A-F School Grading
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

A. School Grading Basics

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 The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), originally enacted in 1965, requires schools to show annual improvement in mathematics and reading.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, A-B-C-D-F [§22-2-1, §22-2-2, and §22-2E-1 to §22-2E-4] [6.19.8.1 NMAC – N, 12-15-11].

Who participates in school grading?

Schools and districts under the jurisdiction of the Public Education Department (PED) must participate in school grading. These include the following:
- School districts
- District schools
- Charter Schools

Non-PED schools are exempt from school grading. These non-PED schools include private, home, state-supported, and Bureau of Indian Education schools.

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) and mathematics	03-11
Standards Based Assessment (SBA), Spanish ELA	Certain English language learners, 3-11
New Mexico Alternate Performance Assessment (NMAPA), reading and mathematics	Certain students with disabilities, 3-11

What about students whose parents refuse to let their children take the tests?

Those students are counted as nonparticipants when participation rates for a school are determined. It is in the best interest of parents to make sure their students are represented in the assessed population. If a school fails to have 95% of the enrolled students assessed, its grade is automatically decreased by one letter grade.

Is there flexibility for alternative schools?

Yes. Beginning in 2012 New Mexico recognizes schools that specialize in teaching students with disabilities or in the mission of dropout recovery. These are known as SAM schools (Supplemental Accountability Model) and these schools are given additional ways to demonstrate success. For example, SAM graduation rates recognize the school's success in graduating students whose cohort has aged out of the 4-year, 5-year, and 6-year cohorts of typical high schools. Additional assessment indicators including WorkKeys, TABE, and ASVAB are used in calculating college and career readiness indicators. For SAM schools, value-added modeling of current standing is only computed among other SAM schools. SAM schools are also exempt from participation penalties due to their high rates of student mobility and turnover.

What happens to schools that do not have one of the tested grades?

New Mexico tests students in grades KN-11. In the rare case where that does not happen, a school's historic data are combined with current data to form a more robust evaluation.

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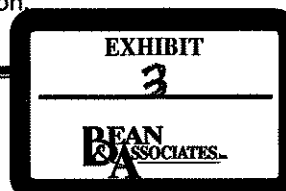
What is VAM (Value-Added Modeling)?

Value-Added Modeling refers to a statistical adjustment of a school's outcome that takes school's and students' characteristics into account, in particular the makeup of the student body and prior scores. It is often called growth modeling and is a fairer way to measure the impact the school has made on student learning than just using proficiency rates alone. The result is a truer picture of the school's impact (value added) on student achievement.

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
- School size – overall enrollment in all grades
- Prior achievement – student scores from the prior two years
- Alternate assessment-percent of students taking alternate assessments

For each student, his or her prior achievement along with school size, mobility and alternate assessment indicators are used to predict a current scaled score. The student's actual current score is then compared to this prediction. If the difference is positive, it shows that the student scored higher than anticipated. If most of the students in a school score above their predicted values, then the school will have a high value-added score, but if most score below their predicted values, then the school will have a low value-added score.

Why doesn't PED include crime statistics in the VAM?

We would like to remove all influences on scores that schools cannot reasonably be expected to control. However, we are limited to those that have data that are reliably available for all schools.

Is it possible to see which other schools are like mine in VAM student characteristics?

The comparison of schools that have similar characteristics is useful, especially for identifying high performing schools and replicating their successful strategies. The School Grading Report Card supplies information in the table called *Similar Schools.*

I notice that the VAM uses multiple prior data points. Why?

Average scores can be unstable for very small schools, because shifts of even one or two students can cause substantial changes in the averages. By using data over several years, we get a clearer picture of the school's overall impact. The second purpose of using multiple 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.

What is FAY?

"Full Academic Year" is defined as continuous enrollment in the same school from test season to test season (e.g., Spring 2016 to Spring 2017). FAY is an approximate measure of student mobility, and schools with a higher proportion of FAY students are considered to have a more stable population.

Are all schools graded the same?

For the most part, all schools are graded the same. Each school is classified either as an elementary or middle school (EL) or as 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 of high school and preparation for college or career. Charter schools are held to the same standards and calculations as regular public schools.

What is the 1% Cap?

In order to prevent over identification of the most significantly cognitively disabled students, the U.S. Department of Education placed limits on the numbers of these students who could be counted as proficient. Students counted as proficient using the alternate assessment cannot exceed 1% of the tested population at either the district or state level. The consequence of exceeding this cap is that proficient scores in excess of 1% are reversed to non-proficient prior to

calculating school and district grades. Beginning in 2018-2019 school year, this rule will be revised to cap the number of students taking the alternate assessment, not just scoring proficient. A penalty is applied only at the district and state levels, and does not change a student's score for reporting.

