Are Parents and Students Consistently Aware of Academic Progress?

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Coyote Creek Elementary (CCE) School is located in Highlands Ranch, which is part of the Douglas County School District. Our attendance area consists of affluent families that are known for taking an active role in their child's education. Approximately three years ago, the Douglas County School District decided to take a new approach to their elementary level report cards that would better reflect the district's focus on standards-based education. These report cards took on a whole new look and meaning, not only for students and parents, but for teachers as well. The overall purpose of the progress reports changed, along with the way teachers created the report. The Elementary Progress Report would now be created electronically.

This new progress report was developed in order to meet a variety of purposes. Those purposes included: developing a District-wide, K-6 method for reporting student performance, providing a common language that would be applied to the reporting of student progress, creating an integrated system that would report on a variety of student measures, and the creation of a "user friendly" system for parents, students and teachers.

The Douglas County School District established a set of guiding premises for this reporting system. Some of these premises include:

- o "The primary goal of grading and reporting is communication."
- o "Grading and reporting are necessary parts of the instructional process."
- o "The Elementary Progress Report enhances teaching and learning by guiding teachers as they determine next steps for instruction for each child."
- o "Consistency in determining checkpoint proficiency and summary grades, and in using effective grade book practices, increases consistency in teacher judgment and credibility across the district."

As a result of the change in reporting systems, many parents, students, and teachers reached a certain level of frustration. The parents of some CCE students felt as though they were in the dark as to how their student was performing in the classroom. The students were often in the same position. If asked, they had a difficult time explaining to me, the teacher, or to their parents, how they were doing in class. As for the teachers, they felt frustrated with recording student grades, as well as feeling that they were unable to consistently communicate with parents about a student's academic progress.

As a classroom teacher, it is my responsibility and duty to consistently and clearly, provide students and parents with an accurate assessment of a student's performance level. Parents should always be aware of their child's academic progress. I also believe that students should have a clear understanding of what they are doing well and what skills they need to put more effort into. With the adoption of this new progress report, my responsibility, along with the needs of the students and parents, seemed to have become more difficult to meet.

I believe that to some extinct, the problems that came to the forefront as a result of the new progress report began to distance the parents from their child's education. This distance, if it continued to grow, would only create new problems between the three parties involved in this process, the students, the parents, and the teachers. I believed that I needed to improve the communication between my students and parents to help defuse these future problems.

With this paradigm shift in the report card/progress report format, I was left with the question: Are my students, and their parents, accurately informed of student academic performance? If the answer to this question was no, then I, and CCE as a whole, needed to develop a plan that would improve the communication between home and school. Changing or eliminating the new elementary progress report was not an option.

Background

  In 2001, CCE was one of 15 schools that decided to pilot the new progress report. The new report was designed to summarize three essential components of a student's educational success: the Content Standards, Work Habits, and Study Skills. There was still a use of letter grades for intermediate students, but they would take on a whole new meaning.

  My building established a Progress Report Leadership Team that consisted of a primary and intermediate classroom teacher, the Building Resource Teacher, and the Principal. I was the intermediate representative for this team. The Leadership Team was the first of any CCE staff members to receive initial training in the philosophy behind, and the use of, the new progress report. Shortly after this, the remainder of the CCE staff received similar training. The staff training took place after the school year was underway, and after teachers had established their grade books and grading policies. Immediately following their training session, the staff voiced their concerns as to how they would successfully make this transition, and also a concern as to how the parent community would receive this new information.

  The most simple and non-controversial change for anyone involved in this process was the report's name. What was once referred to as the "report card," was now known as the "Elementary Progress Report." Another change that came under some criticism was the content of the progress report. Teachers once provided basic feedback to parents and students in all content areas, along with an overview of classroom/school behavior. This feedback addressed general primary and intermediate skills in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. The format of this report had been decided on within the building. With the new Elementary Progress Report, teachers were now reporting on a student's progress towards the mastery of the District's content standards and checkpoints at their specific grade level. The teachers were now required to report on this progress using a four-point scale.

- o 4 = Student is progressing above grade level expectations.
- o 3 = Student is progressing at grade level expectations.

- 2 = Student is progressing below grade level expectations.
- 1 = There is incomplete data from the student and the teacher is unable to make an accurate assessment of the student's progression.

The biggest change, and the change that seemed to meet the most resistance from parents, and some teachers, was the disappearance of traditional letter grades in the intermediate grade levels (grades 4-6). With the new progress report, students no longer received the type of letter grades that their parents had received in school. Students would now receive a "Summary Grade" for all content areas, including reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. The Summary Grade, which intermediate students earn, is determined by how the students are performing on the District checkpoints, additional content standards, and their overall work production. Summary grades are broken into the following five categories:

- A = The quality and quantity of student work consistently and independently exceeds grade level expectations; OR the quality and quantity of work consistently meets grade level expectations AND work habits and study skills are consistently high.
- B = The quality and quantity of student work consistently meets grade level expectations.
- C = The quality and quantity of student work is sufficient to meet grade level expectations.
- D = The quality and quantity of student work is inconsistent in meeting grade level expectations.
- I = Incomplete Data: the quality and quantity of student work is incomplete or insufficient for teacher to evaluate the student at this time.

Teachers did their best during the first trimester and slowly began to make the transition into the new grading system and electronic reporting format. Then, the first progress reports were sent home, and the phones began to ring. A good deal of the parent's complaints and concerns were ultimately based on

misunderstandings and the use of a new and "foreign" reporting tool. A few specific comments that I heard included:

- o "I don't know if my child is passing."
- o "What does a '3' or a '2' really mean?"
- o "How is my child doing compared to other children in the classroom?"
- o "I see my child has earned several 2's, but they are getting B's."

Out of all the comments I heard, the last one mentioned above was the most disturbing. I quickly came to realize that parents and students in my classroom, and throughout the school, didn't clearly understand this new grading format. The parents were overlooking how their child was progressing towards the District standards and checkpoints, and were only focusing on the Summary grades, which were not a true picture of their child's academic progression. Needless to say, the new Elementary Progress Report met a good deal of resistance from parents and teachers. Not only were the parents receiving information about their student's learning in a new format, the teachers were now having to record student learning and performance in a whole new way. Percentages and everyday letter grades began giving way to "3's" and "2's." This in itself caused stress and uncertainty among the staff members. The school year continued and fortunately, many aspects of the Elementary Progress Report seemed to be more accepted and became less of an issue. By the end of the 2001-2002 school year, it was evident that students, parents and teachers were slowly adjusting to the new progress report.

The 2002-2003 brought me a new group of parents & students, and a new start. In the back of my mind I was still recalling the previous difficulties that my colleagues and I had encountered with the Elementary Progress Report. After completing two trimesters this school year, I believed that the current interpretation and understanding of the progress report by parents had gone much more smoothly. I was, however, still witnessing the problem of students and parents not having a clear and consistent understanding of specific academic progress. With the previous grading practices and "report card," I had

an easier time providing students and parents with a mid-term report. Not only was I unable to provide this same report, but I also ran into the problem of reporting the grades for assignments that remained in a student's class notebook, or had been placed in their Body of Evidence. There also still seemed to be an element of surprise with parents when they received their student's trimester progress report.

