

Understanding Missouri's A-F School Grading System

A Q&A Resource for Local School Board Members

Q1. Why is Missouri assigning A-F grades?

The A-F framework stems from Executive Order 26-01, signed by Governor Kehoe on January 13, 2026. The order directs the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to develop a grading system that assigns an overall rating of A, B, C, D, or F to every public school district, public school, and public charter school. Private schools may opt in but are not required to participate.

The order states that families and community members often find current accountability reports difficult to interpret. The Governor's stated goal is to give parents a simple, easy-to-understand picture of how schools are performing and to place more weight on student outcomes than on administrative processes.

Q2. What process has this gone through so far, and what happens next?

DESE submitted an implementation plan to Governor Kehoe's office on June 30, 2026, and held virtual and in-person stakeholder sessions in August and September. The State Board of Education first reviewed the framework on August 18 and approved it on September 15, 2026.

With approval in place, DESE will develop a technical guide and share embargoed draft grades, calculated with 2024-25 data, with districts and charter schools for review. After superintendents raised concerns at the September meeting, public release of the draft grades was pushed back to no earlier than mid-November 2026. A second preview using 2025-26 data is expected in 2027, and the first full grade cards, using 2026-27 data, are expected in fall 2027.

- Late October 2026: Embargoed release of 2024-25 grade cards
- Late November 2026: Public release of 2024-25 grade cards
- December 2026/January 2027: Public release of Annual Performance Report (APR) 2025-26
- Spring 2027: Embargoed and public release of 2025-26 grade cards
- September 2027: Embargoed and public release of 2026-27 grade cards
- December 2027/January 2028: Public release of Annual Performance Report (APR) 2026-27

Q3. How was our grade calculated?

Some specific questions on calculations will not be answered until DESE publishes the technical guide. At this point, we know that points are earned on each measure, points earned are divided by points possible to produce a percent, and the percent is converted to a letter grade. For example, a K-8 school that earns 78 of 84 possible points scores 93 percent, which is an A.

The measures are academic achievement (status) in English language arts, literacy, math, and science; value-added growth in ELA, math, and science; growth to proficiency; a Success-Ready Graduate measure; and the four-year graduation rate. The executive order also requires a 95 percent test participation rate.

The weighting differs by school level. K-8 schools are graded on 84 possible points: achievement 32 points (38 percent), value-added growth 28 points (33 percent), and growth to proficiency 24 points (29 percent). High schools (9-12) are graded on 96 possible points: achievement 28 points (29 percent), value-added growth 28 points (29 percent), Success-Ready Graduate 20 points (21 percent), and four-year graduation rate 20 points (21 percent). District weighting is explained in Q7.

The resulting percentage is converted to a letter grade:

- A is 89 percent or above
- B is 76 to 88 percent
- C is 63 to 75 percent
- D is 50 to 62 percent
- F is below 50 percent

The framework adopted by the State Board includes the Governor's recommendation that the grading scale become more rigorous once 65 percent of school buildings statewide earn an A or B, so these cut points are not necessarily permanent. Grades will only be produced for schools that meet data thresholds, and the framework does not adjust for student demographics.

Q4. What does academic achievement mean?

Academic achievement, also called status, is a snapshot of how well students scored on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) in English language arts, math, and science in a given year. It answers the question, "Where are our students right now?" In K-8 schools, ELA and math are worth 12 points each and science 4 points. High schools use the same point values.

K-8 achievement also includes a new literacy measure worth 4 points. DESE will use Lexile measures from the foundational reading assessments for grades 1 and 2 and from the MAP English language arts assessments for grades 3 through 8. Literacy begins with the 2026-27 grade cards. It will not appear in the draft grades built on 2024-25 or 2025-26 data, so districts will not see how this measure affects their score until the first full implementation.

Q5. What does student growth mean?

Student growth, called value-added growth on the grade card, is measured by the Missouri Growth Model. It compares how much students actually learned over the year with what would be expected based on their prior test scores. It answers the question, "How much progress are our students making?" regardless of where they started.

Growth matters because a school serving many students who start behind can still earn strong growth points, and a school with high scores can earn low growth points if students are not progressing. Growth counts for 33 percent of a K-8 grade, 29 percent of a high school grade, and 23 percent of a district grade.

Q6. What does growth to proficiency mean?

