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A Marking and Reporting System for North Dakota High Schools

Harold C. Gulbrandson

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A MARKING AND REPORTING SYSTEM
FOR NORTH DAKOTA HIGH SCHOOLS

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota

Harold. ¹⁸³
By
H. C. Gulbrandson

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the
Degree of
Master of Science in Education

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This thesis, submitted by H. C. Gulbrandson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education at the University of North Dakota, is hereby approved by the Committee of Instruction under whom the work has been done.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study will be devoted to marking and reporting systems used in the high schools of North Dakota. An attempt will be made to discover to what extent the high schools follow the traditional type of marking and reporting systems and to what extent features of the modern ideas of marking and reporting systems have been adopted.

Traditional marking and reporting systems are generally thought of as being the A-B-C-D-F method of grading or an equivalent 5-point scale, using plus and minus in some cases.

During the past forty years there has been growing concern as to the adequacy of the traditional marking and reporting system. Many educators have pointed out the weaknesses and shortcomings of the 5-point scale, but so far progress has been very slow in coming about.

In summarizing progress to date, W. L. Wrinkle¹ states:

Most of the progress in the improvement of marking and reporting practices has been made in the elementary schools. There the emphasis is on what the subject matter can be made to do for boys and girls. In the secondary schools the emphasis is more on what students can do to subject matter. That is why progress in secondary schools in the improvement of marking and reporting practices has been limited, with some exceptions of course, to changing per cent grades to A-B-C-D-F grades plus perhaps the incidental checking of a list of personality characteristics, or conduct, or citizenship, all of which adds up to not much progress.

¹ W. L. Wrinkle, Improving Marking and Reporting Practices, Rinehart & Company, New York, 1950, Chapter 1, p. 4.

There are reasons to believe that the situation described by Wrinkle in the above paragraph exists in North Dakota. A later chapter will be devoted to the present status of marking and reporting systems used in the high schools in North Dakota.

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be considered in this thesis has two phases. They are:

1. What are the methods of marking and reporting used in North Dakota high schools?
2. What steps can be taken to bring about improvement in these marking and reporting systems?

The problem is by nature complex, involving many factors. It seems logical to assume at the beginning that no one perfect plan, adaptable to all schools can be designed. However, there are certain general principles that all schools could follow in laying out a program for their locality. The writer believes that these systems should have a certain amount of uniformity, with perhaps small deviations to adjust such a plan to the local needs.

So far most of the criticisms of our marking and reporting practices have come from within the profession. We still have the problem in our own back yard. This gives us the opportunity to attack the problem through our own initiative, not as the result of pressure from the general

public.

Need for the Study

In so far as can be determined, no similar study has been attempted in North Dakota in recent years. School administrators interested in marking and reporting practices have expressed a great deal of interest in a study of this type. One of the biggest handicaps to an administrator attempting change in marking and reporting practices in North Dakota would be the lack of information available concerning current practices in our state, and the question as to where to look for guidance. One of the principal sources of information is the Administrator's Handbook.² This publication of the State Department of Public Instruction is prepared and issued to assist the administrator with a wide variety of school problems.

The entire section on marking and reporting systems consists of showing the conventional A-B-C-D-F system, the percentage equivalents, and a statement that this system together with a few character traits to be checked by the teacher is recommended by the County Superintendents of North Dakota. No statement is made as to whether this system is recommended for the elementary school or the secondary school, or both.

² Administrator's Handbook for North Dakota High Schools, prepared and issued under the direction of the Department of Public Instruction, Bismarck, North Dakota, 1953.

An administrator feeling the need for a change of marking and reporting systems in his school should find the survey made and the bibliography listed very helpful. The recommendations to be made in the last chapter will not be accepted by all, but they may serve the purpose of stimulating efforts to improve upon them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to show that a marking and reporting system must be constructed on sound principles. It must have a definite purpose, based on the objectives of the school. Every school should develop a marking and reporting policy in light of these objectives. The clearer and more concise these objectives are, the simpler the task of giving grades, and the more easily these grades will be understood. The marking and reporting policy should explain the general philosophy of the system, making the assigning of marks much easier and meaningful for the classroom teacher. The policy should tell clearly what basis should be used in determining marks. It is deciding just what factors determine a mark that there appears to be the greatest variation among teachers. If this can be tied down to a few specific factors, the marking system will have more effectiveness and be less vulnerable to the usual criticisms. It will also give a much needed uniformity within a school, and if marking policies could be set up on a state-wide basis, we would have more

uniformity between schools.

Review of Literature

The amount of literature available on the subject appears to be nearly unlimited. Most of the leading professional publications regularly publish articles by educators who have done experimental work with marking and reporting practices. The results are varied, supporting the contention that the problem should be attacked on a local level. Statements are made as the result of an experiment and in many cases opposite results are indicated by other studies. For example, Wrinkle³ contends that one of the fallacies in the A-B-C-D-F system is that most people believe the success of a student in after-school life compares favorably with his success in school. He supports his point by contending that people in life are compared only to those in their own group. That is, the success of a teacher is rated on comparing one teacher to another teacher, not a teacher compared to grocery clerks, lawyers or dentists. In direct opposition to this thinking is a survey by Leech⁴ in which a survey of several graduating classes of a Nebraska high school was made. The findings indicated very definitely that there was a strong correlation between scholarship in high school and success in later life.

³ Op. cit., p. 46.

⁴ Leech, Don R. Scholarship and Success in Life, School Review 38 (March 1940) pp 222-226.

Perhaps one of the most recent and complete works on the topic is Wrinkle's⁵ book, "Improving Marking and Reporting Practices." William L. Wrinkle was for many years Director of College High School at the Colorado State College of Education at Greeley, Colorado. At the present time Mr. Wrinkle is Chief Educational Adviser to the Government of Ethiopia. He reviews the experiments tried at the Campus-Research School since 1929. By his own admission they made every mistake in the book. They developed and discarded such devices as report forms, check lists, juggled symbols, informal letter reports, teacher-parent conferences, cumulative records, student self-evaluations and numerous other devices. After ten years of trying to find a successful method of reporting grades to parents, they came to the conclusion that reporting practices are closely related to the objectives of the school. They had to know clearly what the school was trying to do before they could report on how well the student was accomplishing these objectives.

It is recommended that any administrator contemplating any deviation from the conventional A-B-C-D-F system read this book. Perhaps they tried the very thing he is about to try. It would be of value to know what the results were and why the system was discarded. A reader must keep in mind that Wrinkle's book tells of experimentation done in a laboratory school, not in a public school.

⁵ Op. Cit.

Almost every textbook in the Guidance field devotes space to discussion of the problem of adequate marking and reporting systems. Their principal concern seems to be that the report card should serve as a device to promote cordiality and mutual understanding between the school and the home. Guidance experts feel that this is essential to an adequate guidance program.

One of the first studies made concerning the reliability of school marks dates back to 1912, when a series of studies were made by Starch and Elliot.⁶ Since that time a multitude of similar studies have been made and reported on in various professional publications.

There is a wealth of literature available on most every possible phase of marking and reporting systems. No attempt will be made to review even a fractional part of all that has been written. Reference will be made to lend support to various statements and beliefs. A more complete, selected bibliography is presented in a later chapter.

Delimitation

Our primary concern is how to bring about an improved marking and reporting system that will satisfy the needs of the high schools of North Dakota. Endless materials are available which discuss the pro and con of various systems

⁶ Starch, Daniel and Elliot, E. C., The Reliability of Grading High School Work in English, School Review XX Sept., 1912, pp. 442-457.

both in general use and being tried on an experimental basis. Many theoretical generalizations are arrived at, usually stated in professional terminology, the actual meaning of which often eludes the average person. Some theory must be considered, but every effort will be made to present only the practical applications of these theories. Methods of approach to the problem will be presented with the schools of North Dakota in mind. Here briefly is the scope of the study:

1. To determine what marking and reporting systems are actually being used in North Dakota.
2. To evaluate these systems in the light of current and generally accepted standards.
3. To determine what can be done to make our methods adequate and more effective.
4. To recommend actual procedures for use by North Dakota high schools in improving their marking and reporting practices.

