

## **School Report Cards**

### **Review of the use of school report cards internationally**

Sarah Maughan  
Louise Cooper  
Pauline Benefield

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## **Project Team**

Sarah Maughan	Project Director
Louise Cooper	Research Officer
Pauline Benefield	Principal Research Librarian
Elizabeth Maher	Project Administration Assistant

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# 1 Executive Summary

## 1.1 Introduction

In response to the proposal in England to introduce a School Report Card to provide a broad measure of school performance for accountability purposes, NFER has conducted a small research project to investigate how Report Cards are used in other countries. The research aimed to complement the work that the Department for Children, Schools and Families has already conducted in this area.

## 1.2 Methodology

The aims of the study were to:

- collect information about what data is reported about schools in different countries, or different states in those countries, to include New York;
- if possible to collect stakeholder views about those reports, including what they like and dislike about them;
- where it arises, to collect information that is reported on individual pupils as well as schools.

A systematic literature review was conducted to locate detail about the uses of School Report Cards in different countries. This literature review was supplemented with a Google search.

## 1.3 Results

The results can be categorised into two main groups: general findings and discussion about the nature of School Report Cards and what should be included; and specific findings about what is reported in different countries.

### *General Findings*

A number of the articles addressed general issues related to what should be reported by schools and how, rather than specific details of what is reported in particular cases. Many of these relate to providing a broad measure of school performance using an approach similar to the 'Balanced Scorecard (BSC) Approach' (Kaplan and Norton, 1992) developed for business and adapted for an educational setting.

In business the different perspectives of the BSC are:

- the financial perspective;
- the customer perspective;
- internal business processes; and

- learning and growth.

A key feature of the BSC approach is that there is one lagging measure in the form of the financial perspective, the other measures focus more on setting up the business for future success.

When translated to the school context, examples of lagging measures could be test results and budget management. It is suggested that other factors which would demonstrate how the school is set up to improve in the future should also be included. These could include factors such as teacher learning, to match the learning and growth criteria in the BSC approach.

A further area which was apparent in the research was the need to agree the purposes of schools and their main audiences, before it is possible to decide what should be included in any report on their performance.

The reviewed literature overwhelmingly supported the idea of having a broader measure of a school's performance than merely academic achievement, although the precise detail of what should be included varied in the different articles.

## 1.4 Country Findings

### *United States*

Under the No Child Left Behind initiative in the United States, States are required to report annually on performance at the school, district and state level. Schools must report on the achievements of a number of subgroups including students from major racial or ethnic groups, those with special educational needs, and economically disadvantaged students, in addition to reporting on overall student achievement.

Districts are required to report on the State's achievement goals for each subgroup, the annual yearly progress, the district's graduation rate, and the professional qualifications of the district's teachers in the aggregate, and also for high and low poverty schools.

There is some variety between what is reported in the different States and three examples are included to demonstrate that diversity.

- Educational services through the *Bureau of Indian Education* support education programs and manage residential facilities for Indian students. The School Report Cards cover the following areas: enrolment, attendance, graduation and dropout rates; student achievement in three core subjects, information about teachers. Student achievement is reported in language arts, reading and mathematics, including the two year trend in each subject.
- Delaware City Schools have earned an *Effective* rating on the State Report Card for four consecutive years. All schools within the district earned

excellent or effective ratings as well<sup>1</sup>. The district covers eight schools – one high school; two middle schools and five elementary schools, and serves around 4800 students. Four measures are reported: school indicators, performance index score, adequate yearly progress, and value added. In addition, each school is awarded a designated grade which is displayed at the front of the report. Trends in the 2007/8 reports are given since 2005/6. The percentage of core academic subject classes not taught by *highly qualified* teachers and the percentage of core academic subject classes taught by *properly certified* teachers are both reported.

- The New York School Report Card covers three areas: school profile information, accountability status, and an overview of school performance. A section on teacher profiles includes details such as the percentage of teachers with fewer than three years experience, and information on teacher turnover rates. Progress reports are produced in addition to the School Report Cards. Every school is graded A to F to help teachers, parents and governors understand how well a school is doing in comparison to similar schools. The grading takes into account: school environment (which uses parent, teacher and student surveys plus other data to measure conditions for learning); student performance (success in graduating students); and student progress (which measures student progress towards graduation).

### *Australia*

In Queensland, the Education Department requires schools to adopt a Balanced Score Card approach which focuses on: financial delivery and performance; stakeholder relationships; schools, teaching and learning; and learning and development. It is not clear how this is reported although it is clear from the literature that there are other reporting systems in place for parents.

In Victoria, an example was found of a Student Report Card which provided a broad range of measures to be reported to parents. These include: traditional subject areas: English, mathematics, science, the humanities (economics, geography, history), languages and the arts; as well as new areas: physical, personal and social learning (health and physical education, interpersonal development, personal learning, civics and citizenship); and interdisciplinary learning (communication, design, creativity and technology, ICT and thinking processes). Assessment of achievement in each of the areas is based on performance on a range of tasks, as judged by the teacher.

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<sup>1</sup> A school's designation is assigned by assessing a combination of four measures. These are: i) State indicators ii) Performance index score iii) AYP iv) Value-added. The six designations are: i) Excellent with distinction ii) Excellent iii) Effective iv) Continuous improvement v) Academic watch vi) Academic Emergency.

