

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 The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), originally enacted in 1965, requires schools to show annual improvement in mathematics and reading.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 (§22-2-1, §22-2-2, and §22-2E-1 to §22-2E-4, and 6.19.8 NMAC).

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	K-2
Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics	3-11
Standards Based Assessment (SBA), Spanish Reading	Certain English language learners, 3-11
New Mexico Alternate Performance Assessment (NMAPA), English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics	Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, 3-11

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

Those students are counted as nonparticipants when participation rates for a school are determined. If a school fails to have 95% of the enrolled students assessed, its grade is automatically decreased by one letter grade. Schools must meet the participation rate in both Reading/English Language Arts and Mathematics.

Is there flexibility for alternative schools?

Yes. New Mexico recognizes schools that specialize in teaching students with disabilities or in the mission of dropout recovery. These are known as SAM (Supplemental Accountability Model) schools 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. When conditioning data for current standing, an offset is applied to level the playing field for SAM schools. Additionally, 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 assessed grades?

New Mexico assesses students between kindergarten through high school. In the rare case where that does not happen, a school's historical data are combined with current data to form a more robust evaluation.

What is VAM (Value-Added Modeling)?

Value-Added Modeling refers to a statistical adjustment of a school's outcome that takes school and student characteristics into account, in particular the makeup of the student population 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 percentage of the student population that is FAY
- School size – overall enrollment in all grades
- Prior achievement – student scores from the prior two years
- Alternate assessment – percentage of students taking alternate assessments

For each student, 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.

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 traditional 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 assessed 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 earned by each school determines the school's overall grade.

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 earned over half of the available points for Graduation, but they still earned 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 earned the same number of points for *Current Standing* as the high school, but each school earned a different grade. Why?

Some indicators are weighted differently in the 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 (e.g., Attendance), whereas others (e.g., School Growth, Student Growth) 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 percentage 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 earning 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 populations.

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 assessment 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 three 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 historical 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 FAQs*, which is available on PED's Graduation Data webpage at <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/accountability/graduation>.

Some new high schools do not yet have any members in the graduation cohort and therefore do not have a graduation 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, and 6 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. 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, Parent Survey*).

What is the target for attendance?

The target for attendance rate is 95%. For example, a school with an attendance rate of 85% will earn fewer points than a school with an attendance rate of 95%, but they will earn partial credit. On the other hand, if a school has 100% attendance, they will earn more than the maximum points.

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. A school earns the maximum number of points when the average survey score is at least 45.

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 earn an 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:

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

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 five programs was expanded to nine, and is currently 14. Because data sharing agreements are not in place with all vendors, and the PED is sensitive to the burden of additional data collection on schools, 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 earn any one or more of the benchmarks (below) are considered successful and are included in the numerator, while students who attempted any program or assessment form the denominator. The success rate is the percentage of participants who succeeded.

What are the benchmarks for success in CCR?

Students who repeat any of the assessments 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 earns their appropriate *Shared Accountability* credit for that success.

I. Miscellaneous

What is the timeline for the next round of grades?

Grades are typically 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.