



A-F School Grading

Accountability- Why bother?

The purpose of a school accountability system is to spur school improvement and increase student performance by providing transparent, objective information to parents, educators, and the public about school effectiveness. A, B, C, D and F school grading recognizes success and exposes failure in a way that everyone can understand.

Why use A-F?

Federal law requires all states to publicly report school performance information. Letter grades do not need an explanation. Everyone understands the difference between an A and a F. This transparency is the catalyst for reform that improves student achievement. Accountability itself does not improve student outcomes, but the data it produces should inspire action that will improve student outcomes.

Why does it work?

A-F is an effective accountability tool because the rigorous model uses valid and reliable indicators based on student learning outcomes and aggregated into a rigorous A-F grading scale. Schools that face accountability under an A-F system feel pressure to improve. It was proven by researchers at the Manhattan Institute¹ who found positive, meaningful impacts continued six years after A-F was first adopted in NYC but ceased after A-F was repealed. Researching Florida's A-F system² found schools facing accountability pressure changed instructional practices in meaningful ways, which explained some of the test score gains.

What are the fundamental principles for A-F school grading?

1. Use clear and transparent descriptors of A, B, C, D and F.
2. Include objective, concise student learning outcome measures.
3. Balance measures of student performance and progress.
4. Calculate student progress toward grade level and advanced achievement.
5. Focus attention on the progress of the lowest performing students in each school.
6. Report results in a timely manner as close to the end of the school year as possible.
7. Communicate clearly to parents.
8. Establish rigorous criteria, with automatic increases, to earn A, B, C, D or F grades.
9. Use grades to identify schools for recognition, intervention, and support.

Who is implementing A-F well?

Florida and Mississippi's A-F systems align to the fundamental principles and have dramatic improvements in student achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and state measures. Eighty-four percent of the national public supports assigning schools a letter grade regarding how well they educate students³.

What are some additional resources to learn more?

ExcelinEd [School Accountability Playbook](#).

[Opinion | Covid Learning Loss is Setting Back American Education. That's a Bad Thing.](#)
- [The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#) and [The accountability conundrum | The Thomas B. Fordham Institute](#).

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