At this time, I am still a member of the Leadership Team. The role of this team has transitioned into more of a "technology support team." At the beginning of this school year, I met with a new teacher to our building. This meeting focused on helping her become familiar with the electronic portion of the progress report: establishing her grade book, using the database, and saving her files to the server. These same topics are what I often address during the time surrounding the dates of progress reports going home. I also take part in various discussions with other staff members regarding the philosophy of the progress report, but I no longer have a "training role" with this aspect of the reports.

My school is taking part in the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) program. This program is similar to Action Research in that it focuses on a Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle. Being that we have this focus, I was able to combine the requirements of both. Through my research, I tested the effectiveness of a periodic grade-reporting tool. This tool was a student-maintained document that communicated student achievement to parents. This communication was in addition to the required elementary progress report, which is sent home at the conclusion of each trimester. I also had the goal of creating a more learner-centered environment that directly involved students in their learning, and made them more accountable for their grades. I investigated as to whether or not this new reporting document would help me reach that goal. As part of our building's CQI work, I evaluated my research and findings based on the philosophies of the CQI program as well.

As for support within my building, I had the full support of my principal. She was anxious to find out how the research went and the results of using this

additional reporting tool. I also had the support of one of my D Track colleagues.
This is the teacher that I loop with and who had previously used the graphing
document that I used in my research. She had been using the document
throughout the school year, but had never sent it home to parents.

Research Questions
1. **Would providing students with a hands-on document help them
    have a better understanding of their academic performance?** *In order
    for students to feel successful about their academic abilities and to have a
    clear understanding of their own progress, they must have access to their
    grades.*
    o   How often should students record their grades/scores onto this document: On a daily
        or weekly basis? Which is more practical for students and myself? Will this grade
        reporting method get students involved in the recording/reporting of their grades, but
        will also take the least amount of time from their daily work? Our amount of class
        time is limited. Students must be working towards the actual standards they are
        being asked to record/report on.
    o   **Will provide students with their grades and asking them to record their scores
        on this document create a great deal of additional work for myself?** My time is
        already limited and it must be allocated carefully.
2. **Would supplying parents with this hands-on document, created by
    their child, provide them an accurate report of how their student is
    performing?** *Parents are often asking me how their child is doing and if
    they are "passing." Providing parents with a consistent report would also
    alleviate any surprise when the progress reports are sent home.*
    o   **How often should student grades be reported to parents? Today's parents
        are busy and can often view additional communication to and from school
        as tedious.**
3. **Will this type of reporting tool be a good way to get the students
    involved as much as possible in this "periodic grade-reporting"
    process?** *Students need to be responsible for their own grades and
    sharing these grades with their parents. Students should also be aware of
    their progress and where they are going with their learning.*

- **Will students be able to recognize their areas of success and growth?**
  Students consistently see their grades on individual papers when they come home on a weekly basis, but they seem unable to formulate a "big picture" of how they are doing overall.

4. **How can I encourage my students and parents to interpret grades as more of a "celebration" and "where they need to go next" versus "what I don't know or did wrong?"** *Taking grades home to parents can be a stressful event for some students. The document that they will be taking home on a regular basis may cause some anxiety for students, and some additional stress for parents.*
   - How will the parents react to their student's grades? Some students may receive praise for what they have done well, while others may receive punishment for what they have not done well.
   - Can this document serve as a guide to parents and students as to what skills they need more practice with?

Method

I designed this implementation study to analyze the effectiveness of a periodic grade-reporting document. Throughout the research project, I refer to this document as "Assessment Graphs." The students themselves maintained the Assessment Graphs. The purpose of these graphs was to provide students and parents with an accurate picture of academic performance in the classroom. The outcome of the research resulted in modifications to the Assessment Graphs and to a permanent implementation of this reporting tool that will be utilized between the standard grading periods. Below I have outlined the research methods I used throughout this project.

Survey. I administered surveys to both my parents and my students. There were four surveys created and administered. These surveys were designed to capture the thoughts and feelings of parents and students as related to academic progress in the classroom. A survey was administered to parents

and students before and after my research took place. The structures of these surveys were as follows:

- o Student Surveys. I distributed the student surveys prior to parent – teacher conferences. Students completed their survey in the classroom. To ensure that students had a complete understanding of the questions, I read them the survey orally as they completed it. My students were aware of the fact that I was in the ILT Master's program, so I gave them a simple overview of the survey and it's purpose. This initial survey also had students completing an example of the Assessment Graphs, using some of their most recently graded work.

  The second student survey was distributed to students in the classroom after we had used the Assessment Graphs for seven weeks. On both surveys, I used the following rating scale: 1 = disagree, 2 = somewhat agree, 3 = strong agree. I have twenty students in my classroom. There were nineteen students that completed the Pre-Graph survey and twenty completed the Post-Graph survey. The difference in numbers was related to an absence.

- o Parent Surveys. I distributed the initial parent survey at my parent – teacher conferences. This allowed me to have personal contact, as well as the opportunity to give some background knowledge related to the survey. This survey contained the Assessment Graphs completed by their own child. In the survey, parents were given a short explanation of the graphs, viewed the graphs, and then answered several questions related to the Assessment Graphs. Parents took the survey home and their child then returned it to school.

  The second parent survey was distributed after the seven week time period. This survey was sent home to parents in our weekly Thursday Folder. Upon its completion, their child once again

returned the survey to school.

On both parent surveys, I used the following rating scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neither agree or disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = strongly agree. As previously mentioned, I have twenty students in my classroom. I had hoped that with this personal contact, my survey return rate would be higher. There were fifteen of the first surveys (Pre-Graph) returned by parents. As for the second surveys (Post-Graph), eighteen of the twenty sets of parents return the survey.

Focus Group. As mentioned above, students completed an example of what the Assessment Graph may look like during their initial survey. Upon completing this graph, I conducted a focus group discussion with them that provided me with feedback on how they felt during the graphing process. This feedback provided me with additional ways of how to modify the process in which the graphs were completed.

People's Perspective. On the initial survey, parents had the opportunity to include their phone number if they wanted to talk with me one-on-one about the use of the Assessment Graphs. On both survey's they were able to add any additional comments they may have had. The parent comments and information from interviews provided authentic feedback that was utilized in the ongoing development of my Assessment Graphs and the policies surrounding them.

Classroom Case Study. The largest portion of my research consisted of various Assessment Graphs that were completed by students. There were individual graphs created for each standard and checkpoint within all content areas. The graphs contained the grades earned by students on their daily classroom work. All of the graphs were contained within a single folder. This folder was sent home through our weekly Thursday Folder. Folders were taken home for a total of seven weeks. Parents were responsible for reviewing the

graphs contained in the folder, signing a designated paper stating that they had viewed and discussed the graph with their student, and then returned the folder with their child back to school.

