

# Kindergarten Report Cards

Sooner than you'd expect, a big envelope will be headed your way with your child's [kindergarten](#) report card in it. In some cases, just the sheer size of that bulging envelope is a shock. As you tear open the package to find out if the teacher thinks your child is as wonderful as you do, you might think to yourself, "What *is* all this? Surely the report card itself is not six pages long!" In fact, it may be.

National standards for education have had a big effect on the way educators report a child's progress. While in the past, schools may have formatted their report cards based on what was important for parents to know and what they could understand, these days report cards are often formatted based on the level at which your child is meeting state standards. If you can't make heads or tails of the terminology in your child's report card, relax. Underneath all the mumbo-jumbo, report cards still contain all the important information, even if the format can seem overwhelming.

Kindergarten report cards are usually broken down into two major components: academic skills and social ones. Tammi Mackeben, National School Counselor of the Year for 2007, says that in the past, kindergarten was a year dedicated to learning how to be a student and gaining basic socialization skills. But the nationwide swing towards a more academic focus has led to a reorganization of kindergarten report cards. "Parents probably can expect a very different kindergarten report card than they had. Now instead of a basic covering of socialization skills, kindergarten report cards weigh heavily on letter-sound recognition and academics," Mackeben says.



Each state also has curriculum standards and competencies for kindergarten, and the report card will reflect those as well, Mackeben says. While every educational institution has a different way of presenting report cards, here are some tips that will help you decipher that progress report, when you find it in your mailbox:

1. **Familiarize yourself with the grading scale.** Is it letter grades? Numbers? A ten-point scale or a four-point one? Taking the time to know exactly what kind of system your child's teacher is using to grade him will save you time and frustration. Often, there are two different types of marks used for academic grades and "citizenship" (or social) grades. For example, a teacher may use numbers 1, 2, and 3 to show academic grades, but use S, G, and E (satisfactory, good, and excellent) for grading citizenship. Before you scan the results, look for a key at the top of the report card, so you'll understand the grading scale.
2. **Look at the headings.** On report cards that seem to go on forever, it may be tempting to only look at the lines that have grades on them. But on many report cards, each section contains a heading, followed by a set of specific skills and grades. For example, a kindergarten report card might have the heading "Math" followed by a subheading "Algebra and Functions," followed by a list of areas and grades for each, for example, "Sorting and Classifying Objects." Reading all of the headings, subheadings, and breakdowns can be incredibly helpful, especially in kindergarten, when parents may not have a clue what kindergarten algebra looks like! If you take note of the report card's organization structure, you'll see that sorting and classifying is considered algebra in kindergarten.
3. **Take it as a progress snapshot, rather than the final word.** Report cards are only one of the many tools parents can use to gauge how well their student is doing. Know that as the year goes on, your child's mastery of skills will likely wax and wane. Kindergarten presents some huge leaps for your learner. Understand that the report card is only a snapshot of where he is *right now*, not where he will be by the end of the year. If you look at your kindergartener as a work in progress, you can use the report card to figure out where he needs the most help—then do some [activities](#) at home to help him get where he needs to be.
4. **Read the teacher's comments.** With so many skills to be graded, the overall idea of the report card can be hard to grasp. Often what the teacher says in his or her comments gives a better feel for overall progress, rather than individual skills. According to Mackeben, "Teacher comments are probably the most important part of the kindergarten report card. A's or 4's are so general, but a comment is specific to your child."
5. **Have a conference with the teacher.** In many cases, there is a scheduled parent-teacher conference time after report cards are issued. If your child's teacher does not ask to have a conference with you, it's probably because she feels your child is right on target for that time of the year. If your child is doing well, but you still would like to discuss her report card, ask the teacher to schedule a conference with you. Remember that the goal of a report card is to inform you of your child's progress so that you can help her to succeed. If you need more direction for how to use the report card as a tool in your endeavor to help, ask the teacher.
6. **Use the report card as a tool for yourself, not for your child.** A report card doesn't hold a whole lot of meaning for kindergarten kids. At this point, Mackeben says, the motivation for doing well is not to get a good grade. Motivation comes from the excitement and pride in learning a new skill. For this reason, it's best not to discuss every grade on the report with your kindergartener. "Showing a kindergarten student a report card will probably mean very little to the child. It is a very abstract tool, and kindergarten students are very concrete thinkers. But it is important to discuss with the child the strengths and areas of growth in a very positive way." In other words, use the report card as a jumping-off point and keep pressure out of the picture.
7. **Give positive feedback.** While your kindergarten student doesn't need to know how she measured up in every subject, she does need to know that her performance is being evaluated. Praise your child for all her hard work, using specific examples to make the compliments more meaningful. Instead of saying, "You got a 4 on your report card, good for you!" Say, "Ms. Jones told me that you are an amazing reader!" If there are areas needing improvement, it's a good idea to discuss this with the teacher before discussing it with your child.
8. **Look for progress.** One of the most important aspects of measuring academic success is progress. After the second report card is issued, look for areas of growth and recognize your child's success. Even if a new grade is not quite where you'd like it to be, progress is what's key. If there are areas of the report card that show no improvement, talk to your child's teacher about expectations and what you can do to help.

When that first kindergarten report card rolls through your door, it's a chance to see your child's progress through his teacher's eyes. Savor these times, as the report cards only tend to get heavier—both in a physical sense and in their implications for your child. Communicate with the teacher, keep an eye on the big picture, and praise your child for her many successes. This is the first report card of many. There's plenty of time for improvement on the road ahead!