they lacked rich examples to illustrate the entire process.

<div align="center">Methodologies of Assessment/Grading Research</div>

The effectiveness of additional research methods was analyzed based on criteria and/or

recommendations about qualitative research written by Wolcott (2001) and Maxwell

(2005). The strengths of the research methods from the reviewed studies included results being

replicated and consensus among multiple researchers. Studies about assessment, grading and

report cards each resulted in similar findings that did not provide evidence to challenge

conclusions from other researchers or explain evidence that ruled out validity threats (Maxwell,

2005).

Qualitative methodologies captured detailed information rather than focusing on general

numbers and averages that quantitative methodologies may result in. Multiple qualitative

methodologies were used, including questionnaires, surveys, descriptions of process, and

interviews. Advantages to the surveys and questionnaires that most researchers used in the

reviewed research included gathering information from larger groups of people; however,

disadvantages included no opportunity for the researchers to re-word questions for respondents

to elaborate on responses. Open-ended interviews can increase understanding and evaluation of

the meaning, process and context by fostering identification of the influences and causal

explanations to create credible theories (Maxwell, 2005).

The reviewed studies illustrated components of assessment, grading and report cards,

however, they lacked rich examples to illustrate the entire assessment, grading and report card

process. The researchers' methodological choices of questionnaires and brief interviews affected

their research findings as it pertained to understanding the impact SBRC changes can have on

students, teachers and parents.

Summary

This chapter has established the historical and contextual basis for assessment, grading

and report cards in American elementary schools. The literature reveals the primary purpose of

grading is communication (Berridge, 2006; Guskey & Bailey, 2001; Marzano & Heflebower,

2011). However, research has focused on teacher and student perceptions of grading rather than

understanding parental perceptions about different aspects of traditional report cards and SBRCs.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology for this study to add new insight about parents' perceptions

of strengths and weaknesses of standards-based assessing, grading, and report cards.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative study developed out of my work as a school principal in responding to parent questions that emerged. This dissertation initially focused on whether parents preferred traditional report cards or SBRCs and evolved to focus on understanding parental perspectives regarding strengths and weaknesses of SBRCs to provide parents with the support they needed. Chapter 3 describes the sample, data collection procedures, validity considerations and data analysis for this study. The qualitative interviews with eight parents from four elementary schools examined their understanding assessment, grading, and report cards. The context for this study was one school district that had recently implemented Standards Based Report Cards (SBRCs). The participants included parents with two or more children, at least one of whom was in the fourth or fifth grade. The interviewed parents were part of traditional families and had lived in a northern suburb in Illinois for five or more years. The collection procedure included interviewing two parents from each of the four elementary schools in the district. Data analysis identified the themes and aligned the transcribed data with the research question.

Research Design

To address the research question, a qualitative study was designed. Qualitative research focuses on description and understanding from the participants' perspectives (Wolcott, 1994). Hence, the qualitative interview design of this study provided a venue for asking parents open-ended questions to facilitate deeper insight into the parents' perspectives about assessment,

grading and report cards, both traditional and SBRCs. Background planning included organizing

potential interview questions to facilitate more natural discussions, with subsequent questions

based on interviewees' responses to capture insight about the parents' perceptions of assessment

and grading.

This study is a problem of practice and therefore the findings have limited

generalizability. However, key findings may be useful in creating a model to help educators talk

with parents to determine areas of focus for scaffolded professional development for parents.

<div align="center">Research Question</div>

The research question that informed this study was: How do parents perceive the

strengths and weaknesses of SBRCs?

<div align="center">Setting</div>

The data collected from the website City-Data.com (010) describes basic information

about the northern suburb where this study took place. The northern Illinois suburb, referred to

as "Springfield," has a population of almost 22,000 people and a land area of almost nine square

miles. It had an estimated median household income in 2009 of $100,048 (City-Data.com,

2010). The northern suburb's racial and ethnic background distribution reported 85.5% White,

5.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.0% Multiracial/Ethnic, 3.8% Hispanic, 1.2% Black, and 0.1%

Native American (2010 Illinois Report Card, 2010). The total enrollment for the school district

was 2,574 students, 95.3% of whom met or exceeded standards (compared to the state average of

80.9%) on the 2009-2010 Illinois Standards Achievement Tests (2010 Illinois Report Card,

2010). The percent of low-income students in the school district was 4.7%, and 1.27% of

students are limited in English proficiency. The student mobility rate was 5.6%, and 6.0%

percent of students had a special education Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (Illinois Report

Card). Of the school district's revenue sources, 83.4% came from local property taxes, 6.2%

from other local funding, 5.7% from other state funding, 2.6% from general state aid, and 2.2%

from federal funding (2010 Illinois Report Card). (see Table 2)

Table 2

Characteristics of Elementary Schools Studied

School	Student Population	Number of classroom Teachers
Jefferson Elementary School	258	14
Lincoln Elementary School	531	25
Roosevelt Elementary School	405	20
Washington Elementary School	286	14
Total	1,480	73

Participants

One school district in northern Illinois was selected for this study. I selected this school

district because of the changes taking place as the school district transitioned from traditional

report cards to SBRCs. The research location and interviewees were selected based on

predetermined criteria to facilitate the collection of information that aligned with research

questions and purposes. The interviewees were parents who had lived in the northern suburb for

five or more years and had multiple children. Parents were selected for this study because they

are more typical of the families I had observed and worked with as a principal in this community.

Parents who had lived in the northern suburb for five or more years were selected to increase the

probability I would gather information more specific to the schools and school district in which

the study took place. Eight parents were selected because interviewing two from each school would provide more data than interviewing only one from each school and provide additional options to compare interview responses. I made sure I interviewed parents who had sons and parents who had daughters to account for potential gender differences among the students.

The parameters for the sample evolved during the selection process. Modified criteria focused on two primary attributes of 1) being parent to more than one child and 2) having at least one child in fourth or fifth grade. New methodologies that compensate for research weaknesses from reviewed research include purposeful selection of parents with multiple children in the same district and facilitating an in-depth interview process. Multiple experiences and perspectives with different teachers, grade levels, and children were perceived benefits of talking with parents who had more than one child. Fourth and fifth grade was a major focus for the first two parents who were interviewed because the change for kindergarten through third grade students was less drastic because of the lack of academic grades at that level. Additionally, the new SBRCs had only been implemented in kindergarten through fourth grade the school year before the summer during which interviews took place.

Two additional changes in the selection criteria included not restricting 1) parents who had a child who qualified for the gifted program and selecting 2) parents who had previously been teachers. I justified including the perspective of a parent of a gifted student would provide additional insight and that responses from parents who were former teachers would be valuable because they previously graded students and could add an interesting perspective. Keep in mind that parents with more diverse backgrounds and experiences could respond to interview questions differently than the parents interviewed for this study.

My justification for selecting interviewees who aligned with the typical parent of a child in the northern Illinois suburb was because their feedback should be representative of the targeted school district and of the most frequently shared feedback between parents and principals. I interviewed parents whose age was representative of the parents I have worked with in the school district in order to interview a typical group that covered 80% of the age range. The median age was determined by using the northern suburb's median resident age of 39.2 years and Illinois' median age of 34.7 years (City-Data.com, 2010). I extended the northern suburb's median resident age by eight years on each end of the spectrum to have an age range of 31 to 47 years old.

Table 3 describes the demographic attributes of the eight parents interviewed in this study to contextualize the parents' comments. All eight parents were interviewed in June, July and August at the end of the 2011-2012 school year. The interviews ranged from ninety minutes to two hours depending on the depth of responses from participants. Follow-up and clarifying questions were used as needed to encourage parents to explain or clarify their statements and to obtain more detailed information.

Table 3

Attributes of Interviewed Parents

Name	School	Grades of Children	Education (Degree Field)
Amber	Jefferson	2nd, 5th	MBA
Anika	Jefferson	3rd, 6th	Journalism and Advertising
Carol	Lincoln	1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th	Elementary Education and C&I Master's
Kaitlyn	Lincoln	2nd, 4th, 8th	Criminal Justice and Elementary Education
Fiona	Roosevelt	Pre-k, 1st, 3rd, 5th	Master's in Secondary Education
Tessa	Roosevelt	1st, 5th	Psychology Doctorate in Clinical Psychology
Roxi	Washington	2nd, 4th, 7th	College (stay at home mom)
Rosalie	Washington	4th grade twins	Master's in Counseling

Gathering data from a small, non-representative group of parents of a homogeneous and affluent community with minimal socioeconomic or racial diversity may result in unrepresentative conclusions. However, the purposeful timing and situation related to these parents provide valid information due to recent experience with traditional report cards and SBRCs. I selected parents whose children had recently experienced the change from traditional report cards to SBRCs so the parents could describe their perspectives. Specifically, the informants for this study could reflect because their children were currently experiencing a transition from traditional to standards-based report cards.

I needed to be sure the interviews elicited the parents' perceptions of meaningful report cards as part of face and construct validity by asking questions that fostered meaningful answers and by actively listening to responses to ask appropriate follow-up questions. I needed to be sure

that questions measured parental attitudes to the two types of report cards and increased the quality of interview evidence with member checks that verified how I perceived their responses.

A factor that could lead to inaccurate research conclusions included failure to facilitate discussion to fully understand parental perspectives. Not describing the interviewees' responses with sufficient detail or accuracy could lead to validity threats or alternate explanations. I dealt with these threats and increased the validity of the conclusions by asking detailed follow-up questions to elicit descriptive responses during the interviews.

Data Collection

Information (the Letter to Superintendent Requesting Permission and Parent Contact Information – Appendix A, Subject Recruitment/Introductory materials –Appendix B, Phone Protocol – Appendix C, and List of Potential Interview Questions –Appendix G) and informed consent documents (see Appendix E) were distributed to the interviewees who agreed to participate in the study and to administrators who recommended potential participants.

The Letter to Superintendent describes the research and why this school district was selected. It ensures confidentiality of the participants' information will be maintained and that the participants will receive a summary of the interviews. The parents were asked to call or e-mail the researcher to proceed with the study. The informed consent form explains that parents will not be at risk for participating in the interview and that completion of the interview constitutes voluntary consent and details the expectations of the study, the understanding that the interviews will be audio recorded, the importance of confidentiality, and who they can contact if they have questions about the research.

The Subject Recruitment/Introductory materials (Appendix B) introduced the researcher to potential interviewees, described the purpose of the study, described the interview process, and provided my contact information in case potential interviewees have questions. The Phone Protocol (Appendix C) is a script what the researcher said to each interviewee when he called to describe the interview process. The parents were asked if they were interested in participating in the study, what their email address was so additional information could be e-mailed to them, and convenient times the interview could be scheduled. The List of Potential Interview Questions (Appendix D) details the semi-structured interview questions I asked interviewees. The questions were organized into sections to facilitate asking questions that aligned with the research question. The Informed Consent (Appendix E) asked interviewees to give consent to participate in the research project titled *An Examination of Parents' Perceptions of Report Cards* and for the interview to be audio recorded. The consent form described what interviewees were be asked to do: 1) answer questions during an audio recorded interview that lasted about 90 minutes to two hours, 2) provide copies of their child's traditional and standards-based report cards, and 3) answer any follow-up and clarifying questions as needed via a phone call. The interviewees signed the document to acknowledge they received a copy of the consent form.

Other data sources included a copy of a traditional report card used by the school district up until June of 2011(Appendix E) and a copy of the new standards-based format that was used with all kindergarten through fourth grade students beginning in August of 2011 (Appendix F).

Participation in this study was on a voluntary basis, and interview results were kept confidential. Prior to starting the data collection process, I completed the Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams online course and gained approval from the researcher's dissertation committee and Northern Illinois University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The

time frame of the interviews was forty days between June 24 and August 3, 2012. Data collection

methods included one individual interview for about 90 minutes with each of the parents as the

primary data sources. Table 4 depicts the dates and times of the interviews with the eight parents.

Table 4

Interview Dates and Times Organized by School

School	Parent's Name	Date of Interview	Duration of Interview	Interview #
Jefferson	Amber	June 24, 2012	1 hour and 55 minutes	Interview #1
Jefferson	Anika	July 2, 2012	1 hour and 28 minutes	Interview #4
Lincoln	Carol	July 17, 2012	1 hour and 36 minutes	Interview #7
Lincoln	Kaitlyn	August 3, 2012	1 hour and 9 minutes	Interview #8
Roosevelt*	Fiona	June 25, 2012	2 hours and 1 minute	Interview #2
Roosevelt*	Tessa	June 29, 2012	1 hour and 46 minutes	Interview #3
Washington	Roxi	July 2, 2012	1 hour and 41 minutes	Interview #5
Washington	Rosalie	July 11, 2012	1 hour and 8 minutes	Interview #6

The data collection process began with mailing a letter to the superintendent requesting

permission and parent contact information via U.S. mail. This mailing to the superintendent

asked him to distribute my Subject Recruitment/Introductory Letter to five parents from three of

the elementary schools, seeking individuals who would be able to provide feedback regarding

their perspectives about the report cards. I also distributed the Subject Recruitment/Introductory

Letter to five parents at the elementary school at which I am principal. All of the parents who

were asked to participate agreed to participate.

Once I received a phone call or email from potential interviewees, I discussed the

information on the Phone Protocol form (Appendix C) with them and allowed them to choose an

interview location: the conference room at the researcher's school, the conference room of their

child's school, or an alternative location for the interview. Next, I mailed the Informed Consent

form (Appendix D) that asked interviewees to keep one copy of the form for their records and to

sign and mail the other copy back to me in the provided self-addressed stamped envelope. Once I receive the signed informed consent form I emailed interviewees 1) to confirm the date, time and location for the interviews and 2) to summarize the general interview themes and processes in advance so they were aware of the focus and scope of the study.

The beginning of the interviews focused on the general experiences of interviewees, such as background experiences they had as a student, work experiences, ages and grades of their children, and involvement in their child's education and school. Questions evolved to focus on more detailed topics of assessing, grading, feedback and report cards. Morgan and Harmon (2000) remind researchers to expect research questions to emerge and evolve to align with reformulating assumptions. Research questions and direction definitely evolved and were reformulated during this study as open-ended questions focused on meaning and process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

The interview questions were designed to explore the parents' perceptions of report cards, which included their prior experiences and beliefs about report cards. The first part of the interview concentrated on more specific questions that helped answer how the parents perceived congruency between feedback on assessments, assignments, and report card grades. The second part of the interview focused on general questions that explored the parents' perceptions of grading and report cards in general and explored meanings parents constructed from their child's report card. The third and final part of the interview focused on parents' perceived strengths and weaknesses of traditional and standards-based report cards are and what educators can learn from parents' feedback about standards-based report cards. Parental perspectives about traditional report cards were analyzed to glean insight about strengths and weaknesses of SBRCs and to help draw conclusions about SBRCs.

The interview process focused on awareness and sensitivity that facilitated relaxed and non-judgmental conversations that elicited and captured emotional and cognitive reactions (Weiss, 1994) regarding parents' reactions about understanding assessments, grades and report cards. I asked questions that let the participants guide the flow and direction of the discussions. After themes or interests emerged, I used a funneling approach that started with the big picture of the topic of grading and narrowed the focus to the selected topics in depth. This funneling structure helped the interviewees understand the general questions, relate to the questions on a personal level, and provide detailed answers. During the second half of the interviews the parents and I reviewed the traditional report cards the school district had previously used and the new SBRCs. Looking at different report cards allowed the parents to supply more specific information. Follow-up questions took into account research questions, interviewee's responses, and emerging themes and patterns.

