



Raise THE Grade TOGETHER

Quick Reference Guide for Parents

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. 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 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.

The release of report cards is a chance for constructive and positive conversations. Some schools 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. Some schools may have achieved an overall higher letter grade but aren't doing quite as well in one area. This is another opportunity for a constructive dialogue between parents, school leaders and teachers.

PARENT POWER

A crucial goal of the A-F reform is to foster more parent and community engagement in schools. Parents and community members can join in the effort to raise the grade together by taking the mission of educating children as a community approach.

A school community's purpose is to ensure that each student gains the knowledge, skills, habits, and attitudes necessary for success. This community forms the bond between the home and school where responsibility for students' academic, social, and emotional learning is shared.

When a school functions as a community rather than in a community, its stakeholders have the opportunity to interact with one another and share common values about the education of their children. This requires many people to work together including students, teachers, administrators, parents, family members, and volunteers to support the student.

A school community is based upon the shared belief that:

1. All parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them;
2. All teachers are inspired by professional standards and personal conviction to see each child succeed;
3. Student success is reinforced when parents, teachers, and other members of the school community work together on their behalf; and
4. School leaders are the prime movers in establishing and nurturing the processes and practices to intentionally strengthen the school community.

In short, a school community rests upon mutual respect, strong relationships and focused attention to students' academic, personal and emotional learning.



Superintendent Janet Barresi's Message to Parents:

"The report cards are an important piece of information parents can use when deciding the best educational options for their own children. This is a call to action. This provides an opportunity for each and every one of us to join in the effort in our own communities to work with educators on assuring the success of each child."

The Role of the School Leaders

Effective school leaders and administrators can lead “The Way to an A” by engaging teachers and the community in the development and implementation of a school-wide vision that is shared and supported by the entire community. The effective school administrator leads progressive change by establishing high expectations for all students, focusing on quality instruction, and promoting a school culture that encourages and motivates the success of all students. Eliciting the buy-in from teachers, students, parents, and community leaders is the result of intentional communication, shared involvement in decision-making, and identification of improvement strategies. It will create a school culture that will yield improvement. If you haven’t already, now is the time to engage your school administrators and leaders in a meaningful conversation about how your school can Raise the Grade.

Be Intentional! Build a culture of Parental Involvement and Engagement!

Work with school leaders to establish within the school an open and welcoming climate that creates trust and opportunities for families to communicate their insights, concerns, and hopes for their children. Ask questions of and talk to teachers and administrators about the school. Start a conversation about your child and your thoughts! This two-way communication informs administrators so that they can better support your children’s education, and it helps teachers to better understand the external factors that can influence students’ learning and engagement.

Here are a few key questions to ask to get the conversation started in your school:

Does my school have a plan for how to raise the grade?

Is my school utilizing the five Common Practices of successful schools listed in the Raising the Grade Together Guide? (see “The Way to an A” p.4-10)

- Does my school **Organize Data in a Meaningful Way?**
- Does my school have a **Written Plan for success?**
- Does my school **Monitor the Implementation of the Plan?**
- Does my school **Use Tools Designed to Support Improvement?**
- Does my school perform an annual **Fiscal Analysis?**

Is my school utilizing federal funding to increase student achievement, to retain and train great teachers, and to reduce class sizes?

■ Federal dollars are set aside to assist schools with many things that are likely to support student success. See “Aligning Funds and Resources to Needs” (p. 11-12) in the Raise the Grade Together Guide.

Has my school applied for grants to increase advanced coursework offerings to all students, to establish enriching after school programs for kids, or to improve the school?

■ Federal and state funded grants are available to schools for a variety of purposes. Schools must apply for the grant money to receive it. Could you help your school apply to receive grant funds? See “Grant Opportunities to Help You Succeed” (p. 13-14) in the Raise the Grade Together Guide.

Is my school utilizing the state-funded and highly-trained REAC³H Coaches to improve literacy scores?

■ REAC³H Coaches are reading specialists who are located regionally throughout the state. The 60 coaches have been strategically placed throughout the state in order to allow all districts to be serviced.

Is my school training teachers to teach the new Oklahoma C³ Standards to prepare my student to be successful on the new, more rigorous PARCC tests which will be implemented in the 2014-15 school year?

■ Oklahoma C³ Standards are new standards to guide instruction which will affect all students from Pre-Kindergarten to 12th grade. The standards require much deeper and more thoughtful learning in order to prepare students for a changing world and global competition. All schools should implement the standards by the 2013-14 school year or sooner to prepare students for the more rigorous tests which will commence the following school year.

What can I do to help my school be more successful?

■ Great schools really are borne out of great communities.
■ You really can make a difference for not only your child, but for your child’s school.

Get involved! Be in the know! And let’s Raise the Grade Together!