



# A-F

## District Communications Toolkit





## A Message From State Superintendent **Janet Barresi**

Dear District Superintendent:

I'm pleased to provide this communications packet as your district prepares to receive the first set of school site and district-level A-F Report Cards under the new A-F School Grading System. In this electronic kit you'll find a variety of resources intended to help you prepare as you communicate information about your district's A-F School Grading System report cards and the A-F reform to parents, citizens and media outlets in your district.

With this toolkit, our intent is not to prescribe or interfere with your own district-level communications but rather to provide you with additional resources. You'll find:

- A timeline for when to expect embargoed preliminary data related to A-F school performance report cards, as well as dates for when and how the grades will be unveiled statewide to the public.
- A one-page handout you can distribute to parents to explain the reform in succinct terms.
- A short sheet with the most frequently asked questions (a lengthier version of this document is available on our website).
- A sample letter you can adapt and send to parents and constituents in your own district after the State Department of Education officially releases local A-F School Grading System report cards to the public statewide.
- Sample press releases you can adapt for local use after the State Department of Education has officially released A-F School Grading System report cards to the public.
- Links to key online resources for educators, parents and citizens who want more information.
- Three sample report cards that show simulations for how an elementary school, a middle school and a high school might be graded.

Earlier this year the State Department of Education provided districts with a comprehensive technical guide ([go.usa.gov/7q1](http://go.usa.gov/7q1)) to our new A-F School Grading System on school performance, with more in-depth information related to how grades are calculated. I want to remind district leaders that this technical guide is still available online, as is a detailed video seminar ([bit.ly/NobUwC](http://bit.ly/NobUwC)) presented by our Assistant State Superintendent for Accountability and Assessment, Maridyth McBee.

These previously existing resources walk administrators and educators through the finer points and major components that determine a school's letter grade — student achievement, student growth and whole school performance.

I believe the new A-F report cards will make school performance clear in a transparent manner easily communicated to the public. The new A-F Grading System will replace past systems that were too complicated for most parents to understand.

Every stakeholder in our state should also understand that the new letter grades from the A-F reform should be seen in context as only one measure of a school's performance. The end result of this new reform should be that we will all raise the grade together to improve our schools, to learn from best practices and to see to it that every school in our state succeeds.

Sincerely,

Janet C. Barresi  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Oklahoma State Department of Education



# Key Dates & Tentative Timeline Related to A-F School Grading System Report Card Release

## ■ August 15

A-F Communications Toolkit released to districts.

## ■ August 23

Monthly meeting of State Board of Education.

## ■ The week of August 27

- Embargoed and confidential preliminary data on A-F School Grading System released to districts for review.
- Embargoed preliminary ESEA Waiver Designations released to districts (please note: this is separate from A-F School Report Cards).

## ■ The week of September 10

New resource booklet and toolkit available to districts, **Raise the Grade Together** (a guide to assist districts in planning for future improvements to A-F School Report Cards).

## ■ September 12-13

**Raise The Grade Together** symposium for schools preliminarily designated as Priority, Targeted Intervention, or Focus Schools under ESEA waiver.

## ■ The week of September 24

Deadline for districts to reply to the State Department of Education with corrections and refinement of data.

## ■ September 27

Monthly meeting of State Board of Education.

## ■ Early October

All A-F School Grading System report cards released to the public, along with a Web page enabling public access to report cards.

## ■ What is Oklahoma's A-F School Grading System?

**Oklahoma's A-F School Grading System** is based on the concept that parents and community members should be able to quickly and easily determine how schools are performing. To that end, the new A-F system gives all schools and school districts in the state of Oklahoma a grade of A, B, C, D, or F — similar to grades already given to students. This allows us to offer a system similar to report cards given to students.

The A-F grading system will be a much more user-friendly way for parents to determine school performance than previous complex systems such as the Academic Performance Index, used under the federal *No Child Left Behind* law, which gave schools numerical scores from 0 to 1,500 based on performance measures.

The A-F grading system will be implemented for the 2012-13 school year based on data from the 2011-12 school year, and will be reported annually thereafter. The reform offers easy-to-understand and concise information for parents and citizens, so that they can access information about schools quickly and at their fingertips on the Web.

## ■ What does this mean for me and my child?

Knowledge is power. The new A-F Report Cards are one important way to empower parents and community members with easy-to-understand information. The impact of grades will vary from school to school. Each situation is unique. Broadly speaking, overall letter grades are a good indicator of school performance, but there are other indicators of performance that should be considered as well.