Jerror, Colby and Schweder (1996) described how qualitative research emphasizes procedural aspects like narration, empathy, interpretation, and contextualization to understand the meaning, implications and significance of events from a specific time and place. I focused on avoiding bias through careful formatting and delivery of questions during interactions, by establishing a substantive frame for the study, and by being honest while listening and analyzing interview answers and fairly and fully reporting all evidence, even when it did not align with a potential theory or anticipated responses (Weiss, 1994). Steps taken to capture essential data from the sample and other targeted sources included establishing rapport through professional relationships with the interviewees based on mutual respect for time, purpose, and expectations. Establishing professional relationships was done via clear communication and by valuing input throughout the process. Establishing professional relationships was important to maximize the

comfort of the interviewees so they could feel they can answer questions honestly and in detail. I also empathized, bracketed judgments, valued serendipitous moments, and gained trust. I established rapport by asking background questions that helped me understand the interviewee's professional and parenting experiences. During interviews, I listened carefully to what the interviewees said, treated their answers as potential clues by asking follow-up questions to unlock interviewees' views, was mindful of body language, asked clarifying questions as needed, and listened to perspectives without judging (Maxwell, 2005).

Memos were developed to summarize the researcher's thoughts relating to inspirations, connections, emerging themes, interview methods and strategies, rapport with interviewees, ethical dilemmas, breakthroughs, revelations of assumptions, points of clarification, making sense of data and creating follow-up interview questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) during and after interviews.

The final part of the interview process included follow-up conversations and questions via telephone, as needed, with the eight parents. All responses were transcribed and produced 252 pages of text, including the researcher's questions and follow-up questions. Gathered interview responses were analyzed and coded under general themes guided by the research questions and sorted to discover emerging patterns and trends within the responses, and then summaries of interviews and preliminary analysis were emailed to provide interviewees with an opportunity to review summaries of the interviews.

Data Analysis

The following steps, identified by Hatch (2002), guided the qualitative analysis process in this study:

1. Identify classifications to be analyzed.

2. Read the data, marking entries related to my classifications.

3. Read entries by classification, recording the main ideas in the entries on a summary sheet.

4. Look for patterns, relationships and themes within classifications.

5. Read data, coding entries according to patterns identified and keeping a record of what entries go with which elements of your patterns.

6. Decide if patterns are supported by the data and search the data does not follow patterns.

7. Look for relationships among the patterns identified.

8. Write patterns as one-sentence generalizations.

9. Select data excerpts that support your generalizations.

Data preparation included inputting and logging data into the computer, verifying accuracy and developing a database that accounted for various measures (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007). Analytic techniques included the use of memos and coding. Memos facilitated my reflection while capturing analytic thinking and metacognition.

I identified themes across interview questions, and eventually, the entire study, which guided me to refocus on parental perceived strengths and weaknesses of SBRCs as themes emerged. I aligned the transcribed data with the research questions to facilitate a complete

analysis of interview statements for similarities and differences. All aspects of the data analysis

process sought to "identify, develop and relate concepts that emerged from analysis and that

appear(ed) to have relevance to the evolving theory" (p. 202). Saldana (2009) described coding

as the qualitative inquiry process of determining core meanings with essence-capturing words or

brief phrases. Coding was used to classify responses to open-ended questions into simple

categories. Coding included analyzing patterns of frequencies, sequences, causations,

correspondences, similarities and differences to identify patterns and why they exist (Saldana,

2009). Coding facilitated fracturing and rearrangement of data into categories and broader

themes that fostered comparisons and the development of theoretical concepts (Bogdan &

Biklen, 1992).

Categorizing strategies to organize gathered data included defining organizational,

substantive and theoretical categories. Organizational categories were considered topics that

were anticipated (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). For this study, organizational categories included 1)

grading, 2) report cards, and 3) information about what educators can learn from the parents'

feedback. Substantive categories were used to create a general theory by identifying

subcategories that made a claim about assessment, grading or report cards that could be found as

correct or incorrect (Bogdan & Biklen).

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the research design and methodology of the study. It reviewed

the research design and question, setting, participants, data collection process and data analysis.

The evolution of the research question allowed a refocusing of the analysis of data and a more

focused examination of SBRCs. The next chapter will present the research conclusions and

suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

Since report cards and standards-based grading and reporting continue to be topics of focus for education and legislation, this study sought to understand parents' perceptions of recently adopted standards-based assessment for kindergarten through fourth grade students in an elementary school district in northeastern Illinois. Because the issue was more complex than the initial research question that focused on whether parents preferred standards-based report cards (SBRCs) or traditional report cards, the question that evolved to inform this study is: How do parents perceive the strengths and weaknesses of SBRCs?

The methodology used to explore this research question involved qualitative interviews, sorting of positive and negative beliefs about SBRCs and grouping of information according to themes that emerged through the data. The parents' perceived benefits of traditional report cards were used to make inferences through data analysis about the perceived weaknesses of SBRCs.

Parental Perspectives on the Strengths and Benefits of SBRCs

Parental perspectives on the strengths and benefits of SBRCs included the following topics that emerged from the data: 1) SBRCs identify students' strengths and weaknesses, 2) SBRCs provide comprehensive grades, 3) SBRCs promote teacher communication that enhances

parent understanding, and 4) SBRCs positively impact student motivation. Findings regarding

how SBRCs are perceived to identify students' strengths and weaknesses will be discussed first.

SBRCS Identify Students' Strengths and Weaknesses

Parents indicated that a key strength of SBRCs is that they identify students' strengths

and weaknesses in the classroom. Seven parents explained how they use information on the

report card to support, encourage, and motivate student growth. Fiona appreciated the direct

feedback provided about the students' understanding of a concept and whether the students

followed through and worked carefully. Anika explained that she appreciated seeing prompt

feedback about homework that indicated "you have to work on this with your child with a sense

of urgency." Anika also concisely explained how she involves her child in the process by

saying, "I ask him what do we need to work on?" Carol, Kaitlyn, Rosalie, Amber, Tessa and

Fiona also focused on how SBRCs foster improvement. Carol discussed how SBRCs help her

"see what they need help with, offering help at home and praising them for what they are doing

well." Kaitlyn revealed she looked at grades and areas to improve and clarify. Kaitlyn identified

that SBRCs "break down concepts by standards and specifics" and explained a math example:

"For measurement and data, he was 'Approaching' and then 'Meets' in the third trimester, so he

obviously was doing something well. Breaking it down was helpful because it specifically tells

you what they are working on." Amber added, "report cards help specify what students need

help with."

Tessa summarized that SBRCs foster discussions about growth, strengths and

weaknesses. "I get a better understanding of what is happening in the class or growth through a

trimester by looking at [SBRCs]." Tessa later added, "I think they spell out strengths and

weakness of students so we can move forward." Tessa explained, "I absolutely would prefer the standards-based. I don't care how he did on a quiz; I care if he understands how to do each topic. I can tell what he needs to work on or his strengths based on the SBRC rather than traditional." Fiona agreed by recognizing that SBRCs highlight areas of strength for lower achieving students and areas for potential growth for higher achieving students. The number of standards graded for each subject allows for more detail about strengths and areas of growth for every student. Fiona thought with "kids that are struggling, you can see growth and report more information" on SBRCs. Fiona also discussed noticing "a greater emphasis on relative strengths and weaknesses in topic areas. I think the fundamental shift [is SBRCs' focus on] what students are good at, what's easy and what motivates them." However, Fiona also highlighted the differences between the perceived growth for younger and older students. According to Fiona, "I see [SBRC grades] as more of a progression for younger grades, but for older students if they don't do well on a project in the first trimester, it doesn't have anything to do with growth."

The parents' responses emphasized why SBRCs help them better understand their child's strengths and weaknesses. The parents acknowledged different ways they problem solve to make connections about progress, strengths and weaknesses as they shifted their thinking to align with SBRCs. The parents' feedback emphasized parents wanted to understand report card information while also having the report card information be actionable so they could help their child with areas of improvement. Parents may understand aspects of traditional report cards better, however, the true outcome is how parents can recognize their child's strengths while also helping their child continue to improve in specific areas. Findings align with Aidman, Gates, and Sims (2000), who encouraged accurate and consistent communication of student growth

while being cognizant of possible impacts on student motivation and parent reaction. Comprehensive grades that SBRCs provide are discussed in the next section.

<u>SBRCs Provide Comprehensive Grades</u>

Conversations about aspects of SBRCs that helped parents understand their child's performance in school guided their reflections regarding which grade levels the parents preferred SBRCs rather than traditional report cards. Most parents identified that they preferred SBRCs for kindergarten through third grade, with a mixed preference for fourth and fifth grades. Carol indicated, "I've been happy with [SBRCs]. I definitely like [SBRCs] better than the K-3 report cards we had in the past." Similarly, Roxi explained, "I guess I am more comfortable with [SBRCs for] my child in second and third grade. In my mind it was not changed and was not offered in the past so I can accept it. It is just these fourth and fifth grade years that have been more of a struggle." These discussions about different grade levels for which the parents preferred SBRCs add insight into why and when parents preferred SBRCs most. The parents preferred SBRCs for kindergarten through third grade because they were similar to the previous traditional report cards used in kindergarten through third grade for Springfield School District where multiple grades were communicated rather than one overall grade. However, the change from traditional report cards that included an overall grade for each subject made the transition more difficult for parents of fourth and fifth grade students. The following topics were identified through data analysis: 1) separate academics and effort grades, 2) communicate grades for multiple standards for each subject, 3) base grades on standards rather than comparison to classmates, and 4) base grades on recent performance.

<u>Separate Academics and Effort Grades</u>

The first emerging topic regarding comprehensive SBRC grades focused on the perceived benefits of separating academic and behavior grades. Traditional report cards report an overall grade for subjects such as math by combining a student's grades for academic math skills with process grades such as behavior and participation (O'Connor, 2009). However, SBRCs report behavior grades in a separate section and report separate grades for what students learned and were able to do in relation to each learning standard and related subtopic.

Although the parents recognized the value of understanding their child's behavior and effort at school, Tessa, Carol and Fiona explained why they thought effort should be reported separately from academic grades. Tessa remarked: "I like it separate better, only because you may have to work hard to achieve in any given topic or you may not have worked hard at all and get a good grade." Fiona admitted that including effort in grades might reduce accuracy of academic grades such as math but would provide additional benefits like fostering effective learning skills and work habits:

> At [elementary school] ages, no I don't think it should be because at this age it can be misleading, if you have a kid who is trying so hard, but there are not up to scratch I don't think you want the parents to think they are. Put that in the comments at the end. Worked real hard, this is going to pay off, building good learning skills.

Carol described her perceived differences between expectations for report cards and the real world: "In the real world [my daughter] will be successful because of her effort and organizational skills, and therefore she's going to produce A's and B's in life, but I don't think you can put it together in the report card, I think you should separate it."

The parents distinguished the benefits of the SBRC grading practice of reporting academics separate from behavior, which aligned with Guskey (2015), who explained that more

school districts were reporting separate grades for achievement, work habits and performance.

Guskey (2015) suggested that, "reporting separate grades for product, process and progress

criteria… makes grading more meaningful" (p. 79). For example, a traditional report card

reports the letter grade for math as an "A," while an SBRC reports grades of "Meets" or

"Extends" for different math standards such as "Operations and Algebraic Thinking,"

"Measurement and Data" and "Geometry." Teachers who incorporate effort, behavior,

responsibility, and class participation into grades are emphasizing process grading criteria

(Guskey, 2015). Grades can be enhanced based on compliance and reduced based on unwanted

student behaviors (Guskey, 2015). Lowering academic grades because a student is misbehaving

or rewarding a student with a higher academic grade for compliancy or quiet behavior impacts

the accuracy of grades because well-behaved students do not necessarily achieve higher

academic levels (Guskey & Bailey, 2011; Reeves, 2011). O'Connor (2009) and Guskey (2015)

propose that effort, participation, and attitude are valued student characteristics that should be

reported separately from academic grades because the characteristics are challenging to define

and measure. Parents in this study thought effort should be reported separately from academic

grades on SBRCs.

Communicate Grades for Multiple Standards for Each Subject

A second topic parents identified that relates to comprehensive SBRC grades was the

benefit of reporting different grades for multiple standards for each subject. For example,

Springfield School District's SBRC reports six grades: literature, informational text, foundational

skills, speaking and listening, writing and language for the subject of reading/language arts.

Three parents said they appreciated the additional details, categories, and sub categories for each subject. As a general positive, Tessa commented on the problem solving and learning benefits of SBRCs: "SBRCs gave me a list of [standards] that match up for each subject, which was helpful to me." Roxi stated, "I guess I feel [SBRCs] break it down better and you are getting more information," paralleling Fiona's comment that SBRCs "definitely give you more information."

Five parents voiced support for the categories listed for each subject on SBRCs. Amber explained, "I like the categories and sub categories for each subject." Rosalie described, "I like the summaries where they break out the categories so you have a better understanding of what goes into that subject matter." Carol, Tessa and Kaitlyn provided additional context regarding the benefits of understanding specific grades for math and language arts. Carol admitted, "I think the standards-based is definitely clearer. [With SBRCs] I can key in on numbers and operation, measurement and data and even break those down." Tessa added, "like in reading, for comprehension, maybe they work well with groups or with rubrics, but when it comes down to it on a test where are they going to perform? I like that [with SBRCs] I can get that and pull that out by breaking it down." In general, the lists of standards helped the parents understand the expectations.

While discussing the benefit of SBRCs reporting different grades for multiple standards for each subject, the parents also made connections to two aspects they did not like about traditional report cards. Parents did not like that traditional report cards: 1) communicated how information was gathered rather than by standard or topic and 2) communicated general information regarding student performance rather than specifics.

The parents did not like that traditional report cards communicated how information was gathered in that traditional report cards assign one overall grade for each subject, but also assign grades within each subject based on how students did on tests, quizzes, homework and projects. For example for the Springfield 5th grade report card, an overall math grade is assigned as well as grades under math for tests, quizzes, homework and projects. However, these grades describe what activity was used to gather the grade rather than specifying the skill or standard the grade was based on. Carol explained that "traditional report cards are] so broad with daily work and quizzes as a parent, I want to know more about what is going on day-to-day." Similarly, Tessa explained she did not know what topics to focus more on when reviewing a traditional report card: "I don't care how he did on a quiz, I care if he understands how to do each topic [or standard]."

Two parents also shared negative feedback regarding traditional report cards communicating general information regarding student performance rather than specifics aligned with each standard for each subject. Evidence of this sentiment was apparent when Tessa reflected, "I do not like looking at an overall 'A' grade because it does not tell about other areas." Carol painted a picture of her perceptions about not being able to distinguish as much information regarding student performance on a traditional report card:

> The grades based on [traditional] report cards showed a difficult 3rd trimester, but [my son] still received "B"s, "A"s and one "D" for the first time. My daughter who constantly struggles with the tutor got "A"s and "B"s. She got a better report card than he did because of the "D," but if you look at them or their ISAT scores there is a difference. Based on [SBRCs] you can tell a difference. It better describes my child.