Procedures

Much of the data for this thesis was secured by a survey conducted in the fully accredited high schools of the state. The survey was made to determine the marking and reporting systems being used in North Dakota. The systems used will be examined closely and recommendations will be made on the basis of the results of the survey. In addition to the survey, which was conducted by mail, information was gathered by personal contact with capable school administrators in North Dakota. It is hoped that the survey made together with

personal conferences with administrators will give a complete picture of marking and reporting systems as used in North Dakota high schools today.

Many school men feel that the State Department of Public Instruction should take a more active part in directing marking and reporting practices in North Dakota. Contact was made by letter with Mr. Richard K. Klein, Director of Secondary Education, to determine what the thinking of his department is on the place of the State Department of Public Instruction in making marking and reporting policies for high schools.

It will be of great help to us in North Dakota to find out what procedures are followed in other states in setting marking and reporting practices. Several state departments were selected to receive a short questionnaire. They were: Minnesota, South Dakota, Montana, Nevada, Utah, Ohio, New York, California, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Oregon, and Arizona. These states were selected with the idea of trying to get a good cross-section of our nation's schools. These replies should give a good deal of information as to the part the state department does and should play in determining marking and reporting policies.

In addition to the surveys conducted, information was secured from books and articles listed in the bibliography, and was used to help interpret the findings of the surveys.

All these procedures described have been to gather

information. This information will be tabulated and arranged for clarity. The interpretation of data, conclusions and recommendations will be made on the basis of the data presented and on the background obtained by reading research.

CHAPTER II
FALLACIES OF CONVENTIONAL MARKING
AND REPORTING SYSTEMS

Just how important is the problem of providing adequate marking and reporting systems? When compared to other problems facing schools such as the shortage of classrooms, shortage of adequately trained teachers, and general lack of funds, it may seem that the problem presented here is secondary. However, the more acute problems generally are given more attention because of their critical nature. The problems of adequate classrooms and enough teachers are being considered very earnestly by legislatures, civic and social organizations throughout the land.

Our problem here is one that will most likely be of concern to the profession alone for some time to come. Very few instances can be found where the public has demanded that a school system change from the conventional A-B-C-D-F system of marking and reporting to one that will do a better job. Surprisingly enough, most school administrators do not seem to believe that too much of a problem exists. We can draw this conclusion very easily. If administrators were not satisfied, there would be more experimentation with marking systems. Most of the schools would not be using the A-B-C-D-F system if the schools felt it were not doing a good enough job. Perhaps in many cases it is a complacency rather than satisfaction that

perpetuates conventional practices. This attitude of contentment can be understood, however. Most of the school administrators are busy trying to deal with the more elementary problems of properly running a school. Perhaps, too, many of them feel that some day they would really like to look into the marking and reporting system, when they get the time. So, the probable reason why progress has been so slow in coming about in this field is that there are too many more pressing demands on an administrators time.

It is altogether possible too that many school administrators have never given very serious consideration to the contentions of the critics of our conventional marking and reporting systems. Assuming that this could be true, an effort will be made to discuss some of these supposed fallacies in this chapter.

Before we discuss how well conventional marks do what they are supposed to do, we have to know what they are supposed to do. What are the functions of marking and reporting? Wrinkle lists four functions of a mark. They are:

1. The administrative function.

Marks indicate whether a student has passed or failed, whether he should be promoted or required to repeat the grade or course, and whether he should be graduated. They are used in transferring a student from one school to another and in judging candidates for admission to college. They may be used by employers in evaluating prospective employees.

2. Guidance functions.

Marks are used in guidance and counseling in identifying areas of special ability and inability, in deciding on the advisability of enrolling the student in certain courses and keeping him out of others, and in determining the number of courses in which he may be enrolled.

3. Information functions.

Marks are the chief means employed by the school in giving information to students and their parents regarding the student's achievement, progress, and success or failure in his schoolwork.

4. Motivation and discipline functions.

Marks are used to stimulate students to make greater effort in their learning activities. They are used for the same purpose in determining eligibility to honors of many different kinds such as participation in school activities, eligibility to play on the team, membership in selected groups, the winning of a scholarship, etc.

The conclusion can be drawn from reading the foregoing that marks must be wonderful things, they must be to do all these things. The question is, do they do these things?

Wrinkle⁷ also lists six fallacies in the use of A-B-C-D-F marks. These are six statements that a great many persons feel are correct. Here is the list, with a brief summary of why he believes these commonly accepted beliefs are not correct:

I. The mark is an effective conveyor of information.

It is very likely that the teacher who assigns the grade has reasons why she gave that mark. But, does the grade show the reasons? No one can be sure what the mark means unless it represents the measurement of a single identified value.

⁷ Op. cit., pp. 31-32.

An interesting experiment was conducted by Bolmeier⁸ in showing the extent to which marks have common meaning. Twenty-four officials of a city PTA council took part in an experiment to demonstrate the unreliability of A-B-C-D-F marks. Each PTA official was given a sheet on which appeared statements of six typical high school cases. They were asked to assign an A-B-C-D-F mark in each case. It is interesting to see the wide range of marks the officials gave.

Other factors that would indicate that grades do not effectively convey information are these:

- A. Does a B in one school mean the same as a B in another school?

An interesting study to support the contention that the answer to the question above is no, is one by Dr. Walter Crosly Eells.⁹ In a testing program conducted in eleven schools there were indications that in extreme cases an A in one school could very easily be an F in another.

- B. Within the same school and within the same course, is a B in one class comparable to a B in another class?
- C. How accurately do marks represent the actual achievement of students in academic courses?

II. Anyone can achieve any mark he wishes if he is willing to make the necessary effort.

- A. Marks should be awarded on how well the student works up to his level of ability, not on how he compares in achievement to the rest of his class.

⁸ Bolmeier, E. C., What's in a Mark? School Executive, 62 (May 1943) p. 25.

⁹ Eells, Walter Crosley, The Scholastic Ability of Secondary School Pupils. Educational Record, Volume 18, January, 1937.

III. The students success in after-school life compares favorably with his school success.

- A. The fallacy here is that in life the individual is not compared with all other people. The teacher is compared with other teachers, not with grocery clerks, etc.

IV. The mark is rightly comparable to a pay-check.

- A. If the student cannot be stimulated to apply himself without the inducement of pay-check compensation, it is probable that the activity is either inappropriate to his needs or has been so presented that he does not recognize its appropriateness.

V. Marking practices provide a justifiable introduction to competitive adult life.

- A. Cooperation should be given greater emphasis rather than competition through promotion of cooperative activities, cooperative planning, cooperative evaluation, and in many other ways.

VI. The mark can be used as a means without its eventually becoming an end in itself.

- A. The emphasis given to marks by most teachers in most schools tends ultimately to convince the student that the mark, rather than what it is supposed to represent, is the important outcome of learning.

Wrinkle's objections to the A-B-C-D-F system of grading are very similar to those of Bossing.¹⁰ Here are some of the criticisms he makes:

1. Foremost among objections leveled at traditional school marks is that they are based too narrowly upon informational or factual acquisition. Education represents more than the amassing of information.

¹⁰ Bossing, Nelson L., Progressive Methods of Teaching In Secondary Schools, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 1942, Chapter XX, pp. 755,764.

2. Too frequently marks do not represent the actual achievement of the student but become an index of relational speed between the members of the group tested. Possibly a more serious by product of such marking schemes is the terrific nervous strain placed upon the students.
3. The five point type of scale has in itself little meaning. What does an A in English mean? Does it imply complete achievement? Does it mean that a student getting an A has complete knowledge of the subject? The grade tells us little for we do not know whether the class was above or below average.

The following paragraph by Bossing states very well just what the philosophy of marking and reporting should be in the modern school. It deals with the whole development of the individual.

A marking system should reflect an inclusive evaluation plan so effectively devised that it will reveal broadly the degree of social-citizenship development of the student in general and with respect to important aspects of social-civic orientation. Such a marking system should give due consideration to acceptable patterns of behavior, individual ability and background of opportunity, and the degree of effective orientation that should be expected at various maturity levels. School marks of this kind will be individual, not comparative, based upon definite if somewhat broad standards, and only slightly relative.

In a general review of what efforts have been made to develop a marking system that is in harmony with a modern philosophy of education, Bossing places these efforts in three groups. They are:

1. Marks are given, but with reference only to actual achievement of the individual equated in terms of his ability to achieve.