## *Canada*

In Canada an independent organisation, the Fraser Institute, publishes Report Cards of school performance in a number of states. The Report Cards include academic measures such as average achievement in English and mathematics, as well as gender differences and the percentage of pupils performing below an acceptable level. The indicators are used to generate a score out of 10. A number of additional indicators are reported but not included in the score. These features include: performance over time, a socio-economic indicator, student characteristics and value added measures. There is some variability in the exact measures used in different states.

## *India*

In India, a website includes measures for all schools on a searchable database. The precise indicators are very different to those seen in other countries and highlight the fact that the indicators are largely determined by the particular country context. In India the indicators include, alongside academic achievement, measures such as the source of water, and furniture available for teachers and students.

## **1.5 Discussion**

The implications from the research findings for developments in England are summarised as follows.

1. Overall, very few examples of School Report Cards have been found in use. Karathanos and Karathanos (2005) describe the ‘dearth’ of research literature related to using a Balanced Scorecard approach in schools. This may be of concern because it is difficult to assess the unintended consequences that may arise with so little evidence to inform the introduction. The lack of reliable evidence and existence of some concerns support the view that a pilot period will be of use when introducing a School Report Card in England.
2. In the literature and examples that were found there seems to be support for the use of broader measures against which to judge schools. A key point from the Balanced Score Card examples would seem to be that some of these measures will be lagging measures, ie reporting on things that have happened in the past, and others will be measures of how the school is set up to improve and develop in the future. Although there is some variety in the features included, the following seem to be worth considering: test results, measures of emotional and physical well-being, teacher learning, leadership, pupil characteristics, value added measures, and stakeholder and community views.
3. There seems to be a consensus in the view that academic achievement ought to be one of the measures. In addition to this, it will be important in England, given the high stakes nature of the accountability system, for a School Report Card to be made up of the measures which are assessed consistently across schools, and in a way that is as reliable as possible for the given measure.

4. A number of examples highlight the use of trend data as a more effective means of judging where a school is, as compared to a single snapshot in time. It is suggested that the trend data may be less affected by pupil background than achievement and therefore it is likely to be fairer. A measure of 'direction of travel' may be useful in a School Report Card for England.
5. A key aspect highlighted in a number of the articles is the importance of carefully agreeing the audience for the Report Card and what they would be most interested in, and how it should be reported.
6. Perhaps more difficult than agreeing the audience is reaching an agreement about the purpose of the education system, and therefore the exact features to include in the Report Card. Related to this are the purposes of the Report Card itself. Jones (2004) suggests these should be:
  - to 'serve to improve student learning and school practices and to ensure equity and access, not to reward or punish schools';
  - to 'provide guidance and information for local decision making, not classify schools as successes or failures';
  - to 'reflect a democratic approach, including a balance of responsibility and power among different levels of government'.

These appear to be a useful starting point.

7. Another factor that is raised as providing useful information is details of performance of subsets of pupils. It is felt that this can give a measure of equity and fairness of a school which is not available from whole group data.
8. A number of the School Report Cards combine the different features to give an overall grade. In some cases additional features are reported that are not included in the overall score. It would appear that there is no consensus as to the best approach here and careful consideration will be needed as to what is included in an overall grade, the weightings given to each aspect, and anything that is reported separately.
9. The different features included in the Report Cards demonstrate the requirements of different countries for reporting. Jones (2004) goes further by arguing that within a single country (in his case the US) a single approach is not valid and some of the measures should be localised. Perhaps it would be appropriate for local authorities, or even for individual schools, to be able to select a number of measures that they would like to include on their Reports, in addition to a number of compulsory measures.

## 2 Introduction

In an announcement in October 2008, Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, announced that School Report Cards would be introduced to give parents a new, simpler and more comprehensive way of understanding schools' performance and achievements. The Report Cards would be based on the model in use in New York schools. Subsequent to the announcement, the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) launched a consultation on the Report Cards and their proposed content. This consultation closed on the 3 March and a White Paper and a report on the consultation are due in June 2009.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has conducted a small research project, using internal funding, to develop a better understanding of School Report Cards as they are currently used in other countries, and of their strengths and weaknesses. Whilst working on the review, an EPPI Centre report was considered, commissioned by DCSF, reviewing the information that is reported on children's progress in 13 'high-performing education systems (Husbands *et al.*, 2008). This report highlights all the data that is provided about children in these countries, whatever its source, eg on a Ministry of Health website. In contrast to this, and in order to complement rather than replicate the findings of this study, it was decided to focus on what is reported by schools in the countries studied.

The DCSF have also released data from two further studies into Report Cards, the first reporting on the views of parents and of the general public as collected via a 'general omnibus survey with a nationally representative sample of 1634 adults, including 550 parents' (TNS, 2008).

They key findings of the report are:

- *'As presented to survey respondents, the majority of parents (84%) and public (74%) felt a School Report Card would be very or quite useful;*
- *The majority of parents (92%) and public (80%) were aware of at least one public source of information about school performance, with the highest awareness being public examination results;*
- *The majority of public and parents said it was very important to them personally that parents and the public should know how well each school performs;*
- *The majority of public and parents agreed that parents should be able to compare one school's performance against another, that the performance of each school in tests and exams should be published and publicly available and that test and exam results are one important measure of a school's performance.'*

The second piece of research, by Counterpoint for the DCSF (Counterpoint Research 2009), with groups of parents in England found that the question parents really wanted answering *'was not 'what's the best school', but 'what's the best school for my child' - a highly individual answer'*. In particular what they want is *'the reliability and clarity given by 'objective measures', measures which could be used to hold a school to account, but covering the range of information they need to help their child and their child's school as well as make the right decisions'*.