Collectively, the second topic parents explained that relates to comprehensive SBRC grades was the benefit of reporting different grades for multiple standards for each subject. Parents appreciated that reporting multiple grades for each subject based on a grade for multiple

standards communicates multiple details about student performance. In the age of Common

Core standards, parents want to understand their child's performance in relation to expected

grade level standards and how they can help their child.

<u>Base Grades on Standards Rather than Comparison to Classmates</u>

The third emerging topic regarding comprehensive SBRC grades focused on the

perceived benefits of basing grades on standards rather than their children being compared to

classmates. SBRCs base grades on the degree to which students meet different grade level

academic standards while traditional report card grades can be based on comparing student

performance to other classmates. Tessa rationalized why comparing student performance to

standards within each subject is more accurate than basing a grade on comparisons to other

classmates: "It doesn't matter how other students are doing because I could put him in another

school and [my son] would get straight 'As.'" Similar to Tessa, Fiona also preferred comparing

her children's performance to the standards. Fiona elaborated using the following comparison:

> That's one of the things I liked about running, you could be better than other people, but
> were you faster than yourself? Did you beat your time? You could have a kid on junior
> varsity. Was she getting faster each time compared to her [previous] times? That is her
> win, that's her 'A.'

The three parents' responses indicate the benefits and enhanced accuracy of report cards that

evaluate students based on whether they have met academic standards rather than basing their

grade on comparison to classmates' performance.

Base Grades on Recent Performance

The fourth emerging topic regarding comprehensive SBRC grades focused on the impact of basing grades on recent performance. Teachers who considered recent performance would base grades on performance at the end of a grading period rather than averaging all of the work from throughout the grading period. Tessa and Amber contended that grades should not be averaged because they are not as accurate. Tessa explained, "I think it should [take into] account recent performance" (Interview #3, June 29, 2012). Rosalie indicated she understands why teachers average grades, but her description included the word "skew," which paints a picture that researchers such as Marzano (2006), Scriffiny (2008), Guskey (2009, 2015) and O'Connor (2009) described when they explain that averaging grades decreases grading accuracy. Researchers such as Guskey (2015) suggest more accurate grading alternatives to averaging, and Reeves (2011) indicated that averaging grades does not accurately reflect student performance "unless student performance oscillated around the mean throughout the year" (p. 45). According to O'Connor (2009), teachers grading with SBRCs take into account recent performance rather than averaging scores on tests and assignments when determining a grade. Teachers grading with an SBRC would notice recent progress and would probably assign a grade of "Meets." Averaging grades will be discussed again later in this chapter in the context of parents' historical memory of traditional report card grades.

Collectively, analysis of interview responses provided information about aspects of comprehensive SBRCs that helped the parents understand their child's performance in school. The parents identified benefits when SBRCs: 1) separate academics and effort grades, 2) communicate grades for multiple standards for each subject, 3) grades based on standards rather

than comparison to classmates, and 4) grades based on recent performance. Overall, the parents preferred SBRCs for kindergarten through third grade because they were similar to the previous report cards used in kindergarten through third grade where multiple grades were communicated rather than one overall grade.

<u>SBRCs Promote Teacher Communication that Enhances Parent Understanding</u>

Rather than just focusing on traditional report cards and SBRCs, the researcher asked questions to uncover the parents' understanding of their child's assessments during the entire grading process. The rationale for focusing on more than just the report card aligns with Guskey's (2015) proposal to change the focus from the report card to the reporting "system" (p. 111) that includes communication about student achievement such as emails and parent-teacher conferences. Key questions focused on what grading procedures the parents felt optimized support and encouragement of their child, grading procedures that optimized communication with their child's teacher, and feelings regarding the teachers' comments written on report cards. The parents' understanding of teacher communication throughout the entire grading process impacted their understanding of SBRCs.

Responses from two parents helped frame the importance of teacher communication with the parents. Anika and Rosalie described how effective communication and collaboration among teachers helped as they learned more about SBRCs. Anika acknowledged feelings of frustration and comfort while describing the components of the SBRC that were challenging for her to understand: "The new report cards and system are a frustration with just understanding it, but I feel very fortunate because the teachers are very open to answering parent questions."

Rosalie also referred to a positive experience that was dependent on collaboration among fourth

grade teachers and resulted in grading consistency for her twins:

> I think with fourth grade at [Washington Elementary School] the teachers are very in synch. It is interesting because I have twins so I get two of the three teachers. I think the fourth grade team especially, works well together and are similar which is not always the case. I think it is consistent in fourth grade maybe because they work so well together.

When discussing SBRCs, the overarching topic of teacher communication during the grading

process emerged. SBRCs promote teacher communication that enhances parent understanding

about: 1) narrative report card comments, 2) parents agreed with and appreciated perceived

purpose of report cards, 3) congruency among assessments and report card feedback, 4)

parent/teacher conferences and 5) communication throughout the year.

Narrative Report Card Comments

Narrative report card comments are defined in this study as the comments teachers write

on SBRCS each trimester. Parent feedback regarding narrative SBRC comments provided

insight into the difference narrative report card comments make on parents' understanding of

their child's performance in school. Five parents explained why students and parents value

richer and more detailed SBRC comments that describe how students can improve. Anika

described how comments were "generic," could "be more specific," but were beneficial:

> I feel like I know my child best, but it is nice to see how [teachers] identify my child. It is nice to see what she can continue to work on. This is what she did well, but this is what she could still work on, bulleted. It shows if they know my daughter, [and could include] areas they need to work on.

Fiona articulated her belief that narrative SBRC comments discuss student strengths, and Tessa

explained, "I value teacher's narrative comments on report cards" but admitted to being "biased

because we have not had a lot of negative" experiences with report cards. She described why

report card comments are "important for all of us as students and parents.… I think they are

helpful. Kids look forward and covet [narrative comments]." Kaitlyn emphasized that, "you

don't really know to work on subtraction over the summer unless the teacher writes it down."

Rosalie also embraced the importance of written comments about areas of concern on report

cards:

> Wow, it looks like a lot of work for the teacher to design [report cards]. I want to read the narrative that the teacher writes because I think that gives me the most insight. Also with twins, there are definitely phrases [in narrative sections on report cards] that are repeated like the standard, but I like that the best because I feel like that is the teacher talking. I look for any changes and if there is an area of concern for one of the children, I would look at that category.

These parents valued the communication that written SBRC comments provided to make

connections among student work, progress, and accomplishments. The parents agreed that

narrative report card comments are one way SBRCs promote teacher communication and

enhance their understanding of their child's report card grades. Benefits of communicating the

purpose of SBRCs will be discussed in the next section.

Parents Agreed with and Appreciated Perceived Purpose of Report Cards

Guskey (2015) contends that parents' beliefs about the purpose of report cards add

insight regarding their interpretation of report cards as it relates to the information parents think

should be communicated on report cards, the intended goal of the communication, and how

parents think they should use the information. Three parents in this study thought the primary

purposes of report cards should focus on communication, performance, areas of deficiency,

academic progress, future areas of focus, and accountability. Amber contended that, the report

cards should "identify areas that need help. I would say to identify academic progress, how well

they are doing [compared] to themselves, not compared to others." Anika added, report cards

should "keep track of my child's growth and [provide] accountability of [my child]. I'm in

control of their destiny, but so is my child." Kaitlyn said, "Just to give the child and the parent a

summary of where the child is with that subject and if you need help outside of the classroom."

Rosalie added the purpose of SBRCs should be to recognize strengths and areas of focus by

stating: "To stress direction for [what] students have to do next." The parents' understanding of

the primary purpose of report cards can help define the importance of specific grading processes

and report card components. The parents' feedback regarding the purpose of report cards helps

frame teacher communication that enhances parents' understanding of report card grades and

aligns with Reeves (2011), who emphasized that the primary purpose for grading was to provide

feedback to students and parents to improve learning. Parent feedback recognizes that SBRCs

that communicate a purpose of the report card enhances effectiveness of communication with

parents. This is connected with previous parent responses from this study regarding parents' use

of SBRCs to support, encourage, and motivate student growth and reinforced the parents'

appreciation for SBRCs. The second teacher communication theme is congruency among

expectations, assessment feedback, and report cards

Congruency among Expectations, Assessment Feedback and SBRCS

Parent responses regarding congruency among expectations, assessment feedback and

SBRCS provided insight regarding the parents' understanding of teacher communication, which

can have a negative or positive impact on the parents' understanding of SBRCs. The parents

discussed their perspective of assessments as well as the context of how they monitor or help

their child prepare for assessments and review assessment results during the grading process.

Hence, the parents' experiences with assessments detail an additional preliminary layer of understanding SBRCs. Congruency among expectations, assessment feedback and report cards was analyzed by coding the parents' perspectives about three different topics: 1) meaningful assessments, 2) students' readiness for assessments and 3) parent feedback regarding congruency among assessments and report card feedback.

Meaningful assessments. Chappuis (2009) defined meaningful assessments as assessments that provide students with a clear understanding of expectations and opportunities for feedback, goals, self-assessment, and revision. Marzano (2006) reviewed research about effective assessment and summarized that effective classroom assessment should be frequent and formative and should communicate progress on learning goals and improvement. Feedback from three parents provided insight into assessments that are a part of the grading process. Tessa expressed that meaningful assessments indicate "potential for change. If I can see an assessment and know what needs to be worked on and know what strengths or weaknesses are. That is what I am looking for." Rosalie elaborated on how meaningful assessments provide her with information "mostly about performance." She added, meaningful assessments "give an accurate representation of your child's performance, knowledge, and the assessments." There was also an explanation from Carol, a former second grade and gifted teacher who earned a Master's in Curriculum and Instruction and had experience with assessments:

> One that measures what my child has learned not only through a rote test, but a demonstration or applying it to a real problem. Sometimes I have seen that over the years. Multiple parts rather than just a test or a quiz maybe some sort of demonstration or support something where the kids are demonstrating their understanding rather than regurgitating.

The parents' responses regarding meaningful assessments emerged as an important theme because assessments are part of the process that informs teaching, learning and grades. The

parents explained why assessments provide feedback that guides their support of their child, which also relates to the parents' understanding of SBRC grades. The next topic of students' readiness for assessments provided additional insight regarding the congruency among expectations, assessment feedback and report cards.

Students' readiness for assessments. Parents talked about their child's readiness for classroom assessments. Parents discussed alignment of learning and assessment to think of alignment of content and assessment. Educators may argue that traditional report cards do not necessarily convey information about preparedness because a student may or may not perform well on an assessment regardless of how much time they spent preparing for the assessment. However, the parents' perspectives regarding how well they think their child is typically prepared for assessments reveal their thoughts regarding alignment of taught content with assessment questions. Insight can also be learned regarding the fairness and levels of difficulty of assessment content and questions.

Four of the participating parents clearly recognized that their children were prepared for assessments and described relationships between how much students studied and how teachers prepared and communicated with students. As revealed by Amber:

If the child reads the unit I would say, sure. If you follow the study guide that comes home, I would say, yes. I think they are very prepared and dependent on the teacher. There are teachers where we know there is a test in two weeks and others that send home a study guide the night before, and that doesn't work the night before.

Fiona and Anika focused on how preparation for assessments is student specific, is dependent on how much time the student and the parents prepare for the assessment, and changes as the child becomes older. Fiona noted, "I think they're prepared; it is just a matter of their mom or dad working with them. The information is provided. It is just how much time students

spend." Anika elaborated by saying, "We study together, so in grade school I did study with my child. Once my son got to [middle school], he studied by himself so his grades are his own. Which is good." Kaitlyn did not go into much detail, but based on her children's high report card grades, she thought her children were prepared. Kaitlyn also expressed excitement about why she wanted students and parents to be able to understand performance and how she knows when her children "know what questions they got wrong." These parents indicated their children make connections between what they learn and questions asked on assessments. The parents' perception that their children are prepared for assessments is important because assessments are used to determine SBRC grades. Assessments that correlate with report card grades can promote better communication so students and parents better understand SBRC grades. Students' preparedness for assessments led to discussions regarding parent/teacher conferences, which will be discussed next.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Parent/teacher conferences are a specific type of feedback that happen during the school year that provide insight into ongoing communication with parents and also enhance their understanding of their child's performance in school. For the Springfield School District, report cards are distributed in November, March, and June. Parents meet with the classroom teacher for about twenty minutes in October and February to discuss the child's progress, goals and grades. Similar to parent responses regarding feedback throughout the year, parent/teacher conferences can help parents understand their child's strengths and areas they should focus on more, during the grading period while there is still time to help their child and improve their grades. The responses from two parents identified that discussions about SBRCs during conferences between

teachers and parents were helpful and more focused. Carol reported that conferences helped her

better understand difficulties she encountered regarding "consistency between the different grade

levels and teachers." Carol's response also painted a picture of hope:

> I had two classes and absolutely, I consistently saw these grades come home from my
> first grader based on the 'Meets,' 'Extends' and 'approaching.' I wasn't getting a lot of
> paper back from my other daughter, but at conferences they had the lingo consistent and
> were explaining how it was graded.

Tessa also illustrated how parent teacher conferences can provide additional details about the

context of discussions:

> I remember in Montessori we got something that said [my son] was unorganized and
> sloppy. [Teachers at Montessori] got a little serious and showed us the covers of a
> reading book and other [classmates'] examples and said we need to see this. We thought
> he did something wrong, but it was just sloppy. So that is a negative experience. I think
> it is the context in which the educators present these things and we have always had good
> experiences.

The mothers' responses indicated the meanings they constructed from their child's report

card grades involved more than just looking at the SBRC. Parent/teacher conferences are a

strength for SBRCs, because they enhance parents' understanding of their child's performance,

progress and grades by being more focused and productive. Understanding their child's

performance before the end of the grading period informed parents about how they could help

their child at school before report card grades were determined. The impact of communication

throughout the year will be explored next.

Communication Throughout the Year

Feedback throughout the year is defined in this study as communication from the teacher

to the parent that provides insight into their child's performance on assignments and assessments

via emails, corrected schoolwork, midterms and report cards. Two parents' perspectives

regarding feedback throughout the year provided insight into ongoing communication with

parents that enhanced their understanding of their child's performance in school. The parents

explained how discussions with their child about daily learning activities and report cards helped

them support their child's performance in the classroom. Tessa explained why feedback and

discussions at school and home about daily learning activities provided more information to

improve learning than the report card: "The report card might not [improve learning]. It is more

of the day-to-day stuff. Short bouts of 'how did your behavior or work pay off?' This is the end

result. No one should be surprised if you are paying attention, which sounds a little arrogant."

In summary, Tessa explained that, "in general, parents use the report cards as a discussion point

in the home." Similarly, Fiona described how she was aware of her children's performance via

the SBRC and felt "lucky there have been no surprises." These comments demonstrate the

ongoing feedback and discussions that occur throughout the grading process among the parents,

students and teachers provide insight about student performance so parents are aware of general

performance in school before reviewing report cards. The more focused SBRC feedback during

the grading process allows parents to help their child make adjustments or make time for

additional practice before the end of the grading period. Positive impact SBRCs had on student

motivation will be discussed next.

