



From: Adam Larsen, Assistant Superintendent

To: Board of Education

Cc: Thomas Mahoney, Superintendent

Re: February 2020 Board Report

Online Report Cards

In the Fall of 2019, all three buildings moved to online-only report cards. These report cards were developed for several reasons. At the elementary level, standards-based grading presents some unique challenges that can be solved through a more flexible template.

One challenge is that grade levels have differing numbers of priority standards, which makes it difficult to develop a consistent look and feel across the grades. The consistency is important in conveying a logical, orderly progression to students and parents through learning targets and standards.

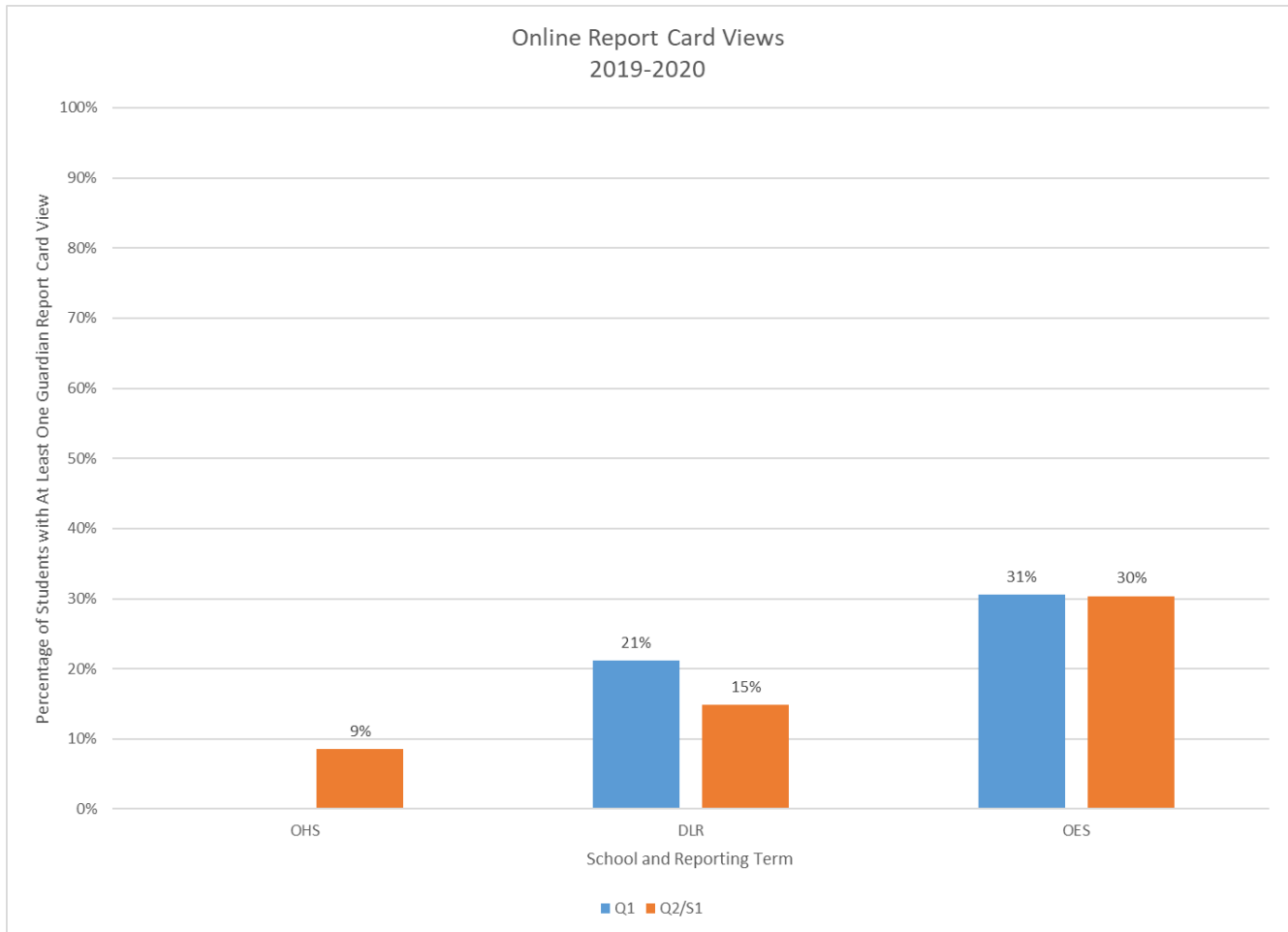
Another challenge is that in some of these grade levels, there are enough priority standards to fill more than a single page. Historically, our solution to the length problem had been to limit the number of standards reported to ones at a less-specific level of feedback. This has the unfortunate side effect of undoing one of the goals of standards-based grading, which is providing more specific feedback about student learning.

A third challenge of fixed-template report cards is that they do not accommodate very well the differences in student schedules. That is, students taking electives such as band or choir have a different course schedule and thus a different set of standards. Fixed templates must look the same for every student, so families receive report cards with courses and standards that do not apply to their student. It can be confusing to see Choir 6 on a report card when the student is not enrolled in choir.

Aside from the issues of standards-based grading, still more issues exist at the junior high and high school level. There is no guarantee that a paper report card will make it home, and the only way to ensure that it did is to have it signed and returned. There is also the cost associated with printing and distribution.

