

What is the purpose of school grades?

School grades reflect whether students are learning a year's worth of knowledge in a year's time, which is the leading indicator of a quality education.

Parents use school grades to understand the quality of education their child is receiving so they can make informed decisions for their family. The public uses school grades to understand the quality of education being provided by the public schools in their community. School districts use school grades to identify strengths and weakness so resources can be targeted for continued improvement.

What is the grading scale for schools?

Schools are graded on the same scale as students – A, B, C, D or F.

How are school grades determined?

School grades are based on FCAT scores in reading, writing, math and science. Half of the grade is based on performance, which is the percentage of students who have the knowledge and skills required for their grade level. Half of the grade is based on progress, which is the percentage of students who gained knowledge and improved their skills from one year to the next even if they are not yet on grade level. The total number of points a school can earn is 800. Each point represents one percentage point.

FCAT Subjects	Performance	Progress	
	Percent of Students who score on or above grade level	Percent of Students who improved their score from the previous year	Percent of the lowest performing students who improved their score from the previous year
Reading	100	100	100
Math	100	100	100
Writing	100	*	*
Science	100	*	*
Total: 800	400	200	200

* No “progress” scores are calculated for these subjects because these subjects are not tested annually, like reading and math.

How do points correspond to letter grades?

A: 525 or more points

B: 495-524 points

C: 435-494 points

D: 395-434 points

F: 395 points

Are scores the only factor in determining the school grade?

No. Two factors also impact school grades:

First, schools must test at least 90% of their students to earn a grade and 95% of their students to be eligible for an A. Schools that test fewer than 90% of their students are given an Incomplete, or “I.”

Second, at least **half** of the students who score in the lowest 25% must show progress from one year to the next. Schools who fail to meet this requirement lose a letter grade (from an A to a B, from a B to a C, and so on).

What is an example of a school grade?

In this example, 60 percent of all the students at the school scored on or above grade level in reading, 68 percent in math, 82 percent in writing, and 48 percent in science; 68 percent of all students improved their score in reading and 70 percent improved in math from the previous year; and 52 percent of students who scored in the lowest 25% also showed progress in reading and 55 percent showed progress in math from last year. The total score is 503, which means the school earned a B.

FCAT Subjects	Performance	Progress	
		Percent of All Students who improved their score from the previous year	Percent of Students scoring in the lowest 25%, who improved their score from the previous year
Reading	60	68	52
Math	68	70	55
Writing	82		
Science	48		
Total: 503	258	138	107

Why is half of the school grade based on progress?

Basing half of the grade on performance and half of the grade on progress maintains high standards for academic achievement but gives credit to schools for making progress even if students are not yet achieving on grade level.

When did Florida begin grading schools?

Florida began grading schools in the early 1990s. Initially, schools were given descriptors such as: “high achieving” or “low performing.” The system was changed to grade schools using a number, 1 through 5. In 1999, Florida began grading schools using a letter grade- A, B, C, D or F, which is easier for parents and the public to understand.

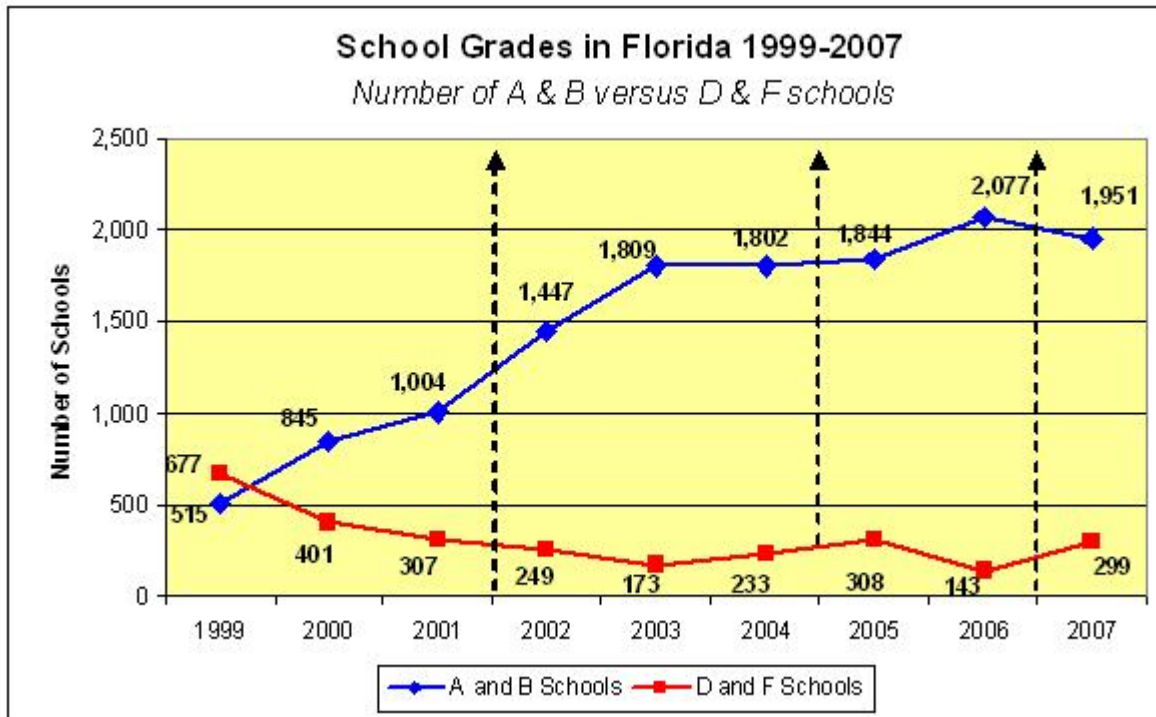
How has the process changed since we started using a letter grade?