SBRCs Positively Impact Student Motivation

Motivation is defined in this study as parents' perceived impact report cards have on

helping students work to achieve high grades. Parent perspectives about student motivation

impact parents' overall thoughts about SBRCs. Topics emerged that helped explain why SBRCs

impacted parents' support and encouragement while also positively impacting their child's

motivation. Fiona described general ways SBRCs impact student motivation and why motivation was not a major focus for her husband, son or herself. However, she acknowledged her fifth grade daughter focused on her grades and progress. Fiona also distinguished between older students being rewarded for grades while younger students were rewarded for behavior. However, Kaitlyn and Rosalie described specific ways SBRCs motivated their children. Kaitlyn described how "there is such a long road ahead of [children], they have to learn to give 110%." Kaitlyn also emphasized why grades can "motivate your child to maybe try a little harder" by stating, "I think if you have an 'Approaching,' you look at that and see there is room for improvement, so you say, let's shoot for a 'Meets' next trimester." Rosalie shared a similar perspective about grades being a "motivator for the child and a wakeup call for the parent" when she stated, "I think it might motivate you to take action if you see an area they are struggling with." Rosalie also illustrated how SBRCs foster giving compliments: "You may say hey, I see you have an "Extends" so you tell your child great job. She might be striving more if she knows about it."

Tessa explained how traditional report cards have negatively impacted her son's motivation because they emphasize grades rather than learning. While discussing the change from traditional report cards to SBRCs, Tessa identified another potentially negative impact of traditional report card grading methods that focused too much on final grades rather than the learning process by describing a challenge she encountered with her fifth grade son:

> He was fixating on these 'B's. We actually almost got into an argument at a restaurant. We took them out for a celebration dinner and he was almost in tears. I mean we were supportive the first half hour, then we were like look buddy that "B" doesn't mean a thing. It's the process and how you are learning that's more important. I think that is an educational piece that educators will have to fill in if they are going to use [SBRCs].

Fiona contended that parents focus too much time and pride on children's athletic

accomplishments rather than their academic accomplishments. These comments by Tessa and

Fiona emphasize the parents' awareness that learning and student growth should be an emphasis

rather than their child getting "straight As" for grades or talking more about their children's

performance in sports rather than school. Other parents explained why the details communicated

on SBRCs can facilitate student motivation and specific parent praise. This additional specificity

may also lead to different conversations among parents.

Some of the parent feedback in the interviews recognized ways SBRCs emphasized the

learning process and growth for different learning standards. Hence, parent feedback highlighted

a negative aspect of traditional report cards that SBRCs could help with regarding focusing on

the learning process and growth rather than final grades. In addition, the parents recognized

ways SBRCs can motivate their child in regards to effort and actions and can help parents

support their child's learning. Parents recognized SBRCs positively impact their child's

motivation resulting in increased effort and specific action while also guiding parents' support of

the learning process.

Parents discussed the following strengths and benefits of SBRCs: 1) SBRCs identify

students' strengths and weaknesses, 2) SBRCs provide comprehensive grades, 3) SBRCs

promote teacher communication that enhances parent understanding, and 4) SBRCs positively

impact student motivation. Weaknesses of SBRCs will be discussed next.

<u>Parental Perspectives on the Weaknesses and Challenges with SBRCs</u>

Much of what parents did not like about SBRCs related to aspects of traditional report

cards they did like. Data that addressed challenges parents encountered when trying to

understand report cards revealed the second theme: weaknesses with SBRCs. Negative parent

perspectives of SBRCs were shaped by what they liked about traditional report cards.

Discussions during interviews enabled the parents to discuss positive meanings they attached to

traditional report cards and question some of their assumptions as they discussed specific

challenges they encountered when reading their child's SBRCs. Key questions focused on

aspects of SBRCs that were confusing or could be communicated more clearly and descriptions

of how math grades are determined. Questions also inquired about their understanding of how

homework should be graded as well as understanding of the rating scale for the academic portion

on the traditional report card, methods of the current SBRC grading process that could be

improved, and confusing wording on SBRCs.

Parental perspectives on weaknesses and challenges of SBRCs included the following six

topics that emerged from the data: 1) SBRCs create perception of decreased expectations, 2)

SBRCs are initially difficult to adjust to and understand, 3) SBRCs utilize language that may be

unfamiliar to parents, 4) SBRCs calculate grades differently, 5) SBRCs foster a different purpose

for homework and 6) SBRCs fail to align with grading expectations in middle school, high

school, and college.

<u>SBRCs Create Perception of Decreased Expectations</u>

Positive impacts SBRCs have on student motivation were discussed in the strengths

section. However, three parents also explained why SBRCs create a perception of decreased

expectations. For example, some parents explained that they had questioned if grades of

"Meets" equate to ok or good enough rather than striving for the superior grade of "Extends."

Tessa explained that SBRCs are less motivating "to a student because you can't get [the highest

possible grade] 'Extends' in everything." Similarly, Fiona also recognized that parents were not

rewarding their children for "Extends" SBRC grades. Fiona extended the impact of SBRCs to

students' self-concepts:

> My concern is, I think some of the movement away [from traditional report cards] might
> be motivated by concern for how a kid feels about oneself. I don't want to crush anyone's
> spirits, and we have been very fortunate with generally good performances in the
> classroom, but I think if you teach the kid that ok is great then they don't know how to be
> great. We teach that all the time in sports, but we don't do it enough in the classroom.
> And I am not saying that is a [Roosevelt Elementary School] problem, I am saying that is
> a problem with saying everything is great, everything is great and then kids are shocked
> when it is not enough. [Students] don't know how to work or why they should work
> hard. That would be my concern of going with only standards based at the older grades.

While discussing the impact SBRCs have on motivation, the parents also discussed why

motivation was also impacted by traditional report cards their child previously used. They

offered stories of encouraging their children to achieve the highest traditional report card grade

of "A," but encountered a different target and process with SBRCs. Kaitlyn thought that

traditional report card grades enhanced motivation because the grades are based on comparison

to other students rather than to performance on specific standards for SBRCs. Kaitlyn described

motivation for improvement as a positive outcome for comparing performance to other students:

> I think comparing to other students in their class challenges each child differently
> because you want to do your best and be like the best kid in the class. But some children
> have challenges, so I think you have to take each student and assess them on their own. I
> like it reported, but not averaged into the grade.

The parents' perceived benefit of this aspect of traditional report cards was used to make

inferences about the perceived weaknesses of SBRCs. Parents may not be accustomed to SBRCs

basing grades on standards rather than comparison to students. Hence, educators may spend

additional time and focus on this topic to help parents understand their child's performance based

on performance on grade level standards. Overall, parents described why SBRCs create a

perception of decreased expectations. Educators should explain different ways parents can

monitor and support their child striving for excellence.

SBRCs Are Initially Difficult to Adjust to and Understand

It was clear that the parents communicated a general acceptance of the change in grading

processes and of improvement in the communication of expectations and grading standards with

SBRCs. However, the theme of challenges with changing grading and report cards emerged as

an obstacle. Parent feedback provided insight into challenges four parents faced when changing

the grading process and report card. Roxi explained how she felt most comfortable with

traditional report cards while still acknowledging she is trying to understand SBRCs: "I guess I

understand my son's [traditional] grades at [middle school] better than at [elementary school],

because I feel like I am still going through this learning process of the new [standards-based]

report card." Kaitlyn emphasized some questions she had when understanding SBRCs while also

recognizing the change process:

> Being a parent we are kind of set in the old ways with grades, and having an oldest who
> gets [traditional] grades we are always saying great job, so we will always say great job.
> Our children say, what does an 'Approaching' or 'Meets' mean, is it a 'B?' So we are
> getting [SBRCs] in our heads and our generation is getting used to them, but we are used
> to [traditional report cards]. At first there was a ton of negative feedback, but it's
> growing on us the more we are educated.

Similarly, Tessa described how her understanding is evolving when discussing a specific

challenge when understanding language arts grades: "I think it has been a learning process in

order to consume the SBRC. Comparing characters, setting and main idea is important for

parents of first grade students to understand because that is one of the expected standards for first

grade students." Carol concisely summarized, "So now put it into play with everyone and give it

a couple of years and I think it will be better." Carol's comments reflect the acceptance of change and expectations for ongoing improvement, increased comfort, and more meaningful report cards during subsequent years. Comments regarding the amount of time changes take sheds light on obstacles and support that impacted the parents' understanding of new report cards. The next emerging topic highlighted ways that SBRCs utilize language that may be unfamiliar to parents

SBRCs Utilize Language that May Be Unfamiliar to Parents

Understanding is defined in this study as components of traditional report cards and SBRCs that help parents comprehend their child's performance in school. When analyzing the parent responses regarding weaknesses with SBRCs, the third greatest challenge the parents faced was SBRCs utilize language that may be unfamiliar to parents. The parents spoke to the significant impact their past experiences had on their understanding of report card grades when they explained familiarity with meanings of traditional report card grades compared to the uncertainty of a single clear meaning with some standards-based grades. Traditional report cards have six letter grades with five of the grades having pluses and minuses for a total of thirteen different grades; however, the SBRC from the school district in this research only has four grades for each academic standard: "Extends," "Meets," "Approaching" and "Below." Table 8 defines the four possible SBRCs grades reported in Springfield.

Table 5

SBRCs Grades in Springfield Assigned the Following Grades:

> E (Extends): Student demonstrates application and/or understanding that extends beyond what was taught in class.
>
> M (Meets): Student demonstrates application and understanding of the concepts and/or skills taught in class.
>
> A (Approaching): Student demonstrates partial understanding of the concepts and/or skills taught in class.
>
> B (Below): Student demonstrates partial understanding, with assistance, of the concepts and/or skills taught in class.

Parents feedback regarding why SBRCs utilize language that may be unfamiliar to parents focused on three specific challenges parents experienced while transitioning from traditional report cards to SBRCs: 1) quantifying what SBRC grades mean and 2) challenges determining SBRCs levels of proficiency and 3) impacts of the parents' previous experiences with traditional report cards. According to Rosalie, there were challenges with understanding what some of the SBRC grades meant, "I think there is confusion about what [SBRC grades] mean. It has come up a few times; Maybe it is because our age group had letter grades so that is what we grew up with and are used to." Fiona emphasized that SBRCs "show great strengths and big weaknesses, but the middle ground covers too much area. I like that given a particular area it shows the progression across the board, from 'Meets" to 'Exceeds.'"

Anika explained her perception that grades of "Approaching" and "Meets" were too similar; she thought SBRCs did not show improvement and wanted her children to be challenged. She also expressed confusion about the grade of "Extends" and wanted additional examples and opportunities for "Extends." Kaitlyn and Rosalie also voiced difficulty explaining

the meaning of an "Extends" grade. Rosalie noted, "You don't necessarily know what an "E" is."

Tessa described the challenges of "not knowing how to consume each [SBRC] description." Specific examples of grades difficult for the parents to comprehend reinforce the importance of creating understandable report card language. For example, Kaitlyn focused on a challenge she encountered, admitting that, "with SBRCs, you can't tell if you are at the top or bottom of the spectrum." Amber focused on her difficulty understanding the SBRC report card vocabulary. Amber explained why the "phonological awareness" reading standard might be confusing: "The English as a second language parents would benefit with a definition in parentheses maybe. Otherwise I think it is pretty good." A conclusion from this study is reporting on multiple standards on SBRCs provides additional information only if parents understand what the wording of the standards mean.

Parent feedback regarding why SBRCs utilize language that may be unfamiliar to parents also focused on challenges determining SBRCs levels of proficiency. Amber admitted not fully understanding the process for determining a grade or what constituted a grade of "Meets." When discussing phonological awareness, she said, "I like the descriptors on SBRCs," but she wondered, "What does 'Approaching' mean a 'C?' Is 'Below' a 'D'? What do the [SBRC] grades mean?" Rosalie offered a similar perspective:

> I think the categories underneath are understandable and the comments at the end are understandable, but I think more [explanation about] what is an "M," what makes that up. I guess it may be getting more confusing regarding what is a "Meets" or "Extends." Sometimes it seems like well if you have two wrong [answers] is it an 'M?' It is not always consistent.

Roxi and Rosalie were also not able to distinguish where on the spectrum an SBRC grade is. Roxi admitted, "I understand the information or standard, but don't always understand how they get to the letter [grade]." Rosalie explained,

> I think the categories underneath are understandable and the comments at the end are understandable, but I think more [explanation about] what is an "M," what makes that up. I guess it may be getting more confusing regarding how "Meets" or "Extends" are determined or calculated. Sometimes it seems like well if you have two wrong [answers] is it an 'M?' It is not always consistent.

Roxi also expressed her uncertainty about grading criteria:

> An 'M' means 'Meeting,' 'approaching' is partial understanding. I guess sometimes I wonder if a student missed one spelling word, they got an 'Approaching,' but 'Approaching' may be a big window. They may have missed one or three. I don't know what that window is.

Feedback about performance and understanding grading criteria were priorities for these parents. The stories shared by the parents demonstrate the importance of providing examples and clear definitions so parents understand the different SBRC proficiency levels. Two specific challenges parents experienced while transitioning from traditional report cards to SBRCs included: 1) quantifying what SBRC grades mean and 2) Determining SBRCs levels of proficiency. Parent comments regarding the difficulty quantifying what SBRC grades mean highlights a challenge that school administrators can focus on to enhance parents' understanding of report card grades.

A second way the parents explained that SBRCs utilize language that may be unfamiliar to parents focused on the parents' previous experiences with traditional report cards. This theme emerged as parents answered questions about their understanding of traditional report card language or grading criteria and discussed some of the positive experiences they encountered with traditional report cards. Key questions asked during the interviews focused on feedback on

report cards that helped the parents understand their child's performance, understand their child's ability in specific math skills or concepts, and explain how the traditional report cards provide more useful information about how their child is performing in math.

Grades based on traditional grading criteria are based on the following scale: Scores of 60-69 are assigned a letter grade D, 70-29 are a C, 80-89 are a B, and scores of 90-100 are assigned a letter grade A. Traditional report cards also report one overall grade for different subjects such as math, science and language arts. Traditional report card grades are calculated by combining scores from assignments, tests, projects and behavior. The parents discussed their understanding of traditional report cards and expressed preferences for traditional grading calculation methods such as understanding expectations and criteria that helped explain the academic and behavior performance they value.

While discussing the parents' understanding of traditional report cards, five parents emphasized their familiarity with one overall grade for each subject and the number of possible grades for traditional report cards. Fiona explained, "I totally get why they would put all of that together, what are they doing every day, how are they doing on projects, let's lump it all together and give it an overall grade." Anika shared a similar perspective by saying, "I like a single grade because that is what I know best." Parent responses demonstrate their understanding of how assignments and assessments are combined to determine one grade for each subject for traditional report cards.

The parents described that they are accustomed to the 13 possible traditional report card grades (A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, etc.) and believed that the number of possible grades enhanced their understanding of where students were performing along a continuum. Anika appreciated that "it is broken down more with more levels like '+' and '−' to define it better," which

paralleled Amber's description of her comfort with the traditional report card. Kaitlyn illustrated her understanding of traditional report cards by explaining that she understands her child barely received a traditional letter grade of "A" if she sees a percentage such as a "93%." Tessa admitted, "It's [percentages] so I understand it does not compare one child to another; it is not a curve. It is bottom line, you get so many out of 100 correct and get a grade." The parents explained that traditional report cards communicate information in formats they understand. Parent responses also pointed to ways the grade communicated as a percent and the number of grades can facilitate problem solving by parents about how they can assist their children.