For schools that receive lower letter grades, the State Department of Education is already working to provide resources designed to assist in future plans for improvement. The State Department of Education will also recognize "A" schools as examples of excellence. The A-F reform is one important piece of information parents can use when deciding the best educational options for their own children.

## ■ What can I do with this information?

The A-F report cards are "news you can use." Just as important as the clear and easy-to-understand information provided by the report cards, the letter grades provide an opportunity for everyone to raise the grade together, to look for areas for improvement and to work as a team. The release of report cards is a chance for constructive and positive conversations. One school may receive an overall lower letter grade, but demonstrate success in one or more areas. Parents and school leaders can use this information to build on success to achieve better marks in other areas. For schools that have achieved an overall higher letter grade, it may also be the case that they aren't doing quite as well in one area. This is another opportunity for a constructive dialogue between parents, school leaders and teachers.



# Frequently Asked Questions About Oklahoma's A-F School Grading System



## ■ What is the A-F School Grading System?

The A-F School Grading System gives all schools and school districts in the state of Oklahoma a grade of A, B, C, D, or F, similar to grades given to students. The A-F grading system will be implemented for the 2012-13 school year based on data from the 2011-12 school year, and will be reported annually thereafter. The reform offers easy-to-understand and concise information for parents and citizens, so they can access information about schools quickly and at their fingertips.

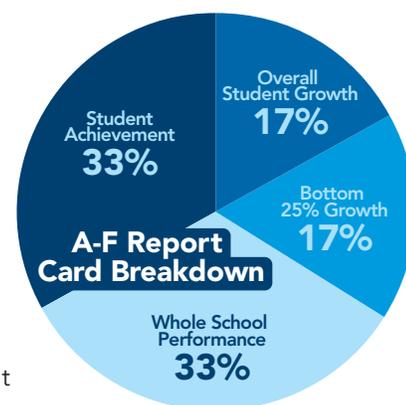
## ■ Why is an A-F School Report Card important?

In 2011, the Oklahoma Legislature adopted the A-F School Grading System to provide incentives to schools to challenge all students to reach high levels of college and career readiness. A-F report cards will be used to help schools focus on areas of excellence as well as areas where improvement is needed. The new A-F report cards will make school performance clear in a transparent manner easily communicated to the public. The new report cards also will give schools a tool to encourage more parental and community involvement. Schools with higher levels of parent and community involvement have a better chance of succeeding. With this important reform, Oklahoma is empowering everyone — whether school administrators, parents, classroom teachers or citizens — to make informed choices and to identify ways to strengthen and improve all of our schools for the benefit of each student in Oklahoma. Each school's and district's report card will be available to the public on the State Department of Education's Website. The State Department of Education will develop an honor roll of schools that receive an "A".

## ■ How is a school or district's A-F grade calculated?

A-F Report Card grades are calculated using the following four categories:

- 33 percent of a school's grade will be based on **student achievement** on state exams.
- 33 percent of the grade will be based on **whole school performance** factors such as student attendance rates, dropout rates, graduation rates, advanced course participation and performance, and more. Bonus factors are school climate surveys, and parent and community involvement.
- 17 percent of the grade is **overall student growth**.
- The remaining 17 percent is **student growth of the bottom 25 percent of students**.



A letter grade will be awarded in each of these categories and combined to award an overall letter grade for a school. Districts will receive report cards based on the grades of all school sites in the district. The State Department of Education in April released a comprehensive A-F Report Card technical guide ([go.usa.gov/7q1](http://go.usa.gov/7q1)) to all Oklahoma school districts. The technical guide explains each factor used to determine grades and gives schools and districts a step-by-step methodology to calculate their own grades.

# Frequently Asked Questions About Oklahoma's A-F School Grading System



## ■ When can schools and districts expect to receive their A-F grades?

Preliminary embargoed data will be released in draft form to districts by late August. The districts will have 30 days to review the data used to factor the grades and/or request a review of the grade received. Once requests and corrections have been approved, report cards will be released to the public.

## ■ Where can I find rules governing the implementation of A-F?

In compliance with the new state law directing an A-F School Grading System, the Oklahoma State Department of Education developed detailed rules for implementation of the reform. These rules were approved by the State Legislature and Governor Mary Fallin during the 2012 legislative session. The entire rules document can be found on the Oklahoma State Department of Education Website at [go.usa.gov/7q2](http://go.usa.gov/7q2).

