



## 2023 A-F School Letter Grades

### Communications Toolkit

To assist districts, schools, and stakeholders in sharing information with the public about School Letter Grades, the department has developed a communications toolkit to provide tips and resources. Please feel free to use and customize any of the following resources.

#### **Sample Press Release Language**

*Consider this sample press release language as you develop your communications with families, students, teachers and other members of your school community about School Letter Grades.*

#### **TITLE: [Insert District/ School Name] Receives School Letter Grade(s)**

#### *SUB: Providing Transparency About School Performance*

[INSERT CITY NAME], TN – Today, (insert district/school name) announced their [2022-23 School Letter Grades](#) to provide a provide a snapshot of how each/our school is doing in meeting the state’s expectations for learning, including student achievement and academic growth measures for all schools, as well as a measure of college and career readiness just for high schools.

School Letter Grades are available via a public dashboard [here](#). Additional information and resources about letter grades are available [here](#).

[INSERT DISTRICT/SCHOOL QUOTE]

“School letter grades will provide Tennessee families with a clear rating system that gives them a snapshot of how their child’s school is performing,” **said Lizzette Reynolds, Commissioner of Education.** “No matter what your school’s letter grade is, everyone can play a role in supporting the success of our students and the success of our schools by engaging with your local school communities and joining the conversation.”

[INSERT DISTRICT/SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS OF PROGRAMS/INVESTMENTS IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES]

Several factors determine school letter grades for each school, including student achievement, academic growth, growth of the highest need students, and a measure of college and career readiness just for high schools.

School letter grades will also be visible in the fully refreshed State Report Card in early 2024.

For media inquiries, contact [Edu.MedialInquiries@tn.gov](mailto:Edu.MedialInquiries@tn.gov).

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## **Sample Talking Points**

*Consider these sample talking points as you develop your communications with families, students, teachers and other members of your school community about School Letter Grades.*

### **General Audience**

#### **Overview:**

- The Tennessee legislature passed a law in 2016 requiring every school to receive a letter grade- A, B, C, D, or F- annually with the goal of making school performance more transparent to parents and communities.
- There is no one more essential to a child's learning than their family and parents who need a clear understanding of how their school is performing.
- It is also important for parents to remember that no one measure or data point should define a school or a student's performance.
- This letter grade is one piece of the puzzle, alongside a student's other test scores, report card grades.
- There are several factors that determine letter grades. These include student achievement and academic growth measures for all schools, as well as a measure of college and career readiness just for high schools.
- In this first year of letter grades, it is important to remember that many factors determine an increase or decrease in a school letter grade and the specifics are important. A school may be struggling in one area and excelling in another. District leaders and principals have a clear understanding of a school's strengths and weaknesses and are hard at work creating a plan for improvement.
- For those schools who receive a D or F, this is a call to action – not just for those working in or attending the school, but also for parents and the broader community – that more needs to be done to support the students in this school. Additional resources are available this year to support all TN schools, but especially those serving students in our low income communities and those hardest hit by the pandemic.
- The first letter grade release coincides with the first year of a new funding formula for Tennessee schools based on the needs of individual students. The [Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement](#) (TISA) provides additional funds to school districts to provide services such as literacy and English language learner support, special

education needs, preparation for college and career, and more. Schools will be able to take advantage of these funds as they identify improvement strategies.

- The department will be working closely with all of our districts schools to provide expertise and best practices. We all need to work together to ensure that every one of our Tennessee schools is Best for All of the students and families they serve.

### **Background:**

- In 2016, a law was established that required the Tennessee Department of Education to develop a school letter grading system beginning in the 2017-18 school year to provide parents and families with a rating system for school performance. Following passage of the legislation, testing administration issues and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic delayed a roll-out of school letter grades as part of Tennessee's state accountability system; however, the law will be implemented for the first time this year.
- The General Assembly required the inclusion of two measurements in the formula: achievement and growth. Other factors to be included were to be determined by the department.

