



Daily Report Cards: A Recommended Intervention in the Schools

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Abstract – *The purpose of this paper was to review and evaluate the available and current literature regarding the use of daily report cards. Literature was gathered using computer searches of the ERIC, Psych Info, and Google Scholar databases. Also, the reference sections found in the articles from the computer searches were also searched. The overview, history, summary of components, sample models, and issues surrounding daily report cards were provided. Sample outcome studies using daily report cards were reviewed. These studies and others reported daily report cards to be an effective intervention for both elementary and middle school students. This was also found across both social and academic behaviors. The limitations and concerns regarding the use of daily report cards were discussed*

Key Words – *Daily report cards, Home communication, Contingency management, Evidence-based intervention, Home consequences, Students with disabilities, Academic intervention, Home/ school linkage.*

1 Introduction

There have been numerous studies seeking the effectiveness of the use of the daily report card method in the classroom to improve classroom behavior and academic work. The analysis of this procedure involves many recent and older studies, which will give educators a more in-depth look over this intervention model. One of the earliest noted studies of a home reinforcement package was a study conducted at the University of Kansas that examined young pre-delinquent boys' behavior during a summer school math course. This early home reinforcement system was quite simple. Each participant carried his own report card to class and the teacher marked yes or no, in response to if the student "studied the whole period" and "obeyed the rules" (Bailey, Wolf, & Phillips, 1970).

Daily report cards have been successfully implemented and used with students of all ages and abilities. The populations employed have ranged from kindergarten children (Bushrod, Williams, & McLaughlin, 1983), to junior high school students (Bailey et al., 1970; Newstrom, Sweeney, & McLaughlin, 1999; Schumaker, Hovell, & Sherman, 1977). Parents of children with disabilities often

feel disconnected to their child's schoolwork. They have experienced high frustration levels with their student both behaviorally and academically. The parents may have given up working with their student at home as a result of this frustration, or they simply may not know how to help their child, or how to respond properly to their behavior. The daily report card can be a clear link between the classroom and home (Kelly & Carper, 1988). The daily report card is not simply a few lines passed between the teacher and parent that lists daily activities or states simply that the child had a "good" or "bad" day. The daily report card is a vehicle to transport information regarding specific target behaviors that a student needs to work on, or to include the parent as much as possible in the student's academic life. A low score on a particular section of the report card may prompt the parent to intervene at home. A visual sample of various report cards is presented in figures 1, 2 and 3.

Daily report cards have been referred to by a number of different titles, including home note, home-based reinforcement, daily behavior report cards, and home-school notes. (Jurbergs, Palcic & Kelley, 2007, 2010; Kelly & Carper, 1988). There is currently no one set definition, but there are common characteristics between all of these variations. These characteristics typically include (a) specification of a behavior(s), (b) at least daily rating of the occurrence of behavior(s), (c) sharing obtained information across individuals (e.g. parents, teachers, and students), and (d) using the card to monitor the effects of an intervention and/ or as a component of an intervention. Not having a firm definition allows flexibility for individual needs of students, parents, and situations. (Chafouleas, Riley-Tillman, & McDougal, 2002).

There are four types of feedback forms that fall within the daily report card category. The first one is the "Good Day Card." Students receive a signed and dated card to take home that says, "Your son/daughter had a good day today." No additional information is provided and no cards are issued on the days that had less-than-satisfactory work and behavior. Another type of card is a comprehensive report. This includes a checklist where the teacher circles positive or negative outcomes, which is totaled at the bottom. The third method is a personal letter. Students are given a handwritten letter from the teacher summarizing the student's day. If a parent does not receive a letter, this is considered an unsatisfactory day. The last method is a telephone call. The teacher directly contacts the parents by phone (e. g. Trice, Parker, Furrow, & Iwata, 1983).

The card can be constructed so some type of a scale, point system, or assignment scores can be employed. Also, cards can look just like a note from the teacher to inform the parent. It is also suggested that there should be an area at the bottom of these notes for both teacher and parent comments.