In addition to test results parents would also like:

- *'a measure of happiness e.g. parent / pupil ratings; performance tables including non-academic achievements;*
- *a measure of how nice the pupils and teachers are e.g. how much is done in the local community - is there evidence of voluntary work done, care for the vulnerable in the community for instance?*
- *a measure of how health-oriented the school is e.g. how it handles / prioritises school meals; its 5 a Day commitment;*
- *a measure of stability in the school - principally staff turnover, but also building works, short / medium plans;*
- *a measure of approachability e.g. communications with parents; availability of staff;*
- *invitations to parents' talks **and** participation; and*
- *a measure of flexibility e.g. information about how the school has reacted to crises in practice (bullying, drugs etc.).'*

Parents did not object to the idea of a single grade for the school, summarising the above data.

### 3 Methodology

The aims of this study were to:

- collect information about what data is reported about schools in different countries, or different states in those countries, to include New York;
- if possible to collect stakeholder views about those reports, including what they like and dislike about them;
- where it arises, to collect information that is reported on individual pupils as well as schools.

A literature review was conducted to locate detail about the uses of School Report Cards in different countries. The following databases were searched:

#### *Australian Education Index (AEI)*

AEI is produced by the Australian Council for Educational Research. It is an index to materials at all levels of education and related fields. Source documents include journal articles, monographs, research reports, theses, conference papers, legislation, parliamentary debates and newspaper articles.

#### *British Education Index (BEI)*

BEI provides bibliographic references to 350 British and selected European English-language periodicals in the field of education and training, plus developing coverage of national report and conference literature.

#### *Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)*

ERIC is the largest education database in the world, with over one million abstracts on educational research and practice. It indexes over 775 journals, mostly American, and provides good coverage of grey literature, such as conference proceedings, theses and technical reports.

#### *PsycInfo*

This is an international database containing citations and summaries of journal articles, book chapters, book and technical reports, as well as citations to dissertations in the field of psychology and psychological aspects of related disciplines, such as medicine, sociology and education.

Results were screened to remove duplicates and details that did not fit within the search parameters. (Details of the search parameters can be found in Appendix 1).

The review team then used agreed criteria to select appropriate literature. The criteria included articles:

- which provided detail of the information that is reported;
- which detailed an approach used by a number of schools, not just in one school;
- that included detail about stakeholder views of the information provided;
- published since 2000.

The literature review was followed up by an internet search using Google on the terms:

- School Report Cards;
- Balanced Score Cards Education;
- School accountability.

A useful additional step would be to follow up with contacts in each of the reviewed countries to collect further evidence about views and to verify the findings, but this has not been completed at the current time.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 General

In general, few articles were found about the use of School Report Cards in other countries. A number of the articles addressed general issues related to what should be reported by schools and how, whilst others described specific details about what is reported in particular cases.

A small number of the general articles relate to providing a broad measure of school performance using an approach similar to the 'Balanced Scorecard (BSC) Approach' (Kaplan and Norton, 1992) developed for business, and adapted for an educational setting. In business the different perspectives of the BSC are:

- the financial perspective;
- the customer perspective;
- internal business processes; and
- learning and growth.

A key feature of the BSC approach is that there is one lagging measure in the form of the financial perspective, the other measures focus more on setting up the business for future success.

Karathanos and Karathanos (2005) describe the use of the BSC and also 'The Baldrige National Quality Program' which uses similar principles to recognise organisations that can be used as role models for other businesses. The approaches used to select organisations are similar to those used in the BSC. The criteria for the Baldrige National Quality Program have been converted for use in education and in 2001 three institutions received awards against the criteria.

Seven categories are used for the education version of the program:

- Leadership;
- Strategic planning;
- Student, stakeholder, and market focus;
- Measurement, analysis, and knowledge management;
- Faculty and staff focus;
- Process management;
- Organisational performance results.

In these categories, the seventh one contains the lagging measure of test results, along with other measures of performance including budgetary results and governance. The authors comment that the categories ‘allow organizations to track student learning while simultaneously monitoring their progress in building the capabilities and acquiring the resources that would affect their capacity to improve student performance and development’.

Karathanos and Karathanos (2005) believe that the BSC approach could usefully be adopted more in an education context but that this is not yet the norm ‘*Although the concept of the BSC has been widely adopted and used in the business sector, the education sector apparently has not embraced the BSC concept widely, as indicated by the dearth of published research on this topic*’. (p. 223)

Hendrickson (2002) suggests that an important first step is to decide who will be receiving the data and what it is that they are interested in. Once this has been agreed he suggests a number of other factors that should be taken into account:

- Trend data is perhaps more useful than snap shots of where students are at any given point. This is particularly useful for subsets of the data, so it becomes apparent if any one group consistently outperforms another group.
- Focus on growth, not standards. Where improvements are seen this offers hope to teachers, pupils and parents, and good standards will usually follow. This can also highlight what programs and methods lead to growth.
- The results should be given in context. Isolated improvements in test scores could reflect a particularly strong year group or exceptional teaching, additional data is needed to know which of these (or some other factor) is the case.
- Data should be used with integrity: it is easy to choose a selection of results that show a school or group of pupils in a good light, while ignoring others that do not. Strengths and weaknesses should be highlighted. The processes for testing and reporting should be evaluated thoroughly.