### **Engagement Process:**

- Throughout the summer, the department invited Tennesseans across the state to engage on this topic via public town halls, a working group of stakeholders, and a public comment opportunity to discuss legal requirements for the calculation.
- During August and September, [nearly 300 public comments were submitted](#) from Tennesseans on their top priorities for measuring a school's academic success, and how the state should measure progress towards those priorities. Public comments were submitted via e-mail, written, and also during the [10 town halls](#) hosted in each region of the state.
- In October, the department held five [working group meetings](#) to review the public comment submitted and make recommendations on the new calculations for each letter grade. Working group members represented district and school leaders, elected officials, parents, and education stakeholders.
- This robust period of engagement and discussion was open to all members of the public and was transparent with videos of town halls and working group meetings posted online.

### **The Calculation:**

- Letter grades use data that indicates a school's performance in several key categories, including achievement, growth, academic growth of the group of highest need students, and college and career readiness.

- Schools will receive a sub-score for each indicator, ranging from levels 1-5, and each sub-score will be multiplied by assigned weights to generate an aggregate score then will be cross walked to determine the school's letter grade.

### ***Superintendent to Principal***

- The Tennessee Legislature passed this law in 2016 requiring every school to receive a letter grade annually with the goal of making school performance more transparent to parents and communities.
- This is going to be personal for the communities receiving C's, D's and F's. Your teachers, parents and community leaders will be looking to you to give them hope and a constructive way forward. You are the leaders they know personally and trust.
- The most important thing you can do is to explain why the school was assigned its letter grade and to be prepared to share the details of your plan customized to your school's goals and needs.
- Our office is prepared to give you additional resources so that we are asking you to do more with more, not more with less. Communicating the new TISA dollars available to your school is a way to instill optimism that resources are available to meet student and school specific needs even though these dollars are not attached to letter grades. For example, you may be hiring a math or reading specialist based on your proficiency scores.
- Proactive, predictable, frequent communications to parents will be important so that you stay in front of counter narratives that may be generated by parents or community members. A communications vacuum gives away your power as the most trusted voice in your school.
- Parents will be looking for something they can do to change the trajectory of the school. Principals should try to identify those opportunities for parent and community involvement in advance – whether that is committing 30 minutes to homework a day, or checking the TCAP Family Portal once a week, or volunteering at Saturday school, etc.

### ***Principal to Teacher-Parent***

- The Tennessee Legislature passed a law in 2016 requiring every school to receive a letter grade annually with the goal of making school performance more transparent to parents and communities.
- This letter grade is similar to student letter grades and gives teachers and parents a high-level snapshot based on the school's ability to meet student learning expectations in reading and math.

- No one measure defines a student or a school, but it is an important piece of the puzzle so that parents and community leaders come alongside our school with additional supports.
- Based on your school's result, consider customizing the following language:
- We are proud that our school has earned a high grade and recognize the hard work of our students and staff. Let's keep up the good work and continue partnering to support all our students.
- While our school is doing well in some areas, there are others where we're asking for your partnership to improve.
- Our school is in need of support and we are asking for your partnership to improve.
- Be very specific in explaining the grade: *Customize: We exceeded expectations on growth which means...and were behind on proficiency in reading and flat in math...*
- The good news is that we have a plan.
- Customize communications approach: *I will be updating the school community once a month with our progress in the newsletter as well as in person at our Tuesday coffee hour.*
- It is going to take all of us working together. *Customize: We need parents to step in as volunteers in x, y, z ways.*

## **Sample Social Media Posts**

*Consider this sample social media posts as you develop your communications with families, students, teachers and other members of your school community about School Letter Grades.*

### ***Every Post Needs***

- Use these hashtags: #SchoolLetterGradesTN
- Tag Tennessee Department of Education – [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#)
  - Twitter (@TNEdu) & Instagram (@TNDeptofEdu)

***Please feel free to use or share the department's social posts and resources on the [School Letter Grades webpage](#) as well as to customize your own content to share with your networks. You can access all graphics, videos, 1-pagers, etc. [here](#).***

### ***General Social Posts***

- The #SchoolLetterGradesTN dashboard is now live, providing an easy-to-understand rating system of how our schools are doing. Search for your school's letter grade at: <https://tdepublicschools.ondemand.sas.com/grades>
- Visit the School Letter Grade Dashboard to view your school's letter grade here: <https://tdepublicschools.ondemand.sas.com/grades> #SchoolLetterGradesTN

