By MARGARET MORABITO
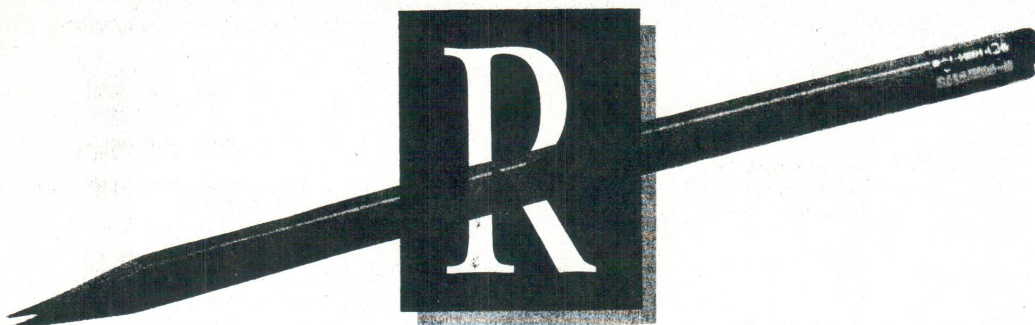
If you're a teacher, a gradebook program can save you time and aggravation.

Teachers have a demanding work day. Not only do they teach, but they counsel students, prepare budgets, coach athletic teams, and even patrol cafeteria and recess areas. And after the last bell rings, they don't just go home and take it easy. They have to prepare lessons, homework assignments and tests, correct and mark students' work, calculate grade averages and talk to parents.

Of all these jobs, perhaps the most time-consuming is figuring semester and final grade averages. Until recently, grade averaging was done with pencil and paper, then a hand calculator. Now teachers are discovering that a personal computer and a gradebook program can speed up this process and let them manipulate their data in more productive ways. Not only can they figure grade averages, but also generate various types of reports for use throughout the school year. Electronic gradebooks are flexible and powerful enough to accommodate all teaching levels, too, from elementary through college.

A basic feature of all gradebook programs is the class roster. Most programs can handle many classes, with varying numbers of students, allow you to add or delete students and create a duplicate roster if you have the same group of students for different subjects.

The fundamental purpose of a gradebook is to calculate individual averages, but various programs do this in different ways. With some, you input grades as points earned out of a possible total. The program keeps a running count and, at the end of the semester, generates a sum and converts it into a letter grade. With others, you input letter grades and assign numeric values to the letters. There are even more flexible programs that accept both letter and number input.

While calculating individual averages is the main goal of gradebook programs, some go further. They'll figure class averages on particular assignments; perform statistical analyses such as standard deviation, mean and median; and print out graphs of class performance, as well as reports and forms.

The report-printing function alone makes gradebooks invaluable. With a well-designed program, you can create all the documents you'll need throughout the year, including class lists with semester grade averages; attendance sheets; individual student progress reports with missing assignments and teacher evaluations; class performance reports on particular assignments; and parent communications. With some gradebooks, you can design your own reports.

Most schools still require the traditional hard-copy grading book as a permanent record, so electronic gradebooks let you create and print out appropriate forms. You can tailor these to include the student's name and identification number, assignment type, due dates, grades and averages—whatever you need.

Electronic gradebooks incorporate features found in spreadsheets and databases. For example, they'll let you search for individual records and class averages so you can assess an individual student's performance or spot class trends. You can also sort class rosters into alphabetical or numerical order and students' grades into descending order according to exam type or marking period.

A crucial feature of a gradebook is the ability to handle many categories of assignments, but allow you to exclude irrelevant ones when you're calculating averages. It should also be able to assign different weights to tests and papers, according to their importance.

The best electronic gradebooks have anticipated these varying needs and provide an encompassing framework in which you can work. Of course, it'll take you time to learn how to use all the functions of these programs, but for years to come you'll save time and be more productive.

Here's a brief look at three commercially available electronic gradebooks for the C-64 and C-128. They offer features typical of gradebook programs on the market today, and they illustrate the level of professionalism that software developers are attaining. A list of manufacturers and prices appears in Table 1.

Grade Manager

Grade Manager by ACS runs on the C-64. It includes eight assignment categories you can customize to your class, and it lets you assign weights to the categories.