One of the critical components when employing daily report cards is the determination and selection of consequences (Alberto & Troutman, 2012; Morgan & Jensen, 1988). The effectiveness with the reinforcement items varies child by child. The age of the child will also be helpful in the determination of a desired and/ or appropriate item to use as a possible reward. These consequences can be delivered daily, weekly, or when the target amount of points has been earned. The method of delivery should be chosen by both the parent and teacher to meet the individual needs of the child (Jurbergs et al., 2007). As Alberto and Troutman (2012) suggest, educators are strongly urged to know how to carry out a preference assessment to determine which items might function as a reward. A sample of those suggested by Morgan and Jensen (1988) and Yell, Meadows, Drasgow, and Shriner, (2009) can be found in figure 4.

Rewards can be assigned different values and the items could also be chosen from a bank dependent on the points earned. Immediate reinforcers include praise and point tallying at school. This pairs contingent praise and tangible reinforcement. Based on the age or developmental level of child, the complexity of the report card changes. This is a surface intervention, which means that it is easily

learned and taught. It can be implemented across a wide array of environments without extensive behavior knowledge.

2 Advantages of Daily Report Cards

Advantages of using a daily report card include minimal effort in preparing the note, usually taking less than one minute, and this method does not require lengthy or costly training for the teacher. Frequent communication with the home about the student's progress is a benefit openly discussed by many parents (Strukoff, McLaughlin, & Bialozor, 1987). This is an effective method of changing academic behavior. Programs such as the daily report cards eliminate the necessity for drastic change in institutional policy/ procedures (Bornstein et. al.).

Daily report cards possess many appealing aspects, such as the flexibility of the program, and the dual purpose to monitor and serve as an intervention to increase home-school communication (Chafouleas et al., 2002). The use of daily report cards appear to be a valuable tool, appropriate for combination with other management techniques to positively influence classroom behavior (Dolliver, Lewis, McLaughlin, 1985). Daily report cards are feasible, acceptable, effective in promoting a positive student, effective in producing change across behaviors and population, and a way to increase parent/ teacher communication (Chafouleas et al., 2002).

Daily report cards can be used to provide feedback in three areas of school performance: schoolwork, homework, and classroom behavior. It can also be used on several different levels of complexity, ranging from simple rating scales to precise behavioral definitions. This package may also be adapted for individual learning and behavior problems, with specific behavioral definitions written for different children and altered as intervention proceeds (Dougherty & Dougherty, 1977).

The daily report card can be used for social behaviors that need to be eliminated or strengthened, as well as to monitor and track academic performance. The daily report card can be individually tailored to report about a particular behavior or academic area for each student. The teacher may have a target behavior for the class as a whole to reach; it could be a group contingency with individual consequences received at home (Kelly & Carper, 1988).

The use of a daily report card procedure has been known to produce sharp decreases in the number of rule violations and strong increases in the amount and accuracy of work completed (Kelley, Reitman, & Noell, 2003; Lahey, Gendrich, Gendrich, Schnelle, Gant, & McNees, 1977). Parent participation in behavioral interventions has been found effective across a variety of target behaviors (Witt, Hannafin & Martens, 1983). In cases where parent support is not forthcoming, home-based interventions are not likely to succeed.

The daily report card provides a link between parents and teachers. Since it is a home-based reinforcement system it is extremely practical for the classroom teacher to use. It is a very simple procedure that can be explained quickly to parents with minimal time and effort. If the teacher implements the daily report card system for each of his or her students, then that eliminates the need to provide rewards for each student, which could prove to be quite costly.

There have been studies emphasizing the acute relationship between home and school in that the home serves as the primary setting for delivery of a positive consequence. The child's home offers an opportune setting to increase the number of potential contingencies and promote generalization of any school-based intervention (Chafouleas et al., 2002). A home component to behavioral intervention may relieve some of the burden on the teacher to be responsible for the entire treatment program (Chafouleas et al., 2002). A behavioral home-school intervention can benefit early-identified high-risk

students without segregating them from their classmates (Blechman, Taylor, Schrader, 1981). Research results strongly suggest that the use of daily report cards by teachers represents a highly efficient method of indirect intervention with the behavior problems of children (Lahey et al., 1977).