Roxi explained why she preferred traditional report cards rather than SBRCs: "based on my experiences, I understand traditional better because I know what an 'A,' 'B,' 'C,' 'D' is. I don't know if I truly" do for SBRCs. Tessa discussed earning a specific amount of points, while Amber commented on the combined academic and behavior grades. Amber recounted that based on her experiences with school that "homework needs to be turned in on time, needs to be legible, daily work needs to reflect that you are learning material well and tests [are] consistently 90% or higher throughout the semester." Tessa believed that "daily work should improve as the year goes on." The parents' perspectives emphasized the importance of students and parents understanding expectations and criteria.

Overall, the parents' responses painted a picture of a shared common understanding for what traditional report card grades mean when they were able to contextualize and perceive an understanding of where their child's grades were on the continuum of possible grades, what each of the grades meant, and how grades were determined. The parents explained why their experiences with traditional report cards guided their understanding of their child's traditional report cards but can negatively impacted their understanding of their child's SBRCs. Parents

feedback regarding why SBRCs utilize language that may be unfamiliar to parents focused on three specific challenges parents experienced while transitioning from traditional report cards to SBRCs: 1) quantifying what SBRC grades mean and 2) challenges determining SBRCs levels of proficiency and 3) impacts of the parents' previous experiences with traditional report cards. A conclusion is parents lack initial familiarity of SBRCs therefore educators need to scaffold support to enhance parents' understanding.

SBRCs Calculate Grades Differently

Parents in this study discussed comfort with the grading processes for traditional report cards that 1) average grades and 2) offer extra credit. However, parents did not explain why averaging grades and incorporating extra credit points into calculation of grades impacts the accuracy of the grade. In fact, parents were confused with the degree with which SBRCs are accurate or less accurate than traditional report cards.

The parents' comments about why they liked averaging grades for traditional report cards provided opportunities for inferences about the weaknesses of SBRCS. An example that helps understand averaging is a student with math scores of 60, 70, 70, 80 and 100. A teacher grading with a traditional report card would add the scores and divide by five to assign a score of 76 or a letter grade of C. Two parents had mixed feedback about whether grades should be determined based on averaging of scores on assignments to calculate a grade. However, their comfort and understanding of averaging grades as a traditional grading calculation method was a theme that emerged. Some of the parents understood and accepted averaging of grades to determine traditional report card grades. Roxi accepted the idea of teachers averaging grades. Carol thought grades should be averaged if they related to the same standard or topic within a subject

but did not think they should be averaged if they were unrelated, such as addition and fractions for math. Ultimately, the parents had experiences with averaging grades and understood the process, but they did not necessarily indicate averaging grades was accurate, nor did they advocate for this grading process. Another area of the gathered data is that the parents were not informed about why averaging grades can negatively impact grading accuracy. This inference about parents not understanding negative impacts averaging grades has on accuracy of grades is important because SBRC grades are calculated based on recent performance on specific standards rather than averaging different grades together.

Parents also discussed their understanding of extra credit that is incorporated into the calculation of traditional report card grades as a second way SBRCs calculate grades differently than traditional report cards. The parents' comments about why they liked extra credit opportunities for traditional report cards provided opportunities for inferences to be made about weaknesses of SBRCS. Three parents accepted and embraced the use of extra credit, but sometimes they specified a context for when extra credit could be used best. Kaitlyn thought extra credit should align with learning standards. Amber described the perceived benefits of extra credit, "Extra credit is applicable when for whatever reason you are not doing well and you take responsibility for it and improve and try. That is where I think it is applicable. If it is between a passing and failing grade that is when I think it is important." Fiona described how a student's progress might be accounted for and recalled how she graded students when she was a teacher by saying:

> I think it is the nature of the beast. Overall you are assessing the general area. In the high school I taught at we tried to build in wiggle room for projects and participation so you could give that extra bump to the kids who made it if they tanked a test but then mastered a concept.

Tessa contended that some extra credit might be too difficult for some students:

> [My son] would get extra credit on tests for answering a challenging question correctly.
> In that particular case it was not fair because not all students were capable of answering
> that question. I think every kid should have a chance to earn extra credit. I think there
> needs to be a different way to reflect higher achieving kids' abilities. Not that we don't
> praise him for [earning extra credit], but [it is] probably not fair.

Overall, the parents discussed two ways SBRCs calculate grades differently than

traditional report cards. The parents had experiences with averaging grades with traditional

report cards and understood the process. However, they did not necessarily indicate averaging

grades was accurate, nor did they advocate for this grading process that is not part of the process

teachers use to determine SBRC grades. The parents also believed extra credit opportunities

should be made available to foster challenging opportunities that relate to what students are

learning and are at the appropriate level of difficulty for students. Extra credit can improve a

grade on a traditional report card, but would decrease accuracy because the parents do not know

if the grade is based on academic performance or if it is a higher grade because extra credit was

awarded. SBRCs do not account for extra credit when determining grades. A better explanation

about why SBRC grading practices are more accurate than averaging grades and offering extra

credit would enhance parents' understanding of SBRCs.

SBRCs Foster a Different Purpose for Homework

Similar to challenges understanding the process for determining levels of SBRC

proficiency, three parents in this study had challenges understanding the different purpose that

report cards facilitate. For SBRCs, homework is recorded separately from academic grades,

often as a grade about being prepared, displaying organizational skills, or seeking challenges.

Regardless of how homework impacts grades, three parents sometimes did not understand

feedback on homework or the purpose of homework. For example, Amber asserted, "[Teachers]

don't grade assignments. They are a check, check minus or check plus. I don't like that and I

don't like being told 'I don't grade homework, I just give it a check or a plus.'" Tessa also

discussed homework as she shared recommendations:

> It may be helpful if you clarify this is based on one test evaluation and not the everyday
> work and the everyday work will be held somewhat separately. Because that can
> sometimes be confusing to parents since their homework is always so great, why are they
> only 'Meets.' Because they are doing their work and that is reflected in behavior like ta
> king responsibility. Good work habits that are being established doesn't necessarily
> mean that you know where that is, but maybe that differentiation would help.

An inference was made based on parent comments that parents do not understand SBRCs

foster a different purpose for homework. The parents' comments reflect the importance of

explaining how and why homework is graded differently for standards-based grading and how

homework grades are typically reported as a separate grade. Carol shared a potential solution for

helping parents better how and why homework is graded. Carol's recommendation focused on

the desire to see "better communication" and more work so she could better understand grades:

"With the new [SBRC] report card, I want to see the work before the report card" (Interview #7,

July 17, 2012). The fact that parents suggested better communication seems to be evidence they

need additional information to better understand how SBRC homework is graded.

SBRCs Fail to Align with Grading Expectations in Middle School, High School, and College

The sixth and final perceived weakness and challenge of SBRCs that emerged during

interviews was alignment with grading expectations in middle school, high school, and college.

The parents spoke about their assumption that middle schools, high schools, and colleges will

continue to use traditional report cards rather than changing to SBRCs. Alignment with future

learning and grading expectations in middle school, high school and college impacted the parents' preferences for SBRCs, as was demonstrated by one mother who supported traditional report cards: "I can't say I like [traditional report cards], but that is the way college and higher education [operate] so you better get used to it sooner rather than later." Amber did not care about comparisons to other students on the traditional report cards, but she made a connection to standardized tests and future education where students are compared against other students' test scores.

Overall, a primary reason the parents preferred traditional report cards was to prepare students for grading criteria and expectations in middle school, high school and college. Parent comments about alignment with future learning and grading expectations provided opportunities for inferences about the perceived weaknesses of SBRCs. The parents were paying attention to whether SBRCs will be the new type of report card in middle schools, high schools, and colleges as well as whether the degree of acceptance of SBRCs can be negatively impacted if elementary schools are the only level using SBRCs.

In summary, parental perspectives on weaknesses and challenges of SBRCs included the following six topics that emerged from the data: 1) SBRCs create perception of decreased expectations, 2) SBRCs are initially difficult to adjust to and understand, 3) SBRCs utilize language that may be unfamiliar to parents, 4) SBRCs calculate grades differently, 5) SBRCs foster a different purpose for homework and 6) SBRCs fail to align with grading expectations in middle school, high school, and college. Schools can focus on these four topics as they explain the benefits of SBRCs and help parents understand why some of these grading practices could change to enhance accuracy and clear communication.

Summary

The intention of this study was to identify How do parents perceive the strengths and weaknesses of SBRCs? Parents' positive and negative beliefs about SBRCs were grouped according to themes that emerged through the data. Findings from this study indicated that the issue was more complex than the initial research question that focused on whether parents preferred SBRCs or traditional report cards. For example, the parents verbalized a preference for elements of SBRCs such as the narrative report card comments, but they perceived the SBRC grading criteria to be confusing. The parents appreciated the details SBRCs communicate regarding their child's performance for different learning standards, the accuracy of SBRCs that separate academic and behavior grades, and the way SBRCs impact understanding of their child's strengths and weaknesses. The parents acknowledged the importance of ongoing formative feedback throughout the entire grading process to help the parents encourage and help their child. The parents realized the importance of the benefits of SBRC grading aspects they understand, such as comparing students to standards and reporting academic grades separately from behavior grades.

One finding is the need to shift to multiple complex perspectives on report cards rather than simply expressing a preference for traditional report cards or SBRCs, as both overlap. Much of what the parents did not like about SBRCs related to aspects of traditional report cards they did like. The parents demonstrated that they understand traditional report card grades, but that they also recognized traditional report cards do not communicate enough detail. The challenges with SBRCs the parents described should be addressed to maximize parent understanding.

Parents' understanding of SBRCs was described in great detail. Collectively, all of the parent feedback can guide educators who want to scaffold support to enhance the parents' understanding of SBRCs. Findings from Chapter 4 will guide Chapter 5's recommendations for educators.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The parents in this study provided insight about the strengths and challenges of SBRCs and explained why different types of teacher communication during the SBRC process provided them with a more comprehensive understanding of their child's academic performance in school. The discussion provided in this chapter can guide educators through effective implementation of SBRCs that maximizes comprehensive communication and professional development throughout the entire process to enhance parent understanding.

This study confirmed findings from reviewed literature, but also produced divergent findings. Prior research only focused on assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998, Loeb et al, 2008: McMillan, et al, 2002; Stetcher et al, 1998), grading (Brookhart, 1993, 1994; Randall & Engelhard, 2010), traditional report cards (Brigden, 1998; Panchisin, 2004; Tuten, 2005; Waltman & Frisbie, 1994), or SBRCs (Abbott, 2007; Adrian, 2012; Aidman et al., 2000; Olson, 2005; Schmidt, 2008; Scriffiny, 2008). Prior research also focused on a single grade level or narrower range of grade levels, such as kindergarten (Mathura, 2008), kindergarten through fourth grade (Panchisin, 2004), kindergarten through fifth grade (Adrian, 2012), fourth grade (Waltman & Frisbie, 1994; Tuten, 2005) ninth grade science (Brigden, 1998), or high school math (Scriffiny, 2008). In comparison, this study focused on parents who had multiple children in Kindergarten through fifth grade.

The preceding chapters provided an introduction, reviewed the literature, explained the methodology, and presented the findings. Chapter 5 discusses the field data collected through interviews conducted with eight parents of elementary school students. The analyses connect the constructivist theoretical framework to the implications of the findings in relation to the research question and the review of literature. Topics include 1) the communicative value of SBRCs; 2) opportunities for enhancing the communicative value of SBRCS; and 3) using SBRCs to scaffold collaborative professional development for teachers, administrators and parents. Chapter 5 also includes suggestions for future study and the conclusion.

During interview discussions about standards-based assessing, grading and reporting, the parents in this study frequently talked about communication in different contexts. However, a closer analysis helped identify clusters of emerging trends. Aspects of communication were mentioned as they specified ideal communication to enhance their understanding as they identified the strengths of SBRCs. The parents in this study indicated they embraced the communicative value of SBRCs because they provided comprehensive grades and promoted teacher communication that enhanced parent understanding of their child's performance in school.

Communicative Value of SBRCs

Findings from this study suggest the parents' understanding of their child's performance in school was enhanced when the SBRCs promoted meaningful and precise communication parents value. The parents in this study recognized the communicative value was based on the degree to which the parents found the information on SBRCs meaningful for understanding their child's progress in school.

The parents found the SBRCs meaningful when they communicated the intended purpose stated on SBRCs, paralleling Guskey's (2014) suggestion that school districts should specify whether the goal of the report card was to communicate academic achievement, facilitate self-evaluation, provide incentives, evaluate effectiveness of programs, or select students for programs. Findings from the current study align with Guskey's recommendation to create and communicate a clear purpose for a report card because the purpose can be referenced during critical conversations about SBRCs. Similar to Olson's (2005) findings, the parents in the current study also described progress on alignment of the teachers' views of the purpose and the basis for the grades.

The parents in this study also discussed being able to construct the meaning of SBRCs as they described appreciation for ongoing detailed written and verbal communication between teachers and parents. These parents believed detailed communication from the school district to parents should focus on "small, consumable updates" (Fiona, June 29, 2012) about how students and parents can understand the grading criteria, curriculum standards for different subjects and information to better understand standardized test scores. The parents appreciated communication that focused on feedback about effort, citizenship, progress, areas of concern and comparisons to expectations and peers.

Meaningful SBRCS foster communicative value when they are detailed and communicate student progress toward achieving established learning objectives. Findings from the current study align with recommendations from Heflebower et al. (2014), who proposed that meaningful report cards accurately communicate what students are doing well and what they can work on while also connecting grades with learning and progress on prioritized standards. Standards-based grading and reporting involves grades based on learning compared to specific standards

and requires teachers to discriminate among progress, product, and process (Guskey, Swan & Jung, 2010). Although the parents did not use the terminology of progress, product and process, they discussed appreciation of communication about each of the grading components. The parents in this study confirmed the desire to understand communication regarding their child's strengths and areas for growth so they could encourage continuous improvement while also recognizing benefits of reporting progress, product, and process separately. Progress criteria provide individualized descriptions of academic growth or learning gains, product criteria refer to student performance and achievement, and process criteria refer to class behaviors that lead to achievement such as behavior, effort, and attendance (Guskey, 2001; Guskey et al., 2010).

Meaningful SBRCs foster communicative value when they are relevant. The parents in this study discussed relevance of SBRC grades that were meaningful when SBRC grades were assigned. SBRCs were also relevant when grades were timely and based on recent performance and compared to standards. Guskey and Bailey (2010) acknowledged how meaningful grades should facilitate learning but should also recognize the needs of parents, teachers, and administrators. Parents may want precise information that is useful and understandable, while administrators and teachers may want grading consistency that aligns with and enhances teaching and learning. As Waltman and Frisbie (1994) noted, understanding the difference between parentally interpreted meaning and the teacher's intended meaning helps educators establish effective grading practices and reporting methods and determine if parents interpret their children's report card grades in the manner intended by the teacher. Based on the findings from the current study, the communicative value of SBRCs was more meaningful to parents when the SBRCs were detailed and relevant.