2. The check-list. A general estimate of the pupil's work based upon his total reaction in the school in terms of a number of qualities assumed to characterize the good citizen in a democratic society.
3. The informal written report and teacher-parent conferences. Usually in this type grades or evaluative marks are abandoned. An effort is made to indicate descriptively aspects of progress made in all phases of personal development within the school. Various devices are employed to collect data, such as: achievement graphs, anecdotal records, logs, case histories, student self-evaluation reports, general impressions and so forth.

These three general types of marking and reporting systems include most of the current thinking on the topic. Wrinkle describes the actual experiences they had with all three of these types, and will be referred to later when recommendations are made as to where we could possibly begin a program of improvement in our schools in North Dakota.

People active in the Guidance field continually express concern over our marking and reporting practices, as one of the basic tools of guidance is an understanding of the school progress of the pupil. One of the recognized leaders in the field of guidance is Arthur E. Traxler. In his book "Techniques of Guidance"¹¹ he states:

Reports to the home are a major technique in the functioning of a program of individual guidance. Traxler lists a

¹¹ Traxler, Arthur E., Techniques of Guidance, Harpers and Brothers, Publishers, New York, 1945, Chapter XIII, pp 235-283.

rather interesting and comprehensive group of trends in forms for reports to parents. They are:

1. There is a growing dissatisfaction with systems of marking that encourage the comparison of pupils with one another.
2. There has been a trend in report cards away from percentage marking toward a scale with fewer points.
3. There is a widespread tendency for report cards to include an evaluation of traits other than subject matter achievement alone.
4. There is a clear tendency to use descriptive rather than quantitative reports.
5. In some schools, formal reports are being replaced by notes or letters to parents.
6. Noteworthy attempts are made in some of the more recent report cards to analyze and diagnose a pupil's achievement in terms of the objectives of the school.
7. Report cards are being sent at less frequent intervals and in some cases only when there is specific occasion for communication with the home.
8. Attendance continues to be an important item on report cards.
9. Parents are being asked to cooperate in building report cards and also to take part in plans of reciprocal reporting.
10. In some schools, pupils are cooperating in devising report cards and in evaluating their own achievement.

An unidentified educational speaker is credited with the following: "The school with its formal, lifeless curriculum and its poor teaching methods has got into such a fix that a marking system had to be invented to make pupils work." This

is a somewhat subtle attempt at humor, but all too often it is not far from the truth.

The whole problem of adequate marking and reporting practices are of necessity closely related to theories of education and learning. Burton¹² classifies theories of education into two groups. They are:

1. Seeing education as the mastery of designated segments of subject matter. The segments are arranged in a series of grade levels. Marks are assigned on the basis of teacher judgment as to how well the materials have been retained.
2. Seeing education as the progressive development of the personal-social-moral traits, understandings, abilities, of the learner. Marks, if given at all, are usually accompanied by descriptions of the pupil's actual achievement of functional learning outcomes.

It is Burton's belief that the second of these theories is the ideal situation, but that we must learn to live with the other. In speaking of marking systems he states, "Teachers need to know how to operate a fundamentally unsound device as sensibly as possible."

This has been a general summary of what leading educators are thinking and writing about our marking and reporting practices. This is by no means meant to be any semblance of a complete list of authors or materials written on the topic. Almost every summary of research on this subject made the statement that the amount of materials written is practically unlimited.

¹² Burton, Wm. H., The Guidance of Learning Activities, D. Appelton-Century Co., New York, 1944, Chapter 19, pp. 479-513.

Most of the writing on marking and reporting practices can be placed in two main categories. They are:

1. Reports of the results of surveys and experimental projects. The results of these studies indicate generally the same things as pointed out in this chapter. However, there are many surveys reported on that indicate results contrary to the points presented here. The vast majority however, draw conclusions that support the weaknesses already described.
2. Textbooks written on some phase of education, or general principle of education. These texts usually devote some space to marking and reporting systems. They all state that while the prime objective of their text is not marking and reporting systems, it is so integral a part of the whole of education that its place must be noted and a brief general discussion is needed.

The second point above indicates again the importance qualified educators throughout the nation place on the topic. The more reading that is done, the more easily it can be seen that thinking generally crystallizes along certain lines. Most of all the other material available will fall into categories presented here.

While it may seem that there are many more critical problems to concern us in education, some attention should be given to marking and reporting practices. How long can we ignore these sincere, logical criticisms by leaders in the profession? Assuming that our critics are only partly right, the problem still remains significant.

CHAPTER III
MARKING AND REPORTING PRACTICES
IN NORTH DAKOTA HIGH SCHOOLS

One purpose of this study is to develop a marking and reporting system suitable to the needs of the high schools of North Dakota. Further, these systems should be so constructed as to meet criteria set forth by educational leaders, a system of marking and reporting that is in line with modern educational thinking.

To begin the program of improvement in anything, the first step is to determine exactly present conditions. Once the present location is established, then efforts should be directed toward advancement from that point.

To gather information about the marking and reporting systems now being used in North Dakota, a short questionnaire was sent to the 157 Fully Accredited High Schools in North Dakota. Of the 157 schools surveyed, 127, or 80 percent of these schools returned the answered questionnaire. This is an excellent percentage of return, perhaps due to the brevity of the questionnaire, and partly due to the interest in the topic among school administrators. The completeness of the returns should give an accurate picture of present marking and reporting systems in our high schools.

The survey questionnaire consisted of six questions designed to give a clear, concise picture of methods in each school. The complete questionnaire is shown Appendix A. The

questions will be discussed separately with their results.

The first question asked the administrator was what type of marking system was used in his school. All schools returning the questionnaire answered this first question. One hundred twelve schools, or 88 percent stated that they used the conventional A-B-C-D-F system, or a slight variation of it, such as including the letter E, or the use of I for incompetence. Thirteen schools, or 10 percent, are using the percentage system. One school uses a point scale ranging from 1 - 6. There is one school in the state using only S and U symbols for Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory.

As was expected, the great majority of the high schools in North Dakota use the conventional A-B-C-D-F system, or a slight variation of it. Several schools mentioned that although marks were given on report cards in letters, office records were kept in exact percentages. In these schools, the teachers kept their class records in percentages and converted them to letter equivalents for reporting purposes. The percentage equivalents for conversion were reported by many schools and showed very little variation. The failing percentage point varied from 70 percent to 75 percent. Some schools reported the use of plus or minus with letter grades, others stated that they were definitely not used.

The percentage system of marking is still being used in 13 fully accredited high schools. The schools did not all indicate

whether or not the percentages were on a five point scale (90-95-100) or stated in exact percentages.

One high school uses a six-point scale, the number 6 denoting the highest grade obtainable and the number 1 as the lowest. On the report card these six points are shown with percentage equivalents, the percentages stated in five-point intervals. The number two is said to be not passing and the number one is a failure.

The one school indicating the use of S and U symbols denoting Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory gave no further information than stating the symbols used.

The second question on the survey sheet was asked to determine the number of times during the school year grades are reported to the home. Here again the results of the survey were anticipated. Of the 127 schools answering this question, 122, or 96 percent, report grades to the home sixtimes during the school year at the end of each 6-weeks period. Three schools report more than six times, doing so every four weeks or nine times during the school year. Two schools report less often, using a nine-week period reporting four times during the school year. The two schools using the nine-week period are using a more detailed system of reporting to the home. They reduce the number of times grades are reported because the teachers are required to spend more time preparing each report.

The opinion of the school administrator was solicited on the third question in the survey. He was asked whether or not he felt that the marking and reporting system used in his high school was adequate. Most replies were either "yes" or "no", while a few elaborated somewhat giving reasons why they thought as they did. Seventy-two administrators, or 59 percent, felt that their system was adequate and meeting their needs, while fifty-one, or 41 per cent, did not believe so. Several school administrators who felt their system inadequate stated that faculty committees have been at work trying to devise a more satisfactory system. Some of the comments of the administrators who felt their system adequate were rather interesting. For example, the administrator of one of our larger high schools made the statement that if the system were not adequate, they would change it. One of the administrators who feels his system inadequate asked the question, "Is any system adequate?" The thinking appears to be very evenly divided and the convictions of some persons on both sides seem quite definite.

In question 4, the schools were asked whether or not any experimentation had been done in their school system. If so, what was attempted, and with what results. The tabulation of the results show that some experimentation had been done in twenty-eight, or 22 percent, of the 125 schools answering this question. In 78 percent of the schools nothing had been done. In approximately half of the 28 schools reporting experimental

work, the changes referred to were the change from marking and reporting by percentages to the use of the 5-point scale. Here again is evidence to back the contention stated earlier that the only significant change that has taken place in the field of marking and reporting during the last forty years, has been the change-over from using percentages to the 5-point letter scale.