Review of Literature. I located various articles that helped me answer my research question pertaining to parent and student attitudes towards grades. Information that I gathered from my readings was shared with parents and students in the appropriate manner.

Findings

Focus Group

Prior to beginning their own Assessment Graphs, students had an opportunity to complete an example of what the Assessment Graph would look like during their initial survey. During the focus group I asked specific questions of the students. Here are a few of the questions along with student answers:

1. How did you feel while you were doing this?
   - "It was good to see my grades. I can try to do better, even though I got all 3's."
   - "I expected it to be boring. When I saw my grades they were better than I thought."
   - "[It felt] frustrating because I was looking at my own grades and I don't always want to know."
2. How would you like to do this on a regular basis? Why?
   - "Yes. You can know how you are doing."
   - "Even though it's frustrating, [I] should do it to see how I'm doing and how I could improve."
   - "Yes. My mom's wondering what kind of grades I get."
3. What changes would you make to these pages or graphs to make them easier to do or understand?
   - "I would add a space for a '1'."

I felt that at the conclusion of the focus group, students were very excited to receive their own Assessment Graph folders and get recording. As some of them mentioned, they were a little apprehensive about taking this type of grade reporting tool home. The funny thing was, they didn't realize that they were

already taking their papers home each week in their Thursday Folder. I think having all of the grades in one, central location had a different appearance to the students.

Surveys

Much of the data I collected were from my survey results. To document the attitudes of my students and parents prior to using the Assessment Graphs, as well as after using the graphs. I have organized findings according to my initial research questions. Throughout the section I will refer to the data from my initial survey as "Pre-Graphs." The data collected from the second and final survey, which occurred after the use of the Assessment Graphs, are referred to as "Post-Graphs." All results are labeled as such throughout this section.

1. Would providing students with a hands-on document help them have a better understanding of their academic performance?
   o How often should students record their grades/scores onto this document: On a daily or weekly basis? Which is more practical for students and myself?
   o Will providing students with their grades and asking them to record their scores on this document create a great deal of additional work for myself?

Prior to using the Assessment Graphs I was unaware of how much time it would take for the students to record their grades and had concerns that too much of our instructional time would be spent on graphing. In my original Methods section, I had hoped to create a line graph that documented the amount of class time spent on graphing assignments. This proved to be nearly impossible. I attempted to provide students with the same of number of assignments to graph each time, but this was easier said then done. Even though I was unsuccessful in recording and graphing our time, I did quickly discover that the time we spent graphing was also an excellent time to provide feedback on the assignments. Providing adequate and timely feedback was an area that I knew I needed to improve in. I was able to spend time reviewing assignments with students independently, or as a class.

Over the course of the seven weeks that we did use the Assessment Graphs, I noticed that the majority of students began to feel more comfortable with the graphs in their folder. They were quick in finding the appropriate standard and checkpoint, and required less assistance in locating the graph they needed. To help make this process smoother, I wrote the standard and checkpoint addressed by each particular assignment at the top of each page, or attached it by a smaller piece of paper. It was written in the following format: L.A. 4.2 = 3. This would translate to the following for the student: Language Arts Standard #4 (Reading), Checkpoint #2 (Comprehension Skills), and they received a 3 (Grade Level work). This marking system also assisted me in maintaining my grade book. I was able to evaluate what standards and checkpoints I was focusing on, as well as what areas I needed to provide additional assessment.

Overall, I don't believe that the Assessment Graphs created any additional work for me. I was able to easily implement all of the Assessment Graph work into our daily schedule, as well as my planning schedule.

2. Would supplying parents with this hands-on document, created by their child, provide them an accurate report of how their student is performing?
   o How often should student grades be reported to parents?

In my initial survey, the majority of parents stated that they would like to see the Assessment Graphs on a weekly basis. (Figure 2-1) For me, this was going to be hard to do, so I decided to send them home every other week. I was just getting acquainted with the graphs myself. It was interesting to see the parent shift in the timeframe of how often the graphs should come home. In the final survey, the majority of parents felt that the every other week schedule worked just fine. (Figure 2-1) I feel that if a parent wants a different time frame for viewing their student's graphs, I could easily accommodate them and individualize their schedule.

	Weekly	Every other week	Monthly	Other
Pre-Graphs Survey	8	3	2	1

Post-Graphs Survey	2	13	3	0

Figure 2-1

The students' attitudes on how often the reports should be sent home were very different. Students felt that the Assessment Graphs should go home less often. (Figure 2-2) Prior to using the graphs, students were not asked how often they would like to take them home. This was only asked after the use of the graphs.

	Weekly	Every other week	Monthly	Other
Post-Graphs Survey	3	8	8	1

Figure 2-2

I believe that this split between monthly and every other week is due to the fact that students still aren't comfortable with taking home poor grades. In both surveys, student comments were very consistent. When asked how they feel when taking home good grades, students made the following comments:

- o "I feel happy and sometimes annoyed because my dad won't stop telling me how proud he is."
- o "I feel smart and like nothing can bring me down."
- o "I feel happy because I know I won't get in any trouble."
- o "I feel good that I am doing good in a subject."
- o "When I bring home good grades I feel happy and proud."

On the flip side, when asked how they feel when taking home poor grades, students made the following comments:

- o "I feel embarrassed."
- o "I feel disappointed for letting my parents down and letting my life drag me behind."
- o "When I bring home bad grades I feel dumb."
- o "I feel upset when I bring home bad grades because I know I have failed."
- o "I felt bad because I earned a bad grade. Then there's the fear of getting grounded."
- o "I knew I needed to improve."

It appeared that the comments made by students prior to the Assessment Graphs were much more harsh and noticeably negative. The comments made

after using the graphs appeared to be less severe and focused more on just feeling "sad" and not "stupid." I did observe comments that took on more of a personal ownership after the students were required to take the graphs home.

3. Will this type of reporting tool be a good way to get the students involved as much as possible in this "periodic grade-reporting" process?
   o Will students be able to recognize their areas of success and growth?

