



## Arizona State Board of Education

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# FAQ: Statewide Accountability: School Letter Grades

## Why does Arizona have an A-F system of grading schools?

Federal and state law require it. The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to measure school performance using valid, reliable and comparable information across all schools. State law mandates the A-F letter grade system, which is based on a range of quantitative measures including the statewide assessment.

## When will grades for 2021-2022 be released?

The Board directed the Arizona Department of Education to release A-F letter grades for the 2021-2022 school year by November 1, 2022.

## What does each letter grade mean?

*A (excellent)*: Distinguished performance on the statewide assessment, significant student growth, high four-year graduation rates, students on track to proficiency; overall performance is significantly higher than state average.

*B (highly performing)*: High performance on statewide assessment and/or significant student growth and/or higher four-year graduation rates and/or moving students to proficiency at a higher rate than the state average.

*C (performing)*: Adequate performance but needs improvement on some indicators, such as proficiency, growth or graduation rate.

*D (minimally performing)*: Inadequate performance in proficiency, growth and/or four-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.

## How are the grades assigned?

Assessment, growth scores and other measures are compiled and submitted to the Department of Education. The State Board of Education sets “cut scores,” which are the number of points required to earn an A, B, C or D. The Department then calculates the letter grades using the cut scores and the data submitted by schools.

## What do the grades measure?

Five quantifiable factors go into the grades.

- Student growth from year to year, or, for high-performing students, maintenance of top achievement. Individual students are compared year to year, rather than comparing one class to the previous year’s class. For elementary schools, growth accounts for 50% of a school’s grade.
- Proficiency on the statewide assessment, AASA or ACT.
- English language proficiency and growth (as measured by AZELLA).
- Indicators measuring if an elementary student is ready for success in high school and high school students are ready for success in career or higher education.
- High school graduation rates.



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### **What is different from the previous (2018-2019) letter grade system?**

For the 2021-2022 school year, the statewide assessment shifted away from AzM2 in high school and grades 3-8, to the ACT in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade and the AASA in grades 3-8. Please see the State Board of Education's [Five-Year Accountability Plan](#) for more information.

### **What if a school disagrees with its grade?**

A school may appeal their letter grade until November 15, 2022 at 5:00 PM. Grounds for an appeal are limited to incorrect data; environmental issues or events; adverse testing conditions; school or community emergency; school tragedy or other substantive events. A committee of the State Board of Education hears appeals and makes recommendations to the full State Board of Education.

### **How did COVID-19 impact the school's letter grades?**

In the 2021-2022 school year, the COVID-19 pandemic affected schools by various degrees. While COVID-19 was a universal factor for schools across the state, the State Board of Education recognizes individual schools may have experienced substantial events beyond the "normal" impacts.

### **Are there previous year letter grades (2019-2020 and 2020-2021) that can be used for comparison?**

Due to school closures resulting from COVID-19, House Bill 2910, passed in 2020, carried over prior year A-F Letter Grades. Therefore, 2019-2020 letter grades are the same as those awarded in the 2018-2019 school year.

HB 2402, passed in 2021, paused A-F letter grades for the 2020-2021 school year. In lieu of issuing A-F letter grades, the Legislature and the Governor directed the Board to identify below average schools, issue a report and direct ADE to release component data. For more information, please go to: <https://azsbe.az.gov/2020-2021-school-year-reports>

### **What should parents do with these grades?**

The letter grades measure critical quantitative areas key to students' success in school and career – mastery of math and language arts standards and the students' readiness for the next educational level or career. These are important considerations when choosing a school, but they are not the only indicators of a school's performance. Qualitative measures, which will vary in importance from family to family, should also be considered. Some students thrive in a small school, while others seek the wide range of options a larger school offers. If art or music programs are important to a family, they should consider those factors when choosing a school. Information on a school's characteristics can be found on the school's report card at <https://azreportcards.azed.gov/>. Parents and families are encouraged to have letter grade conversations with their student's school administrator and staff members.