## ■ What is the law governing A-F?

In 2011, the Oklahoma State Legislature passed House Bill 1456, authored by State Representative Lee Denney (R-Cushing) and State Senator Clark Jolley (R-Edmond). Governor Mary Fallin signed HB 1456 into law in the spring of 2011. The text of the bill can be located at [go.usa.gov/7q4](http://go.usa.gov/7q4).



# Sample Letter to Parents and Community Members



Dear parents and community members,

Our school recently received its new letter grade from the State Department of Education as part of a statewide reform initiating an **A-F School Grading System**.

This grade reflects several different factors, such as test results of all students, growth factors that compare test results from multiple years as well as growth in the 25 percent lowest performing students, and whole school performance factors such as attendance, graduation and dropout rates.

As parents or community members, you help to play a role in the grade our school receives. We are able to receive bonus points based on the number of school climate surveys we receive each year. You can assist by supporting and reinforcing the hard work needed by your student to learn the information taught in school. One way to do so is by volunteering in the school, because we also receive bonus points based on the involvement of parents and community members in our school. As we look ahead to improving our letter grade in the future, we'll be working with you on ways to increase these bonus points.

Our letter grade is important for several reasons. Though it should be seen in light of a complete context and is one measure of our performance, it shows areas where we are doing well and it highlights areas where we need to improve.

Perhaps more importantly, this new report card provides more straightforward information than performance ranking systems used in the past that were confusing and cumbersome for the average parent or community member to understand. The information provided in the report card is clear cut and is available to you online as well.

We hope you will view this grade as a way to become more involved in [OUR SCHOOL]. As part of this new reform, State Superintendent Janet Barresi has launched **Raise the Grade Together** — an effort to help every school in the state improve and succeed.

Help us raise the grade together by taking the mission of educating children as a community approach. Where you see weak areas in student achievement or attendance, help us to shore up those areas by offering mentoring assistance. As always, we need volunteers to help in a classroom or in the media center at our school. Attend school functions. Communicate with us about your child's needs.

Together we can strive for excellence in all areas of education. Together we can raise this grade.

Sincerely,

# Sample Letter – A Schools



Dear parents and community members,

Our school recently received a new “A” letter grade from the State Department of Education as part of a new statewide reform initiating an **A-F School Grading System**.

This is a moment to celebrate, and represents a significant accomplishment for our school community. As educators, as parents and as students we can all take pride in this achievement. Our “A” grade reflects several different factors, such as test results of all students, growth factors that compare test results from multiple years, and factors such as attendance.

As parents or community members, you can also take pride in the fact that you have played another role in the grade our school received. We are able to receive bonus points based on the number of school climate surveys we receive each year. We also receive bonus points based on the involvement of parents and community members in our school.

We’ve done well, and while this is a chance to celebrate, this is also a time to continue to strive for excellence. Though our letter grade is high, there is always room for improvement. We’ll be looking ahead to plans for sustaining our “A” and building upon it.

Perhaps more importantly, this new report card provides more straightforward information than performance ranking systems used in the past that were confusing and cumbersome for the average parent or community member to understand. The information provided in the report card is clear cut and it is available to you online for download at the State Department of Education’s website ([ok.gov/sde](http://ok.gov/sde)).

We hope you will view this grade as a way to maintain your involvement in [OUR SCHOOL]. Meanwhile, as part of this new reform, State Superintendent Janet Barresi has launched **Raise the Grade Together** — an effort to help every school in the state improve and succeed.

Let’s work together to maintain the level of excellence we’ve achieved. And let’s look for ways to help other schools attain a similar level of achievement.

Sincerely,

## [YOUR SCHOOL] RELEASES NEW A-F SCHOOL REPORT CARD

CITY, DATE — [YOUR SCHOOL] released its new letter grade report card today to parents and community members, as part of Oklahoma’s new **A-F School Grading System**.

[QUOTE FROM LOCAL SUPERINTENDENT AND/OR PRINCIPAL]

[YOUR SCHOOL/DISTRICT] received a [GRADE], which reflects several different factors, such as test results of all students, growth factors that compare test results from multiple years as well as growth in the 25 percent lowest performing students, along with whole school performance factors such as attendance, graduation and dropout rates.