For the most part, students' attitudes about the importance of being aware of their academic success and/or failure at school did not change as a result of the Assessment Graphs. It was encouraging to see that for the most part, students were interested in their academic process. (Figure 3-1) I saw the same value placed on this awareness from the parent's point of view as well. All but one parent strongly agreed that consistently being aware of their student's overall performance in school was important. Assuming that the attitudes of parents would not change greatly after the use of the Assessment Graphs, I did not include this question on their second survey.
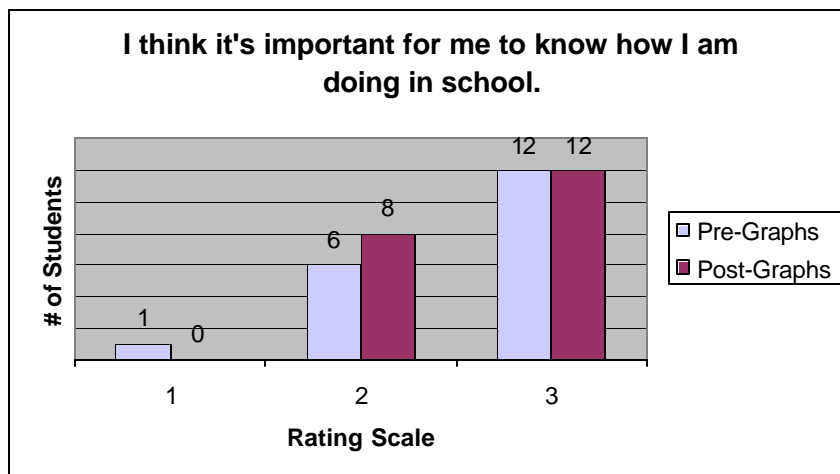
I think it's important for me to know how I am doing in school.

Figure 3-1

Academic awareness was really the heart of my research. I believed that the success or failure of the graphing system would center on the questions surrounding this topic and the answers given by parents and students. I was encouraged to see that before and after the Assessment Graphs, students had a relatively clear idea as to what their overall grades were in each subject area. This was something that I had not anticipated. I felt students would be less

aware of their overall performance levels. After using the Assessment Graphs for seven weeks, students did increase their overall understanding of how they were performing. (Figure 3-2)
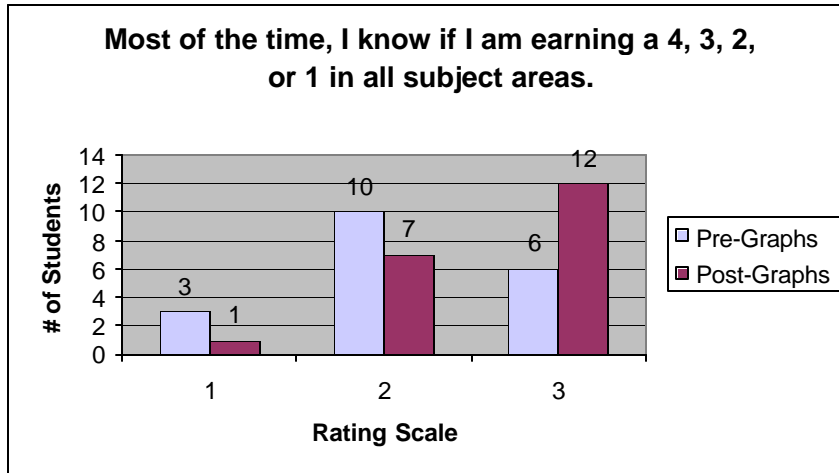
Most of the time, I know if I am earning a 4, 3, 2, or 1 in all subject areas.

Figure 3-2

Even though it was not as drastic as I might have hoped for, I was glad to see a slight shift upward in the thoughts of the parents. (Figure 3-3)
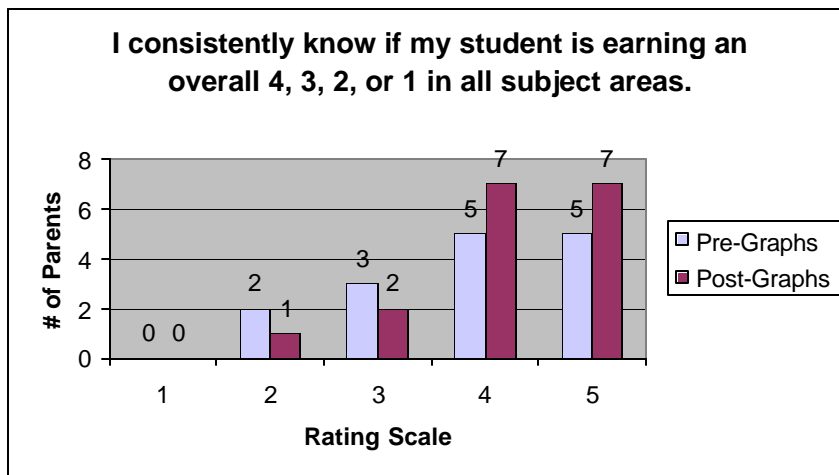
I consistently know if my student is earning an overall 4, 3, 2, or 1 in all subject areas.

Figure 3-3

There was evidence that parents had a better understanding of how their student was performing in school after using the Assessment Graphs. I believe that by making some of the modifications they suggested, and using the Assessment Graphs for a longer period of time, parent's thoughts would improve even more. Some of the improvement comments mentioned by the parents included:

- "[Add] more space for the explanation of assignment."
- "Make the box for the name of assignment a little larger so it would be easier to read."
- One parent mentioned this about the time period for which the Assessment Graphs are sent home, "Longer time between reviews would mean there is more new information and should be often enough to allow for a response to problems if needed."
- "Dates [would be helpful] so I would know which colored graphs were for this week."

4. How can I encourage my students and parents to interpret grades as more of a "celebration" and "where they need to go next" versus "what I don't know or did wrong?"
- How will the parents react to their student's grades?
- Can this document serve as a guide to parents and students as to what skills they need more practice with?

It was interesting to see the perceptions parents had about their child's knowledge of how they were doing in school. As shown in Figure 3-2, students seemed to have a good idea of how they were performing. Prior to using the Assessment Graphs, parents didn't really believe that their child was aware of their own performance. (Figure 4-1) There was a definite shift in their beliefs after using the graphs. I was glad to see that parents had noticed this increased awareness in their student.

I believe that my child is aware of what they are earning in all subject areas.
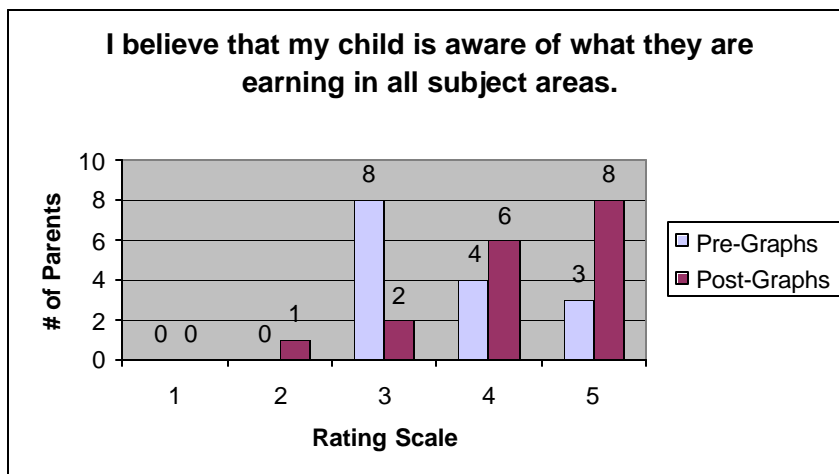
Figure 4-1

Prior to my research I had wondered how many students were rewarded or punished for their grades. I was also interested in discovering if the use of the

Assessment Graphs would influence this decision. As a part of the student survey, the children were asked whether or not they received rewards and/or consequences related to how they did in school. The results of these particular questions are shown in Figure 4-2. It didn't appear that the graphs had much influence on any type of system and many of the same rewards and/or punishments remained in place.

