

The ABCs Of Assessment

School Report Cards Issued Academic Achievement, Teaching Approaches, Parent Satisfaction Gauged



During April parents with students at Independent, Ministry of Education and private Arabic schools can expect to receive individual school report cards from their child's school, giving them a broad overview of key academic, pedagogic and social areas related to the school.

School report cards provide information about 277 schools on a wide range of issues such as how the school performed on the QCEA, how satisfied parents are with educational provisions and extra-curricular activities, what approach teachers take to general instruction and dealing with students who may have learning difficulties, and whether students enjoy their classes. There is also basic description of the schools, such as the number of teachers, average class size and facilities available.

It is the first time in Qatar that such reports have been released.

The main target of the report cards is parents, who are meant to use the reports as one of the many tools needed to consider which school might be best for their own child. "The main goal is a very constructive one, which is hopefully to make our schools better and make our schools more accountable by ensuring parents are more actively and truly involved," said Michael Byrne, director of the School Evaluation Office at the Evaluation Institute.

Mr. Byrne cautions against using the report cards as the definitive word on a school, or focusing on any one area of the reports, such as how the school's students performed on the QCEA relative to students in other schools. "It's not designed to be a report card like a student report card," Mr. Byrne said.

Reports have been available on-line since early March. Paper copies are now being distributed to all

Independent, Ministry of Education and private Arabic schools, a task which has proved to be a major production and logistic challenge. School principals receive copies of their report for themselves, their staff and each parent; in addition, schools are sent binder sets containing copies of all 277 reports. Parents also receive a booklet which provides some guidance about how to read and better understand the reports; these booklets are also available on-line. Though printing some 300,000 report cards is an intimidating task, SEC officials say they are committed to delivering hard copies since many parents do not yet have easy access to the Internet.

Report cards provide data not only about the school, but also comparative data about public and private schools catering to the same grade levels.

The sources of information, compiled during the 2004 - 2005 school year, are multiple: questionnaires completed by parents, students, teachers and principals; school visits; school records; and QCEA results. Schools will also receive from the SEC far more information than is contained on the card, in the form of a school report which is a compendium of more detailed statistical data. School principals can decide what to do with the additional material, such as using it for internal review purposes and / or sharing it with school staff or parents.

While the Evaluation Institute is now finishing the distribution of paper copies of the school report cards, it is already collecting the data for the next ones, which it hopes to distribute towards the end of 2006.

Some aspects of the work on the initial reports were undertaken with the support of international organizations, but the great majority

of it has been undertaken locally, according to SEC officials.

The next release should be even more relevant, since it will allow parents to consider a school's development over time. "School report cards are something that should engage and empower parents — enabling them to become more informed about and involved in schools," said Mr. Byrne.

“The main goal is a very constructive one, which is hopefully to make our schools better and...more accountable by ensuring parents are more actively and truly involved”