Because one of the purposes of this study is to show the importance of establishing marking and reporting policies in a school system, question 5 was asked. This question asked the administrator if the high school marking and reporting policy is given the teachers in written form for their reference. The schools were asked to include a copy of their policies if available. This question was answered by 122 schools. In forty-three schools, or 35 percent, the marking policy is given the teachers in written form. In 79, or 65 percent of the schools it is not given. Most of the administrators who do not give teachers written policy, stated that the policy is discussed in detail at faculty meetings. Some schools indicated that this was done at the first meeting in the fall. Six schools enclosed copies of their marking policies. As a whole they seem quite complete. Several schools indicated that they followed the suggestions for marking and reporting given in standard class record books. The one record book mentioned most often was the Flynn-Utne system.

The last question was asked to try to determine the

thinking of school administrators on the part the State Department of Public Instruction should play in determining marking and reporting policies and practices. The question asked, "Do you feel the State Department of Public Instruction should give high schools a definite marking and reporting system to be followed?" This question was omitted by more administrators than any of the others, indicating further the controversial nature of the question. The question was answered by 113 schools. There were sixty-six schools, or 58 percent, who felt that the State Department should give the schools a policy to follow, while forty-seven schools, or 42 percent, felt that the department should not try to determine policies.

The majority of the answers were either "yes" or "no." However, there were some interesting and enlightening comments by some persons. The comments of those answering "yes" were concerned mostly with the establishment of a uniform system in the state. Several persons pointed to the confusion that exists in interpretation of grades when a student transfers from one school to another. One administrator pointed out the tendency to strive for greater uniformity in many other phases of school work. He believed than an attempt should be made to make marking and reporting systems uniform too. Two schools that answered the question "no", made an interesting comment as to why they did not feel the State Department should establish marking and reporting policies. They were afraid they would

be saddled with a system, such as the S and U symbol system, that they did not want or believe in. They seemed to fear too radical a change could be made and the schools forced to submit to using these systems against their will.

Approximately 40 percent of the schools enclosed a sample report card with their return. Because of the results indicated in question 1, the majority of the cards were of the usual type, showing grades, attendance, percentage equivalents of letter grades, and places for the signature of the parents. In examining these cards some interesting things were noted. Three schools use a card whereby the grades are expressed in letters, but shown on the report card in graph form. A red line is drawn across the graph showing the "Danger" points. Below this line are the letter E and F grades. Habits and attitudes are graded with letters in seven of the report cards submitted. Each card lists several desirable traits and the student is graded for each of these. One of these has to be signed by the parent and returned to the school, stating the report has been examined and discussed with the pupil.

Two schools use an individual subject report card. The student is given a card for each subject in which he is enrolled. In addition to a subject grade he is graded as to attitude, effort, preparation, work habits, personal adjustment and responsibility in that class. One of these cards calls for remarks by the instructor. This school has a policy

that places special emphasis on this part of the report.

There is an excellent example evident in this survey to show just how far apart school administrators are on marking and reporting policies. One administrator commented that he did not like any marking system that was competitive. Students should be marked according to their effort and should be compared only with themselves, according to his philosophy.

In direct opposition to this thinking, one report card gives the following meaning to the letter grades assigned:

- A - Work is the best in the class.
- B - Work is better than that done by most of the class.
- C - Most of the class made this grade.
- D - Work is not as good as that done by most of the class.
- F - Work is the poorest in the class.

One school also indicated that in addition to the letter grade, class percentile rankings were given on the report card.

On the questionnaire administrators were invited to make any comments they wished about any portion of the survey. Just a few are presented here. One man with over forty years of administrative experience feels that the most important factor in making any marking and reporting system function properly is an understanding of the system being used in the school by the teachers. He states that he has seen many things tried, and that the success or failure usually depends

upon how well the teacher was able to use the system of the particular school.

Several schools indicated that consideration was being given to attempting changes in marking and reporting system. One of the most noteworthy of these is a proposed method of setting up objectives for each subject offered and doing the grading with these objectives as the criteria.

The results of this survey of the Fully Accredited High Schools in North Dakota are almost exactly the same as the outcomes predicted by Wrinkle.¹³ He states that if complete information on the marking and reporting practices of all elementary and secondary schools over the past twenty-five years were available, there is little question but that the evidence would bring us to the following general conclusions:

1. Many schools report by use of a multiple-point scale commonly involving the use of the letters A-B-C-D-F.
2. The greatest single innovation in marking practices has been the substitution of letter grades for percent grades.
3. Most schools in addition to reporting a letter grade also report on a variety of character traits by checking one or more items in a printed list of undefined terms or statements.
4. Most of the departures from conventional practice have been made by elementary schools and very few by secondary schools.
5. Most schools send out reports each six weeks.

¹³ Op. Cit., P. 30.

6. Few of the schools that have made departures from conventional practices (represented by the use of informal letters, parent-teacher conferences, the substitution of S and U or H, S and U for A-B-C-D-F, etc.) are satisfied with their new practice and are working to improve it still further.
7. The marking and reporting problem ranks close to the top among those about which schools and teachers are seriously concerned, but since they do not know how to improve on what they are doing, they do not change.

In regard to point 3 above, we in North Dakota apparently are not up to the standards of the rest of the nation. On the report cards returned with the questionnaire, the majority confined marks of character traits to one or two general classifications, usually conduct and effort. One of the largest printers of school forms, The School Specialty Company, Salina, Kansas, prints a high school report card used widely in North Dakota. This particular card limits character traits to one grade, called citizenship.

In point 4 above, Wrinkle states that the elementary schools have made most of the departures from conventional practices. This was indicated in the survey, although the question was not specifically asked. Several schools explained their elementary marking and reporting systems, and they were quite modern. A few administrators indicated that the great satisfaction among parents and teachers with the new systems.

Writing in "Educational Trend", W. C. Kvaraceus, Professor

of Education at Boston University, states:

Attempts to improve reporting procedures and practices in the elementary schools are far more numerous than in the secondary schools. Report forms in the junior and senior high schools today resemble more nearly the same traditional practices used fifty years ago. Defensively, the stereotype reply on the part of the upper school staff is, "The colleges Won't let us change". Yet few high school people have ever queried college authorities as to their attitudes concerning present practices or proposed adaptations. However, at least one high school principal, Charles M. Allen of the University High School, Urbana, Illinois, did take the trouble to survey a representative sample of colleg officials as to their willingness to consider various adaptations in reporting techniques at the high school level. He found almost all college officials not only open minded toward any new innovations but also surprisingly willing to entertain most innovations aimed to improve report cards, even though the change represented a radical departure from traditional marking practices.

Question number 3 in the survey made in this study should be compared to point number 7 by Winkle. The survey did not reveal a clearly defined concern over the marking and reporting problem in North Dakota. This is possibly because the majority of the school administrators answered the question with a "yes" or a "no." However, the results of the question, forty-one percent indicating dissatisfaction would be an indication that administrators rate the problem close to the top among those which they are seriously concerned.

CHAPTER IV
THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND MARKING
AND REPORTING POLICIES

In North Dakota the State Department of Public Instruction does not prescribe one specific marking and reporting system to be used in the high school. At the present time the policy of the State Department is to allow the individual school administrators to determine the systems to be used.

In the survey reported on in Chapter III, school administrators were asked if they felt the State Department should give them a definite marking and reporting system to follow. Opinion was quite evenly divided, 58 percent answering the question "yes" and 42 percent answering "no." There is also reason to believe that these opinions are very definite. In order to influence well set opinions one way or the other, further information will be needed.

Because the whole of the controversy involves the State Department, it seemed that the thinking of that department should be known before any recommendations could be made. A questionnaire consisting of seven questions was sent to Mr. Richard K. Klein, Director of Secondary Education.

Mr. Klein was very cooperative and helpful in making his replies. They should be of real interest to all school administrators. Mr. Klein made complete replies to all questions. In some instances, with Mr. Klein's permission,

he is quoted directly to avoid misinterpretation of his remarks.