The new **A-F School Grading System** adopted by the Oklahoma State Legislature and signed into law in 2011 is part of a package of reforms designed to increase transparency and accountability in Oklahoma’s public schools by providing easy-to-understand information for parents and community members. This is the first year for the new report cards based on the system.

Whether a school receives a higher or lower letter grade, the release of the new report cards represents an opportunity for schools, parents and community members to work together to help every school in the state succeed. To that end, the State Department of Education has launched a new initiative to accompany the release of A-F report cards called **Raise the Grade Together**.

“The A-F reform has strong support among parents and the general public. At the end of the day, it represents an opportunity for a community to gather around a school to help it improve,” State Superintendent Janet Barresi said. “The new A-F system is a step forward in transparency and accountability, and it provides an opportunity for all of us to join hands and help struggling schools succeed.”

Superintendent Barresi pointed out that one component of a school’s grade relies directly on parents and community members, as schools receive bonus points based on the involvement of parents and community members in our school. Barresi said the **Raise the Grade Together** initiative would provide schools across the state with resources as they work with parents and community members on future improvements.

-END-

# Sample Press Release – A Schools



## **[YOUR SCHOOL] CELEBRATES NEW SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REPORT CARD WITH ADDITION TO STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION HONOR ROLL**

CITY, DATE — [YOUR SCHOOL] is celebrating its “A” grade as part of Oklahoma’s new statewide **A-F School Grading System**, after being recognized as part of the State Board of Education’s Honor Roll under the statewide reform effort.

[QUOTES FROM LOCAL SUPERINTENDENT AND/OR OTHER SCHOOL LEADERS]

[YOUR SCHOOL] received an “A” on its new Oklahoma School Report Card, released to the public by the State Department of Education this week.

The new **A-F School Grading System** adopted by the Oklahoma State Legislature and signed into law in 2011 is part of a package of reforms designed to increase transparency and accountability in Oklahoma’s public schools by providing easy-to-understand information for parents and community members. This is the first year for the new report cards based on the system.

Whether a school receives a higher or lower letter grade, the release of the new report cards represents an opportunity for schools, parents and community members to work together to help every school in the state succeed. To that end, the State Department of Education has launched a new initiative to accompany the release of A-F report cards called **Raise the Grade Together**.

“The A-F reform has strong support among parents and the general public. Schools that have received an ‘A’ on their report cards should celebrate this important accomplishment,” State Superintendent Janet Barresi said. “Educators, students and parents at these schools are to be commended for their hard work.”

Barresi also encouraged “A” schools to reach out to schools that might have received lower letter grades.

“The new A-F system is a step forward in transparency and accountability, and it provides an opportunity for all of us to join hands and help struggling schools succeed,” she said.

Through the **Raise the Grade Together** initiative, schools across the state will be provided with resources as they work with parents and community members on future improvements.

-END-

# Want to Know More?



The Oklahoma State Department of Education has compiled a number of resources related to the new **A-F School Grading System**. If parents or community members wish to explore the topic beyond the more condensed information offered in this communications toolkit, you may want to direct them to these additional online resources:

- **Oklahoma State Department of Education**  
**Web page on the A-F School Grading System**  
(includes links to technical manual, a “myths vs. facts” answer compilation and a detailed instructional video for school administrators) [go.usa.gov/7qb](https://go.usa.gov/7qb)
- **A-F School Report Card Technical Guide**  
[go.usa.gov/7q1](https://go.usa.gov/7q1)
- **Text of House Bill 1456**  
[go.usa.gov/7q4](https://go.usa.gov/7q4)
- **Administrative Rules**  
[go.usa.gov/7q2](https://go.usa.gov/7q2)
- **Rule Impact Statement**  
[go.usa.gov/7qj](https://go.usa.gov/7qj)

## **Contact Information:**

Damon Gardenhire  
*Director of Communications*  
[Damon.Gardenhire@sde.ok.gov](mailto:Damon.Gardenhire@sde.ok.gov)  
(405) 521-4894

Tricia Pemberton  
*Communications Specialist*  
[Tricia.Pemberton@sde.ok.gov](mailto:Tricia.Pemberton@sde.ok.gov)  
(405) 521-3371

This 2012 report card is released in the initial phase of the A-F reform  
 No school identified under the new accountability system will face any new requirements than if they had been identified in the 2011-12 school year.