Growth to proficiency is a new measure required by the executive order. For each student with two consecutive years of MAP scores, it asks whether that student is on a trajectory to reach grade-level proficiency within three years. Progress is tracked in thirds: a student should close about one third of the gap between a baseline score and a proficient score each year.

In its final framework, DESE decided the calculation will include students at all performance levels, including students who are already proficient. Earlier drafts counted only students below proficient.

The difference from the Missouri Growth Model is the question each one asks. Value-added growth asks whether students grew more or less than expected. Growth to proficiency asks whether that growth is enough to get students to grade level. It is measured in ELA and math and counts for 29 percent of a K-8 grade and 19 percent of a district grade. It is not part of the high school grade.

Q7. How does the district grade differ from building grades?

Each building is graded on the structure for its grade span, K-8 or 9-12, as described in Q3. The district grade uses its own blended structure that includes every measure: achievement 26 percent, value-added growth 23 percent, growth to proficiency 19 percent, Success-Ready Graduate 16 percent, and four-year graduation rate 16 percent.

Because the district grade has its own weighting rather than being an average of building grades, a district may earn a different letter than some or all of its buildings. Buildings that do not meet data thresholds, such as very small schools or buildings serving only untested grades, may not receive a grade at all. Questions also remain about buildings with configurations outside the K-8 and 9-12 structures, and those details should be addressed in DESE's technical guide.

Q8. What does the grade not measure?

The grade is built almost entirely from state test results, graduation rates, and college and career readiness measures. It does not reflect many things families value, including subjects that are not tested, such as social studies, fine arts, world languages, and physical education; school climate, safety, and student wellbeing; attendance and engagement; extracurricular activities; and family and community partnerships.

The Success-Ready Graduate measure counts only college and career readiness assessments and advanced credit. Leaving out five-, six-, and seven-year graduation rates also leaves out students who persevere and graduate after four years. The grade also leaves out the continuous improvement work that is part of accreditation, such as the climate and culture survey and the continuous improvement plan. And because the framework does not adjust for demographics, the grade does not account for differences in poverty, student mobility, or the share of students with disabilities or learning English.

Q9. Is this the same as accreditation?

No. Accreditation is determined by the State Board of Education through the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP 6), and that process has not changed. DESE describes the A-F grade card as an addition to Missouri's existing accountability tools, not a replacement, and the approved framework does not change any district's accreditation status.

Because the two systems measure different things, a fully accredited district could receive a lower letter grade, or the reverse. School leaders who spoke to the State Board in September specifically cautioned that letter grades should not be mistaken for accreditation, and boards should help their communities understand the difference.

Q10. How do A-F grades and the APR fit together for our district?

Think of them as two different reports that answer different questions. The A-F grade card is a short summary written mainly for parents, and it is built almost entirely on state test results and graduation rates. The Annual Performance Report (APR) is the broader review DESE uses under MSIP 6, and it remains the basis for accreditation decisions. Both will be published each year, and neither replaces the other.

The APR counts several things the A-F grade does not, including:

- **Social studies:** achievement and growth in social studies.
- **Student group performance:** results for student groups, such as students with disabilities, English learners, and students from low-income families, are scored separately so that gaps are visible.
- **Extended graduation rates:** the APR gives credit for five-, six-, and seven-year graduation rates, not just the four-year rate.
- **Graduate follow-up:** whether graduates go on to college, technical training, the military, or employment.
- **Attendance and career planning:** student attendance and individual career and academic plans (ICAP).
- **Continuous improvement:** the district's improvement plan and its response to MSIP 6 standards, including the climate and culture survey. This work makes up roughly 30 percent of the APR.

Because the two reports weigh different things, a district can score well on the APR and earn a lower letter grade, or the reverse. When sharing results publicly, it helps to present the letter grade alongside the APR so the community sees the fuller picture.

Q11. What is our district's grade?

Every district, school building, and charter school will receive its own grade. Districts will see their draft grades first, under embargo, before anything is released to the public. Your superintendent is the best source for your district and building grades once DESE shares them.

Keep in mind that the first grades are drafts built on 2024-25 data. Grades for 2024-25 and 2025-26 do not include the new literacy measure, and DESE may still make corrections, updates, and refinements before the grades are published. Treat the draft as a preview, not a final judgment.

Q12. How do we talk about the grades when our buildings earn different letters?