The first question asked "Does the State Department advocate a certain marking policy to be used in North Dakota high schools?" This question was asked because there appears to be a great difference of opinion on the question. The Administrator's Manual¹⁴ does present the A-B-C-D-F system with the notation that this method of marking and reporting is recommended by the county superintendents of the state. The point of confusion centers around the recommendation being made by the county superintendents. To most school administrators county superintendents are concerned primarily with the elementary schools. The Administrator's Manual does not specify whether the system is recommended for elementary or secondary schools, or for both.

Mr. Klein indicated that this system is suggested for use in the secondary school. However, the State Department does not advocate a single rating system to be used throughout the state. According to Mr. Klein, the matter of grading is all relative and means only as much as the reliability of the teacher doing the grading, regardless of the system used. The A-B-C-D-F system was recommended for the sake of some state-wide uniformity.

¹⁴ Administrator's Handbook for North Dakota High Schools prepared and issued under the direction of the Department of Public Instruction, Bismarck, North Dakota, 1953.

Question two asked whether or not Mr. Klein felt it is the place of the State Department or the school administrators to set marking and reporting policies.

Mr. Klein's reply was not entirely definite one way or another. To prevent misunderstanding his reply is quoted:

"School administrators might attempt to develop a grading system to be used within our accredited schools. This primarily would have value from the standpoint of some uniformity on a statewide basis. Too, it would be easier when recording transcripts from one school to another. Before drawing up the physical letter or numerical system which might be used, it would be necessary to develop philosophies and objectives which are to be used as a basis for a grading system."

The feeling seems to be that a uniform system would be desirable, but the system should be devised by the school administrators themselves, and not by the State Department.

In question three, Mr. Klein was asked whether or not any experimentation had been carried out, or was now being done with changing from the conventional A-B-C-D-F system to some other system. Mr. Klein replied that to his knowledge no state-wide experiment had been carried out concerning this matter, although a few individuals have done some work with it in their local community.

He made an interesting comment regarding some of these local experiments. He states:

"It has been our observation that even though some systems have been adopted, there was a feeling after the adoption that this system was not the answer to their real wish

to properly report pupil progress to pupils and parents."

Mr. Klein was asked in question four if he felt that the conventional A-B-C-D-F system of marking and reporting was adequate. He was asked to list his objections to it, if any.

Mr. Klein feels that no single system will truly be a measuring stick for whatever we are trying to measure. Much depends upon the subject being graded, as well as the teacher doing the grading. The reason that he feels no single system is possibly the best system is that there are too many subjective and intangible elements involved. An "A" grade in one school, under a certain teacher, may be the equivalent of a "C" grade should the same individual be evaluated on his achievement by another school. Thus an "A" does not really mean an "A". It might mean that the student apparently is doing well in what he is undertaking. Additional trait checks to supplement a given system will come closer to expressing deficiencies or progress of a pupil.

In reply to the question "Is there any indication that school administrators in North Dakota feel that there is a need for an improved marking and reporting system," Mr. Klein gives the impression that most school administrators and county superintendents would welcome a better and more uniform system.

The question was asked, "Has any other rural state made particular progress on this problem that you know of?" Mr. Klein was not prepared to answer a question of this sort because he has not had occasion to work specifically on this problem. He did indicate that he has found the same pros and cons existing in other states.

In order to follow through in more detail on what is being done in other states to establish marking and reporting policies, a separate survey was made. State Departments of Education were contacted by letter in twelve states. These states were placed in the following groups:

- I. It was felt that our neighboring states should have problems and conditions very similar to our own. Therefore the State Departments of Montana, Minnesota, and South Dakota were contacted.
- II. The policies of the larger states would be of interest in this study. Contact was made with the State Departments in Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, California and Oregon.
- III. A few of the less thickly populated states were also selected. They were: Utah, Nevada, Arkansas, and Arizona.

The returns received from these letter contacts were not exceptionally good. Of the twelve letters of inquiry sent out, eight replies were received. However, some replies were received from each of the three groups listed above.

In group one, the replies were more complete than in the other two groups. Here briefly is a summary of what is being

done in each state:

Minnesota

No specific marking system is recommended. There are some general suggestions concerning pupil records in their publication entitled "Guidance Services for Minnesota Schools". Here again the close relationship between marking and reporting practices and guidance work is indicated.

South Dakota

Each school in the South Dakota school system adopts a marking and reporting system that fits the needs of the school. They do use a uniform transcription blank in South Dakota. On this blank each school explains the grading system which it uses. The majority of the high schools use the traditional letter plan in grading.

Mr. F. R. Wanek, Secondary School Supervisor, commented:

"It is my opinion that we do not have an adequate grading system or reporting system. Too much of the time we rely on a letter grade to serve as a report on the progress of a pupil. This does not give the parents a complete picture of the progress of the pupil. It does not give the parents any information as to the other phases of a pupil's activities."

Montana

No particular grading system is recommended. They do state that they favor and encourage the parent-teacher plan as a means of evaluating the work of the pupil. Mr. William I. King, High School Supervisor, states: "A very few of our old-fashioned schools use the percentage system of 100 points. Passing grade is usually 65 or 70, with the distribution made accordingly. A few of the schools use the S and U plan.

Most schools use a five-point plan using the letters A through F, dropping the "E". At best, the numerical system is poor in giving any idea of the pupil's work. There are so many factors indicative of success or failure that cannot be recorded by letters or numbers, that I would be very happy to see the whole system replaced with a more realistic pattern of reporting."

In group two, replies were received from four of the five departments contacted. The replies are as follows:

Oregon

There has been no attempt to incorporate into one publication the high school marking and reporting systems in Oregon. The State Department makes no attempt to prescribe a uniform system. This is left to the individual schools, according to Cliff Robinson, Director of Secondary Education.

Ohio

R. M. Garrison, Director of the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education for Ohio states: "Marking and Reporting policies are not a responsibility of the State Department of Education." It was suggested that individual school systems be contacted to learn what systems were being used.

New York

According to Mr. Robert E. Parker, Supervisor of Secondary Education for New York state, "Scholastic marking and reporting policies vary a great deal from school to school and little if any legislation by the State Department governs these policies."

New York uses a system of Regents Examinations, similar to our own state examinations in North Dakota.

Passing grades on these examinations are stated in percentages, varying from 65 to 75 percent, depending upon the circumstances under which these examinations are used.

California

The letters written to each state department requested publications or other information available on the topic of marking and reporting. The California State Department answered that request by stating on a small tab that no information was available. This tab was attached to a list of publications by the State Department of Education. On reviewing the list of publications, no indication was found that a printed document was available to assist in the writing of this thesis. It seems logical to assume that California does not formulate marking and reporting policies on a state-wide basis.

In group three, requests were made for information to four state departments. Only one reply was received.

Utah

Mr. William P. Miller, assistant State Superintendent replied: "Utah high schools follow the general policy of scholastic marking by grades A-B-C-D-E-F. There is no attempt on the state level to regulate or change the marking and reporting system in Utah."

Mr. Miller also mentions that they realize their system has many shortcomings, but no attempt has been made as yet to try to correct these weaknesses.

In the three groups of states surveyed, the returns could be considered as very good in groups one and two, and rather poor in group three.

In summarizing briefly the results of the questionnaire sent to other states, all the state departments replying indicated that the State Department did not determine marking and reporting practices in the high schools of their state. The principle justification made seemed to be that marking and reporting systems must be tailored to the local situation and to the needs of the school. This is in line with the thinking of most educators in the field of marking and reporting.

The problem presented in this thesis seems to be one of which everyone is aware, but one which few persons care to do much about. Several state directors of secondary education indicated a dissatisfaction with the present systems, but gave but very little indication that much was being done or planned to be done to correct these faults.

Upon comparing Mr. Klein's letter to those of directors of secondary education in other states, North Dakota seems to be no better or worse off than many other states. The situation in North Dakota, and elsewhere, seems to be that the marking and reporting policies of a school are the responsibility of the local school administrator. This would seem to indicate that, at the present time, the administrator is free to use any type of marking and reporting system he chooses, regardless of how radical or unsound it may be. The only safe-guard against extreme inadequacy of

a system would appear to be the people living in that particular community.

It is interesting to note here that with the great deal of freedom given the school administrator in devising a marking and reporting system, most schools use the conventional A-B-C-D-F system. Yet, according to the survey reported on in Chapter III, forty-one percent of the administrators stated that they did not feel the system they were using was adequate.