B. Understanding Points

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

Each component of a school's grade is assigned points. The final point values are now part of New Mexico state law. (See *A. Why are schools being graded?*). The points for each component are summed to assign a grade. The maximum number of points from all components added together is 100 for each school. The total number of points received by each school determines the school's overall grade.

Rather than assigning points for the school grade on raw proficiencies, the PED assigns a score based on where a school is in relation to all other schools in NM. A school that achieved proficiencies that placed them in the top 10% of the schools (90th percentile) would earn a score of 5.4 on a 6-point scale. The percentiles were used to set the criterion for a midpoint "C" in 2011.

Since grades using a distribution will always force some schools high and some schools low, how can a school ever improve?

This process of setting grade boundaries using the grade distribution was important in the baseline year of 2011 to get an accurate picture of realistic goals for improvement. The cut points now remain the same for all schools and do not change.

My school received over half of the available points for Graduation, but they still got a "D" for this component. How can this be?

The boundaries for the grades for the different components were set using the distribution of all schools in 2011. For some components, such as *Graduation*, the bulk of schools did fairly well. Because a school has to rank higher than most of their peers to get an A, they have to score near the top of the available points. Tables for how points relate to grades are included at the end of the *School Grading Technical Guide*.

Were the grade distributions standardized across all components before setting points?

No, the grade distributions are different for each, and therefore the qualifying points differ. To interpret the points, use the tables appended to the end of the *School Grading Technical Guide*, found on the PED website at http://webapp2.ped.state.nm.us/SchoolData/SchoolGrading.aspx.

My elementary school got the same points for *Current Standing* as the high school, but each school got a different grade. Why?

There are different points and grading schemes for high school (HS) and elementary and middle school (EL) models. Because the two grading systems weigh certain components differently (See *Are all schools graded the same?*), the point values have slightly different interpretations. For that reason it is better to look at the grade than the points.

How are points assigned, since each component is on a different scale?

Points are assigned according to how well a school performed when compared to a target. Some components have absolute criteria (Attendance and Graduation), while others (Current Standing, School Growth, Student Growth, College and Career Readiness) are based on the state distribution in each of these components. For components with absolute criteria, points are assigned based on the ratio of the school's performance to the target.

C. Current Standing (Proficiency)

How is Current Standing defined for the purposes of school grading?

The *Current Standing* portion of school grading is divided into two pieces – proficiency and VAM-adjusted. The proficiency portion measures the percent of students in the school who are proficient in the given year. Assessments classify students as either proficient (on grade level or college/career ready) or not. For example, in the PARCC assessment, students achieving Level 4 or 5 are considered proficient for *Current Standing*. The VAM-adjusted part of current standing takes into account the prior achievement and mobility of students in the school to measure how the school is performing in relation to other schools with similar student bodies.

D. School Growth

What is meant by School Growth?

The concept is similar to student growth, only for schools. Schools should demonstrate increased abilities over time, in particular the ability to produce better-prepared students. It is measured through reading and math scores of the students enrolled in a current year, compared to how these students performed during prior years.

E. Student Growth

How does Student Growth differ from School Growth?

Just like schools, individual students are predicted to increase achievement over time. Unlike Current Standing VAM, Student Growth calculates growth separately for higher and lower achieving students. Two years of test results predict the score that each student should get in the current year. If students score higher than expected, they are considered to be making more growth than their academic peers. If they score lower than expected, then they are making less growth. Student growth takes into account the student's prior scores along with school size, mobility and alternate assessment measures but does not adjust for students' demographic characteristics. There is a clear expectation that all students have the capacity to attain the same goals.

Does the student have to be enrolled in the same school for 3 years?

No. The best predictor of how a student will score today comes from their score in the prior year and the year before that. School Grading calculations use prior data only to develop the student's historic path and to estimate how they will likely score today.

F. Graduation

How are graduation rates calculated?

In 2008, the PED moved to the calculation of a 4-year adjusted cohort rate. This rate tracks students from the beginning of their 9th grade year to successful graduation with a standard diploma within 4 years. Details about the calculation of the cohort graduation rate are provided in the companion document, *Cohort Graduation FAQ*, posted on the PED webpage (A to Z directory, Graduation, Instructional Guides).

Some new high schools do not yet have any members in the graduation cohort and therefore don't have a grad rate. How can they get a grade?

School Grading calculations adjust for high schools that do not yet have cohorts. These schools are graded only on their remaining non-cohort components, eliminating Graduation and College and Career Readiness from the total points. Their final score is adjusted upward to a 100-point scale just like other schools.

How does graduation contribute to a high school grade?

The school is rated on its ability to graduate students in 4 years, 5 years, 6 six years. The school is also judged on its ability to increase the overall 4-year rate from year to year, called *Graduation Growth.* Together these components account for 17 points of the overall grade.

Are SAM schools treated differently?

