

## Vague school reporting not serving needs of students

A Jan. 16 Calgary Herald article described the frustration of Calgary Board of Education parents over vague reporting that leaves them unable to discern their children's actual competency in CBE school classrooms from grades K-9.

The 'new' reporting system for K-9 CBE students, used since fall 2014, does away with percentages and uses a sliding scale from 1-4 with 2 being 'performing at grade level'.

Jeanine Everett, CBE superintendent of learning, claimed, "You don't need a percentage to provide good information," and that "we can actually see now, if a group of kids in a certain grade and in a certain subject are, say, getting a lot of twos, we need to address that."

I would remind Everett that parents are not naive. Wouldn't it be just as easy for the school to identify concerns if a group of children were getting grades under 50 per cent, and "address that"?

Testing, personal percentages and class averages are the best way for parents and students to define how the student is faring in a class, and how well a teacher is teaching the material. To use testing and percentages is to return accountability to the classroom for both the student and the teacher.

If your child receives a 60 per cent in a math 9 class, and the class average is 75 per cent, then you know your child needs remedial support. If your child receives a 60 per cent in an Language Arts class, and the class average is 45 per cent, then you are asking the teacher some tough questions about what is going sideways in that class? And if your child gets a 98 per cent in a science class, and the class average is 89 per cent, then you are asking some questions about how such grade inflation is possible?

Could it be that testing and uncomfortable questions are what the CBE is trying to avoid with their new reporting system?

Defining the nuance of a student's success and failure in any class is only possible with testing and both a personal percentage and a class average upon which to compare the success or failure of your child.

Vague reporting protects teachers, schools, and school boards from hard questions when class averages don't add up. It also does a disservice to education, because when teachers, schools and school boards can't see what works, they can't improve their product.

Providing personal and class averages also allows good teachers, schools and school boards to shine, especially when improvements occur in schools that have a history of students with complex learning needs like a large portion of students with English as a

second language.

This is not just about top percentages, but about celebrating student success when a child improves a grade from 55 per cent to 75 per cent over a school year. This success from almost failing to almost honours is a significant differentiation that is lost in vague in reporting, removing the incentive to succeed.

Instead of the microscope of accountability, the CBE reporting system is a house of mirrors, leaving parents at a loss to define how their children are actually faring in school. Doing this might protect educators, schools and school boards from accountability and competition in the education marketplace, but this is at the expense of Alberta students, who are left in the dark about their own competencies. By high school remedial support is often too little, too late.

If our province cares about improving the outcomes of Alberta students, then all grade 7-12 classes should provide the testing and reporting clarity that only class and personal percentages can offer.

Parents for Choice in Education gives the CBE's 'new' reporting system a 1 out of 4 (doesn't meet expectations).

*Donna Trimble is Executive Director of Parents for Choice in Education ([www.ParentChoice.ca](http://www.ParentChoice.ca))*