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

In summarizing the findings of this study, four general groupings will be used. They are:

- I. The criticisms of educational leaders of present marking and reporting practices.
- II. Trends in forms of reports to parents.
- III. A summary of marking and reporting practices in the fully accredited high schools in North Dakota.
- IV. The State Department of Public Instruction and its relationship to marking and reporting systems.

I. CRITICISMS OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERS OF PRESENT MARKING AND REPORTING SYSTEMS.

The criticisms found through reading research can be grouped into four general areas. They are:

- A. We tend to make our marking systems competitive, ignoring the concept of treating the student as an individual and marking his progress or failure in terms of his abilities.
- B. We over-emphasize the achievement of subject matter and place too little emphasis on the growth of the individual in attitudes and behavior changes.
- C. We attempt to report progress by quantitative methods.
- D. We do not mark a student in respect to how well he has achieved the objectives set up by the school.

Almost all writings on marking and reporting practices tend to criticize the conventional systems. There are few

published works that defend our present practices.

There is no large-scaled agitation under way to revolutionize marking and reporting practices, even though endless materials have been written exposing our systems as unsound.

II. TRENDS IN FORMS OF REPORTS TO PARENTS.

A. Trends in report cards are away from:

1. Systems that encourage comparison of pupils.
2. Percentage marking.
3. Quantitative reports.
4. Formal reports.
5. The 6-week reporting period.

B. Trends in report cards are toward:

1. Scales with fewer points.
2. Systems which compare a student's actual achievement with his expected achievement.
3. An evaluation of traits other than subject-matter achievement.
4. Descriptive reports.
5. Reporting progress in terms of objectives of the school.
6. Fewer reporting periods a year.
7. Attendance continues to be an important item.

III. A SUMMARY OF MARKING AND REPORTING PRACTICES IN THE FULLY ACCREDITED HIGH SCHOOLS OF NORTH DAKOTA.

- ### A. The large majority of the high schools of our state are using the conventional A-B-C-D-F system of reporting grades to the home.

- B. The six-weeks period is by far the most preferred interval for sending report cards to the home.
- C. The majority of school administrators in the state feel that the system of marking and reporting being used in their school is adequate and meeting their needs.
- D. There has been very little experimental work done in North Dakota with marking and reporting systems.
- E. Less than half of the schools surveyed give their teachers written policy to follow in assigning marks.
- F. The majority of school administrators surveyed feel that it would be advantageous to have a uniform marking and reporting system in our high schools.
- G. The great majority of the schools surveyed are using a report card designed by school form publishers and readily available from any school supply firm.
- H. Considerable progress has been made in North Dakota in the elementary schools in reporting pupil progress to the home.

IV. THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO MARKING AND REPORTING SYSTEMS.

- A. The State Department does not recommend or advocate a single rating system to be used throughout the state.
- B. Any effort to establish a uniform system of marking and reporting should originate with the school administrators, not with the State Department.
- C. No real progress in improving marking and reporting systems has been observed by the State Department.
- D. The State Department feels that most school administrators and county superintendents would welcome a better and more uniform system of marking and reporting.

- E. A survey of procedures used by other State Departments reveals similar concern over present practices.
- F. It is not usual for a State Department to recommend one system for use throughout the state.
- G. In other states, marking and reporting practices are the concern primarily of the local school administrators.
- H. There is a close relationship between marking and reporting systems and guidance work in schools throughout the nation.

Conclusions

On the basis of the foregoing summary, the following conclusions are presented:

- I. The only major change evident in marking and reporting systems in North Dakota during the last several years has been the expressing of percentages in a five or six-point scale.
- II. Any new method of marking and reporting should originate with parents, school administrators and teachers.
- III. The school administrators of North Dakota would not readily accept any revolutionary proposal for revising our present marking and reporting systems. Changes will have to be made slowly and methodically.
- IV. Many school administrators are aware of the shortcomings of present marking and reporting practices. The probable reasons why so little progress has been made are:
 - 1. The press of seemingly more urgent problems.
 - 2. Excessive work load.
 - 3. Satisfaction with present systems.
 - 4. No demand from the public that changes be made.

5. Uncertainty as to where responsibility for making necessary changes lies.
 6. Lack of organized effort.
 7. Lack of leadership.
- V. School administrators have overlooked one of the most effective means of establishing sound marking and reporting practices by not putting in writing a complete explanation of the marking and reporting policies of the school.
- VI. How effective any system of marking and reporting will be is determined largely by how well the teacher is able to use the system in effect.
- VII. Objectives in individual subjects are not worked out by the school. As a result work in our schools lacks direction. When a grade is given, the teacher does not have clearly in mind what the student is expected to get from the course.
- VIII. There is a great need for experimental work in North Dakota and additional studies before much progress can be expected.
- IX. The marking and reporting problem is evidently no more acute in North Dakota than in our neighboring states.

While it is true that North Dakota seems to be no worse off than many other states concerning this problem, we seem to be less aware of the existence of a problem at all. In light of the comments of leading educators in North Dakota and elsewhere, it appears that the system used is not nearly as important as how the system is used. Present marking and reporting systems would perhaps be adequate provided that these systems were used in the manner for which they were intended. The responsibility for improper use of a system

rightfully can be placed directly on the school administrator,
and indirectly on our entire system of secondary education.

CHAPTER VI

RECOMMENDATIONS

In Chapter II an effort was made to indicate some of the more generally accepted fallacies in the conventional A-B-C-D-F system of marking and reporting. The individuals quoted are leaders in the field of secondary education and in marking systems and reporting practices. Some of these persons are extremely critical of the conventional methods, and some experts merely indicate the direction in which we must go to attain a more usable system. A person who studies only this one phase of education becomes more and more critical as his information increases. In order to further the argument in favor of improvement of marking and reporting systems some of the more determined critics of our system have been purposely quoted in this study.

A literal translation of indictments leveled against our present practices would indicate to some that an immediate large scale revolution in marking and reporting systems was necessary in order that our schools could continue to function. In reviewing the changes and improvements that have come about in education during the last half century, it can easily be seen that our forward progress has not been revolutionary in nature, but rather evolutionary. There are too many people affected by change to expect changes to come about in a short period of time. Therefore, no drastic proposals will be

offered here for a revolutionary change that will cure all the ills evident in our present system.

In recommending a change in marking and reporting system, care must be taken not to propose a system so highly theoretical that it ceases to be workable. It is very essential to set ultimate goals high, but for the present consider only those changes that will move us a step closer to these more theoretical, long-range objectives. To begin with, present methods must be used as a basis for change. Those phases of presently used systems that most need improvement should be changed first. After these changes have been accepted and proven sound, further progress is possible. The proposed marking and reporting system presented here is not to be considered more than the initial step toward a system that will be completely usable, and in line with sound principles of education.

A Recommended Marking System and Report Card for North Dakota High Schools

The report card on the following pages is presented for consideration by the high schools of our state. This proposed report card will be approximately six by seven inches in size, folding in the middle to make four pages. On the illustration the pages have been numbered and a brief explanation as to the reasons why the card has been designed in such a manner is given.

PAGE ONE

ADAMS
HIGH SCHOOL

Adams
North Dakota

Period, Semester and
Annual Report

of

Class _____

H. C. Gulbrandson, Supt.
James Van Camp, Principal

"The Home and the School
Should Work Together for
the Good of the Child"

PAGE THREE

CITIZENSHIP

Below are listed five traits which we believe to be necessary to good citizenship, which we are trying to strengthen through our school program. Every effort is being made to provide opportunity for all to take part in activities that will develop better citizens for the world of tomorrow. The report below attempts to give you our opinion of his outstanding qualities as well as his weaknesses. We invite your cooperation in developing these traits of character in your child.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Cooperation</u> with teachers and other students in and out of the classroom.						
<u>Dependability</u> - can be depended upon to do assigned work and recognizes his duties as a citizen of the school and community.						
<u>Courtesy</u> - Is polite in all relations with teachers and other students.						
<u>Appearance</u> - Is neat and clean in habits and appearance.						
<u>Leadership</u> - Shows special ability to take charge and direct school and social activities.						

PAGE FOUR

ADDITIONAL COMMENTSPeriod

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN

Your signature below indicates the report card has been examined by you and discussed with the student.