# Simulated A-F Report Card Grades K-5

District: EXAMPLE DISTRICT School: EXAMPLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

## Student Achievement (33%) \*

Subject	# of Students	Performance Index	Letter Grade
Language Arts	177	77	C
Mathematics	175	88	B
Science	61	77	C
Social Studies/History/Geography	61	59	F
Writing	57	83	B
<b>Overall 2011 Student Performance Grade</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>C</b>

## Overall Student Growth (17%) \*\*

Subject	# of Students	Growth Index	Letter Grade
Language Arts	120	80	B
Mathematics	120	87	B
<b>Overall 2011 Student Growth Grade</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>B</b>

## Bottom 25 Percent Growth (17%) \*\*\*

Subject	# of Students	Growth Index	Letter Grade
Language Arts	30	64	D
Mathematics	30	79	C
<b>Overall Bottom Quartile Growth Grade</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>C</b>

## Whole School Performance (33%) \*\*\*\*

Student Attendance Rate		95%	A
Dropout Rate		0%	A
Advanced Coursework		***	***
	Bonus		
School Climate Survey	Y		
Parent & Community Engagement	Y		
<b>Total Community School Participation Grade</b>			<b>A</b>
<b>FINAL GRADE</b>			<b>B</b>

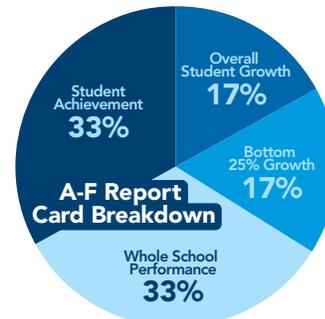
# B

## 2.83 GPA

## School Performance Grading Scale

How is overall GPA (grade point average) determined for a school?

GPA Range	Letter Grade
3.75 – 4.0	A
2.75 – 3.74	B
1.75 – 2.74	C
0.75 – 1.74	D
Below 0.75	F



\*Student Achievement: 33% of the overall grade is based on the Oklahoma School Testing Program assessments in grades three (3) through twelve (12).

\*\*Overall Student Growth: 17% of the grade is based on annual student learning gains as measured by Oklahoma's annual standardized assessments in reading and mathematics in grades three (3) through eight (8); and Algebra I and English II end-of-instruction tests.

\*\*\*Bottom 25 Percent Growth: 17% is based on the growth of the bottom 25 percent of students as measured by Oklahoma's annual standardized assessments in reading and mathematics in grades three (3) through eight (8); and Algebra I and English II end-of-instruction tests for the lowest 25 percent of students in the school.

\*\*\*\*Whole School Performance: 33% of the final grade is based on whole school improvement, based on a variety of factors including attendance, dropout rate and parent & community engagement.



This 2012 report card is released in the initial phase of the A-F reform  
 No school identified under the new accountability system will face any new requirements than if they had been identified in the 2011-12 school year.

# Simulated A-F Report Card Grades 6-8

District: EXAMPLE DISTRICT School: EXAMPLE MIDDLE SCHOOL

## Student Achievement (33%) \*

Subject	# of Students	Performance Index	Letter Grade
Language Arts	353	88	B
Mathematics	389	88	B
Science	115	98	A
Social Studies/History/Geography	171	94	A
Writing	111	94	A
<b>Overall 2011 Student Performance Grade</b>	<b>1,139</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>A</b>

## Overall Student Growth (17%) \*\*

Subject	# of Students	Growth Index	Letter Grade
Language Arts	283	84	B
Mathematics	319	81	B
<b>Overall 2011 Student Growth Grade</b>	<b>602</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>B</b>

## Bottom 25 Percent Growth (17%) \*\*\*

Subject	# of Students	Growth Index	Letter Grade
Language Arts	53	51	F
Mathematics	48	38	F
<b>Overall Bottom Quartile Growth Grade</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>F</b>

## Whole School Performance (33%) \*\*\*\*

Student Attendance Rate		97%	A
Dropout Rate		0%	A
Advanced Coursework		27%	B
	Bonus		
School Climate Survey	Y		
Parent & Community Engagement	N		
<b>Total Community School Participation Grade</b>			<b>A</b>
<b>FINAL GRADE</b>			<b>B</b>

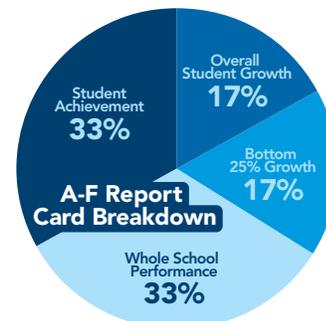
# B

## 3.15 GPA

## School Performance Grading Scale

How is overall GPA (grade point average) determined for a school?

