



A–F District and Campus Rating Systems

For the first time in August 2018, the Texas commissioner of education labeled each public school district with an A-F letter-grade rating. In 2019, both campuses and districts will receive A-F ratings. TASA opposes A–F ratings; we believe that Texas students would be better served by a comprehensive community-based accountability system that looks beyond high-stakes, multiple-choice tests to meaningful assessments that have value for students, parents, and teachers, as well as measures what each community deems important in promoting college and career readiness. See the “Texas Accountability Series” of essays: <http://www.futurereadytx.org/project/texas-accountability-series/>

A–F rating systems are based predominantly on once-per-year standardized test scores.

Although it is called a criterion-referenced test, the STAAR was designed to rank order students, not assign judgments of quality. A rank-order test can never measure for the amount of what is being analyzed, making the STAAR inappropriate for accountability. In addition, when surveyed by the State Board of Education (SBOE) in 2016, an overwhelming majority of Texans said they do not want a public school accountability system based primarily on students’ standardized test scores.

A–F systems have not worked in other states.

Virginia repealed its A–F school rating system in 2015. Oklahoma researchers conducted a study on the state’s A–F system and found that test scores have not only stagnated or declined generally, but performance drops have been most severe among low-income students. The significant growth in student performance touted under Florida’s A–F system can be credited to adjustments in state policy and rules to make the results match public expectation, rather than actual improvement.

To reduce the many measures of campus and district performance to a single grade, A–F rating systems use pages of complicated rules and calculations.

As a result, no one really knows what a letter grade means. No one can explain the grade, and no one knows what to do to raise the grade. “A” campuses and districts have just as difficult a time explaining why they were given an “A” as “D” campuses and districts have explaining why they were given a “D.” The difference is that “A” schools don’t have to.

A–F systems fail to account for varying socio-economic conditions that impact performance.

Letter grades based largely on standardized test scores hold campuses and districts accountable for many factors

they do not control. A simple example: Some students come to school not yet knowing their ABCs. Their schools should not be penalized for that any more than schools should get credit for enrolling students who already know their ABCs.

A–F grades align with wealth or poverty and punish poor schools for being poor.

When schools are held accountable for factors they cannot control, poor schools are judged as bad, and wealthy schools are judged as good, when neither is entirely true. A–F systems don’t account for student growth; they assign a label based largely on a snapshot of those students’ performance at one point in time.

A–F rating systems provide no sense of what campuses and districts must do to improve.

When surveyed by the SBOE in 2016, most Texans agreed that accountability should provide a way to identify areas of support needed for underperforming schools as well as identify areas of effective best practices used by high-performing campuses and districts. “Simple” letter grades based on a complicated system of calculations is neither transparent nor useful for improvement.

A–F systems create a false impression about an entire neighborhood and shames students.

The reduction of a campus or district to a single grade dismisses the variance in a school, reducing every student to the grade assigned to the campus or district.

A community-based accountability system empowers school districts to design their own systems of assessment and accountability.

While meeting general state standards, these systems allow districts to innovate and customize curriculum and instruction to meet the unique needs and interests of their communities. Learn more and see how community-based accountability has been implemented in some Texas districts: <http://www.futurereadytx.org/goals/cbas/>