	Yes	No
Pre-Graphs Survey	13	6
Post-Graphs Survey	7	13

Figure 4-2

Some of the reward/consequence comments mentioned by the students included:

- o "If I get bad grades I get grounded, and if I get good grades I don't get grounded."
- o "A reward I get is to go and get an ice cream and some pop. If I get bad grades, my mom and dad get a little mad, but then they start helping."
- o "If I get bad grades my parents help me work harder. I get a treat if I get good ones."
- o "If I get bad grades, I have to practice with my mom."
- o "I have to do extra work."

The issue of how parents and students interpret grades is addressed in my findings related to question two. I don't believe that all parents and students treat grades in the same respect.

People's Perspective

From the initial survey, I gathered these comments from parents:

- o "I think this graphing system is very helpful. It helps the child be aware of their progress. It also is an incentive for the child to do well, so that her progress will appear on the graph that she has prepared."
- o "I think this is an excellent idea! I hope the students and the parents use this as a tool for measurement (and if need be – improvement)."
- o "I really like the students involvement."

       o   "I think this is a great idea. I circled weekly, but every other week would be good too. I think a month is too long."

After examining what the parents had to say, I felt confident in the fact that they were willing to give the Assessment Graphs a good first try. It was encouraging to hear their positive response to the use of the graphs.

Literature Review

When I began my search for literature resources, I ran into some difficulty. I was looking for resources that addressed student attitudes towards their grades and academic performance. I was hoping to find information on how to change student's attitudes about their grades. After additional searching, I was able to locate resources that addressed this subject to some degree.

During my research I utilized WilsonSelect, ERIC, and Google.com. The keywords I used in these databases included: students and their grades, attitudes about grades, elementary, students, attitudes, grades, and progress reports. Below I have summarized the articles that I found, along with relating the specific resources to my Action Research project.

In a Latvian study of 189 high school students (Olina, & Sullivan 2002), the students were introduced to the basic concepts of scientific research. These concepts would develop student's skills in designing experiments. The study addressed three main research questions:

1. Does teacher evaluation have a positive effect on student performance?
2. Does the combination of teacher elevation and student self-evaluation have a different effect on student performance than teacher evaluation alone?
3. Does the combination of teacher evaluation and student self-evaluation have a different effect on student attitudes than teacher evaluation alone?

During the program, there were three study groups established: students who had no evaluation of their work, students who had their work evaluated by the teacher, and a final group of students who evaluated their own work, along with an aspect of teacher evaluation. The group of students who evaluated their own work did receive training in how to effectively complete the evaluation.

At the conclusion of this study, it was discovered that the students who received teacher evaluation and feedback during the formative stages of their work, and used then utilized the feedback in their final product, demonstrated higher student performance. The group of students who received the teacher feedback, along with the self-evaluation, demonstrated an increased confidence in independently conducting experiments.

This study demonstrated to me that the amount and type of feedback provided to students directly affects their attitude towards learning and would ultimately affect their academic success. I realized that during the completion of the assessment graphs was an excellent time for me to provide additional feedback to my students. It was also a good time for me to review the correct answers to assignments that would result in students taking on some type of self-evaluation. This self-evaluation provided students the opportunity to discover their mistakes and realize what steps they needed to take next in their learning.

In his article, Brophy (1997) focused on music education classrooms. It examined the problem with students receiving single letter grades for their entire musical knowledge and performance. It states that students often receive A's not based on what they can do in music, but just for trying hard and doing their best. This action is often practiced in the hopes that students, and parents, will keep a general positive attitude about music instruction.

The problem with the single letter grade reporting is that it truly does not reflect what students know, and is unable to accurately communicate to parents the individual performance of their child. It has been proven that students may perform well in one area of music and have difficulty in another. To help solve this problem to provide students and parents with a more individualized report of music knowledge, a "developmental profile" reporting system was developed.

This reporting system is a progress report that communicates a student's individual knowledge of music within each learning area of music. The progress report focuses on three levels of performance: beginning, developing, and competent. This new progress report allows the music teacher to use more

authentic types of assessment, and provide the type of specific feedback parents need to truly understand how their child is performing in music class.

The focus of this article, a development profile reporting system, was directly related to the type of reporting tool that I am currently using. Our elementary progress reports are grade level specific and communicate the requirements for students in each reading, writing, and math.

Just as mentioned in the music assessment article, students often perform at different levels within a content area. This type of reporting tool allows me to be more specific in student assessment and feedback. Instead of giving one letter grade for math, I can communicate how a student is performing a specific area of math. The majority of my students can do well in one area of math, e.g. addition, but have a difficult time in another, e.g. fractions.

The one difference in my progress report and the one mentioned in the article is the language used to communicate the performance level of the students. I use the following marks on our progress reports: 4 – performing above grade level, 3 – performing at grade level, 2 – performing below grade level, and finally 1 – not enough information to assess student.

A Teahcer.net *Teacher Feature* (2003) article discussed the fact that there are a large number of inconsistencies among classroom grading practices. These inconsistencies can impact student's attitudes toward learning, and their academic performance levels.

Within the article there were a variety of procedures that teachers can consider and implement within their classroom to help maintain and improve students' attitudes. Some of the issues focused on included: the use of zeros on assignments, not confusing learning with behavior, grading is often influenced by extraneous conditions, the use of tests for grading or learning, and not grading homework.

This article did not directly relate to my research project, but specific aspects did relate to the grading practices that I use in my classroom. Our elementary progress reports do separate student learning and their behavior. Students receive different assessments for these two aspects of learning.

Another aspect that relates to my classroom was the fact of not grading homework. Homework is assessed, but this assessment is not included in their overall grade.

A study focused on the contents of 428 Wisconsin school district report cards (Friedman 1995). The report cards were collected from around the state and were evaluated within the following categories: kindergarten, elementary, middle school, and high school.

The procedures followed for this study had researches examining twenty-four different aspects of the report cards. These aspects included: dimensions, method of printing, purpose statement, tardiness record, parent signature line, type of measurement scale, effort reporting, and reading information.

Results from this study uncovered the fact that the report cards varied widely in their characteristics. Not only did report cards vary within the school-leveled categories, but also across the school categories. There were a great deal of assumptions that were made in the creation of the report cards. These assumptions lead to varying levels of confusion among parents.

There was a limited amount of application to my research project. I could say that several of the aspects evaluated in this study have also been evaluated in the elementary progress report. At this time, all elementary schools within Douglas County use this reporting tool, and the first middle schools are now piloting this same type of progress report.