GPA Range	Letter Grade
3.75 – 4.0	A
2.75 – 3.74	B
1.75 – 2.74	C
0.75 – 1.74	D
Below 0.75	F



\***Student Achievement:** 33% of the overall grade is based on the Oklahoma School Testing Program assessments in grades three (3) through twelve (12).  
 \*\***Overall Student Growth:** 17% of the grade is based on annual student learning gains as measured by Oklahoma's annual standardized assessments in reading and mathematics in grades three (3) through eight (8); and Algebra I and English II end-of-instruction tests.  
 \*\*\***Bottom 25 Percent Growth:** 17% is based on the growth of the bottom 25 percent of students as measured by Oklahoma's annual standardized assessments in reading and mathematics in grades three (3) through eight (8); and Algebra I and English II end-of-instruction tests for the lowest 25 percent of students in the school.  
 \*\*\*\***Whole School Performance:** 33% of the final grade is based on whole school improvement, based on a variety of factors including attendance, dropout rate and parent & community engagement.



This 2012 report card is released in the initial phase of the A-F reform  
 No school identified under the new accountability system will face any new requirements than if they had been identified in the 2011-12 school year.

## Simulated A-F Report Card Grades 9-12

District: EXAMPLE DISTRICT School: EXAMPLE HIGH SCHOOL

### Student Achievement (33%) \*

Subject	# of Students	Performance Index	Letter Grade
Language Arts	717	94	A
Mathematics	979	83	B
Science	428	86	B
History	369	91	A
<b>Overall 2011 Student Performance Grade</b>	<b>2,493</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>B</b>

### Overall Student Growth (17%) \*\*

Subject	# of Students	Growth Index	Letter Grade
Language Arts	312	107	A
Mathematics	313	106	A
<b>Overall 2011 Student Growth Grade</b>	<b>625</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>A</b>

### Bottom 25 Percent Growth (17%) \*\*\*

Subject	# of Students	Growth Index	Letter Grade
Language Arts	86	90	A
Mathematics	83	95	A
<b>Overall Bottom Quartile Growth Grade</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>A</b>

### Whole School Performance (33%) \*\*\*\*

Graduation Rate		84.5%	B
Advanced Coursework Participation		78.2%	C
AP/IB Exam Performance		58.9%	C
Advanced Courses Performance		86.3%	B
College Entrance Exam Participation		73.7%	B
College Entrance Exam Performance		60.4%	C
Eighth Grade Graduation Rate		***	***
Five Year Graduation Rate		***	**
	Bonus		
School Climate Survey	Y		
Parent & Community Engagement	Y		
ACE Graduation Participation	Y		
College Remediation	Y		
<b>Total Community School Participation Grade</b>			<b>B</b>
<b>FINAL GRADE</b>			<b>B</b>

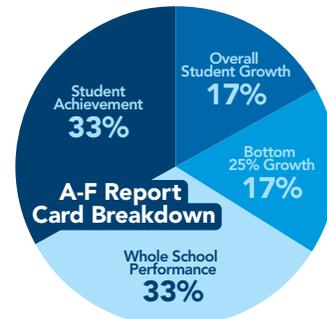
# B

## 3.34 GPA

### School Performance Grading Scale

How is overall GPA (grade point average) determined for a school?

GPA Range	Letter Grade
3.75 – 4.0	A
2.75 – 3.74	B
1.75 – 2.74	C
0.75 – 1.74	D
Below 0.75	F



\*Student Achievement: 33% of the overall grade is based on the Oklahoma School Testing Program assessments in grades three (3) through twelve (12).

\*\*Overall Student Growth: 17% of the grade is based on annual student learning gains as measured by Oklahoma's annual standardized assessments in reading and mathematics in grades three (3) through eight (8); and Algebra I and English II end-of-instruction tests.

\*\*\*Bottom 25 Percent Growth: 17% is based on the growth of the bottom 25 percent of students as measured by Oklahoma's annual standardized assessments in reading and mathematics in grades three (3) through eight (8); and Algebra I and English II end-of-instruction tests for the lowest 25 percent of students in the school.

\*\*\*\*Whole School Performance: 33% of the final grade is based on whole school improvement, based on a variety of factors including attendance, dropout rate and parent & community engagement.