Meaningful SBRCS foster communicative value when they are comprehensive. The comprehensive SBRCs communicated actionable feedback about students' strengths and areas of improvement. Findings from this study aligned with benefits of actionable feedback Chappius (2009) identified that acknowledged student success and directed future thinking. Comprehensive SBRCs report multiple grades for each subject and separate grades for academics and behavior. The parents agreed that comprehensive narrative report card comments are one way SBRCs promote teacher communication and enhance their understanding of their child's report card grades, strengths, and areas for improvement. Similar to the parents interviewed by Brigden (1998) and Panchisin (2004), the parents interviewed in the current study preferred written comments that were informative and personal. The responses from the participating parents demonstrated appreciation for comprehensive comments on SBRCs that guided their support and encouragement of their child.

The parents in this study also recognized the communicative value of SBRCs for understanding their child's progress in school that were precise. The parents in this study found SBRCs to be precise when they were accurate and specific. The parents in this study recognized the communicative value of SBRCs that accurately calculated and communicated the SBRC grades. Wiggins (1994), Guskey (2006, 2009, 2015), Marzano (2000), O'Connor (2007, 2009, 2011), Wormeli (2006), Reeves (2008) and Schimmer (2016) not only questioned the accuracy and validity of traditional grading practices, they also suggested a need to understand the perceptions of parents who are the primary audiences of report cards. Schimmer (2016) contended that teachers grading with traditional grading methods that average grades and that base grades on less relevant older evidence do not use the most recent evidence of learning that more accurately reports student proficiency levels. Similarly, Guskey (2015) pointed out that the

calculation of grades can provide an illusion of accurate grades; however, SBRCs require a transparent purpose, careful judgment, and clear communication. Guskey (2015) encourages educators to calculate and communicate fair and accurate standards-based grades that emphasize recent evidence based on critical learning standards rather than calculating traditional grades that average scores, assign zeros and incorporate behavior into academic grades.

Similar to the reviewed research by Kohn (1994), Waltman and Frisbie (1994), and Brookhart (1993) that describes how traditional grades are not inherently accurate because of the grading methods, parents in the current research recognized traditional report cards could be less accurate than SBRC grades. The parents in this study appreciated the calculation and communication of accurate SBRC grades compared to the shortcomings of traditional report cards researchers have identified. The parents appreciated the communication potential of SBRC grades that were based on recent performance rather than traditional grades that average grades, reported grades separately for behavior and academics, and based grades on standards rather than comparison to peers.

The parents in this study recognized the communicative value of specific SBRCs that foster congruency with assessments by basing grades on standards. The parents explained they perceived congruency among the SBRC assignments, assessments and grades because they were aware of their child's performance, had not been surprised about grades, understood why a grade was assigned, and appreciated consistency with the process. The parents' perceptions that their children are prepared for assessments is important because assessments are used to determine SBRC grades. Assessments that correlate with report card grades can provide feedback to parents about their child's performance during the grading period, thus promoting better communication and enhancing parent understanding of SBRC grades. The parents expressed

appreciation for SBRCs that provided a list of standards for understanding expectations, criteria, and consistency during the assessment and grading process.

Findings from this study in conjunction with reviewed research lead to my contention that SBRCs are precise to parents when they provide timely, accurate, specific and consistent feedback to parents and students. Similar to findings from Chermiss (2008), the current study recognized that SBRCs increase awareness about standards and specificity for assessments. The current findings also relate to Loeb et al.'s (2008) findings that assessments help teachers provide timely and accurate feedback to parents. Consistent interpretation of SBRC letter grades should foster a common understanding about grading criteria, levels of proficiency, and the meaning of grades. Findings from the study align with Wiggins's (1994) and Brigden's (1998) research regarding letter grades being useful for improving learning and teaching when the teacher, student and parent interpret grades consistently.

<center>Opportunities for Enhancing the Communicative Value of SBRCS</center>

SBRCs promote valued communication; however, parents' responses about the weaknesses of SBRCs identified opportunities for enhancing the communicative value of SBRCs by enhancing parent perceptions regarding 1) understanding of SBRC criteria, 2) student accountability and 3) transitioning to and from SBRCs.

The parents in this study identified opportunities for enhancing the communicative value of SBRCs by enhancing parents' understanding of SBRC criteria. For example, Fiona explained her frustration with that lack of information she gleaned from "Meets" grades by emphasizing that SBRCs "show great strengths and big weaknesses, but the middle ground covers too much area." Anika explained her perception that grades of "Approaching" and "Meets" were too

similar." Anika, Kaitlyn and Rosalie voiced difficulty explaining the meaning of an "Extends" grade. Roxi and Rosalie admitted, "I understand the information or standard, but don't always understand how they get to the [SBRC] letter [grade]."

Guskey and Bailey (2010) identified key qualities for effective report cards include being "concise, understandable, and easy to interpret" (172). Educators seeking to enhance the communicative value of SBRCs should maximize communication about enhancing parents' understanding of SBRC criteria. The parents from this study admitted to limited experience with the format of SBRCs; however, they were still satisfied with the format. Similar to what Schmidt (2008) discovered, the parents in this study welcomed the change to SBRCS because of their understanding of some of the shortcomings of traditional report cards and the need for change. The parents also indicated SBRC descriptors enhanced the potential for targeted disaggregated feedback on multiple standards. However, they wanted to better understand how and why SBRCs are calculated differently than traditional report cards.

My findings regarding standards-based assessments align with recommendations by Black and Wiliam (1998) to monitor and improve student progress by providing feedback about strengths and weaknesses rather than making comparisons among students. However, the parents still requested comparison to peers, so educating parents about the benefits of comparing students' progress to standards rather than to students is critical.

The parents in this study identified opportunities for enhancing the communicative value of SBRCs by enhancing parent understanding of student accountability. Effective implementation of SBRCs should maximize communication about redefined expectations and accountability. Similar to findings from Brigden (1998), the parents believed their children worked harder to maintain a letter grade and that student confidence was impacted by letter

grades. The parents were concerned that SBRCs created a perception of decreased expectations

for students, explaining that they questioned whether grades of "Meets" equate to good enough

rather than striving for the superior grade of "Extends. Vatterott (2015) reminds educators that

they are preparing students for a different world where students will benefit from being self-

directed, self-motivated, analytic, resourceful, persistent problem solvers rather than students

who compliantly memorize information to earn a high grade. Educators should explain different

ways parents can monitor and support their child striving for excellence.

The parents in this study identified opportunities for enhancing the communicative value

of SBRCs by enhancing parent understanding of accountability via ongoing communication.

Communication throughout the year enhanced these parents' comprehensive understanding of

their child's performance at school. In this study, ongoing scaffolded support was used to

describe the way the teachers communicated with parents and provided the tools the parents need

to better understand SBRCs (Jacobs, 2001). The parents in this study appreciated the

opportunities for experiencing and reflecting (Bandura, 1977) because ongoing communication

throughout the year fostered making connections between the report card grades with what was

being learned, grading criteria, work habits, and assessment practices. The parents felt effective

communication also included written updates and comments in students' assignment notebooks

and on daily assignments and narrative comments on SBRCs. The parents stated that they

wanted to be involved and informed during the grading process as they listened to feedback from

teachers and were able to hear answers to their questions. Understandable and ongoing

communication fostered benefits such as collaboration, support, and encouragement. The

parents discussed the benefits of teachers and parents working on teams as they collaboratively

focused on the students' academic and behavioral needs and recommended working together

during learning, assessing and grading to reach common understandings of strengths, expectations, areas of concern, behavior, and different perspectives.

The reviewed literature provides a strong foundation for contextualizing implications about the impact of communication on report cards. Waltman and Frisbie (1994) found over 50 percent of parents and teachers identified that papers brought home provided the most frequent form of information regarding student achievement. In addition to the SBRC, Guskey and Bailey (2010) identified other commonly used tools for a "comprehensive reporting system" that included phone calls, e-mails, letters, newsletters, notes from principals written on report cards, assessment reports, progress reports, graded assignments, portfolios, homework, websites, and parent/teacher conferences (p. 204). Parents in the current study also relied on communication throughout the school year via different types of teacher feedback to enhance their understanding of the SBRC and better understand their child's performance in school, strengths and weaknesses. Similar to recommendations from Guskey and Bailey (2010), the parents in this study emphasized the benefits of a grading process that included a two-way process that specified how parents' questions and concerns would be addressed.

Parent/teacher conferences were also a critical aspect of ongoing communication parents identified for a comprehensive understanding of their child's performance at school. Focused SBRC feedback during the grading process allowed parents to help their child make adjustments or make time for additional practice before the end of the grading period. Parent/teacher conferences were two-way communication opportunities that should provide time to discuss the students' strengths and weaknesses so parents could understand actionable feedback that could guide their support for their child. The current findings align with Tuten (2005), who found that the report cards were incomplete because the parents needed additional information to

contextualize the report card and understand their child's progress by discussing it during a parent/teacher conference. Parent/teacher conferences are a critical component in the SBRC process because they enhance parents' understanding of their child's performance, progress, and grades.

The parents in this study identified opportunities for enhancing the communicative value of SBRCs by enhancing parent understanding of the questions about students transitioning to and from SBRCs. More specifically, the parents described the biggest challenges for students in third, fifth and sixth grades. The parents differentiated understanding grades at multiple grade levels. They indicated they understood SBRCs for Kindergarten through second grades because they were accustomed to report cards that listed developmental grades rather than traditional letter grades such as "A," "B," "C," "D" and "F." Overall, the parents preferred SBRCs for kindergarten through second grade because they were similar to previous report cards that communicated grades without one overall grade for each subject. However, the parents experienced more difficulty changing from traditional report cards that communicated one overall grade for each subject in third, fourth and fifth grades. The parents were adjusting to having one overall traditional report card grade reported for each subject beginning in third grade to SBRCs reporting multiple grades for each subject. Parents were also thinking about how fifth grade report cards would align with middle school and high school grades. This finding denotes a potentially significant area of future focus for educators.

The parents in this study also identified opportunities for enhancing the communicative value of SBRCs by enhancing parent understanding of the alignment with grading expectations in middle school, high school and universities. Extending this notion further, the findings also speak strongly to professional development so parents, administrators, and teachers about

consistent grading practices and expectations among elementary schools, middle schools, high schools and universities. The parents advocated for consistent use of grading expectations in schools. Consistent curriculum, instruction, and assessment were especially noted by parents who had multiple children and by parents who frequently discussed school happenings with other parents.

Parent communication regarding SBRCs can be maximized with targeted professional development for administrators, parents and teachers. These topics will be discussed next.

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Using SBRCs to Scaffold Collaborative Professional Development for
Teachers, Administrators and Parents

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The first section in Chapter 5 about communicative value of SBRCs explained what parents in this study found meaningful by identifying the degree to which parents thought about the quality of the communication between educators and parents. The parents suggested that educators should think of interactions with parents in terms of communicative value of student performance. If educators know the parents find common understanding of SBRCs meaningful, educators need to use that information to guide their communication. This section will extend the discussion by explaining how SBRCs can enhance communicative value about students' performance by scaffolding collaborative professional development for teachers, administrators, and parents. Professional development should collectively meet different needs of teachers, administrators, and parents by collaboratively focusing on 1) creating a common understanding, 2) redefining accountability, and 3) developing and implementing transition plans for third, fifth and sixth grade parents.

SBRCs can enhance communicative value about students' performance by scaffolding collaborative professional development for teachers, administrators and parents that focuses on creating a common understanding about SBRCs. Professional development should focus on creating a common understanding about grading consistency throughout the school district, quantifying what SBRC grades mean, and understanding criteria for SBRCs levels of proficiency. Additional professional development should focus on effective use of portfolios, maximize the use of rubrics, and provide opportunities for students to earn "Extends" grades. This recommendation for teacher professional development to foster consistent parent understanding aligns with recommendations from Chambers and Dean (2000), who found that standards-based learning focuses on teachers knowing the learning standards students are accountable for as well as knowing how to provide feedback to students, how to assess students' knowledge of the standards, and how to apply standards to all students.

Communication was prominent when the parents discussed congruency among assessment, assignments, and report cards. Their responses aligned with constructivist theory for learning in which new information must be communicated in formats and words that are within the parents' range of understanding (Vygotsky, 1962) regarding student performance, progress and expectations. The parents recommended clear communication that specifies grading criteria to students and parents before assignments, assessments, and report cards so expectations and criteria are understood, paralleling Reeves (2004), **who explained the benefits of** clearly communicating assessment expectations to **students and parents** regarding knowledge and skills.

The parent feedback also highlighted a need for collaborative professional development for teachers, administrators, and parents that redefines accountability. Schimmer (2016)

recommends that educators should focus on clearly communicating what each SBRC grade means and redefining expectations and accountability. This process should include revisiting the school district's established purpose for the SBRC. For example, the purpose for Springfield School District is to communicate progress toward meeting objectives that align with state learning standards, so the meaning of grades and redefined expectations should connect with this purpose. As described by O'Connor (2009), "the time has come to de-emphasize traditional grades and to demystify the entire grading process. We need to focus instead on the process of learning and the progress of the individual student" (p. 237). Two specific areas of focus should be redefined focus on 1) learning rather than grading and 2) purpose of homework for standards-based grading.

Professional development should provide examples that show how SBRCs emphasize what is learned rather than what is taught by establishing targets for students to achieve, assessing development of academic and non-academic skills over time, helping teachers adjust their teaching, and improving communication with parents (Guskey, 2015). As Guskey (2006) asserted, "The intent (of report cards) is to provide a better, more accurate, and much more comprehensive picture of what students accomplish in school" (p. 673). Similar to Tuten (2005), I recommend involving parents in the creation and implementation of report cards and including portfolios to enhance the report card process for students, parents and teachers. Similar to Reeves (2011), I recommend engaging educators and stakeholders in meaningful discussions about grading by discussing potential parent frustrations; reaching consensus on the purpose of grades; specifying aspects of grading that will remain the same; and establishing accurate, fair and specific grading policies that specify formats of communication and feedback. The

recommendation aligns with the constructivist learning theory that values active engagement of participants to enhance ownership and motivation (Fosnot, 1996).

This study and the reviewed literature provide a strong foundation for contextualizing implications about the impact of communication on report cards. O'Connor (2009) acknowledged that SBRC grades are only part of the communication process and recommended educators should plan communication and train parents and teachers to understand their role in the ongoing process. SBRCs can enhance communicative value in regard to students' performance and create a common understanding by scaffolding collaborative professional development for teachers, administrators, and parents regarding ongoing communication. Professional development should begin with discussions about the purpose, benefits, and examples of effective ongoing communication between teachers and parents and between administrators and parents. Professional development should also include discussions about the expectations of participants and ways the ongoing two-way communication can be maximized.

Findings from this study can also guide collaborative professional development for teachers, administrators, and parents that engages stakeholders in discussions about grading and accountability. Overall, educators should maximize the use of different types of feedback throughout the school year in conjunction with SBRCs to foster parents' comprehensive understanding of their child's performance in school. Educators can leverage new opportunities and build capacity via continuous communication throughout the year with clear expectations and criteria, written teacher feedback and narrative report card comments, and two-way opportunities such as parent/teacher conferences and other resources.