Beginning in 2012, the PED recognizes schools that serve specialized populations of students (see *School Grading Basics, Flexibility for Alternate Schools*). For graduation, a senior completer method is used to supplement regular 4-year cohort graduation rates. This method recognizes returning dropouts and students that were not cohort members that the school successfully graduated in the current year.

G. Opportunity to Learn

What does "Opportunity to Learn" (OTL) mean?

OTL refers to a school's general learning environment. This component rewards schools that engage students and parents in ways that ensure students come to school (*Attendance*). It also samples the classroom experiences of students through an annual survey to see if teachers are using good learning practices (*Student Survey*).

What is the target for attendance?

The target for attendance rate is 95%. This means that schools that have an attendance rate of 85% will get fewer points than those that get 95%, but they will get partial credit. On the other hand, if a school has 100% attendance, they can earn a little higher than the maximum points.

How will PED prevent students from negative venting on the survey?

Students, when provided a formal opportunity to provide feedback on their learning opportunities, generally do so honestly. Prior research indicates that when teachers and students are asked the same questions about OTL, the results tend to be in line with one another. Student surveys are preferable to teacher surveys because teachers can only provide a response for the whole class, while each individual student can respond based on his/her individual experience.

Who proctors the survey?

The survey is given via an online platform run through the University of New Mexico.

How is the survey scored?

Survey responses can range from 0 to 5 in order of least (*Never*) to most beneficial (*Always*) for student outcomes. For each survey, the 10 items are summed to create a score ranging from 0 to 50. The average of all surveys for the school is calculated. Like attendance, the school's score is based on all its students' responses. The survey contributes 5 points to the school's overall grade.

H. Career and College Readiness

What is College and Career Readiness (CCR)?

This component captures a school's ability to prepare students to enter post-secondary education or receive industry-recognized certification. It is composed of two parts: participation rate and success rate.

How is participation calculated in CCR?

The four-year graduation cohort forms the basis of the CCR point calculations, using the *Shared Accountability* method (see *Graduation*) to assign credit for student outcomes to all high schools the student ever attended. A school's participation rate results from the weighted count of students in the numerator and denominator, similar to graduation:

$$Participation\ rate = \frac{sum\ of\ shared\ accountability\ fraction\ of\ students\ who\ participated\ in\ any\ indicator}{sum\ of\ shared\ accountability\ fraction\ of\ students\ in\ 4-year\ graduation\ cohort}$$

Cohort members will count as a *participant* when they attempted any one or more of the CCR components any time during their four-year tenure in high school. Students who attempt multiple components are counted only once.

Since most CCR programs are not used by 9th graders, won't including 9th graders penalize some schools?

The inclusion of all grades in high school, including 9th grade, in career and college readiness is purposeful. It helps to reinforce the vision that all high school students strive toward preparation for what lies after high school. While 9th graders have fewer opportunities for CCR attempts, by the time the student has become a senior, he or she will have had four high school years to participate. Since the graduation cohort forms the basis for this calculation, all students will have had more than just a single year. All schools experience the same challenge inherent in including lower grades, so all schools are held to the same standard.

Will additional programs count toward CCR?

The PED is open to recommendations for expanding CCR to other nationally recognized academic credentials. In the baseline year the preliminary list of 5 programs was expanded to 9, and currently to 14. However, data sharing agreements are not in place with all vendors, and the PED is sensitive to the burden of additional data collection on schools, so future proposals will be carefully appraised.

How is CCR Success computed?

The success rate follows the same process as participation, resulting from weighted numerators and denominators from *Shared Accountability*. Students who achieve any one or more of the benchmarks (below) are considered successful in the numerator, while students who attempted any program or assessment form the denominator. The success rate is the percent of participants that succeeded.

What are the benchmarks for success in CCR?

Students who repeat any of the tests or programs or who attempt multiple programs are awarded full credit for their single best outcome. For example, a student who attempted a dual credit course but did not meet the benchmark grade and who also completed the national exam for an Advanced Placement (AP) credential and scored 4 will be awarded full success points for the AP. The minimum conditions required for success were determined from published research and criteria established by institutions of higher education.

If a student does not pass the AP exam, do they count against the school?

The student will count positively for the CCR participation rate, but they will count only in the denominator for the CCR success rate. In other words, the student will count positively for participation but negatively for success, unless they have passed one of the other measures.   If this student demonstrates success in some other part of CCR, such as the ACT, the school receives their appropriate *Shared Accountability* credit for that success.

I. Miscellaneous

What is the timeline for the next round of grades?

Grades are computed annually in July. The reports are released in August for schools to review in preparation for the upcoming school year.

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

Posted on PED's website, the *School Grading Technical Guide* provides detailed calculation rules. If you need further information or have additional questions, please email ped.assessment@state.nm.us.

Will these rules change in coming years?

New Mexico negotiated minor adjustments to the school grading model under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2017. Those changes will take place in the 2019 issue of school grades.