In his 2003 article, Kohn focused on the positive and negative effects of punishments and rewards. Within classrooms, teachers often use stars, stickers, praise, and A's in an attempt to make students comply with learning and classroom rules and expectations. It has been shown that these rewards will affect student behavior, but only temporarily. In the long run, students will not become responsible people, lifelong learners, or self-directed learners.

The same type of behavior has been noted when rewards are associated with the grades students bring home. When students perform in order to earn something, they begin to lose interest in the activity they are being rewarded for.

Also, students who often think about grades and rewards are often less likely to participate in creative thinking and risk taking opportunities.

When students are rewarded or punished for the grades they bring home, it has been discovered that their enjoyment of learning and overall achievement declines. Student's learning should be looked at as acquiring new information, versus a focus on success and failure. When students are in a safe and caring community, they are able to develop attitudes and skills that will help them become enthusiastic and life-long learners.

This article really made me think about what my students face when they take their progress reports home. I know from my student surveys that students in my classroom receive rewards and punishments for their grades. I think that within the transition of our new progress report, there should also be some continued education for parents on the long-term effects of rewards and consequences related to grades.

A study examining the grading and assessment practices of teachers in urban, suburban, and rural schools near Richmond, Virginia had more than 900 teachers in grades 3-5 examining three types of assessments: constructed-response, objective, and teacher-made examinations. (McMillan, Myran, and Workman 2002) The investigation held the purpose of examining the similarities and differences among teacher's practices. There were four specific questions investigated:

1. What is the current state of assessment practice and grading by elementary teachers?
2. What are major assessment and grading components that are used by elementary teachers?
3. What is the relationship between assessment and grading practices and grades given to students?
4. What are the relationships between the independent variables grade level and subject taught and the dependent variables assessment and grading practices?

Teachers were given a questionnaire that had been created with the help of earlier literature and research. The assessment and grading practices from the survey and its results were organized into three categories: factors used in grading, types of assessments used, and cognitive level of assessments.

It was discovered that a large portion of the teachers utilized vastly different grading methods. These various assessment forms included: objective assessments, performance assessments, and projects. It was also discovered that teachers need additional training in how to evaluate the effectiveness and quality of their own assessments. Another finding of this survey was the fact that many teachers use behaviors such as effort, improvement, and participation to figure student grades.

The results of this study not only made me think about the grading practices in my own classroom, but those practices taking place in elementary classrooms across Douglas County. With the new elementary progress reports, there has also been a shift in how students are assessed. I know that just within my own school there are teachers who have not made those changes. It concerns me in the fact that grades reported by some teachers don't truly reflect student knowledge.

In February of 2003, Amy Hetzner wrote an article that investigated the use of new "standards based" report cards in Wisconsin school districts. As a direct result of the standards movement, these report cards communicated to parents whether their child was performing at a beginning, developing, or secure level in the various content areas.

Overall, parents have adjusted well to this new reporting tool. It was stated that this level of acceptance and adjustment came from a great deal of legwork done by the school district to help educate parents. This legwork included creating a guidebook and utilizing parent-teacher conferences to introduce the new reporting format.

There are people who have different perspectives on the Wisconsin report card. While it does provide everyone with a common language within which to discuss student achievement, it may prove to be dangerous while incorporating too many standards. It was stated that there are around 470 standards that students are measured against. Including all 470 would be overwhelming and basically impossible to accomplish.

The focus of this article, a standards-based report card, was at the center of my action research project. When the Douglas County School District created the new elementary progress report, they had the district standards in mind. Several of the points discussed in the article are the same positive and negative aspects we have experienced within our new reporting system.

Guskey's (2001) book on reporting systems is a major focus of the elementary progress report used in Douglas County elementary schools. Not only do teachers use the assessment guidelines within it to determine checkpoint and standard proficiency, but the book also contains many aspects of the progress report's framework.

Guidelines for Considering Evidence
- Give first priority to the **most recent** evidence.
- Give second priority to the **most comprehensive** evidence.
- Give final priority to evidence related to the **most important learning goals or standards**.

Progress Report Frameworks
- Communication is the primary goal of grading and reporting.
- Grading and reporting are integral parts of the instructional process.
- Good reporting is based on good evidence.
- Creating change in grading and reporting requires creating a multi-faceted reporting system.

Summary

Overall, I believe that everyone involved in the study: parents, students and myself, benefited from the use of the Assessment Graphs. Even though some parents are still looking for additional feedback for their child, I do feel that many of the "How is my student doing?" questions are no longer being asked.

As for the students, it was great to hear someone say, "Wow! I got my first 4." Or "I can't believe it! I got a 3 on that assignment." I feel that the time spent on reviewing and recording grades gave students a better opportunity to reflect on their own learning and progress. They didn't always enjoy taking home their grades, but I noticed that over the seven weeks, students began to share their grades more with fellow classmates. Students also quickly became aware

of how many different skills are embedded in just one, simple assignment. It really made some of them consider the quality of work they were doing.

Finally, I feel that I personally benefited from the use of these graphs. I was much more timely on the grading and returning of papers. I also felt that I gave a higher quality of feedback to my students on their various assignments. When we were ready to graph the grades, this time provided us with an excellent opportunity to review and discuss the assignment. I don't feel that I accomplished my goal of changing the parent and student attitudes toward grades. I have come to realize that this will take time and with additional research for articles and resources, I feel that I can continue to work on this topic.

Implications for Practice

Due to the fact I am looping with my class to 5th grade, I included a question in my final parent and student surveys, asking whether or not the Assessment Graphs were something that they wanted to use again next year. You can see that once again, the parents and students were split on this idea. (Figure 5-1)
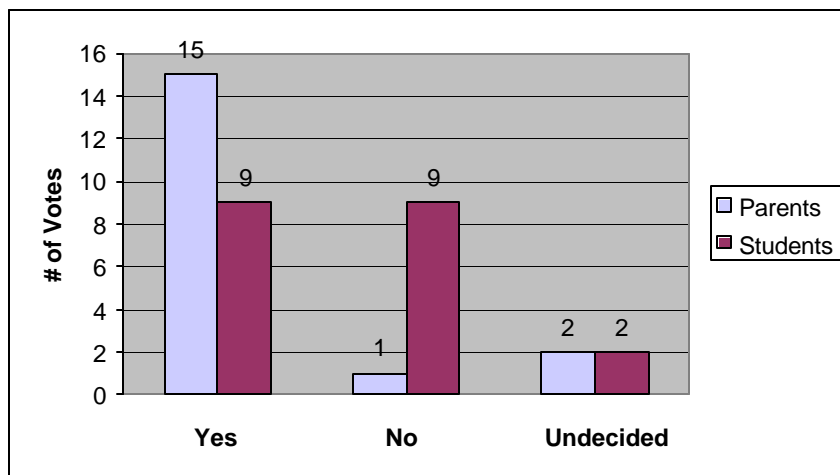

Figure 5-1

Considering that my parents are the customers, it looks like I will be continuing the use of the Assessment Graphs next year. After listening to the comments from parents and students, I will be making several modifications to the graphs. These changes include:

- o Making the columns narrower, while widening the "Name of Assignment" row. This will allow more space for students to write.

