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# Progress Book

To look or not to look

By Tracy G. Williams

When I was in junior high, my academic progress was a mystery to my parents until report card day. Thirty years ago, teachers and administrators actually entrusted these instruments of our fate to us, the students, to hand deliver to our parents. Add that my parents were divorced and that I ping-ponged back and forth between homes, and you can imagine that report card day was filled with more drama than an episode of *General Hospital*. Luke and Laura had nothing on my parents on report card day.

The lethal mixture of hormones, a rough school environment and my non-study habits formed the perfect foundation for a budding underachiever. My parents and stepmother remained blissfully unaware of my underachievement ... that is until report card day each fall and



spring. I would lose privileges — telephone and television—and receive lectures to do better in school. Then the cycle would start over, culminating in the next report card day. No one was truly paying attention to what was happening with me. My guidance counselor suggested a cosmetology high school as an alternative placement, but my father and stepmother said no. After all, I had skipped the eighth grade.

I did not score high enough on the en-

trance exam for my hometown's most prestigious high schools, and my parents' addresses would have landed me in really terrible high schools. So with the help of another relative's address, I got to go to a reasonably safe high school. I continued with my erratic academic performance until my third semester of the twelfth grade when I realized I was hurting only myself.

Thanks to Progress Book, the whole concept of hand-delivered report cards seems

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## The close surveillance that Progress Book affords parents is a double-edged sword.

quaint and old-fashioned. Progress Book is a program that allows parents to monitor their children's academic progress. Seventeen Cleveland-area schools currently use the program. Students can also get homework assignments through the program. Progress Book parents do not have to wait until report card day. I can monitor my daughter's grades like stockbrokers monitor the global stock market: anytime, all the time. I keep hearing that my demographic, 40- to 50-year-olds, is very obsessed with Facebook, but I think Progress Book might be a close contender. Parents use it to share our celebrations and commiserate over the poor grades; it puts a new spin on comparing our children.

Report card day still exists, but it no longer carries any great significance. Much to my daughter's dismay, every day is a potential report card day. Missing assignments and failing test grades are only a mouse-click away. Some teachers even make com-

ments that tell you in ten words or less why your child is not doing well. One teacher gave my daughter a "way to go" for a high grade. I can even print out grade reports for each class. Questionable grades are highlighted and discussed. My daughter looks like a suspect being questioned in an episode of *Law & Order*, while her father and I reconsider the availability of her iPod, YouTube account, Nintendo DS and cell phone/texting device.

Then, I take a deep breath and do a reality check. My daughter works really hard on her schoolwork and homework. There are evenings when she has three to four hours of homework, not including oboe practice. My daughter is a kind, polite, sensitive and reasonably responsible 13-year-old. She rarely misses an assignment. Her academic achievement might be less than I expected, but she is achieving and learning.

The close surveillance that Progress

Book affords parents is a double-edged sword. Occasionally, I might know a grade before my daughter. I once made the mistake of bringing up a failing grade at the beginning of a school day, before my daughter knew about the grade. No child should start the day on a negative note. Her grades are her victories and failures. A piece of paper with a grade on it speaks louder than a mother reciting information off a computer screen. I can cheerlead and cajole, but I must admit that she learns best from her own experiences. When persistent studying pays off in a high grade, it affirms what her father and I tell her about hard work being rewarded. Progress Book gives parents valuable information that can help them intervene before their child's academic progress goes completely awry. The challenge for most parents is to ignore the occasional bad grade, and, instead, concentrate on their child's overall success. ■

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