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A Stage-by-Stage Guide to Understanding Report Cards

Early years—*Kindergarten Through Grade Two*

From the ages of five onwards, children are learning to adjust to an academic setting. Report cards tend to report on student's behavioral and social progress, such as how they are getting along with their peers, and whether they can stay focused on a task.

Academically, young children are being introduced to the basic skills that they will use to build all future learning upon. Reading progression is a critical during the early years. Students should be continually meeting, if not exceeding the reading progression standards.

While young students may have their entire academic future ahead of them, poor report cards could mean potential problems in the long run. If issues are cropping up time and again, parents should consider getting extra help for their child so that the issue doesn't become a major learning roadblock.

Children are changing greatly during the early years, and what was a problem today, may not be a problem tomorrow. Even if a particular area might be of concern, parents should watch for incremental improvement from one report card to the next. Always discuss report cards with the teacher, who can give a better picture of a child's progress.

Each report card marks a milestone of achievement. Just because a child is underperforming on one report card, does not mean that there won't be significant improvement by the next report card.

Middle years—*Grades Three to Eight*

The middle years of school are all about progress markers. While the early years focus on behavior and development, the middle years are very important academically. Children are introduced to increasingly difficult academic skills and their ability to learn these foundational skills is very much the focus of report cards.

Low grades on report card, while problematic, are not as much of a cause for concern as grades that are dropping. Consistency is key on report cards during the middle years; children should not be going down in grade points.

At this stage, the emotional impact of report cards becomes an issue. Worry about grades can cause stress among children and parents alike. Parents can offer incentives to students to help increase their study time, or learn to ask for help in order to maintain grades.

When poor grades are present on multiple report cards, parents should consider it a red flag and seek help before the problem becomes a major issue.

Teen Years—*High School*

In high school, report cards are the biggest indicator of academic performance and progression. The first report of the school year is a warning flag—if there are issues, students should get help as soon as possible. There is plenty of time for students to improve grades before the second and final report cards.

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In high school, students' grades should reflect their short and long-term goals in life. Students need to consider the long-term outcomes of what their grades will mean to them based on what their future goals are.

The pressure is on; students are moving quickly on the fast track towards higher education, and every grade counts. Students should seek extra help as soon as they realize that they need extra support, whether in a particular subject, or in study or homework skills. The sooner that students get the support that they need, the less stressful that report cards become.