1st Period _____2nd Period _____3rd Period _____4th Period _____5th Period _____6th Period _____

PAGE ONE

The front of the card includes the usual report card information. Included are the name of the school, the grade the student is enrolled in, the name of the student, and the names of the principal and the superintendent. The cover should be made as attractive as possible, yet conservative. The short statement found at the bottom of the page was noted on a sample report card submitted by a school returning the questionnaire. Because it states a basic belief of educators, it would be appropriate to include this thought on the first page of the card.

PAGE TWO The Marking System

In recommending an improved marking system that will be evolutionary in nature, the recommended system must be built upon systems presently used. Therefore, it is recommended that the A-E-C-D-F system of marking be retained, with one addition. It appears that a better balance in our marking system would result from the addition of the letter "E" to our five-point scale. It is usually believed that the average student doing what is average work for him, will receive a grade of "C". In the conventional system there are two possible higher grades for the student to attain, therefore there should be two lower grades also. This implies that the letter "F" is not a grade, but rather an indication that the work being done is of such poor quality that it

cannot be properly evaluated in terms of A-B-C-D-E. The letter "F" is a description of failing work, but it could indicate a level from just below passing to a complete failure to accomplish anything. This is a contradiction to the trends in marking and reporting systems outlined in Chapter II, wherein it is stated that the tendency is toward a scale with fewer points. As retention of the present A-B-C-D-F system is being proposed, an adjustment such as this is felt necessary to make it more usable.

At the top of page two is an explanation of the grades being given. These should be as briefly explained as possible and in easily understood terms. Where one word is sufficient, only one word should be used. Percentage equivalents have been omitted as they imply the ability of the teaching staff to evaluate the work of a student in exact terms.

The use of the plus and minus sign would be eliminated entirely. Their use tends to shade the meaning of the grade and have the effect of implying an ability to draw fine lines of distinction in marking. The progress in marking and reporting systems from the percentage system to the five or six-point scale is regarded by most authorities as a step forward. To use the plus and minus signs will make several more grades possible, each with a different meaning. This would appear to be a step in the wrong direction.

Critics of our conventional system are almost unanimous

in their belief that we tend to mark pupils on a competitive basis rather than in terms of how well they have achieved in the light of their own individual ability. This competitiveness is not too evident in the lower grades, but seems to increase as the student progresses through the elementary school. By the time the student is in junior high school it has become a real factor in determining his grade. This competitiveness continues to increase in senior high school, and in college competition becomes very keen among students. Until such a time as grades are assigned in college on the basis of actual achievement in terms of ability, perhaps there is some justification for competitive marking to a certain degree, in the high school.

There is a method of marking that would partially eliminate competitive marking. The expected achievement of the student for a subject would be placed on the card with a grade showing actual achievement. This is an objective we must reach in time. It has not been incorporated into this proposed system for several reasons. Foremost, the question arises as to how the expected achievement could be effectively measured. Would we be subject to the same shortcomings there as we are in assigning marks of actual achievement? This method would demand a fine knowledge of measurement devices and procedures on the part of the administrator and the teacher. However, it is believed that we

will eventually arrive at this method of marking.

The normal load for a high school student is four academic subjects. Because of the great variation in subjects offered in our high school, no subject titles have been printed on the card. Eight lines are allowed for writing in the name of the subject. Several extra-curricular activities carry credit, such as physical education, band, glee club, and a sufficient number of spaces has been allowed for these to be entered as needed.

The survey discussed in Chapter III reveals the six-week reporting period to be the most commonly used. For the present it is believed that this is adequate and space has been provided accordingly.

The trend in the length of reporting periods is toward a longer interval between reports to the home, the nine-week period is becoming more generally used than before. As the amount of information relayed to the home increases it seems logical to believe that it would facilitate preparation of the report by the teacher if more time was allowed for preparation. Therefore, ultimately the nine-week reporting period will be preferred.

Attendance

Attendance continues to be an important part of all school reports. It should be reported to the home to help insure that the absences are actually parent approved. It

has long been the practice of schools to report the number of days the student is absent. This may be a negative approach. This can be partially corrected by reporting the number of days present during the reporting period. This section also contains a line to show the number of school days in that reporting period so the student and parents may draw their own conclusions.

PAGE THREE Citizenship

The student should be evaluated in two ways, first as to their scholastic achievement, and secondly as to citizenship. This method would call for reporting a grade in a subject on the basis of actual achievement, disregarding the personal traits of the student, although these traits are difficult to ignore when assigning a mark. This section of the report card is to be marked in the same manner as the scholastic rating section on page two. A student is to be assigned an actual letter grade with the values shown on the top of page two. It is important that only one marking system be used throughout the entire report card to make it more easily understood.

It is a difficult task to select traits of good citizenship that are meaningful, and yet easily understood. They cannot be expressed in abstract, professional terminology. The objective of evaluation of citizenship is to stimulate improvement by telling the student and the parents where

improvement is most needed in the opinion of the administrator and his teaching staff. Often lists of desirable traits of citizenship are very lengthy and detailed. There is little doubt but what a more detailed list would give a more complete picture of the strong and weak points or phases of a student's citizenship. However, such a detailed system of evaluation does not appear to be practical for the purposes of this study. In the majority of our high schools in North Dakota, report cards are prepared in addition to regular teaching duties. No extra time is given a teacher to prepare these reports. In the majority of our schools many of the teachers are also engaged in directing one or more student activity in addition to a regular teaching load. Therefore, to make this an acceptable, workable plan, it is imperative that the time consumed in preparation should not be excessive.

The elementary school has made a great deal more progress in reporting traits of character and citizenship than has the secondary school. This is probably due to the organizational differences in the two sections of our schools. Usually a pupil in the elementary school has only one teacher. This makes it possible to have one person observe a student in almost all phases of school life. The situation in the high school differs greatly. A student in the high school may have several different teachers in the course of the school day. The problem then becomes one of how can four to six

teachers arrive at one grade to be placed on the report card? Perhaps the most satisfactory method would be by a faculty conference called at the end of each reporting period. The principal or superintendent should present the names of each student, and grades should be decided upon for each of the traits listed on the card. A grade of "C" should be considered an average. The majority of the students will receive such a grade for the traits listed. This system does allow recognition of outstanding abilities in the student, and will indicate weaknesses that can in many cases be overcome. Encouragement can be given to the deserving, exceptional student, and the student having a weakness in one of these categories will become more aware of his shortcomings. This method of assigning citizenship grades will make possible a full discussion of pupils who are somewhat of a problem as well as those who are showing exceptional qualities. Often a teacher may benefit by hearing opinions of a student from other staff members, and will serve to give the teachers greater opportunity to know the student better. Such conferences are not as time-consuming as may be expected and usually are very satisfying to the conscientious teacher and administrator.

PAGE FOUR Additional Comments

At the top of page four there is provided space for any additional comments the teacher may feel are necessary to

further explain the letter grade given on either pages two or three. The teacher should never feel that they are limited in their reporting to just the giving of a letter grade.

When consideration was being given to the possible types of reporting systems to recommend in this study, the informal-letter type of reporting was considered. There has been much experimentation done at all grade levels with the teacher reporting in letter form to the home. In many elementary schools in North Dakota this is the only report sent by the school to the home. This is particularly true in grades 1-2-3. There are certainly many advantages to this type of reporting. It has been said that a pen and a sheet of blank paper in the hands of a competent teacher are the most effective means possible for reporting pupil progress and improving the relationship between the school and the home. This method of reporting has been tried in high schools and found to be impractical for the following reasons:

- I. It involves too much time.
- II. Many teachers cannot or at least do not do an effective job of making themselves understood in writing.
- III. There is a tendency to develop a stereotyped vocabulary for use in reporting progress in this manner.

For the above listed reasons, using only an informal letter plan of reporting is not considered adequate. It may be

noted that the space provided on page four of the card is limited. Extensive remarks are not encouraged. There are times when a simple line or two of explanation can serve to clarify a given letter grade, to warn of extremely poor work, or to commend an especially deserving individual. If the nature of the problem is extreme, a parent-teacher conference should be arranged.

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Space is provided for the signature of the parent or guardian of the child for each reporting period. This represents no change from present practices. It is felt necessary to insure by this means, that the report card actually gets into the home, and is examined by the parent or guardian. While it is requested that the parent or guardian discuss the report with the student, it is difficult to insure this being done.