Jones (2004) describes how the current models of accountability in the US are ‘counter-productive’ because rather than improving the learning of the students they have been ‘*fraught with flawed assumptions, oversimplified understandings of school realities, undemocratic concentration of power, undermining of the teaching profession, and predictably disastrous consequences for our most vulnerable students*’. He suggests an alternative method of evaluating schools. Jones comments that we must first start with the purposes and audiences of schools. Their interests should be central when agreeing a model of accountability. Audiences are likely to include students, parents and the local community.

Jones goes on to suggest the following areas of interest:

- The physical and emotional well-being of students;
- Student learning: not only in subject areas, but of skills and dispositions needed in a modern society;
- Teacher learning: schools must make time and money available for teachers to improve their own performance;
- Equity and access: fair opportunities should be provided for all to achieve high standards;
- Improvement: schools should be seen to self-evaluate and improve over time.

Jones suggests that both quantitative and qualitative data will be needed for reporting on these areas. He also suggests it should be possible to localise the measures and that *'a standardized approach toward school accountability cannot work in a nation as diverse as the U.S.'*

He gives the following roles for an accountability system:

1. To 'serve to improve student learning and school practices and to ensure equity and access, not to reward or punish schools';
2. To 'provide guidance and information for local decision making, not classify schools as successes or failures';
3. To 'reflect a democratic approach, including a balance of responsibility and power among different levels of government'.

Finally, Jones proposes the use of a Balanced Scorecard for schools, which reports against four key areas: student learning, opportunity to learn, responsiveness to students, parents and community, and organisational capacity for improvement. He gives details about what each measure could contain.

A number of the papers reviewed agree that there should be a wider measure of school performance than just test results. One recently published paper, however, questions the use of test results as a measure of school effectiveness at all. Kramarz *et al.* (2009) from the government funded Centre for the Economics of Education in England provide a model for estimating the relative effects of pupil and school factors in determining outcomes. They look in particular at the effects of the different factors on key stage 1 and 2 test scores. They conclude that pupil effects such as ability and background (that is inherited ability, early educational experiences and family background) have the largest effect on outcomes. School effects do have an impact, but this is much less significant than pupil effects. They also investigated peer effects and found that this has the smallest effect on outcomes of the three factors.

This study suggests, therefore, that by holding primary schools accountable by using the key stage 2 test results as the measure, they are in fact being held accountable more for the pupil intake than for any schooling that has taken place.

The following section provides some detail about how School Report Cards are used in other countries, and where possible, stakeholder views of the usefulness of the information provided.

## 4.2 United States

### *School Report Cards – America*

#### **What is reported?**

Since 2001 the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act requires that States develop and report on measures of student proficiency (basic; proficient; advanced) in **English language arts (ELA)**, in **mathematics**, and on a **third indicator**. Schools or districts that meet predefined goals on these measures are making *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*.

In addition to reporting on overall student achievement, schools must report on the achievements of a number of subgroups including students from major racial or ethnic groups, those with special educational needs, and economically disadvantaged students.

Districts are required to report on the State's achievement goals for each subgroup, the annual yearly progress status, the district's graduation rate, and the professional qualifications of the district's teachers in the aggregate, and also for high and low poverty schools.

#### **How often is it reported?**

Each year, the State is required to produce a Report Card that outlines progress at the school, district and state level.

#### **How is it reported?**

This section will look at three different School Report Cards. The comparison shows that in spite of the federal requirements to report on specific areas, there still exists a huge variety in the scope and presentation of the Report Cards across different states or educational authorities. This variety is demonstrated in the following examples which show reports from authorities of different sizes that serve different communities.

## *Bureau of Indian Affairs*

Educational services through the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) support education programs and manage residential facilities for Indian students at 184 BIE-funded elementary and secondary schools and dormitories. The Bureau-wide annual Report Card and School Report Cards are accessible on their website.

### **How is it reported?**

An example of a School Report Card is as follows:

<http://enan.bia.edu/resources/bureau-wide-and-school-report-cards> (Bureau of Indian Education, 2009)

The Report Card covers the following areas:

1. Enrolment
2. Attendance, graduation, dropout rate
3. Student achievement in three core subject areas
4. Information about teachers.

The report is a brief document, the figures presented in table format, and with no additional notes or explanations of terms.

### **What is reported?**

Student achievement is reported in language arts, reading and mathematics, including the two year trend in each subject. If a group numbers less than 10 students, results are not reported. Subgroups reported by the Bureau include Limited English Proficiency, as well as IEP students (students with disabilities). The report ends with an overview of five areas: number of teachers employed, number of core area teachers, school Principal tenure, details about core area classes, and paraprofessionals employed. Included is also a measurement of core area teachers' qualifications in the use of technology for instruction and the number of teachers receiving high-quality professional development.

The Bureau-wide annual report card uses exactly the same format as the School Report Cards and covers around 180 schools.

Views on the reporting system were not found either through the literature review or during the internet search.

## *Delaware City, Ohio*

Delaware City Schools have earned an *Effective* rating on the State Report Card for four consecutive years. All schools within the district earned excellent or effective ratings as well<sup>2</sup>. The district covers eight schools – one high school; two middle schools and five elementary schools, and serves around 4800 students.