All of these concerns are resolved by moving to a flexible, web-based template. This allows each student to receive a different report card, the real estate on the page is essentially unlimited, and all grade levels can use a single template that is easy to maintain and update as needs change. The approach is not without its own issues, however. Guardians must log into the PowerSchool parent portal to see the report card, which takes an active step to access the data. While reminders have been sent home, there are forgotten passwords, confusion about where to go, and a lack of understanding about not receiving a paper report card. Another possible issue is that students may print out a copy of the report card and modify it before delivering it to parents. This possibility existed with paper copies as well, but with an electronic version, this can be done even more easily.

As we implemented online report cards this fall, we added a feature that would allow us to track parent/guardian views of the report card. Teachers were provided instructions on how to view these hits so they could reach out to their families about accessing the grade reports. After two quarters, the hit counters have been queried to obtain statistics on viewership. These results follow.



These views are certainly below what we had hoped to see. At OHS and DLR, there are a couple of explanations as to why these results might be even lower than at OES. At grades 7 and up, parents tend to be less engaged with this kind of information, perhaps with the expectation that their students might be more able to manager their own learning. An even simpler explanation is that parents can see the information on the report card from a different screen in the PowerSchool parent portal and even in the PowerSchool app. We cannot track screen views on the app, so that presents a serious threat to our data quality. The Quick Lookup screen in the web portal is not currently tracked, but it might be necessary to add a hit counter there to determine if this is where parents are obtaining their information at report card time

Taken together, it is clear that we need to do a better job of involving and reaching out to parents regarding accessing online report cards. If they are not seeing progress about student learning, then all of the other expected benefits are outweighed by the lack of use. We are already planning how to improve online access for Q3 at DLR and OES, including e-mailing digital copies of report cards directly to parents. We will continue to report out on usage statistics as the year unfolds.



1:1 Device Deployment Review

DLR Junior High is continuing to pilot the Chromebook devices during the 19-20 school year. At the end of the first semester, we held a meeting with the administrative and technology teams to determine what has gone well, what needs improvement, and how best to plan for a larger deployment of devices during 20-21.

Successes

We built a custom inventory management system for deploying and tracking devices. This has worked rather well so far. The distribution of Chromebooks went smoothly in August, and the tracking of devices that need repair, hot-swap, and replacement has been good. Our estimate of how many devices to have on hand for exchange with students appears to be on target at around 12%. Students seem to be coming to school with devices charged and ready for work. While teachers have indicated that they are concerned about students not charging devices overnight, this has gone pretty well.

Areas for Improvement

Through surveying teachers and through direct observation, it appears that teachers need more training about how best to use the devices in their classrooms. This is in no way unexpected. Having an individual computer for each student changes a lot about how the classroom operates, and it will take time for all parties to adapt. We will continue to provide training on how best to make use of student devices and how to bring about desirable outcomes for students. Specifically, we are looking to help teachers understand that 1:1 devices allow for complete transformation of learning activities into tasks that would not have been possible with pencil and paper. We have selected a model for framing these changes and will continue to work within this paradigm.

Teachers have also reported that they would like some help in monitoring student activity on their screens. We are currently piloting some software-based tools for this task. If it goes well at DLR during this second semester, we will likely purchase the software for all three buildings next year.

There also needs to be some convergence between homework expectations and procedures for sending devices home with students. At the grade levels where there is very little or no homework assigned, this should correspond to a policy of the devices staying at school overnight and over weekends. Where there is homework, this policy would shift to allow the devices at home. Currently, a districtwide policy on homework expectations is being developed in teacher team meetings. As this takes shape, our policy about devices will be brought in line with how homework is handled in each grade.

We also need to make some small adjustments in our process for collecting registration fees to ensure that parents who wish to purchase device insurance are able to do so easily while paying other fees. There was some confusion in Summer 2019 about how this worked, and we may have some parents who intended to purchase insurance who ultimately did not.

Overall, this pilot is going extremely well. We intend to take these lessons and extend them to the other buildings as the device rollout scales to other grades. It is a testament to our commitments to improve infrastructure that we have had no major outages or overloading of the wireless system, as well as smooth login and user experiences for our students. As we select and implement the learning management system (LMS), we know that our device selection and adoption process will converge nicely so that both rollouts can complement each other. We will likely be able to avoid the problems of having a learning platform with no devices or having student devices with no ability to push out content or collect feedback. After years of careful planning, the idea are coming together in a way that will best serve students and teachers in a digital ecosystem.



News – College and Universities Dropping Admissions Tests

In higher education, a trend is emerging where institutions are removing ACT and SAT scores from the admissions processes. The recent news cycle on this topic has been dominated by the announcement that NIU will no longer require these tests for admission. This is reportedly due to the disadvantages that students from impoverished backgrounds face when preparing and sitting for these exams. The intent in removing the requirements is to level the playing field for all students who wish to seek post-secondary education.

Despite the likelihood that this trend will continue to grow, the use of the SAT will continue in Illinois so long as it is a requirement of students as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) school improvement plan and accountability formula. During the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) years, the requirement in Illinois was to take the ACT during grade 11. It is unlikely that the SAT requirement will be removed from the ESSA plan anytime soon, so students will continue to take the test. What will be different is that students may elect not to send these scores to their desired college choice. Rather, the scores will be used solely to determine how well the school is doing in preparing students for college and career. This may present a motivation problem for students who will know that the score has little personal meaning. It will be interesting to see how this affects overall performance on the test.

<https://www.nprillinois.org/post/put-down-your-pencils-many-il-schools-join-test-optional-trend#stream/0>

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Adam P. Larsen'.

Adam P. Larsen
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