- ICYMI: School letter grades have launched to empower Tennesseans to learn about how their local school is doing. Here's a quick video for more information: (announcement video)
- The inaugural school letter grade system has been released for the 2022-23 school year. School letter grades help parents and families understand how their local schools are supporting student success in achievement and academic growth. Search for your school's letter grade at <https://tdepublicschools.ondemand.sas.com/grades>
- Want more information about Tennessee's #SchoolLetterGradesTN? Watch this video to help understand how letter grades are calculated and the main factors looked at to determine school performance: (Use Calculations video)
- TN Parents: Check out the 5 things you should know about #SchoolLetterGrades if you have a child in Tennessee public schools. (link to PDF)
- TN Parents: Learn more about Tennessee's #SchoolLetterGradesTN with this quick tip sheet>>> (link to A-F 101)
- Do you or your school community need help understanding the what and why behind school letter grades? Check out these 1-pagers to understand how school letter grades provide a snapshot of how Tennessee schools are performing. #SchoolLetterGradesTN
- School letter grades provide a snapshot of school performance and determine ways we can all support student and school success. Learn more here: <https://tdepublicschools.ondemand.sas.com/grades> #SchoolLetterGradesTN
- Tennessee school letter grades help inspire conversation and empower parents and families to ask questions on how to help their child succeed. Check in with your principal for more details regarding your school's academics strengths and weaknesses. (Use Letter Grades Meaning Video) #SchoolLetterGradesTN
- ICYMI: TDOE announced school letter grades for all Tennessee public schools. Learn more about the grades and what they mean: (Use press Release link) #SchoolLetterGradesTN
- PARENTS: You are your child's first and most important teacher. Check out free resources on Best for All Central to support your student in reading and math: <https://bestforall.tnedu.gov/>
- Parents and families can play a role to support success for students and schools. Ask your child's teacher if they are on grade-level in reading and math. #SchoolLetterGradesTN

### **District Social Posts**

- School letter grades provide a snapshot for [INSERT DISTRICT NAME] of how our schools are doing in meeting the state's expectations for learning. Search for your school's letter grade at: <https://tdepublicschools.ondemand.sas.com/grades> #SchoolLetterGradesTN
- Have questions on what school letter grades are and what they mean for [INSERT DISTRICT NAME]? Check out these tips to learn more: (link to pdf) #SchoolLetterGradesTN
- Everyone can play a role to support success for students and schools in [INSERT DISTRICT NAME]. Ask your principal for more details regarding your school's academic strengths and weaknesses. #SchoolLetterGradesTN
- PARENTS: You are your child's first and most important teacher. Check in with your teachers in [NAME OF DISTRICT] if your child is on grade-level in reading and math and ask them what can be done at home to support your student. #SchoolLetterGradesTN

## **School Social Posts**

- School letter grades provide a snapshot for [INSERT SCHOOL NAME] of how our school is doing in meeting the state’s expectations for learning. Check out our letter grade here: <https://tdepublicschools.ondemand.sas.com/grades> #SchoolLetterGradesTN
- Have questions on our school letter grade and what it means for [INSERT SCHOOL NAME]? Check out these tips to learn more: #SchoolLetterGradesTN
- [INSERT SCHOOL NAME] has received an [INSERT LETTER GRADE]. Learn more about school letter grades and what they mean here: <https://tdepublicschools.ondemand.sas.com/grades> #SchoolLetterGradesTN
- Parents and families can play a role to support success for students and schools in [INSERT SCHOOL NAME]. Let us know what questions you have by emailing us at [INSERT SPECIFIC EMAIL] #SchoolLetterGradesTN
- PARENTS: You are your child’s first and most important teacher. Check in with your teachers at [INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL] if your child is on grade-level in reading and math and ask them what can be done at home to support your student. #SchoolLetterGradesTN

## **Additional Resources**

*Consider these designed resources to incorporate as you develop your communications with families, students, teachers and other members of your school community about School Letter Grades.*

- [School Letter Grades Communications Resources and Materials](#)
- [School Letter Grades General Information One-Pagers](#)
- [School Letter Grades Customizable One-Pagers](#)
- [School Letter Grades Social Media Graphics](#)
- [School Letter Grades Explainer Videos](#)
- [School Letter Grades Webpage](#)
- [School Letter Grades Dashboard](#)