



Building parent-school partnerships

WORDS Lakshmi Singh

School Reports - tips for parents

Report time can be stressful for parents and students. Here are 5 expert tips to guide parents through this process.

School reports could easily be considered a form of art. This type of art, like any other is open to interpretation, review and criticism. It's just that these reviews don't really make it into any literary publications but no doubt can have a huge impact on a child and their family. How then should parents wear the hat of a critic and not only get an accurate representation of their child's work but implement measures to cater to the feedback?

A primary school vs a secondary school report – understanding the differences

In primary schools, teachers report on the child's behaviour in class, educational progression and socialisation skills, says Dr. Karen Phillip, preschool educator and a parenting expert.

However, as children get older and are offered more in terms of electives, the expectations shift as their focus and attentive behaviour should become obvious in their reports, says Dr. Phillip.

As they gravitate towards their chosen subjects of interest, the effort they put in

and the results can be expected to reflect their work ethic.

"In high school teachers report on the child's academic results, dedication to lessons, assignment results and class participation," she says.

Also, at this age, any concerns are generally better picked up by both the child and the teacher.

"Parents whose children are in high school usually place a higher value on the school report as this may be vital to enter the University of choice," she says. Although they may realise the report is describing their child's progress, expecting more from teachers and blaming them for a poor report is a regular occurrence, she says.

"Parents see their child as intelligent, better than others, special, more gifted. When a report is average, they blame," she says.

However, before jumping to conclusions, it is important to note that quite a few factors could be in play when it comes to a school report. Problems mentioned in reports could be as a result of issues from

home transferring across to school – bullying, anxiety or a range of other feelings/situations, says Dr. Phillip. Younger children may not be able to express this adequately.

Elizabeth Watson, Acting Director of Curriculum at Waverley College's Senior School, believes feedback and reporting is essential in helping students reach their learning goals, but they won't be very effective if they aren't treated as conversation starters and opportunities for active reflection.

Engage in discussion

It is important to take a broader view when reading a child's report, says Dr. Phillip.

"Reports can sometimes be a teacher's perspective and not necessarily the complete picture. Talk to both child and teacher to gain a more complete understanding and never judge the child harshly, instead focus on the solution to any problem or issue causing this."

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Watson recommends asking the student to perform a self-assessment by posing questions like: "Does this report reflect my understanding in each subject?", "Does this report reflect my effort in each subject?" and "What will I do differently next time?" Following this self-assessment, it can help to discuss ways of improvement and seek recommendation from teachers.

"Should there be areas that need attention, rather than focus on marks or ranks, think about strategies that will improve the quality of your work," says Watson.

Establish strategies for improvement

Watson encourages parents to make the most of opportunities such as parent teacher interviews. This is where parents can ask for specific areas that need developing and strategies for improvement. Some sample questions parents could ask teachers include:

- 1 Mathematics**
"What particular topics need attention?"
- 2 English**
"Did [student] fall down with his paragraph construction or with his grammar/spelling?"
- 3 Science**
"Did [student] perform better in the practical or theory component of the assessment?"
- 4 Art**
"How much time should [student] be spending on his/her major work compared to theory?"

Parents developing an understanding of the curriculum and content being taught can help establish specific strategies.

"In addition, establishing a more relaxed atmosphere at home so the child doesn't always feel stressed when studying is also a very important strategy. We need to be taking the emphasis off the results and placing it more on the process and the child's overall experience," he says.

Tips from the experts

- 1** Discuss the report with the teacher to fully understand the situation, be curious, and don't jump to conclusions.
- 2** Talk to your child calmly, go through the results and ask how they are feeling about it.
- 3** Ask your child questions like: "Is your workspace conducive to quality home study?", "How can I help you manage your workload?", "What strategies do you think will make a difference?"
- 4** Set practical small steps for the child to work on to reach the final goal.
- 5** Support them along this journey, check in regularly and re-adjust if required.

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