The constructivist model provides a lens with which to understand the parents as they encounter new information about the new purposes for homework that may be in conflict with

previous experiences with or knowledge of traditional grading. Educators should help parents understand the redefined the purpose for homework that focuses on providing multiple opportunities to independently practice previously learned skills related to grade level standards. Parents need to understand that homework will be graded as a behavior for managing time or coming to school prepared. Parents need to understand the goal of grading homework should not be meeting deadlines or compliance, instead homework should provide students with opportunities to demonstrate understanding of recently learned information that aligns with specific standards. Teacher feedback on homework should guide future learning for students by identifying mistakes or misunderstandings and praising correct answers, complex thinking, or extended learning so parents can understand their child's strengths and weaknesses to praise and support accordingly.

The degree to which parents think about the quality of SBRCs is strongly impacted by experiences of parents with students in third, fifth and sixth grade. If we know the parents in this study are strongly impacted by experiences with students in third and sixth grade, professional development should focus on this need. Analysis of the parent responses from this study could lead to recommended professional development for administrators that focuses on 1) supporting parents of third, fifth and sixth grade students and 2) fostering consistency among elementary schools, middle schools, high schools and universities.

Educators should focus their professional development on collaboratively supporting parents of third grade students so they can help and encourage their children. Professional development should focus on understanding the meaning and criteria for SBRCs. Findings from this study aligned with reviewed research about the process of changing from traditional report cards to SBRCs. Similar to findings from Chermiss (2008), the parents from this study were

familiar with traditional report cards. And paralleling findings from Tuten (2005), the parents in the current study encountered challenges solving problems regarding the meaning of SBRC descriptors, had questions about the numerical descriptors, and wanted to know how they could help their child academically.

This study and reviewed studies suggest that changing from traditional report cards to SBRCs caused some confusion because of the new descriptors being used (Berridge, 2006; Chermiss, 2008; Mathura, 2008). Guskey and Jung (2013) remind educators that parents can enhance the effectiveness of SBRC implementation if communication clearly explains benefits of the change from traditional report cards to SBRCs and why the change is happening. Administrators should explain why the change is being made to SBRCs and what specific changes students and parents should expect so there is consistency in the message and overall support. Similar to Vatterott (2015), I encourage educators to focus initial SBRC parent conversations on school improvement rather than grading, emphasize why changes will benefit students, use the district website as a robust resource, and communicate successes with stakeholders. The change from traditional report cards to SBRCs is a shift in philosophies for teaching and learning that extends beyond just changing the letters of the grades that are assigned. Policy and practice are impacted by and should continue to be a focus for professional development.

When maximizing communication to enhance parents' understanding of SBRCs, the constructivist model provides a lens with which to understand the parents as they encounter new information about standards-based assessing, grading, and reporting that may be in conflict with previous experiences with or knowledge of traditional grading. The constructivist learning theory reminds educators 1) to understand that learning is a contextual social activity and that the

learners' "zone of proximal development" means people learn only if new content is within the range they can understand (Vygotsky, 1978), 2) to focus on the mental schemas learners use to understand new content (Bruner, 1966) to help people actively construct knowledge and create personal meaning from new information by integrating connections with previous experiences, and 3) to ensure experts scaffold support to help parents while decreasing support as the parents' understanding evolves (Vygotsky, 1978).

Educators should also focus their professional development on collaboratively supporting parents of fifth and sixth grade students. Specific areas of focus should include a transition plan that communicates changes from the fifth grade SBRC grading criteria, process and expectations compared to the sixth grade traditional report card. A second focus could be on enhancing accuracy of the sixth grade traditional grading practices by basing grades on recent performance rather than averaging grades, reporting grades separately for behavior and academics, and grading homework as a behavior rather than an academic grade.

Professional development could also focus on hybrid SBRCs that report multiple standards-based grades while still providing one overall grade for each subject. Hybrid SBRCs could be an option school districts explore that aligns with the parents' need for understanding their child's performance for different learning standards while also reporting one overall letter grade for each subject. Hybrid report cards could be considered for fifth grades, middle schools, high schools, and colleges.

Suggestions for Future Research

The current research provides a strong base for understanding standards-based assessment, grades and report cards while also suggesting the need for future research. Some of

these suggestions are discussed below. Noted ambiguities in literature about assessment include research that is limited to gathering information from teachers. Future research should relate to Black and Wiliam's (1998) research by evaluating ongoing feedback from teachers to students and parents throughout the learning and assessment process.

Another clear area for opportunity for further research is grading. Findings from this study suggest that these parents focused most of their concerns about SBRCs on students who were in third grade and older rather than Kindergarten through second grade. This finding denotes a potentially significant area for educators: a focus on the needs of students and parents as they seek to understand the purpose, criteria, and expectations for third, fourth and fifth grades that may use SBRCs and to prepare the students and parents for the traditional report cards that may be used in middle schools, high schools, and universities. The parents said they appreciated multiple grades/evaluations, indicating a need for additional research on parent feedback about hybrid traditional or standards-based grading that include multiple grades for each subject. Additional research could focus on ways to redefine perceived student motivation for SBRC grades, resulting in a different mindset for students and parents.

Reporting is the third area in which additional research is recommended. Due to the impact of Common Core Standards on education and parents' and teachers' increased understanding of Common Core Standards, examination should continue to focus on the impact of Common Core Standards on parents' perspectives of SBRCs. An increasing number of school districts are modifying their report cards to align with curriculum, instruction and assessments that have common standards, so research should examine SBRCs as they continue to be developed.

Other topics include studying school districts that have unsuccessfully implemented SBRCs and have gone back to traditional grading and reporting as well as how many states, school districts, or schools would like to change to standards-based grading and assessing, but do not have the current finances to be able to begin this initiative.

Conclusion

A qualitative study was designed to address the research question: How do parents perceive the strengths and weaknesses of SBRCs? The findings from this study encourage school districts to consider the impact that standards-based assessing, grading, and reporting have on parents' understanding of their child's performance in school to facilitate open dialogue among parents and educators about how grading can be improved. From this study, I have learned educators should continue to work collaboratively with parents to define the purpose for grading and report cards as they refine the processes of effective assessing, grading, and reporting to align with changes in learning and teaching. Educators should also seek to understand whether grades are being effectively and accurately interpreted and communicated to students and parents.

Ideally, parents' understanding of their child's performance in school can be enhanced when SBRCs promote meaningful and precise communication parents value. SBRCs are meaningful to parents when they are detailed, relevant, and comprehensive. SBRCs are precise when they provide timely, accurate, specific and consistent feedback to parents and students. The parents in this study identified opportunities for enhancing the communicative value of SBRCs by enhancing parent understanding regarding 1) the meaning and criteria of SBRCs; 2)

student accountability; 3) questions about students in third, fifth and sixth grades; 4) alignment with grading expectations in middle school, high school, and universities; and 5) ongoing communication. Parents and educators may find it difficult to contend with changing report cards in the moment, but they may see the change to SBRCs was needed to foster continuous student growth and enhance communication among students, parents, and educators.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT REQUESTING PERMISSION AND PARENT CONTACT
INFORMATION

Dear Superintendent,

      I am requesting permission for me to conduct my dissertation research in Springfield School District with Northern Illinois University. I would like parents in your school district to participate in the research study that aims at investigating parents' understanding of grading and reporting, based on interviews with a total of eight parents, two from each of the four elementary schools. Your school district was selected because parents should be able to reflect more coherently and passionately about grading and report cards because they are experiencing transition from traditional to standards-based report cards. I selected parents from your school district, rather than from parents of other school districts because my familiarity with the current curriculum, culture and grading and assessment practices could enhance my understanding of assessment, grading and report cards in Springfield School District. You and the other educators, parents, and students will benefit from the information gathered in this study as information is analyzed and then shared with other administrators in Lake County to improve report cards for teachers, parents, and students. Although the results of this study may be published, no information that could identify Springfield School District or parents will be included.

      If you provide consent for my study, I request you distribute my Subject Recruitment/Introductory Letter to five parents from Jefferson, Lincoln and Washington elementary schools who would be able to provide honest and detailed feedback about their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about report cards. I will distribute my "Subject Recruitment/Introductory Letter" to five parents at Roosevelt Elementary School where I am principal. Though I am requesting names of five parents from each school, I only anticipate that two parents from each school will participate in the study. Parents who are interested in participating in the interview are asked to call or e-mail me. I will email the parents who agree to participate in the study the 1) Informed Consent form and 2) a summary of the general interview themes and process in advance so they are aware of the focus and scope of the study. Enclosed in this e-mail are those same forms.

      Please call me at (847) 855-1315 or e-mail me at eyoungman75@hotmail.com if you have questions about the participation of parents from your school district in this study.

Sincerely,

Erik Youngman
Principal
(847) 855-1315

APPENDIX B

SUBJECT RECRUITMENT/INTRODUCTORY MATERIALS

Dear XX,

I would like to introduce myself to you. I am a doctoral candidate at Northern Illinois University and a principal at Roosevelt Elementary School in Springfield. For my dissertation I am conducting a study to examine parent perceptions of report cards. This is an opportunity for you to share your experiences, thoughts, and feelings related to report cards.

Specifically, this research is designed to gather information during interviews to provide data that would inform administrators' and teachers' understandings of parents' perceptions of assessing, grading, and report cards. Parents' perceptions of report cards will be assessed through interviews with eight parents from four elementary schools about grading, assessment, and report cards. Questions will be asked about each part of the assessment, grading, and reporting process to understand what parents think about report cards, what practices and communication are effective, what is not understood, and what recommended improvements would maximize parents' understanding.

I will interview you for about 90 minutes to two hours at a mutually convenient time. These interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. I will also ask for your consent to photocopy your child's traditional and standards-based report card. I will delete your child's name and replace it with a pseudonym.

Your views and opinions are paramount to the success of the study or parent perceptions of report cards. If you would like to volunteer to participate in this research or would like additional information regarding this research, please contact me at (847) 855-1315 or at eyoungman75@hotmail.com.

Thank you in advance for making the time to help me with this research project. It is my hope that this study will be of great value to educators and parents.

Sincerely,

Erik Youngman
Principal
(847) 855-1315

APPENDIX C

PHONE PROTOCOL

1. Dial phone number of potential participant.
2. I will say the following during my conversation with the potential participant.

      Good afternoon, I am the principal at Roosevelt Elementary School in Springfield and a doctoral candidate at Northern Illinois University. My name is Erik Youngman. For my dissertation I am conducting a study to examine parents' perceptions of report cards. I am calling you because you shared interest in providing feedback about your experiences with report cards.

      This is an opportunity for you to share your experiences, thoughts, and feelings related to report cards. Specifically, this research is designed to provide qualitative data that would inform administrators' and teachers' understandings of parent perceptions of assessing, grading, and report cards, through multiple parent interviews. Parent perceptions of report cards will be assessed through interview with eight parents from four elementary schools about grading, assessment, and report cards. Questions will be asked about each part of the assessment, grading, and reporting process to understand what parents think about report cards, what practices and communication are effective, what is not understood, and what recommended improvements would maximize parents' understanding.

      I will interview you for about 90 minutes to two hours at a mutually convenient time and location.
Your views and opinions are valuable to the success of the study or parent perceptions of report cards.

      Are you interested in participating in these interviews?
A. If the answer is no thank I will say, "thank you for making time to talk with me. Best of luck with you and your child the rest of the school year."
B. If the answer is yes proceed to the following three questions.

1. Do you have any additional questions?
2. Could you tell me the gender of your children and the grade level they currently are in?
3. Could you please tell me your mailing address and e-mail address so I can send you additional information and a consent form?
4. Are there days of the weeks or times of day that would be most convenient to interview you?
For interview location would you feel most comfortable interviewing in a conference room at the school your child attends (Jefferson, Lincoln and Washington), the conference room at Roosevelt, your house or a restaurant like Panera?

I will e-mail you the 1) "Informed Consent" form and 2) a summary of the general interview themes and process in advance so you are aware of the focus and scope of the study.

Just to confirm, I will interview you on   date   at   time   at
   location   .
Thank you in advance for making the time to help me with this research project. It is my hope that this study will be of great value to educators and parents.

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT

I agree to participate in the research project titled *An Examination of Parents' Perceptions of Report Cards* being conducted by Erik Youngman, a doctoral student at Northern Illinois University. I have been informed that the purpose of the study is to better understand parents' perceptions of assessment, grading, and reporting so improvements can be recommended to educators.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I will be asked to do the following: 1) answer questions during an interview that will last about 90 minutes to two hours and be audio recorded, 2) provide copies of my child's traditional and standards-based report card, and 3) answer follow-up and clarifying questions as needed via a phone call.

I am aware that my participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice, and that if I have any additional questions concerning this study, I may contact Erik Youngman at (847) 855-1315. I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at (815) 753-8588.

I understand that the intended benefits of this study include learning more about assessment, grading and report cards. I also understand that I will be contributing to a study that will generate summaries and recommendations to improve assessment, grading and report cards.

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks involved with answering the interview questions or providing a copy of my child's grade card. While data will be reported, no specific individual, school, or school district will be identified. Only the researcher will have access to the interview responses and copies of your child's report card. The details of your child's report cards will be kept confidential by using a black permanent marker to cover your child's name on the report card and by coding each report card so only I know which report card is connected to each of the parents that are interviewed.

To ensure that this study provides an accurate portrayal and is meaningful, your input is important.

I understand that my consent to participate in this project does not constitute a waiver of any legal rights or redress I might have as a result of my participation, and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

_____   _____
Signature of Subject   Date

Please sign below to give consent for the interview to be audio recorded.

_____   _____
Signature of Subject   Date

* Please keep one copy of this form for your records and sign the other copy and mail it back to the researcher in the provided self-addressed stamped envelope

COPY OF TRADITIONAL SPRINGFIELD REPORT CARD

EVALUATION DEFINITIONS:
- Very Successful: Student demonstrates proficiency in this area.
- Normal Progress: Student demonstrates grade level expectations.
- Needs Improvement: Student demonstrates beginning knowledge or skill in this area.

Note: A blank space in any evaluation area indicates "not assessed this term."