The social validity of daily report cards is not available, however, daily report cards have been developed to include a positive consequence, and overall, parents have indicated their support for the use of these cards (Chafouleas et al., 2002). In 54 out of 55 instances of positive reports, the parent received the reports 98% of the time. In the instances of negative reports, only 10 (56%) were delivered (Trice et al., 1983). The percent of failing grades in one study decreased from 31% to 6% (Trice et al., 1983). The technique of classroom behavior modification work, but only if they are carried out correctly (Lahey et al., 1977), making daily report cards a better option for classroom management.

The daily report card could be faded into a weekly report card once the desired behavior has been strengthened or met. The fading process must be done gradually. The decrease continues after the report card is rated daily and only sent home at the end of the week (Chafouleas et al., 2002). Daily report cards have been used to reduce talk-outs, increase compliance, and improve academic performance across subject areas such as math, spelling, and handwriting.

A great deal of research has been carried out with children and adolescents with ADHD as to the efficacy of employing daily report cards (Barkley, 2006; Power, Mautone, Soffer, Clarke, Marshall, Sharman, J., & Jawad, 2012). Power et al., conducted a randomized clinical trial with students with ADHD and found that their intervention program, Family-School-Success (FSS), which employed a daily report card as a component of their program, had a positive effect on the family as well as on homework completion.

3 Cost Effectiveness

Daily report cards are the least costly and simplest form of feedback to employ in the classroom (Trice et al., 1983). Teachers respond favorably to the daily report card system (Davies et al., 1989). Extensive record keeping is not necessary for the teacher and time is saved by not needing to hand out tokens or points during class. Teacher involvement has been noted to use 10-15 minutes total to manage the entire general education class' report cards. However, less time may be used in a self-contained room and may be a great service for the teacher's aid to provide. For one student's report card, it has been said it will only take one minute for the teacher to complete. Therefore, they are cost effective because no outside materials are required and little time is involved.

4 Disadvantages of the Daily Report Card

The daily report card system relies on parental involvement. If the parent does not wish to become involved in the students education, the parent may refuse to cooperate with the teacher. An even more disturbing issue is the abusive parent who may punish or even beat a child who brought home a poor report card. If the teacher discovers this is the case, than arrange privately with the child to have the daily report card between the student and teacher. If a negative report card was sent home with a child who is at risk of abuse, some sort of monitoring of parental reactions will be necessary to ensure the safety of the student (Dolliver et al., 1985; Lahey et al., 1977). This aspect deserves close monitoring and attention by school personnel.

Even in the case of good parents, a child may avoid bringing a poor report card home. Teachers may wish to have a parent signature included on the daily report card; however, this could potentially lead

to student forgeries. In the initial implementation of the daily report card, teachers should explain to the parents that a report card will be coming home every day. Failure to bring the report card home on any particular day should result in a loss of privileges greater than the consequence for simply bringing home a poor report card.

5 Who Benefits from the Implementation of Daily Report Cards

Teacher, peer, and parent ratings, as well as student self-rating, revealed that the daily report card was viewed as an effective intervention technique (Kelley et al., 2003; Strukoff et al., 1987). The effects of a daily report card transcend that of the student who is using it. Not only is it likely that the target behavior will improve, but the results of this improvement will benefit all people around this student, especially if the target behavior is behavioral in nature. Teachers benefit from reduced stress in the classroom as a result of talk outs or other disruptive behavior that are improved by the report card. If a student performs well academically, teachers feel more competent in their role. The student's peers benefit from a lack of disruptive behavior, they are not annoyed, and they remain undistracted. The parents benefit as well. Poor academic performance and disruptive behavior are all high stressors on behavior. Parents may grow weary not knowing what to do to help their child. A simple reinforcement system such as the daily report card can empower the parent, as well as creating a friendlier home atmosphere.