During setup, you input the total possible points for each assignment. Then, when you actually input student grades, you type the number of points achieved, not the percentage or the letter grade. The program calculates the percentage grade based on this data.

Grade Manager lets you create, view, modify and print out class rosters; grades for individual students, the entire class or specific assignment categories; and a variety of reports. It also provides a screen dump, and the manual includes a tutorial.

McGuffy's Grader

A fairly new release, McGuffy's Grader for the C-64 and C-128 in 128 mode was produced by Midwest Software in response to teacher demand for a more comprehensive gradebook program than its Master Grades package. McGuffy's Grader comes with a manual, plus demos on disk for fast mastery of the program.

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erates in 80-Column mode and offers windows for combining data on the screen. The program is constructed around a 3000-entry spreadsheet that's designed for inputting, manipulating, sorting and printing out student information.

Twenty assignment categories are built into the program. It can also handle up to four marking periods at once, and store data on up to nine classes on one disk. Grades can be input as letters or numbers, and when you're typing in assignment scores, you can include a description of the assignment in an on-screen information window. The same kind of window is used for inputting student names.

McGuffy's Grader offers a lot of control over the setup of your gradebook and produces a variety of printed lists and reports, including a complete progress report for each student, with comments. If you want to design your own report, you can do that, as well as print out gradebook pages and perform statistical analyses.

The documentation with McGuffy's Grader is clear and comprehensive, and it even provides advice on grading methods. This is a professional gradebook management system that should meet all your needs.

Grade Manager III

Smoky Mountain's Grade Manager III is another quality program that, like the ACS Grade Manager, runs on the C-64. It accepts input from the numeric keypad. The package includes two program disks, a manual, a reference card and membership in the Grade Manager III user's group, which sends out a newsletter.

This program can handle up to 95 assignments and grades per term and then calculate averages for up to six

terms, including midterm and final grades. It can also handle an unlimited number of classes, each one with up to 100 students, and sort data on those students. You can weight assignments as certain percentages of the total grade, and you can weight each term average.

Grades are input as percentages, or you can type in the number of wrong answers out of the total number of questions, and the program will calculate the percentages. The grade display is either in percents or letters, and it's possible to modify the numeric equivalents of letter grades.

Grade Manager III displays some reports on the screen and prints out a lot more in hard copy, including complete gradebook reports and a report card summary covering up to 600 students. You can also print out progress reports on individual students in the form of a letter to the student, with room for comments.

Grade Manager III is available in the third release of Smoky Mountain Software's Gradebook Manager. It's been updated according to teacher requests, and the improvement is evident.

Does It Pass the Test?

As with any major software purchase, before you buy an electronic gradebook, take time to analyze your needs. Then try to see in action any program you're considering.

Also, contact the manufacturer for the names of teachers in your area who use the program. Ask the teachers how they like it and if they'll send you sample printouts.

Your electronic gradebook can be very important in your life. Be sure it's the one you need!■

If you're using Commodore computers for educational purposes (at home or in school) and would like to share your experiences through The Resource Center, write me a letter detailing the equipment you're using, subject areas you teach, grade level or age of your students, software you're using and any other information you feel like including.

Also, if you'd like to donate public domain educational programs to The Resource Center for sharing with other educators or parents, please send along a disk with a brief description of the program. Send correspondence and disks to:
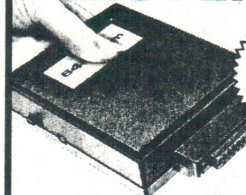
Margaret Morabito
The Resource Center
c/o RUN Magazine
80 Elm St.
Peterborough, NH 03458

You can also leave mail in my online mail boxes: CompuServe (70616,714) or QuantumLink (MARGM).

Table 1. *Manufacturers' addresses and prices.*

Grade Manager/C-64
Associated Computer Services
1306 E. Sunshine
Springfield, MO 65804
$69.95

McGuffy's Grader/C-64 and C-128
Midwest Software
PO Box 214
Farmington, MI 48024
$49.50

Grade Manager III/C-64
Smoky Mountain Software
PO Box 1710
Brevard, NC 28712
$69.95