



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: What is the purpose of the A-F Accountability System?

A: The A-F Accountability System is designed to empower all public elementary, middle and high schools in the state to achieve and increase student success in Arizona. The system:

1. Provides schools with quantitative feedback on what areas they are excelling and in what areas they need to focus on;
2. Empowers parents with quantitative information when making school choices; and
3. Holds schools accountable.

Q: Who assigns the letter grades to schools and when are they assigned?

A: The Arizona Department of Education calculates the letter grades based on the system adopted by the State Board of Education. Grades are made available to schools the week of September 25th and then released to the public on October 9th. The reason for this embargo period is to allow schools to review their letter grade and file an appeal with the State Board of Education if appropriate.

Q: What does the system measure? How are letter grades calculated for schools?

A: The system quantitatively measures student proficiency and annual growth in key areas as well as readiness to take the next step in their education or career. Specifically, schools annually earn a letter grade based on a range of comprehensive measures including:

- Proficiency in English Language Arts, Math and Science
- Growth in English Language Arts and Math
- Proficiency and Growth of English Language Learners
- Graduation Rate
- Acceleration and Readiness Measures, which consists of several measures including chronic absenteeism and the improved growth of subgroups (economically disadvantaged, special education, etc.)
- College and Career Readiness Indicators, which includes passing the ACT or SAT or earning an industry credential, certificate or license

Q: How does a school receive an A? How did the Board decide this?

A: The System is designed to provide multiple avenues for schools to earn points. In order to earn an A, schools must receive the minimum percentage of points out of 100 as established by the State Board of Education. This minimum is referred to as a "cut score." In establishing cut scores, the Board considered its guiding principles: 1) fairness and equity; 2) student-level focus; 3) transparency, ease of understanding and ease of



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communication; and 4) incentives to action. Ultimately, the Board set these cut scores to best reflect the performance of schools and students:

K-8 Schools	High Schools
A: 86-100%	A: 86-100%
B: 85-74%	B: 85-71%
C: 73-62%	C: 70-56%
D: 61-50%	D: 55-41%
F: Less than 50%	F: Less than 41%

Q: What happens to D and F schools? What can schools do to improve their grade?

A: The A-F Accountability System is not designed to stigmatize schools but rather to help the state identify which are in need of support. The Arizona Department of Education will partner with D and F schools to improve their A-F ranking through the development and implementation of a comprehensive improvement plan. Once improvement plans have been implemented, schools are reassessed and schools that continue to perform poorly will receive additional involvement from the state. D and F schools are also potentially eligible for additional federal funds.

Q: What if schools do not agree with their grade?

A: During the embargo period, schools will have the opportunity to appeal their letter grade based on extreme circumstances that are outside of the school's control (i.e. a tornado touched down near the school on the week of testing and negatively affected student performance). Please find the application at <https://azsbe.az.gov/f-school-letter-grades>.

Q: What is the difference between Quantitative Data and Qualitative Data and what type of data does the new A-F Accountability System measure?

A. The new A-F Accountability System assesses **Quantitative Data**, such as test results and graduation results that are measurable. **Qualitative Data**, such as different awards earned, quality of music programs, PTA involvement, etc. is subjective, so it is not included in this system, but is part of the larger picture when evaluating which school is right for individual students.

Q: How should parents/caregivers use the results when evaluating schools?

A: Arizona is required by law to create a system that can assess a wide variety of schools and students through measurable, quantitative data. This new system successfully and accurately assesses key quantitative measures that can be applied to all of Arizona's schools. However, it is recommended that parents couple this system's results with

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qualitative data found through tours, discussions with principals and other parents or other means, to understand if a school is the right fit for them.

Q: Why was a new system created and how does it differ from Arizona's previous system?

A: Arizona is required by federal law to measure school performance and is required by state law to do so through an A-F letter grade system. The new system relies less on the statewide assessment, and utilizes a broader range of measures to obtain a more accurate quantitative measurement of student and school wide achievement.

Q: Will this system change?

A: The Board has committed to refine and enhance the A-F Accountability System and to incorporate new measures of school performance as data becomes available in future years but the Board has not committed to enacting sweeping changes.

Q: Do other states utilize this type of grading system?

A: At least 17 states currently utilize an A-F school grading system. Every state is required to utilize some type of measure of school performance that may include a summative score, accreditation system or an A-F letter grades.

Q: What has been the response to Arizona's A-F Accountability Letter System?

A: In April 2017, soon after its adoption, Arizona's A-F Accountability System was recognized as a national leader in school accountability by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute for its clear labels, focus on all students, and fairness to all schools.

Q: How was the A-F Accountability System developed?

A: Based on the framework established by the Legislature in 2016, the State Board of Education appointed an ad hoc committee consisting of a range of stakeholders, utilized the expertise of the Arizona Department of Education and the Accountability Advisory Group and sought public input through 17 public hearings across the state and a survey that returned almost 1700 responses.

Q: What is the law governing A-F?

A: There are primarily two laws governing A-F: State statute A.R.S. § 15-241 and the federal law The Every Student Succeeds Act.

Q: What does each letter grade mean?

A: Below is a table that describes the levels of performance associated with each letter grade that was developed with stakeholders and adopted by the Board.

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Letter Grade	Level of performance	Descriptor
A	Excellent	Distinguished performance on statewide assessment, significant student growth, high 4 year graduation rates, students are on track to proficiency; overall performance is significantly higher than state average. <i>**"A" schools may not meet each of these descriptors.</i>
B	Highly Performing	High performance on statewide assessment and/or significant student growth and/or higher 4 year graduation rates and/or moving students to proficiency at a higher rate than state average
C	Performing	Adequate performance but needs improvement on some indicators – proficiency or growth or graduation rate
D	Minimally Performing	Inadequate performance in proficiency, growth and/or 4 year graduation rate relative to the state average
F	Failing	Systematic failures in proficiency, growth and graduation rates (below 67%); performance is in bottom 5% of the state

Q: Can I see the previous letter grade each school received? If so, where?

A: Previous school letter grades may be found here: <http://www.azed.gov/accountability-research/reportcards/>. Please remember that the previous letter grades were calculated differently, were partially based on a different statewide assessment and operated under an older set of academic standards.

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