This extra room to write will result in a clearer explanation of the assignment for parents.

o Students will be adding the dates to the assignments. This will help parents distinguish between what graphing is new, and what they have already seen.

o I will also be adding some component that deals with Work Habits and Study Skills. This was an area that parents definitely wanted to see added.

I feel that these changes will meet the needs of all my parents and students. I think it would be very valuable to get additional feedback from both parties once the new school year is underway and we have had a chance to utilize the modified Assessment Graphs.

I will be sharing my research findings in their near future with my principal. I don't expect a "school wide" adoption of the Assessment Graphs quite yet. The majority of the staff is still adjusting to the new progress report and having to record one assignment on a number of pages in their grade book. I do plan on sharing more of my research data with my teammate. Since she has used the Assessment Graphs in her classroom, she was very interested in finding out how it went with sending the graphs home. (Due to time and scheduling conflicts, these two meetings have not yet taken place.)

I can also see the recording process difficult for younger students. I still had a few students that after seven weeks were still struggling with exactly where to record a specific grade. If the system was modified, there may be a possibility that younger students could complete the task.

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Appendix

Focus Group Discussion

February 2003

These are the questions that my class and I discussed after we recorded grades on the graph. I recorded student responses under the questions I asked them.

1. How did you feel while you were doing this?

2. How would you like to do this on a regular basis? Why?

3. Would keeping this type of graph help you understand how you are doing in school?

4. What changes would you make to these pages or graphs to make them easier to do or understand?

Progress Report Survey

February 2003

During the last two school years you have started to receive a different type of grade on your daily assignments, as well as on your progress report. I am in the process of developing a tool that will help you and your parents always know how you are doing in school.

In order to create this new tool, I need some help from you, the students. Below you will find several questions. As a class, we will be reading the questions. Please take your time to answer them and add any additional comments you may have. Be sure to ask any questions you may have as you complete this survey.

Using the scale, rate your feelings on the following statements.
(If you circle a 1, then you disagree with the statement. If you circle a 2, you are sort of in the middle, and if you circle a 3, you agree with the statement.)

I think it's important for me to know how I am doing in school.
1   2   3

Most of the time, I know if I am earning a 4, 3, 2, or 1 in all subject areas.
1   2   3

I feel like I have a complete understanding of what a 4, 3, 2, or 1 stands for.
1   2   3

Now as a class, we are going to record grades from some of your recent assignments using a special graph. This is an example of the graph that will go home to your parents, letting them know how you are doing in school.

After our class discussion, please answer the following questions. Once again, we will be reading them together.

Do you think keeping a graph like this will help you have a better idea of what skills you are doing well on and which ones you need to work more on?
Yes   No
Please give a one or two sentence explanation of your answer.
_____
_____
_____

Would you like to take these graphs home to your parents?
Yes   No
Please give a one or two sentence explanation of your answer.
_____
_____
_____

How do you feel when you bring home good grades to your parents?
_____
_____
_____

How do you feel when you bring home bad grades to your parents?

_____
_____
_____

Do you and your parents currently have any type of rewards and/or consequences related to how you do in school?

Yes   No

If you answered, "Yes" describe what you are rewarded or punished for. What work do your parents base their decisions on?

_____
_____
_____

(Student Pre-Graphs Survey)

Progress Report Survey

February 2003

Over the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years, the parents, students, and teachers at Coyote Creek have undergone a variety of transition dealing with the new Elementary Progress Report.
I know that this new report is very different from the typical "report cards" that we all grew up with, but as of now, they are here to stay. So, we might as well make the most of them.
Over the course of last school year, as well as during the current school year, I have heard a variety of comments pertaining to the progress report and student performance. With the new grading system and reporting tool, there seems to be the need for a new method of periodical updates as to how students are performing towards their proficiency on Douglas County standards and checkpoints.
The attached documents were used by your child to record the scores from several of their most recent assignments. This document was created in the hopes that it will provide you with the needed periodical feedback you need on your child's academic performance at school. After you have answered the questions below, please take a minute to review the graphs and then answer a few questions pertaining specifically to the graphs.

This is really a two-part survey. The first portion asks you to answer a variety of questions related to your feelings about your student's performance. The second portion asks you to view the documents mentioned above and then answer another set of questions.

PART 1
Using the scale, rate your feelings on the following statements.
(1 = disagree, 5 = agree)

It is important for me to consistently be aware of my student's overall performance in school.
1   2   3   4   5

I consistently know if my student is earning an overall 4, 3, 2, or 1 in all subject areas.
1   2   3   4   5

I believe that my child is aware of what they are earning in all subject areas.
1   2   3   4   5

I currently feel that I receive adequate feedback about my student's academic performance in the following subject areas:
(Circle all that apply.)
Writing   Reading   Math   Word Study   Science   Social Studies

I would like more feedback about my student's academic performance in the following subject areas:
(Circle all that apply.)
Writing   Reading   Math   Word Study   Science   Social Studies

It is important for me to consistently be aware of my student's Work Habits and Study Skills.
1   2   3   4   5

PART 2

At this time, please take a few minutes to review the attached graphs. Remember, your child completed these graphs and they reflect their grades.

When your child completed a graph, they were told which standard and checkpoint the assignment should go under. They then wrote the name of the assignment and colored in the corresponding box to the grade they earned. The graphs you will be looking at address a standard in Math and one in Reading.

After you have reviewed the graph document, please take a few minutes to answer the questions that follow the graphs.

Now keep in mind, the graphs you just looked at are only for two of the many standards your student is assessed on. The normal "packet" of graphs would contain all standards and checkpoints from the progress report. (Each set of graphs would look exactly like the ones you just saw.) This packet would be about 7-8 pages in length. The pages would be contained within a file folder. On a regular basis, your student would complete their graphs and the folder would be sent home in Thursday Folders for you to review.

Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions that deal strictly with the graphs.

Would you like to consistently receive a document like this?
Yes   No
Please provide a one or two sentence explanation of your answer.
_____
_____
_____

Were you able to understand the information contained with the various graphs?
Yes   No
If you answered "No," what additional information would have been helpful for you?
_____
_____

From the information on the graph, do you feel like you know if your child is earning a 4, 3, 2, or 1 in that particular standard/checkpoint?
Yes   No
If you answered "No," what additional information would have been helpful for you?
_____
_____

If you were to receive this type of document, a folder containing the standards and checkpoints for all subject areas and checkpoints, would you be willing to review and discuss it with your child within one to two days of receiving it, and then return it back to school with a signature stating you had reviewed it with your child?
Yes   No

If you were to consistently receive a document like this, how often would you like to view the document? *(Circle only ONE.)*
Weekly   Every other week   Monthly   Other _____

Do you have any suggestions on how this document (the graphs) could be improved?
_____
_____
_____
_____

If you have additional comments, please add them below. Also, if you are very interested in this topic and would like to discuss it with me further, please add your name and number below. I would be happy to talk with you in person or over the phone.

