



An important message to parents about proposed changes to school reports.



School Reports

Staying informed about your child's education



New South Wales
Teachers Federation

Improvements in reporting student progress have been under way. We must continue to improve our reporting of student strengths and weaknesses in ways that avoid labelling; that create trust between students, parents and teachers.

An Open Letter to the Community

From Maree O'Halloran, President of the NSW Teachers Federation



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Dear Parents,

We need to work together to improve student reports. You may have heard recently that the State Government is proposing to introduce a standard A-E grading system for all subjects in school reports.

Standard A-E grading will do more harm than good

Like you, I recognise some of our school reports need improving. Teachers have been working to fix the problems of reports caused by the Department of Education and Training. We must continue to improve our reporting of student strengths and weaknesses in ways that:

- avoid labelling
- provide parents with clear information
- create trust between students, parents and teachers
- maintain our duty of care.

A government imposed A-E grading system does not achieve this.

You may recall that when you were a child, there was a system of reporting similar to A-E grades. Schools have moved away from this system over the years. This was because competitive grading systems like A-E erode the confidence of children and discourage them from further learning.

The A-E grading system will brand many young children as failures and hurt their prospects for improvement. It also takes no account of the fact that children learn at different speeds.

Children need support and encouragement, not punishment.

Some secondary schools already use A-E grades or something equivalent. Primary schools do not. But let's not go backwards, and allow politicians to force everyone into their flawed, one size fits all approach. Schools should have a choice on how they report student progress within a standard framework.

Achievement and identifying areas for help are more important

More important than simple grades is knowing what your child is achieving at school and being able to identify where they need help. These are the areas where we should be looking to improve our school reports.

If you feel the same way on this issue, then please see the back of this brochure on how you can support our campaign to send a message to the State Government that this is a bad idea for our children.

But if you are still unsure on this issue then I encourage you to talk to your child's teacher.

Maree O'Halloran

President, NSW Teachers Federation

Teacher 11 years (West Wyalong, Griffith, Sydney)

Support and encouragement, not punishment

5 things you should know about A-E grading

1. It's been tried before and found wanting

In Australia and many other western nations around the world, the trend has been to move away from competitive grading systems like A-E for young students. This is because competitive grading systems damage the confidence of students who receive lower grades and discourages them from further learning.

2. Telling children they are failures doesn't work

There's a view that children are better off knowing that they are failing at school because it will give them motivation to improve and let their parents know where they need help. This view is wrong on both counts. First, we know from past experience that when you continually mark down young students it discourages them from trying to improve. Secondly, there are other and better ways, like teacher-parent interviews to find out where your child may need extra help.

3. Thousands of children will be hurt by it

Under standard A-E grading, thousands of young children will be labelled a failure by this system twice a year every year. This will inevitably harm the educational prospects of many children.

4. A-E won't work as a standard

The idea that education can be improved by number-crunching the performance of every child through a standardised process is wrong. This does not recognise the individuality, creativity or the sensitivity of children. Schools, teachers and parents educate children, not politicians or bureaucrats. The A-E grades will not mean the same thing across schools, school systems and states.

5. Parents already get test results

Students in NSW already face many statewide tests. Reports from these tests are sent home.



What the experts say about A-E

No good purpose will be served by forcing all schools to adopt this archaic grading system. This sort of grading system was gradually abandoned in the past for the very reason that it proved simplistic and educationally unsound.

Lyndsay Connors

Chair of the former NSW State Government Public Education Council

Any system that discourages children from extending themselves and taking risks contradicts, limits and undermines the real aims of education.

Professor Jo-anne Reid

Head, School of Teacher Education, Charles Sturt University

Grading junior primary students is counterproductive – it's nonsense.

Jane Lomax-Smith

Minister for Education, South Australia

The Australian Council of State School Organisations [the peak national parent body] said it would campaign to ensure parents were aware of their right to refuse to have their child labelled from A to E.

Weekend Australian, Saturday, 17 June 2006



Support and encouragement, not punishment

What the principals say about A-E

The mandatory A-E grades are a recipe for confusion. Many school communities will resent having another process imposed on them.

Brian Chudleigh, Primary School Principal

The proposed grading system harks back to the days when all students were categorised, the self-esteem of many crushed, their enthusiasm for learning destroyed and their options for when they left school narrowed.

**Maurie Mulheron,
Secondary School Principal**

This system is unfair. It's about labelling children. When I think about what it will mean to the children at my school it breaks my heart. It's mean spirited and it serves no educational purpose nor does it give any real information about children's learning. Good assessment practice is about being fair to children and this isn't.

Shirley Steel, Primary School Principal

What parents think...

Putting children into categories like A to E will mean that many of the kids getting D's and E's will simply give up. We have actually seen this happen to one of our children."

Jennifer Crew, Armidale

"When I was a child I got a D. I knew it was the last card in the pack. I cried because I knew I had put in an effort and felt horrible. I don't want my kids to go through the same thing."

Patricia Pfeiffer, Glebe



What the government should be doing

1. Working with teachers, parents and principals to develop a consistent set of guidelines for school reports that allow for clear and concise reports.
2. Ensuring that the reporting guidelines are able to take account of the individual achievement and background of each child.
3. Within these guidelines, allowing schools to develop their own reporting formats in collaboration with parents.

What you can do...

1. **Support our campaign** by going to www.nswtf.org.au/reports
2. **Talk to your child's teacher** about this issue
3. **Contact your local State MP** to voice your concern

For more information...

If you would like to learn more about this issue then please contact the NSW Teachers Federation on:

Tel: (02) 9217 2100

Fax: (02) 9217 2470

Email: mail@nswtf.org.au

Post: Locked Bag No: 3010

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