Evaluation Areas	1st Trimester	2nd Trimester	3rd Trimester
Reading	A	A	A
Comprehension	B+	B -	A
Vocabulary/Word Skills	B+	A -	A
Projects/Book Reports	A	A	A
Language Arts	B -	B+	A
Grammar	C	A -	A
Written Work/Mechanics	B+	B	A
Spelling	A	A	A -
In Daily Work	A -	B	A -
Tests/Quizzes	A	A	A -
Math	A	B	A -
Daily Work	A	C -	A -
Tests/Quizzes	C+	A -	B+
Computation	A	A	A
Science/Health	A -	B -	A
Daily Work	A	C+	A
Tests/Quizzes	B+	B -	B+
Experiments/Projects	A	B -	A
Social Studies	A	A	A
Daily Work/Map Work	B	A	A
Tests/Quizzes	A	A	A -
Projects	A	A	A
Art			
Understands Concepts Taught	Very Successful	Normal Progress	Normal Progress
Participation	Very Successful	Very Successful	Very Successful
Music			
Understands Concepts Taught	Very Successful	Normal Progress	Normal Progress
Participation	Normal Progress	Normal Progress	Normal Progress
Social Development			
Respects Others	Normal Progress	Normal Progress	Very Successful
Respects Property	Normal Progress	Normal Progress	Normal Progress
Works Cooperatively	Very Successful	Normal Progress	Normal Progress
Demonstrates Positive Attitude	Very Successful	Very Successful	Very Successful
Shows Self Control	Needs Improvement	Needs Improvement	Normal Progress
Accepts Responsibility	Normal Progress	Normal Progress	Normal Progress
Work Habits			
Listens Attentively	Normal Progress	Needs Improvement	Normal Progress
Oral Communication	Normal Progress	Needs Improvement	Normal Progress
Follows Directions	Normal Progress	Needs Improvement	Normal Progress
Uses Time Wisely	Very Successful	Very Successful	Very Successful
Works Independently	Very Successful	Normal Progress	Very Successful
Works Neatly	Normal Progress	Very Successful	Very Successful

APPENDIX F

COPY OF STANDARDS-BASED SPRINGFIELD REPORT CARD

Report Cards Legend for Academic Standards

E (Extends): Student demonstrates application and/or understanding that extends beyond what was taught in class.
M (Meets): Student demonstrates application and understanding of the concepts and/or skills taught in class.
A (Approaching): Student demonstrates partial understanding of the concepts and/or skills taught in class.
B (Below): Student demonstrates partial understanding, with assistance, of the concepts and/or skills taught in class.
N/A (Not assessed at this time)

Reading/Language Arts	NOV	MAR	JUN
Literature			
Understand and compare and contrast elements of fictional text			
Informational Text			
Use features of non-fiction text to support inferences and summarize			
Foundational Skills			
Apply phonics and word analysis skills to decode and comprehend grade-level text and read fluently			
Speaking & Listening			
Participate in discussions and present information orally			
Writing			
Apply the writing process to write for a variety of purposes, and locate and use sources for research			
Language			
Use conventions, and identify and use figurative language			

Mathematics	NOV	MAR	JUN
Operations & Algebraic Thinking			
Represent and solve problems using order of operations			
Numbers & Operations: Fractions			
Build and compute with fractions, and explain the relationship between fractions and decimals			
Numbers & Operations: Base Ten			
Order whole numbers and decimals, and understand place value during computation			
Measurement & Data			
Use operations to solve problems of distance, time and decimals and to measure angles, area and perimeter			
Geometry			
Use and draw points and lines, identify and draw angles, and understand symmetry and right triangles			

Science	NOV	MAR	JUN
Scientific Inquiry			
Follow the scientific method to explore scientific concepts and conduct experiments			
Scientific Concepts			
Demonstrate knowledge of concepts in physical, life and earth sciences			
Real World Connections of Life, Physical, and Earth Sciences			
Relate science to real life			

Social Science	NOV	MAR	JUN
Principles of Government			
Understand political systems in the United States			
Economics			
Understand the difference between goods and services, and wants and needs			
History			
Understand issues and events that formed the history of Illinois and the United States			
Geography			
Understand how geography impacts people			
Cultural Awareness			
Recognize and understand differences in culture			

Physical Education	NOV	MAR	JUN
Skills Development			
Motor, manipulative, and sports skills; game concepts and rhythmic movement			
Lifelong Wellness			
Lifelong fitness and wellness; fitness testing and daily classroom fitness			

Music	NOV	MAR	JUN
Knowledge of Concepts			
Understand music notation, music vocabulary and qualities of expression			
Application of Learning			
Demonstrate rhythm, melody, vocal development and recorder skills (grades 3-5)			

Art	NOV	MAR	JUN
Knowledge of Concepts			
Identify the elements of art; identify media and tools; relates art to history, society and everyday life			
Application of Learning			
Demonstrate knowledge of concepts through pictorial representation and classroom discussion			

Report Cards Legend for Characteristics of Successful Learners

M (Meets): Meets grade level expectations	G (Goal): Identified as a goal for improvement

Characteristics of Successful Learners: Academics	NOV	MAR	JUN
Comes to school prepared			
Demonstrates respect			
Manages emotions and behaviors			
Cooperates with others			
Follows directions			
Listens and participates			
Works independently			
Manages time			
Produces quality work			
Seeks assistance when appropriate			
Applies problem-solving skills			
Displays organizational skills			
Uses materials appropriately			
Seeks and/or accepts challenges			

Characteristics of Successful Learners: Physical Education	NOV	MAR	JUN
Manages emotions, behaviors and demonstrates respect			
Listens, follows directions and participates			
Cooperates with others			
Comes to school prepared			

Characteristics of Successful Learners: Music	NOV	MAR	JUN
Manages emotions, behaviors and demonstrates respect			
Listens, follows directions and participates			
Uses materials appropriately			

Characteristics of Successful Learners: Art	NOV	MAR	JUN
Manages emotions, behaviors and demonstrates respect			
Listens, follows directions and participates			
Uses materials appropriately			

Teacher Comment

APPENDIX G

LIST OF POTENTIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Question: How do parents perceive the strengths and weaknesses of SBRCs?
      Guiding question: Do parents prefer traditional report cards or SBRCs and why?

Interview Question	Response from	Memos
Describe your son/daughter as a learner.		
How is your son/daughter described in his/her report card?		
What are your thoughts/feelings before you get your child's report card?		
What types of report cards have you had previous experiences with both personally and with your child(ren)? For example traditional or standards-based report cards?		
Can you remember when you viewed your child's first report ca		
Could you walk me through what your thoughts were?		
What is the initial feeling when you open a report card?		
Describe the challenges parents have when reading a report card.		
What currently excites you about report cards?		
How do report cards help parents understand their child's learni		
How do report cards improve learning?		
What are the words parents use to describe report cards?		
How much are report cards on your mind during the school year		
How does your interpretation or reaction differ when viewing report cards at the end of the 1st or 2nd trimester compared to the end of the year?		
What parts of grading are confusing or could be communicated more clearly?		
Is there a subject you think your child tries really hard? Do you think this effort should be directly reflected in the grade for that subject?		
Do you think recent performance should count more than performance during the rest of the grading period?		
What feedback do you consider most helpful to better support yo child's performances at school?		
What role does the teacher play in grading students?		
What role does the student play in the grading process?		
What role do parents play in the grading process?		

How realistic are expectations for your child in regards to grading criteria?		
Key Questions		
What are the words parents use to describe a "meaningful" report card?		

Meaningful" report cards are defined in this study as timely, pertinent report cards that accurately assess students' behavior and academics, focuses on important information that relates to learning and effectively communicates information that improves learning to students, teachers and parents in words that can be understood.
 	
    Can you describe how easy to understand your child's report cards are?
    Can you describe how accurately your child's report cards assess students' behavior and academics?
    Can you describe how your child's report cards effectively communicate information that improves learning to students?
    Can you describe how your child's report cards provide information that improves learning more?		

What do you expect for your child's report card to tell you?		
Describe a time your child personally made progress as a result of feedback from a report card.		
What do you consider to be defining components of an effective report card?		
What feedback on report cards, help parents understand their child's performance?		
Tell me about any experiences you have had where your report card surprised you?		
Tell me about any experiences you have had where the report card matched your expectations?		
What do you look at first on a report card?		
Was there a time you had worries about a report card you read?		
Will you explain how your concern focused on your child, the teacher, or the reporting categories on the report card? Will you talk through the final outcome about your worry?		
Was there a time you felt proud about a report card you read?		
What are your general thoughts regarding the report card proces		
Is there part of the grading process that frustrates you? Can you elaborate on the frustration?		
What do you perceive interferes or is distracting about understanding your child's report card?		

Can you describe your thought process as you read the descripto and grades of your child?		
How do you think report cards help with accountability for the student, teacher, or school?		
Do report cards or the report card process include information to help parents understand what they need to do to assist in their child's learning?		
After reading a report card are you typically able to identify area of strength and potential goals for improvement?		
What do schools do to integrate knowledge of parents' perceptions and needs into report cards?		
What can teachers do to help you understand report cards better?		
What can schools or school districts do to help you understand report cards better?		
Can you describe direct or indirect impacts report cards have on your child or your family?		
Do you reward your child for any behavior or performance at school? What type of feedback do you base your positive feedba or rewards on?		
How do other parents that you know reward their child for performance at school?		
What feedback do you look for when trying to determine how y can support a potential goal for improvement for your child?		
What do parents do with the report card information?		
What information do report cards include to help parents understand what they need to do to assist in their child's learning?		
Is there an ideal frequency of how frequently grading should be shared with parents?		
What are your thoughts about the comments that teachers write on report cards?		
What training would help parents understand report cards or the report card process better?		
What should the focus of homework be? How should homework be graded? How do you think performance on homework should be communicated on the report card?		
How do you think students' effort or participation should be communicated on the report card?		
What do you believe is the number one purpose of any report card? Are there other purposes?		
What parts of assessing are confusing or could be communicated more clearly?		
What do you think teachers compliment or reward students for a		

school?		
What are your feelings to teacher's comments written on report cards?		

What are the words parents use to describe "meaningful" grades? What do grades really represent? To what degree do you think grades represent what your child does or does not know?		
What methods of the current grading process do you like?		
What methods of the current grading process would you like improved?		
Do you understand your child's ability with specific math skills or concepts?		
Do you understand your child's ability with specific reading skills or concepts?		
Do multiple grades explain your child's ability with specific math or reading skills or concepts better than a single grade the subject?		
Could you describe how you think your child's math grade determined?		
What could further enhance parent's understanding of grades?		
What do you perceive are the greatest barriers or frustrations with the grading process?		
What can be done to improve the consistency of grades among different grades? Among different schools? Among different school districts? Among different cities or counties? Among different states? Among different countries?		
Do you think grading errors are based on the teacher or the school district?		
What are your thoughts about averaging grades?		
Can you explain a story of how you or someone you know earned extra credit for an assignment?		
Can you explain how you think the extra credit was fair for their overall grade?		
What grading procedures optimize your support and		

encouragement of your child?		
What grading procedures optimize your communication wit your child's teacher?		
When prioritizing spending money or time on improving grading, what initiatives do you consider more important than creating quality grading?		

Interview Question	Response from	Memos
What are your general attitudes about the communication that occurs between school and parents with the current grading process?		
Is clear criteria specified for your child's learning?		
How do you think teachers measure student success?		
Do you like how assessments have been used as they relate to report cards?		
How well do you think your child is typically prepared for the questions asked on assessments?		
How would you describe the feedback that you receive from your child's assignments?		
How would you describe the feedback that you receive from your child's assessments?		
Do you perceive congruency between feedback on assessments and report cards?		
Do you perceive congruency between feedback on assignments and report cards?		
What differences are you noticing this year regarding alignment with feedback from assessments and assignments with report cards grades?		
Do you think differences you notice this year regarding alignment with feedback from assessments and assignments are different because of the grade of your child, because of your child's teacher, or because the change to SBRCs?		
What are the words parents use to describe how report grades align with parents' expectations of grades for their child?		
Can you describe any differences between grade levels, teachers, or or because the change to SBRCs for how well your child's assignments or assessments aligned with report card grades?		

Can you describe if the teacher, grade level or subject has the biggest impact on congruency of congruency of assignments and assessments with grades?		
What are meaningful assessments?		
What are your thoughts about the feedback your child receives about performance on assessments?		
When prioritizing spending money or time on improving assessments, what initiatives do you consider more important than creating quality assessments?		

Interview Question	Response from	Memos
Were you familiar with standards-based report cards before this year?		
How do you feel about standards-based report cards?		
What did you like about traditional report cards?		
What do you like about standards-based report cards?		
Were your concerns this year similar to previous years when reviewing report cards? Can you justify why this difference exists?		
Let's focus on math as we compare traditional or SBRCs Can you explain how the traditional or SBRC provides more useful information about how your child is performing in math?		
Can you explain how the traditional or SBRC provides more useful information about how your child is progressing in math?		
Please explain your understanding of the rating scale for the academic portion on the traditional report card.		
Please explain your understanding of the rating scale for the behaviors portion on the standards-based report card.		
Please explain your understanding of rating scale for the behaviors portion on the traditional report card.		
Please explain your understanding of the rating scale for the behaviors portion on the standards-based report card.		
What criteria does a child have to meet to earn an A?		
What criteria does a child have to meet to earn an Extends?		

What do you remember about past report cards you have read		
<u>Show traditional and SBRC and then ask similar questions?</u>		
How easy to understand is the new standards-based report card?		
Are you in favor of homework, class participation and use of class time not being included as a part of my student's academic grade?		
What do you see as the benefits of the standards-based report card?		
What wording, if any, is confusing on the standards-based report card?		
What weakness, if any, do you see on the standards-based report card?		
What feedback do you have regarding how you understand the descriptors that define how your child is graded on the traditional and SBRC? Do you anticipate a change when looking at a traditional 4th grade report card?		
Can you describe any difference you see for understanding your child's work habits or characteristics of successful learners on the traditional or sbrc?		
Let's focus on math as we compare traditional or SBRCs-- Can you explain how the traditional or SBRC provides more useful information about how your child is performing in math?		
Can you explain how the traditional or SBRC provides more useful information about how your child is progressing in math?		
Can you explain how the traditional or SBRC provides more useful information about how your child is performing in SOCIAL STUDIES?		
Meaningful" report cards are defined in this study as timely, pertinent report cards that accurately assess students' behavior and academics, focuses on important information that relates to learning and effectively communicates information that improves learning to students, teachers and parents in words that can be understood. Can you describe how the traditional or SBRC is more pertinent?		

Can you describe how the traditional or SBRC is easier to understand?		
Can you describe how the traditional or SBRC more accurately assesses students' behavior and academics?		
Can you describe how the traditional or SBRC focuses more on important information?		
Can you describe how the traditional or SBRC effectively communicates information that improves learning to students more?		
Can you describe how the traditional or SBRC is provide information that improve learning more?		
Explain the factors that affected your opinions about traditional or standards-based report cards?		
How have your conversations with your child changed regarding their performance or grades in school?		
Describe challenges of transitioning from traditional to standards-based report cards?		
Can you explain any shifts in thinking or different approaches to educating, assessing, or grading students you have noticed since the school district started changing to standards-based report cards?		
What differences have you noticed about challenging your child when using the traditional and standards-based report cards?		
What do you think are the most important reasons for why a school district should change to SBRCs?		
If you could have other people understand 2 or 3 things about differences between traditional and standards-based report cards, what would they be?		
Does feedback about specific standards provide more detailed information to parents? If so how/why. If not, how not, why not?		
Do you see a need for grades to reflect recent progress rather than grades that are averaged?		
Do you prefer comparing their child's performance to other students or to standards?		
What are your beliefs about how kindergarten students should be graded?		
Can you describe any changes in your attitude towards mastery of the standards and the standards-based report card throughout this school year?		
How were the relationships between teachers, parents, and		

students impacted by the implementation of the standards-based report card?		
What are your suggestions for improving the standards-based report card?		
What are your thoughts and feelings about your child being scored with a standards-based report card in first grade?		
Does your view change for your child in 5th grade? Does your view change for your child in middle school?		
Does your view change for your child in high school? Does your view change for your child in college?		
What are your current feelings about current grading and reporting processes in Libertyville District 70?		
What parts of standards-based report cards are confusing or could be communicated more clearly?		
What specific updates and information from Libertyville District 70 has been helpful about the upcoming change to standards-based report cards?		
What can educators learn from parents' feedback about standards-based report cards?"		
Are there other areas which you feel we have not covered, but you feel are important, or anything else you would like to add, change, dispute, or clarify before concluding the interview?		