

Introduction: About Oklahoma's A-F School Grading System

Dr. Michael Tamborski
Executive Director of Accountability
Oklahoma State Department of Education



Dear Educators, Parents and Community Stakeholders,

November 6, 2013, marks the second annual release of the A-F School Grading system. Adopted into law by the Oklahoma Legislature in 2011, it is designed to incentivize schools to strive for and reach high levels of college- and career-readiness. Unlike previous systems of school accountability, this initiative shows how students within a school are meeting or advancing toward grade-level academic standards in a framework that anyone can understand.

As this is still a relatively new system, however, we must ensure that the A-F system is both understandable and interpreted appropriately. Therefore, it is important to have a clear idea of what it is — and isn't — intended to measure.

The A-F Report Card is:

- An indicator of the percentage of students, regardless of background, within a school who are currently meeting or exceeding grade-level academic standards.
- An indicator of the percentage of students (particularly the lower performing students) who are at least making significant progress toward meeting grade-level academic standards.
- An indicator of whether schools are exceeding expectations in terms of school attendance, high school graduation, etc. (via the awarding of bonus points).

The A-F Report Card is not:

- A measure of the "school" or "teacher" effect on student learning.
- A statement about a school's overall quality of services provided.

In other words, much like a student report card, the A-F grade tells us how students at a particular school are doing, but not necessarily why.

Finally, substantial changes to state law have made this year's report card very different from the one released in 2012. In addition to how student performance and growth are calculated, data that had fallen under "Whole School Improvement" is now reported as bonus points. Simply put, the 2013 grades place more emphasis on student achievement and student growth than did 2012 report cards.

Because of this, the overall letter grades on the 2013 report card are not directly comparable to last year's results. The progress of students at a particular school can be seen in the "growth" section of this year's report card as the percentage of students who either moved toward, or maintained, grade-level proficiency.

Oklahoma's A-F School Grading System is based on the belief that parents and communities should be able to quickly and easily determine how students in their local schools are performing.

The report cards should spur constructive and positive conversation between educators and parents. School districts need parental and community support to help students achieve their full potential. Through the work, commitment and cooperation of us all – teacher, administrator, parent, student and the local community – our schools stand a much better chance of being the best they can possibly be.