### **How is it reported?**

An example of a School Report Card is as follows:

<http://www.dcs.k12.oh.us/75317561510242/lib/75317561510242/Hayes.pdf>

(Delaware City Schools, 2009)

Progress on the Delaware City School Report Card is monitored according to four measures. These are:

1. State indicators
2. Performance index score
3. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)
4. Value-added measure

In addition, each school is awarded a designated grade which is displayed at the front of the report.

Unlike some school reports which can be lengthy and difficult to read, this report is eight pages long and uses graphics to present the information in a clear and direct way. Explanations of technical terms are given in layman's language alongside the data.

### **What is reported?**

The first page summarises the report (district's designation, numbers of state indicators met, performance index score, AYP and Value-added measure) onto five graphic icons. These headings are then explored in the rest of the report.

Trends in the 2007/8 reports are given since 2005/6. The percentage of core academic subject classes not taught by *highly qualified* teachers and the percentage of core

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<sup>2</sup> A school's designation is assigned by assessing a combination of four measures. These are: i) State indicators ii) Performance index score iii) AYP iv) Value-added. The six designations are: i) Excellent with distinction ii) Excellent iii) Effective iv) Continuous improvement v) Academic watch vi) Academic Emergency.

academic subject classes taught by *properly certified* teachers were both reported, however, unlike the Indian Bureau, there was no mention of teachers qualifications in relation to using technology, or indicators about the professional development of teachers.

The district annual Report Card uses exactly the same format as the School Report Card and covers the eight schools.

Views on the reporting system were not found through the literature review or the internet search.

*New York*

### **How is it reported?**

An example of a School Report Card is as follows:

<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb-rc/2008/b2/AOR-2008-161601040003.pdf> (New York State Education Department, 2009)

The New York School Report Card covers the following areas:

1. School profile information
2. Accountability status
3. Overview of school performance.

In comparison with the Indian Bureau schools and the Delaware City Report Cards, the New York School Report Card has much more written text and a greater number of technical terms explained in the report – for example ‘*safe harbour*’ and ‘*annual measurable objective*’.

### **What is reported?**

The section on teacher profiles is more comprehensive and includes details such as percent of teachers with fewer than three years experience, and information on teacher turnover rates.

In the final section there is an opportunity to see how the school in question rates against similar schools. Interestingly, there is also a record of whether the school has entered any students for ‘other assessments’: the New York State Alternative Assessment (NYSAA), or the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) and if so, what level students have achieved.

## **Progress Report Cards**

Progress Reports are produced in New York (New York City Department of Education, 2009a) in addition to the State Reports and the School Accountability Reports. They are not a measure that other states appear to use. Every school is graded A to F to help teachers, parents and governors understand how well a school is doing in comparison to similar schools. Schools that achieve A or B are eligible for awards; those that score Ds or Fs or three Cs in a row are liable to face consequences such as leadership change or even closure.

### **What is reported?**

The grading system takes three factors into consideration.

1. School environment (15%) - uses parent, teacher and secondary student surveys and other data to measure necessary conditions for learning: attendance, academic expectations, communication, engagement, safety and respect.
2. Student performance (25%) – evaluates a high school's success in graduating students.
3. Student progress (60%) - evaluates annual student advancement toward graduation through credit accumulation and passed Regents. In the weighted Regents pass rate measures, schools receive more points if they are able to help high need students pass the exams.

### **How is it reported?**

An example of such a report for **Philip Randolph Campus High School, Manhattan, NY, is as follows:**

[http://schools.nyc.gov/OA/SchoolReports/2007-08/ProgressReport\\_HS\\_M540.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/OA/SchoolReports/2007-08/ProgressReport_HS_M540.pdf)

(New York City Department of Education, 2009b)

Each school is awarded a grade based on their overall progress report score. The school is then compared to up to 40 schools with a similar student profile. Bar charts are used to compare the performance of the school in question to schools in its peer group, and a further comparison is made with performance across the City.

### **How often is it reported?**

Progress Reports are issued annually near the start of the school year.

## **Criticisms of Progress Reports**

One of the major criticisms of progress reports, according to local press, is the emphasis on student progress and test scores from one year to the next, rather than a three-year or longer average. Even a small drop in student's performance can mean a regress in overall grade. There is also a concern that there is not much room for growth for already high-achieving schools. It can be disconcerting for parents and students if a previously high-achieving school is awarded an average grade.

## **Criticisms of the School Report Card, as required by NCLB**

In terms of the federal reporting requirements, it is very difficult to find any views on what schools produce and how they are received by those in the education community in the published literature or during the internet search, although there is some evidence that states are thinking about how to make their results more accessible to parents.

One of the benefits of requesting the separate reporting for subgroups is that they are given more attention, and the schools, districts and state are able to monitor their achievement more closely. The fact that so many of the reports are available on the internet as well points towards a transparency that aims to give teachers, parents and students a clearer view of any school's progress.

However, one of the main criticisms raised in regards to what is reported is the setting of achievement targets. As Linn (2005) argues, not only are they unrealistically high (by the year 2014, 100% of students must reach the proficient level or above in maths and reading), but the definition of 'proficient' varies from state to state as the performance standard is set by the state (Linn shows how results from each state correlate to NAEP results taken by the same year and grade group). In addition, Linn raises the issue of whether it is fair to compare annual performance against a fixed target (the annual measurable objective), as it does not take into account the previous status of the school – for example, a low-achieving school could make dramatic improvement and still fall short of a fixed target.