Mixed results across buildings are expected, and they do not mean the grades contradict each other. A few points can help keep the message clear and consistent:

- **Explain that buildings are graded on different scales.** Each building is graded only on the measures that apply to its grade span. Elementary and middle schools are scored on 84 points and include growth to proficiency; high schools are scored on 96 points and include graduation rate and the Success-Ready Graduate measure. Two buildings in the same district are not being measured the same way.
- **Explain that the district grade is not an average.** The district grade uses its own weighting (see Q7), so it will not necessarily match the most common building grade or an average of them.

- **Talk about the measures, not just the letter.** A building with lower achievement may still show strong growth. Pointing to the measures behind each letter tells a more accurate story than the letter alone.
- **Prepare for buildings without a grade.** Some buildings, such as very small schools or buildings serving only untested grades, may not receive a grade. Families should know this in advance so a missing grade is not mistaken for a problem.
- **Coordinate before public release.** Use the embargo period to agree on talking points with the superintendent and building principals so families hear the same explanation from every building. Avoid ranking buildings against one another; each grade reflects its own students and grade span.

Q13. What will we do with this information?

Boards and administrators can:

- Review the embargoed draft grades with the superintendent and report any data errors to DESE during the review period.
- Prepare to explain the grade to families, staff, and the community before it is released publicly.
- Compare the results with APR, local assessment data, and the district's continuous improvement plan.

The executive order says grades will help align state, local, and philanthropic resources to strengthen struggling schools, but the approved framework does not identify any new supports tied to the ratings.

Q14. Could this system be changed or ended by a future administration?

Yes. The A-F framework currently rests on an executive order and on action by the State Board of Education, not on state law. A future governor could revise or rescind the executive order, and the State Board could revise or discontinue the framework through its own process. Governor Kehoe's current term runs through January 2029.

That could change if the legislature acts. In 2026, House Bill 2710 would have placed A-F grades in state law; it passed the House but was not enacted before the session ended. The Governor has said he wants the legislation to return. If a future bill becomes law, changing or ending the grades would then require further legislation.

Q15. Have other states moved away from A-F grades?

Yes. Five states eliminated A-F school ratings between 2015 and 2023: Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, Utah, and Virginia. Four of them stopped using systems that were already in place, and Virginia repealed its requirement before grades were ever issued.

- **Michigan.** Used A-F ratings from 2019 to 2023. Because the letter grades did not include every indicator required under federal law, the state had to keep running its prior point system alongside them. The legislature repealed the A-F requirement in 2023.
- **New Mexico.** Ended A-F ratings in 2019, after a state district court ruling found the system did not accurately measure school effectiveness.

- **Ohio.** Stopped using A-F ratings in 2022 after data showed the grades did not accurately reflect performance in high-poverty districts. Ohio moved to a one-to-five-star rating with descriptions and trend arrows for added context.
- **Utah.** Eliminated A-F ratings in 2023. Lawmakers noted the letter grade did not show which indicators were behind it or explain what an F meant. Utah moved to a dashboard that shows each performance indicator separately.
- **Virginia.** Required A-F ratings in 2013 and 2014, but the state Board of Education concluded the grades could not represent complex school situations. The requirement was repealed in 2015 before implementation.

Eight states currently use overall A-F ratings: Arizona, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas. Indiana paused its letter grades in 2018 and plans to resume them in 2026-27. Each state calculates grades differently, and federal law does not require states to use a single summative rating such as a letter grade.

Source: MOST Policy Initiative, A-F School Ratings (March 2026).

Q16. Is there any connection between A-F grades and vouchers?

Not at this time. Neither Executive Order 26-01 nor the framework approved by the State Board ties a school's grade to MOScholars eligibility or any other private school choice program. MOScholars eligibility is set in state law and is not currently based on school ratings.

The topic has come up in the broader discussion, however. The sponsor of House Bill 2710 said letter grades would make school choice simpler for parents, and that bill included financial rewards for top-scoring schools. In some other states, school ratings have been used to determine eligibility for choice programs. Boards should watch future legislation for any proposal that links grades to vouchers, funding, or other consequences.

Q17. Where can I review DESE materials regarding A-F?

You can view DESE's A-F materials, including slide presentations from the State Board of Education meeting and public listening sessions, on the [DESE website](#). These slides include additional information about the proposal, including drafts of the proposed grade cards. Governor Kehoe's executive orders are available at <https://dese.mo.gov/governor-kehoe-executive-orders>.