In 1999, graduation, dropout, attendance and school discipline rates were included in the letter grade. While these are important statistics, they were removed in 2000, at the request of school districts, to keep the focus on the most important measure in a school – learning.

In 2001, school grading was expanded to include the “progress” of students in reading and math. Including “progress” was a very important factor requested by educators to acknowledge the gains being made by students who may still be below grade level, but are still improving.

In 2004 scores of students with disabilities and English language learning students were included in school grades – but only in the calculations of “progress”. Additionally, the standard was raised for grade level performance in writing. Most recently, in 2007, school grades began including student performance on the science portion of the FCAT, the learning gains of students scoring in the lowest 25 percent in mathematics and the performance of 11th and 12th grade students retaking the FCAT.

Even with these changes in how schools were graded, there has been tremendous progress.



How are schools rewarded for a good grade?

Schools that improve a letter grade (from a C to B, D to C or F to D) or that earn an A are given \$100 per student to spend however they want. The school (staff and an advisory council) make the decision. Last year, nearly 90% of the funding was used for bonuses to teachers and staff and the remaining money is used for materials and equipment.

How are low performing schools given assistance to improve?

Schools that earn an F receive about \$1000 more per student than a school that earns an A. In fact, F schools receive more money than D schools that receive more money than C schools, etc. The Supplemental Academic Instruction categorical provides nearly \$750 million annually to assist schools in improving student performance. Additionally, the State Board of Education sends *Assistance Plus* teams to F schools to provide assistance and recommendations for improvement. School superintendents are required to develop a plan to improve schools that are graded an F year after year. The plan might include assigning more experienced teachers or principals to the school or providing more tutoring or other services to parents and students.

What types of schools are graded?

All Florida public schools, including charter schools, – elementary, middle and high schools – are graded, with two exceptions.

Small schools may not receive a grade. Schools must have a minimum of 30 students in each grade, from third grade through high school, to receive a grade. Schools with less than 30 students in each grade do not receive a grade because they are too small to have a statistically viable score and the state does not want score of a single student to potentially determine the grade of the school.

Alternative schools may choose to be graded. Schools that serve students who are at risk of dropping out (also known as alternative schools) have the option to receive a letter grade or to receive a rating of "improving," "maintaining" or "declining." In a school that chooses to receive a rating over a school grade, the students' FCAT results are calculated into the school grade for the school the student would have been assigned were they not in an alternative school.

For the most recent school year (2006-2007), how many schools earned each grade?

A: 1,477

B: 469

C: 589

D: 219

F: 83

How have school grades changed over time?

Since the first year schools were graded in 1999, the number of A and B schools tripled – from 515 to 1,951 – and the number of D and F schools plummeted – from 677 to 299– a drop of nearly 60 percent. During the same period, standards were raised three times – making good grades even harder to achieve. Every time standards are raised, students and teachers rise to the challenge and succeed.

Raising Standards Leads to Higher Performance

When standards are raised, there is an increase in F schools followed by a decline as performance rises to the new standards