Additional comments:
_____
_____
_____
_____

Name _____
Phone Number _____

Thank you so much for your time! I really appreciate you taking a few minutes to provide me with your feedback.
I plan on compiling the survey information and creating a final document that will be used when we track back on in March.

(Parent Pre-Graphs Survey)

Progress Report Survey

April 2003

During the last couple of months you have been working with a folder containing your assessment graphs. These graphs were created in hopes of providing you a type of a tool to help you and your parents always know how you are doing in school.

I know that the time period in which these graphs were used has been short, but I need to get your final feedback. (I will continue to use the graphs throughout the remainder of the school year.)

Below you will find several questions. As a class, we will be reading the questions. Please take your time to answer them and add any additional comments you may have. Be sure to ask any questions you may have as you complete this survey.

Using the scale, rate your feelings on the following statements.
 (If you circle a 1, then you disagree with the statement. If you circle a 2, you are sort of in the middle, and if you circle a 3, you agree with the statement.)

I think it's important for me to know how I am doing in school.
1   2   3

After using the assessment graphs, I feel that most of the time, I know if I am earning a 4, 3, 2, or 1 in all subject areas.
1   2   3

After using the assessment graphs, I feel like I have a better understanding of what a 4, 3, 2, or 1 stands for.
1   2   3   There was no change in my understanding.

Do you think keeping the assessment graphs helped you have a better idea of what skills you are doing well on and which ones you need to work more on?
Yes   No
Please give a one or two sentence explanation of your answer.
_____
_____
_____

How did you feel taking these graphs home to your parents?
Please give a one or two sentence explanation of your answer.
_____
_____
_____

How did you feel when you brought home good grades to your parents?
_____
_____
_____

How did you feel when you brought home bad grades to your parents?
_____
_____
_____

As a result of the assessment graphs, did you and your parents set up any type of rewards and/or consequences related to how you do in school?
Yes   No
If you answered, "Yes" describe what you are rewarded or punished for.
_____
_____
_____

You took home the assessment graphs every two weeks. Was this a good time frame?   *(Circle only ONE.)*
Every other week was enough   Weekly would be better   Monthly would be better
Other _____

Did using the assessment graphs change your thoughts and feelings about grades in general?
Yes   No
Please provide a one or two sentence explanation of your answer.
_____
_____
_____

Considering the fact I will be your teacher next year, would you like to use the assessment graphs again throughout the entire school year?
Yes   No
Please provide a one or two sentence explanation of your answer.
_____
_____
_____

Do you have any suggestions on how the folder and/or graphs could be improved?
_____
_____
_____

(Student Post-Graphs Survey)

Progress Report Survey

April 2003

During the last couple of months you have been receiving a folder containing your child's assessment graphs. These graphs were created in hopes of providing you a type of reporting tool that gives you periodical updates as to how your student is performing towards their proficiency on Douglas County standards and checkpoints.

I know that the time period in which these graphs were used has been short, but I need to get your final feedback. (I will continue to use the graphs throughout the remainder of the school year.)

Please take a few minutes to complete this final survey. You may notice that some questions are identical or similar to the first survey you completed.

PART 1

Using the scale, rate your feelings on the following statements.
(1 = disagree, 5 = agree)

After the use of the assessment graphs, I consistently know if my student is earning an overall 4, 3, 2, or 1 in all subject areas.
1   2   3   4   5

After the use of the assessment graphs, I believe that my child is more aware of what they are earning in all subject areas.
1   2   3   4   5

The assessment graphs provided me with adequate feedback about my student's academic performance in the following subject areas:
(Circle all that apply.)

Writing   Reading   Math   Word Study   Science   Social Studies

Even after the use of the assessment graphs, I would like more feedback about my student's academic performance in the following subject areas:
(Circle all that apply.)

Writing   Reading   Math   Word Study   Science   Social Studies

Did you feel receiving the assessment graph folder was helpful?
Yes   No
Please provide a one or two sentence explanation of your answer.
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Were you able to understand the information contained within the various graphs?
Yes   No
If you answered "No," what additional information would have been helpful for you?
If you answered "Yes," what particular information was helpful for you?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

_____

You received the assessment graphs every two weeks. Was this a good time frame?   *(Circle only ONE.)*
Every other week was enough   Weekly would be better   Monthly would be better
Other _____

Considering the fact I will be your student's teacher next year, would you like to see the assessment graphs used again throughout the entire school year?
Yes   No
Please provide a one or two sentence explanation of your answer.
_____
_____
_____
_____

The assessment graph folders you received did not contain work habits and study skills. Would this be something that you would like to see added if the graphs were to be used again next year?
Yes   No
Please provide a one or two sentence explanation of your answer.
_____
_____
_____
_____

Do you have any suggestions on how the folder and/or graphs could be improved?
_____
_____
_____
_____

If you have additional comments, please add them below.
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thanks again! I really appreciate your time and effort.

(Parent Post-Graphs Survey)

Elementary Progress Report Assessment Graphs

<u>Proficiency Scale</u>

(The numeric scale used for assignments.)
- 4 Assignment was completed above grade level expectations.
- 3 Assignment was completed at grade level expectations.
- 2 Assignment was completed below grade level expectations.
- 1 Incomplete data from the assignment to determine amount of student knowledge.
- * The assignment expectations were modified.

+ and ∨ are considered to be a "3."
- is considered to be a "2."

<u>Guidelines for Considering Evidence</u>

(These are the guidelines used to determine final grades at the end of each trimester, or anytime during the trimester.)
- o Give first priority to the **most recent** evidence.
- o Give second priority to the **most comprehensive** evidence.
- o Give final priority to evidence related to the **most important learning goals or standards**.

<u>Additional Information</u>
- o You will not see homework on the Assessment Graphs. This is due to the fact that it is not used to figure a student's overall grade.
- o The District Anchor assessments are marked with a small circled "A." These assessments are considered secure and cannot be sent home.
- o There are two ways for a student to earn a "4." They may be working on a grade-level assignment and the quality of the completed work is above what is expected at that time of the school year. The second way they may earn a "4" is by accurately completing an "above grade-level" assignment. In order to earn a "4" at the end of the trimester, the student must consistently score "4's" over the course of the entire trimester, not on just a couple of assignments.

Please remember to sign-off below signifying that you have viewed and discussed your student's assessments with them. Please remember to call or email with any questions. Thank you!

SIGN-OFF

Week 1 _____ Week 2 _____
Week 3 _____ Week 4 _____
Week 5 _____ Week 6 _____

Week 7 _____   Week 8 _____