6 Student Populations that Have Used Daily Report Cards Successfully

Within a general education setting, off-task behavior is exhibited more often by students with learning disabilities (Truesdell, 1990). When a daily report card system is in effect, this allows for the students to have a contingency that they work for and they try to excel in the classroom environment. Home-notes provide contingent feedback to students and parents regarding performance at or above the child's baseline mean (Blechman et al., 1981).

With daily report cards, parents are instructed to simply discuss the contents of the report card with their child and to provide positive social praise when the report was good, or discuss ways to improve a negative report (Burkwist, Mabee, McLaughlin, 1987). There have been suggestions that the daily report card could be used for behaviors that should be shaped gradually rather than reduced in a few sessions (Burkwist et al., 1987).

When the traditional school disciplinary and incentive programs have failed, daily report cards are a productive procedure for both elementary school and secondary school students (Trice et al., 1983). This program regularly monitors the students' behaviors and progress. In order for a classroom intervention to be successful and used consecutively, it must be efficient in terms of time and person resources, and it must be effective in modifying classroom behavior. Daily report cards have proven useful for controlling a wide variety of students across a wide array of situations and require less effort than other contingency models (Witt et al., 1983).

Research suggests that daily report cards are a successful intervention in a variety of age groups and disability designations. McLaughlin, Williams & Howard, 1998 urge that daily report cards be implemented with students who show behavioral characteristics of prenatal exposure to drugs. They concluded that the daily report card shows positive results, with tangible reinforcers being more effective with most children than contingent praise.

Junior high school students who are struggling academically have shown positive results following the implementation of daily report cards. Students could earn points not only by completing assignments

correctly, but also by demonstrating proper study and social skills such as promptly asking for help if necessary, speaking courteously to the teacher, bringing proper materials and coming to class on time (Martin & McLaughlin, 1981). The appropriate working habits learned in this study may generalize to other subjects and benefit students in future school and even vocational pursuits.

The implementation of daily report cards in a regular-education fourth grade classroom with all of the students has been shown to improve their academic work completion as well as reduce the amount of talk-outs during class. (Dougherty & Dougherty, 1977; Witt et al., 1983). Daily report cards have been used in classes with students who are above average intelligence but who show difficulty in completing assignments (Drew, Evans, Bostow, Geiger, & Drash, 1982). Other studies explored the effectiveness of the daily report card on learning disabled and or inconstant performers in upper elementary school (Blechman, et al., 1987). Several studies have been shown using daily report cards in a simplified version in a primary school resource room (Davies, Williams, & McLaughlin, 1989). The inappropriate and disruptive behavior of kindergarten boys decreased after the daily report card system was implemented (Lahey et al., 1977; Strukoff et al., 1987).

The daily report card has even been implemented with adult men serving time in prison as convicted felons who display severe behaviors such as abusive language, poor hygiene, refusal to comply with verbal or written commands by the prison personnel, or damaging or destroying personal property (Bornstein et al., 1980). There was an increase in appropriate inmate behavior with the daily report card program. High school students with severe misconduct have demonstrated improvement following a daily report card program (Trice et al., 1983). The daily report card has been shown to be effective across a wide range of ages and school settings.

7 Areas for Future Research

There is little data that explains whether the daily report card without formal home-based contingencies can actually alter behavior. The amount of parent contact and involvement that is needed to achieve behavioral change requires more exploration (Strukoff et al., 1987). However, recently Jurbergs, Palcic, & Kelly (2010) compared the effectiveness of daily report cards with low income minority students with parents who were involved with their children and those who were not. They found that daily report cards improved student performance in both arrangements. However, the effectiveness of the daily report card was greater when parents were involved in this process.