The Parent-Teacher Conference

Only passing comment has been made on the parent-teacher conference as a means of communicating information about the student to the home. It has been stated that parent-teacher conferences should be arranged only when a case has become urgent and requires special attention. Much the same as the informal letter type report, the parent-teacher conference appears at first glance to be the most practical method

of establishing cooperation with the home. The method of reporting has been quite successful in the elementary school, but does not lend itself to the high school level nearly as well. Many educational writers want to see the day when we think of all grades, 1-12, as part of a whole continual process of education, with the same methods used throughout. That is the goal we must try to reach. However, the nature of the elementary school and the high school are so different today, that a plan that works in one will not necessarily be workable in the other. Such is the case with the parent-teacher conference plan. This plan can be used very effectively when one teacher has contact with a student all day. The most serious objection to the use of the parent-teacher plan is the great expenditure of time necessary. The teacher must prepare and then conduct the conference. To do this effectively for several students is not practical. Another objection is that in spite of this method being used to report to the home, adequate office records must be kept. This means that after all the time consumed in preparation for and in conference with parents, the teacher must still make reports to the office, usually in the conventional systems. The high school teacher with one hundred or more students in the classes of one day would find very little to appeal to her in a system of such as this.

Still another objective to the parent-teacher form of

reporting is that as the child progresses through the grades in school it becomes increasingly difficult to get parents to visit the school. When the children are young the parents seem to take much more interest in their school work. This perhaps explains why the greatest success this plan has enjoyed has been in the primary grades.

The parent-teacher conference is a very desirable situation. When special problems arise, conference with the parents should be arranged immediately. They should serve as an auxiliary to another system, they are not a practical system for use in the high school as the only reporting system used. It is regrettable that most parent-teacher conferences result from the student getting into some sort of difficulty. This situation is not conducive to promoting good will between the school and the home. All possible effort should be made by the school to encourage parents to visit the school, and to confer with the teachers and administrators whenever they desire.

Perhaps some system should be devised to make sure the parents confer with the teachers and administrators at least once during the school year. A schedule of visits could be drawn up and visits adequately prepared for. The school should convey some new information to the parent at such a conference.

Marking and Reporting Policies

In order to insure the success of the marking and reporting system presented here, or any marking and reporting system, it is imperative that the policies of the school be put on paper. These policies should be available to the teacher when needed. The teacher should not have to consult the administrator to refresh her memory as to what the policy is.

In the survey reported on in Chapter III, several administrators stated that marking and reporting policies were discussed by the administrator at the first faculty meeting in the fall. It is quite possible that at the conclusion of the faculty meeting where marking and reporting policies are outlined, that the teachers have the policy rather clearly in mind. It is doubtful however, that such a policy can be recalled in detail in the middle of April should the occasion arise. The policy must be in written form. Further clarification of the policies can best be accomplished by the faculty meeting, preferably the first meeting in the fall.

The written marking and reporting policy of the school should contain something about each of the following points. These are not considered a complete list, but rather a minimum listing of points to be considered:

- I. The letter grades to be used, and why they are used.
- II. The meaning of the letter grades used.

- III. The proper methods to use in arriving at a grade.
- IV. A brief listing of objectives for every subject.
- V. The separation of grades for academic achievement and citizenship.
- VI. The proper use of the Additional Comments section.
- VII. The place of the parent-teacher conference in the plans of the school.
- VIII. Minor administrative details such as:
 - 1. The time grades are due in the office.
 - 2. When report cards are given out.
 - 3. Forms to be used for office reports.
 - 4. The regular meeting of the faculty to discuss and assign citizenship grades.

To further clarify point IV. in the list above, care should be taken to avoid lengthy detailed lists of objectives. A very few well defined statements of what purpose the school has in offering the subject will be of great assistance to the teacher in deciding how well the student has achieved these objectives in terms of his own ability. These objectives should not be dictated by the administrator, but rather arrived at by the cooperative efforts of the teaching staff and the administration. These objectives should not be changed from year to year, but should remain unchanged, unless conditions dictate their alteration to fit changing times.

Putting New Methods Into Use

According to present practices in North Dakota and most other states, the marking and reporting system used is the responsibility of the school administrator. Although a system may be recommended for consideration by the State Department, it is not compulsory for schools that such a system be used. Therefore, any new system proposed for use in our state should be determined by democratic means, and the cooperative efforts of school administrators and classroom teachers. Under no conditions should a marking and reporting system be autocratically given by the State Department as the only acceptable system to be used. Whatever new methods are introduced should be designed by the schools of the state, possibly through one or more of the professional organizations.

The North Dakota Association of School Administrators

We have in North Dakota a very active and influential organization, the North Dakota Association of School Administrators. This group meets in conference once or twice a year to consider just such problems as marking and reporting systems used in the high schools. If this group could be interested in the problem, no doubt some action would be taken after the group had given time to discussion and further research. This group has been responsible for many

of the more important improvements that have taken place in the public schools of our state.

County Schoolmaster Associations

Another professional organization that would be interested in the marking and reporting problem in our high schools would be these organizations of school men. The Schoolmaster Associations are organized on a county level. They are composed of both administrators and classroom teachers. These groups usually meet monthly, and often use the plan of panel discussion type of meeting, and consider such problems as presented here.

The State Department

It has not been recommended in this study that the State Department design a marking and reporting system and order its use in the high schools of our state. The plan must come from the schools. However, this plan should have the approval of the State Department, and that department would act as a coordinating agency and in an advisory capacity. Once a plan had been devised by the schools, with the approval of the State Department, the actual presentation of the plan should be done by the State Department. The next revision of the Administrative Manual should contain a section devoted to an explanation of the system. This explanation should explain how much deviation may be made from the prescribed system,

and under what circumstances. Some information should be given as to proper procedure for transferring a student's grades from one school to another. The actual administration of the system would be under the jurisdiction of the State Department.

This has been an explanation of a recommended change in marking and reporting practices, and in defense of the plan. It appears sound and logical to the writer, but undoubtedly has shortcomings. According to research data available and to answer critics of the conventional system of marking and reporting, the separation of scholastic achievement and citizenship in grading seems to be the next logical step forward. Many educators in our state realize that change must come about eventually. We have been slow to outline proposed methods of improvement. Perhaps it is possible that critics of the plan outlined here can do better and offer something that will cause greater progress to come about. This study would then have accomplished much.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Rolette, North Dakota
March 30, 1953

Dear Administrator:

I am writing my Master's Thesis at the University of North Dakota on the topic: "An Adequate Scholastic Marking System for North Dakota High Schools".

I am fully aware of the large number of survey sheets you are asked to complete each year by graduate students. Because of that, I had hesitated to make a survey of any type. However, I believe the information asked for here would be pretty hard to obtain in any other way, so I'm asking your cooperation.

A self-addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed for your convenience. I will appreciate all the information you can give me.

1. What type of marking system is used in your school?
2. How many times during the year are grades reported to parents?
3. Do you feel the marking system used in your school system is adequate?
4. Has any experimentation been done in your school with other marking systems? If so, what was tried and with what results?
5. Is the high school marking policy in your school given the teachers in written form for their reference? If possible please include a copy of this policy.
6. Do you feel the State Department should give high schools a definite marking policy to be followed?

Appendix A Continued

Please feel free to add any explanation or comments you may have on the back of this sheet, or on a separate sheet. They will be greatly appreciated. If possible, please include a blank report card of the type used in your high school.

Sincerely,

s/ Harold C. Gulbrandson
Harold C. Gulbrandson
Rolette, North Dakota

APPENDIX B

The following questions were submitted to Mr. Richard K. Klein, Director of Secondary Education, State Department of Instruction, Bismarck, North Dakota:

- I. Does the State Department advocate a certain marking policy to be used in North Dakota High Schools?
- II. Do you feel that it is the place of the State Department or the school administrators to set marking policies?
- III. What experiments have been tried in North Dakota Schools, or are now being tried, with changing from the conventional A B C D F system to some other system? Is it possible to give me the names of the school and the superintendent so I may contact them?
- IV. Do you feel that the conventional A B C D F system of grading is adequate? Would you indicate what fallacies you find in the system if any?
- V. Is there any indication that school administrators in North Dakota feel that there is a need for an improved marking system?
- VI. Has any other rural state made particular progress on this problem that you know of?
- VII. Could you suggest the names of educators in North Dakota who have a special interest in this problem?