## **4.3 Australia**

*Queensland, Balanced Score Card Approach*

### **What is Reported?**

In Queensland, Australia, the Department of Education Strategic Plan (2001 – 2005) (Queensland Government, Department of Education, n.d.) describes success as being based on three frames: alignment, performance and relationships. It goes on to say that 'the three frames are interrelated through effective relationships driving superior performance across the four quadrants of the Balanced Report Card'. It also states

that each school will choose its own means of meeting the Department's objectives and outcomes.

The Department has adopted a Balanced Scorecard-type approach as a measure of school effectiveness. It is suggested that schools 'increasingly viewed as small businesses, now compete for market share and have moved to employ business-type strategies to enhance operations' (Bishop and Limerick, 2006).

Education Queensland (the overarching name given to the state school system in Queensland) has introduced a Balanced Report Card which all schools must report against. This approach breaks performance down into four areas:

- financial delivery and performance (measures: enrolment trends, student participation and portfolio relationships);
- stakeholder relationships (measures: student completion of year 12, student achievement and student destination);
- schools, teaching and learning (measures: learning framework, learning environments and school services);
- learning and development (measures: workforce capability and continuous process improvement).

Performance against these measures will *'provide the basis for dialogue and negotiation between teachers, parents and students about future directions and priorities for the school'*.

Education Queensland also states a number of priorities relating to social and environmental issues.

- Skilling Queensland;
- More jobs for Queenslanders;
- Better quality of life;
- Building Queensland's regions;
- Safer and more supportive communities;
- Valuing the environment.

Bishop and Limerick (2006) relate this to the triple bottom line accountability and sustainability frameworks also originating in business<sup>3</sup>. Targets relating to each of these areas relating to education are also included in the Department's Strategic Plan.

### **How is it reported?**

It is not clear how the information is reported in Queensland, or whether the information is publicly available, although the suggestion that the outcomes will inform discussion with parents and pupils suggests it is. However, the Department of Education published 'Changes to Schools Reporting' in 2004 (Queensland Government, Department of Education and the Arts, 2004) which details what schools should report to parents and does not mention the Balanced Report Card.

In addition to the information provided above, the 2004 report does suggest that other information about schools including: curriculum taught, opportunities for parental involvement and extra-curricular activities, will be published alongside summary outcomes of performance in literacy and numeracy tests and retention rates.

### **How often is it Reported?**

It is expected that all schools will have a vision statement, based on local needs. The BRC provides a structure for aligning this vision with actions. However, it is not clear how individual schools publish their BRC.

### **Criticisms**

Bishop and Limerick (2006) criticise the BSC approach, saying that many of the measures 'defy accurate quantitative or qualitative measurement'. They also comment that the approaches mean that the strategic planning is 'top-down'.

*Victoria, Student Report Cards*

### **What is Reported?**

A different perspective is gained by reviewing the **Student** Report Cards in use in Victoria. In Victoria, new Essential Learning Standards were introduced in 2006 (Victoria Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2006). The new standards detail what should be learnt from Prep to year 10. The Standards describe six levels through which students will progress in the different areas of learning. Schools began

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<sup>3</sup> Described in Bishop and Limerick (2006), this is an approach developed by Elkington (1997a) in which the financial (or first) bottom line is supplemented with a second bottom line based on environmental factors and a third bottom line focussing on social factors (Elkington, J. (1997a). 'The Triple Bottom Line – sustainability's accountants.' In: Capstone (Ed). *Cannibals with Forks: the Triple Bottom Line of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Business* (pp. 64 – 96). Oxford: Capstone Publishing.

reporting to parents at least in English and mathematics against the Standards from 2006, with other subjects being added later. The Standards, and therefore the reporting, include the traditional subject areas: English, mathematics, science, the humanities (economics, geography, history), languages and the arts. They also include new areas: physical, personal and social learning (health and physical education, interpersonal development, personal learning, civics and citizenship) and interdisciplinary learning (communication, design, creativity and technology, ICT and thinking processes). Assessment of achievement in each of the areas is based on performance on a range of tasks, as judged by the teacher.

### **How is it Reported?**

Student reports include a grade from A to E (C indicates that the student is at the expected level, A indicates they are well above the expected level, E indicates they are well below the expected level), with comments on achievement in relation to the standards.

### **How often is it Reported?**

The Report Card is issued twice a year and supported by parent evenings.

### **Criticisms**

Only the information on the government public website was located and no criticisms were included.

## **4.4 Canada**

[Information is taken from the Fraser Institute  
<http://www.fraserinstitute.org/reportcards/>]

### **What is Reported?**

School performance in Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec is reported (Fraser Institute, 2008). (They also provide reports on hospital performance on the same website.) The reports provide information about the academic performance of the schools using publicly available data. In the frequently asked questions on the site they recommend that this information be supplemented by '*visits to the school and discussions with administrators, teachers, support staff, their child and other parents*'. Performance is reported over time so that it is possible to spot trends. It is suggested that this provides a more 'valid' picture of how the school has performed and how it might perform in the future.