Little research has been carried out regarding the effects of daily report cards for persons with developmental disabilities or for children with autism. The only research published in the peer-reviewed literature involved adults with autism in a vocational work setting (Smith & Coleman, 1986). With the recent increases in the incidence of autism (B. Williams & R. Williams, 2011), research on the use of daily report cards with such children and youth needs to occur. The daily report card is a delayed reinforcement procedure, and frequently these students respond best to immediate reinforcement. However, the daily report card could potentially be a valuable tool in a fading procedure to thin out the use of rewards or consequences in a classroom token economy or some other contingency management procedure. Finally, a comparison of detailed versus simple report cards could be carried out. In this way, the amount and type of information that needs to be on a daily report card can be empirically determined.

8 Conclusions and Recommendations

Everybody benefits from a daily report card. In addition to increased awareness and involvement of the parent in their offspring's education, parent-child contact seems to be a positive side effect of implementation of the system. Use of this system also provides a sense of consistency between the

school environment and the home. The use of a daily report card in the classroom can improve performance both academically as well as behaviorally.

Studies have shown that both behavior and academic performances can be affected positively with the use of daily report cards (Witt et al., 1983). Behavior and academic performance are highly related, i.e., changes in one dimension are likely to be characterized by corresponding changes in the other dimension. Academic interventions are likely to affect both academic performance and behavior of target subjects by systematically reducing the time allotted for negative behavior (Witt et al., 1983).

Classroom problems such as disruptive behavior and failure to complete assigned work traditionally are difficult problems for teachers to control. Reinforcement procedures such as token economies and point systems with privilege and item exchange have, in many cases, provided an answer to such problems. However, such techniques are frequently time consuming, and, therefore, not economical for the classroom teacher (Drew et al., 1982). Daily report cards provide a cost effective and extremely efficient system that not only improves classroom behavior, but helps improve academic work as well. This is a researched based teaching technique that should be utilized in both the special education and general education classroom

Sample Daily Report Card for Use at the Middle or High School Level	
Student's Name :	
Grade :	
	(Date)
To Teacher :	Please evaluate this student in the areas stated during your class. Use appropriate words such as:
	Poor Fair Good Outstanding
To the Student :	This form is to be presented to each of your teachers at the beginning of class and is to be picked up at the end of the class. The completed form is to be returned to:
(name of counselor/ teacher/ administrator)	Behavioral Criteria: a = On time for class b = Brought materials to class c = Completed homework d = Conduct in Class e = Other (Specify)
Teacher's Signature for each class period:	(Place a "+" in spaces of behaviors demonstrated in your class)
	a b c d e comments
1.	
2.	
3.	
4. Lunch	
5.	
6.	
Parent Signature :	
Comments :	

Figure 1: Sample Daily Report Card for Middle or High School

Weekly Goal Card Intermediate Grades			
Child's Name	:		
Teacher	:		
Grade	:	School	:
			:
Home Room	:		
Week of	:		

Figure 2: Sample of a Daily Report Card

Child's Name	:		
Teacher	:		
Grade	:	School	:
			:
Home Room	:		
Week of	:		

GOAL CARD	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
1. Paid attention in class					
2. Completed work in class					
3. Completed homework					
4. Was well behaved					
5. Desk & notebook neat					
Totals					
Teacher's Initials					

Rating Scale

N/A = Not applicable

0 = Losing, Forgetting or Destroying Card

CHECK SCALE TO BE USED

1 = Very Poor	1 = Poor
2 = Poor	2 = Better
3 = Fair	3 = Good
4 = Good	
5 = Excellent	

Try For _____ Points

Figure 3: Sample of a Daily Report Card

- Dinner Out Restaurant of Choice
- Ice Cream Cone, or Other Treat
- TV Privileges
- Homework Pass (if arranged with teacher)
- Small Toy
- Free Time
- Teacher Helper
- Driving privileges
- Music (listening to or playing)
- Extra Recess
- Earned Time with Friend at Home
- French Fries
- Stickers
- Listening to Music
- Computer Time
- Leave School Early

Figure 4: An example of sample rewards to be used with daily report cards

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