SCHOOL GRADES: FOR EDUCATORS

Why are schools being graded?

School Grading is part of state and federal statute that mandates accountability for all public schools. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), originally enacted in 1965, and now the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), requires schools to measure annual improvement in mathematics and reading. In 2011, New Mexico lawmakers enacted additional requirements that schools demonstrate progress through a grading system similar to that applied to students, by using the letter grades A-B-C-D-F.

Which assessments are used to determine a school's grade?

Assessment	Required Grades
Istation's Indicators of Progress (ISIP) • Early Reading	KN-02
Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) • English Language Arts (ELA) • Mathematics	03-11
Standards Based Assessment (SBA) • Spanish Reading	Certain English language learners, 3-11
New Mexico Alternate Performance Assessment (NMAPA), • English Language Arts (ELA) • Mathematics	Certain students with disabilities, 3-11

Are schools penalized if students do not participate in the assessments used to determine a school's grade?

If a school fails to have at least 95% of the enrolled students assessed, as required by federal law, its grade is automatically decreased by one letter grade.

What is VAM (Value-Added Modeling)?

Value-Added Modeling refers to a statistical adjustment of a school's outcome that takes the school's characteristics into account, in particular the makeup of the student body. It is a concept about fairness that allows a school's grade to more genuinely reflect the impact the school made on student learning, rather than the pre-existing characteristics of the student body. The result is a truer picture of the school's impact (value added) on student achievement.

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What variables are considered in the Value-Added Model?

The prediction for a school's performance is adjusted for these variables:

- Full Academic Year (FAY) – the percent of the student body that is FAY, defined as continuous enrollment in the same school from test season to test season
- School size – overall enrollment in all grades
- Prior achievement – student scores from the prior two years

For each student, his or her prior achievement is used to predict a current scaled score. The student's current score is then compared to the baseline of how other similar students are predicted to score. When these differences are positive, they indicate that the student scored higher than anticipated. The individual student differences are accumulated for a school to reach the value-added estimate.

I noticed that VAM seems to always use three prior data points. Why?

Average scores can be unstable for very small schools, because shifts of even one or two students can cause changes in the averages. By using data over several years, we get a clearer picture of the school's overall course. The second purpose of using three prior data points is to inform growth. Both school growth and student growth use information gained from knowing where the school or student has been in the past.

Are all schools graded the same?

For the most part, yes, each school is classified either as an elementary or middle school (EL) or a high school (HS) based on the predominance of grades the school serves. The two grading systems allocate points slightly differently and have slightly different components. The emphasis in early grades is more competency-based, while the emphasis in high school is on successful completion and preparation for college or career. Charter schools are held to the same standards and calculations as traditional public schools.

How are points assigned on each part of the report card?

Each component of a school's grade is assigned points. The points for each component are summed to assign a grade. Additionally, the points from all components total 100 for each school and are used to determine the school's overall grade.

I would like more detail on the exact calculations. Where can I find help?

Posted on PED's website, the technical guide provides detailed calculation rules. If you need further information or have additional questions, please email the helpdesk at ped.assessment@state.nm.us.

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