Performance is reported on a set of 'indicators'. These vary by state and the following list and additional measures are taken from the Alberta reports:

- average achievement-test marks (percent) in grade-3 language arts;
- average achievement-test marks (percent) in grade-3 mathematics;
- average achievement-test marks (percent) in grade-6 language arts;
- average achievement-test marks (percent) in grade-6 mathematics;
- the percentage of achievement tests in (1) to (4) where the results were below the acceptable standard;
- the difference between male and female students in their average achievement test mark in grade-6 language arts;
- the difference between male and female students in their average achievement test mark in grade-6 mathematics.

An overall rating out of 10 is also provided for each school. This rating is produced by standardising the scores from each of the indicators, combining them and then converting this to a score out of 10. Each of the indicators is given equal weighting.

A number of other indicators are included on the Report Card but not in the overall score. These include:

- the percentage of possible tests which were not completed for whatever reason, such as absence;
- statistically different performance over time (five years);
- a socio-economic indicator based on parents' average income;
- student characteristics in terms of percentage of pupils on French immersion programs, with English as a Second Language or with special educational needs;
- value added measures which give the results of a regression analysis aiming to determine how much of the seen effects are due to school inputs rather than pupil characteristics.

There is a great deal of overlap between what is reported in the different territories, for example in Ontario the Alberta seven variables are used, although the language arts measures of percentage achievement are divided into reading and writing, resulting in two additional measures. The same additional measures are given, although without the detail of student characteristics in Ontario as they are for Alberta. Similar variations are seen across the other reports provided on the website.

Wider measures such as citizenship skills are not included because reliable data is not available. It is stated that such measures would be included if the data became available.

### **How is it Reported?**

The Fraser Institute, an independent research organisation based in Canada, produces Report Cards on the performance of primary and secondary schools. They state on their website that this is so that parents can make more informed choices and so that school staff can make improvements. It is not clear where the funding for this comes from.

School results are reported relative to other schools, rather than against a fixed standard. This means that a school has to be improving more quickly than other schools to get a good result.

Reports are published on the Fraser Institute website.

### **How often is it Reported?**

Reports are produced each year based on the latest results released by the Ministry of Education.

### **Criticisms**

The information is taken from the Fraser Institute website and no criticisms were included.

## **4.5 India**

A system for reporting using School Report Cards has been in place in India since 1995 (District Information System for Education, 2001). The National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration is responsible for the reporting, and financial support was provided by UNICEF during the set up stages. The District Information System for Schools provides a simple web interface that can be used to search for any named school to see their results against a number of different measures. The website suggests it is currently being revised to include the following measures:

- Schools by Type of Boundary Wall;
- Schools by Source of Drinking Water;
- Furniture for Teachers and Students and Availability of Kitchen Shed in the School;
- Enrolment by Minority;
- Distribution of Children by Multiple Disabilities;
- Examination Results of SC and ST Students etc.

These measures are of interest in that a number are very different to what would be appropriate in the English education context. This clearly demonstrates the need for measures to be designed to meet the needs of a specific context.

## 5 Discussion

The general articles discussed above, and the country-specific examples, raise a number of issues that need to be considered if School Report Cards are to be introduced in England.

1. Perhaps of particular interest are the very few examples of School Report Cards that have been found in use. Searches of literature and the web turned up only a limited number of examples. Karathanos and Karathanos (2005) describe the 'dearth' of research literature related to using a Balanced Scorecard approach in schools. This may be of concern because it is difficult to assess what unintended consequences could arise with so little evidence to inform the introduction. A word of warning is sounded in a number of articles. Even by providing a broader measure will this really reflect the performance of good schools? Is school performance made up of things that can be measured? This lack of reliable evidence and existence of some concerns may suggest that a pilot period will be of use when introducing a School Report Card in England.
2. In the literature and examples that were found there seems to be support for the use of broader measures against which to judge schools (although as we were specifically looking for cases when this approach is used this may not be surprising). A key point from the BSC examples would seem to be that some of these measures will be lagging measures, ie reporting on things that have happened in the past, and others will be measures of how the school is set up to improve and develop in the future. Although Bishop and Limerick (2006) suggest that these measures are difficult to quantify, it may be a useful approach to consider. Although there is some variety in the features included the following seem to be worth considering: test results, measures of emotional and physical well-being, teacher learning, leadership, pupil characteristics, value added measures, and stakeholder and community views.
3. There seems to be a consensus in the view that academic achievement ought to be one of the measures, and Linn emphasises that this should use the outcomes of some form of standardised assessment system to allow fair comparisons to be made. Following on from this, it will be important in England given the high stakes nature of the accountability system, for a School Report Card to be made up of the measures which are assessed consistently across schools, and in a way that is as reliable as possible for the given measure. Findings from the DCSF research with parents suggest they endorse this view (Counterpoint Research, 2009).
4. Related to point 2 and the use of predictive measures, a number of examples highlight the use of trend data as a more effective means of judging where a school is and where it is going, as compared to a single snapshot in time. It is suggested that the trend data may be less affected by pupil background than

achievement and therefore it is likely to be a fairer measure (although Kramarz *et al.*, 2009 would suggest that both are more an effect of pupil characteristics than school effects). A measure of ‘direction of travel’ may be useful in a School Report Card for England.

5. A key aspect highlighted in a number of the articles is the importance of carefully agreeing the audience for the Report Card, what they would be most interested in, and how it should be reported. In the work that the DCSF has been doing with parents it would seem that their views are being carefully considered (Counterpoint Research, 2009, TNS Research, 2008).
6. Perhaps more difficult than agreeing the audience is reaching an agreement about the purpose of the education system, and therefore the exact features to include in the Report Card. Related to this is the purpose of the Report Card itself. Jones (2004) suggests these should be:
  - to ‘serve to improve student learning and school practices and to ensure equity and access, not to reward or punish schools’;
  - to ‘provide guidance and information for local decision making, not classify schools as successes or failures’;
  - to reflect a democratic approach, including a balance of responsibility and power among different levels of government’

These appear to be a useful starting point.

7. Another factor that is raised as providing useful information is details of the performance of subsets of pupils. It is felt that this can give a measure of equity and fairness of a school which is not available for whole group data.
8. In Canada, a number of different features are combined to provide an overall measure of school performance. Each of the features is given equal weighting. In this example, the overall measure does not take into account the less academic indicators, which raises the question of how much value is then placed on these measures. Unfortunately, no critique or stakeholder views of the system were found during this review to evaluate this. In New York, different weightings are given to different features when arriving at the overall grade. With reference to the English context, decisions will need to be made about the use of an overall grade, the relative weightings of the measures that make up that grade, and whether any additional measures will be included in the Reports.
9. The Indian example, perhaps, shows most clearly how the features included in the School Report Card should be tailored to a particular context. Jones goes further by arguing that within a single country (in his case the US) a single approach is not valid (because it will not reflect the diversity of contexts) and some of the measures should be localised. Perhaps it would be appropriate for

local authorities, or even for individual schools, to be able to select a number of measures that they would like to include in their Reports, in addition to a number of compulsory measures. These could be taken from an optional list, providing details of how the measures should be calculated, if it were felt that this would give fairer results.

## 6 Appendix 1

### Search Strategy

A range of different educational databases were searched to identify research on the use of Report Cards in other countries. Search strategies for all databases were developed by using terms from the relevant thesauri (where these were available), in combination with free text searching. The same search strategies were adhered to as far as possible for all the databases.

The keywords used in the searches, together with a brief description of each of the databases searched, are outlined below. Throughout, \$ has been used to indicate truncation of terms, and (ft) to denote free-text search terms. The searches were defined by the following criteria:

- Material published between 2000 and 2009
- Covering the age range 5 to 19
- Research carried out internationally and written in English

### Australian Education Index (AEI)

AEI is produced by the Australian Council for Educational Research. It is an index to materials at all levels of education and related fields. Source documents include journal articles, monographs, research reports, theses, conference papers, legislation, parliamentary debates and newspaper articles.

- #1 School report card\$ (ft)
- #2 School progress report\$ (ft)
- #3 End of year report\$ (ft)
- #4 Balanced scorecard (ft)
- #5 #1 or #2 or #3 or #4
- #6 Test results
- #7 Test scores
- #8 Examination results (ft)
- #9 School accountability (ft)
- #10 School performance (ft)
- #11 Pupil progress (ft)
- #12 Pupil attainment
- #13 #6 or #7 or #8 or #9 or #10 or #11 or #12

- #14 Reports
- #15 Reporting
- #16 Evidence (ft)
- #17 #14 or #15 or #16
- #18 #13 and #17

### **British Education Index (BEI)**

BEI provides bibliographic references to 350 British and selected European English-language periodicals in the field of education and training, plus developing coverage of national report and conference literature.

- #1 School report card\$ (ft)
- #2 School progress report\$ (ft)
- #3 End of year report\$ (ft)
- #4 Balanced scorecard (ft)
- #5 #1 or #2 or #3 or #4
- #6 Test results
- #7 Test scores (ft)
- #8 Examination results
- #9 School accountability (ft)
- #10 School performance (ft)
- #11 Pupil progress (ft)
- #12 Pupil attainment (ft)
- #13 #6 or #7 or #8 or #9 or #10 or #11 or #12
- #14 Reports
- #15 Reporting (ft)
- #16 Evidence
- #17 #14 or #15 or #16
- #18 #13 and #17

### **The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)**

ERIC is sponsored by the United States Department of Education and is the largest education database in the world. It indexes over 725 periodicals and currently contains more than 7,000,000 records. Coverage includes research documents,

journal articles, technical reports, program descriptions and evaluations and curricula material.

- #1 School report card\$ (ft)
- #2 School progress report\$ (ft)
- #3 End of year report\$ (ft)
- #4 Balanced scorecard (ft)
- #5 #1 or #2 or #3 or #4
- #6 Test results
- #7 Test scores
- #8 Examination results (ft)
- #9 School accountability (ft)
- #10 School performance (ft)
- #11 Pupil progress (ft)
- #12 Pupil attainment (ft)
- #13 #6 or #7 or #8 or #9 or #10 or #11 or #12
- #14 Reports
- #15 Reporting
- #16 Evidence
- #17 #14 or #15 or #16
- #18 #13 and #17

### **PsycInfo**

This is an international database containing citations and summaries of journal articles, book chapters, book and technical reports, as well as citations to dissertations in the field of psychology and psychological aspects of related disciplines, such as medicine, sociology and education.

- #1 School report card (ft)
- #2 School progress report (ft)
- #3 End of year report (ft)
- #4 Balanced scorecard (ft)

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