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WHAT IS A "GOOD" SCHOOL?



All parents want their children to attend a good school, or quality school. But we have to figure out how “quality” is being defined so that we can try to make good choices for our children. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) define school performance in terms of the school’s grade. Just as school children receive report cards on their performance, schools also receive these scores from the state. These letter grades are known as “school performance scores” (SPS) and are given out each year.

What a score is based on

These scores are largely based on how well students test. Not how much the student understands the material, not how well the teachers are teaching, not how safe students feel to ask questions, not how supported students feel at school, but rather TEST SCORES! So it’s important to understand what the scores really tell us, and how we can determine for ourselves what is the right school for our child.

The grading system

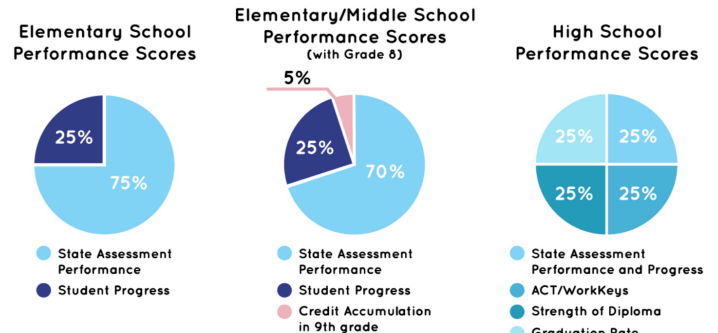
In the past few years, the school grading system has been changing, making it harder for parents to understand how well a school is doing. Now, it’s harder for schools to get a good letter grade, which are mostly based on how many students tested well, or “at grade level,” during end-of-year testing (see chart).

Essentially, the more students who score at grade level, the higher the letter grade the school receives. In 2017 students had to score at “proficient” to be considered on grade level, but in 2018 students had to score at the higher “mastery” level to be considered on grade level. Basically, students had to get more questions right on their state tests.

Progress score

You may also have heard of a “progress score.” The state takes into account whether students are learning at the rate we expect them to, which is called a “progress score,” which is also given in the form of a letter grade. Again, this score is largely based on test performance. So if a school has a lot of students showing up on day one receiving lower grades on tests, if at the end of the year those same students are showing improvements, the school will still get credit even if the students still aren’t doing great.

2017-2018 Formula for School Performance Scores





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Actual score versus progress score

In other words, the performance score/grade is how many students are at "mastery" level, while progress score/grade is how many students got a higher score, even if just a few points, no matter what level they started. Don't let schools try to confuse you. Some will show off their progress score, which is also on a letter system, as if it is their overall grade. Ask to see both scores! And for more info on school performance scores, view the Louisiana Department of Education's (LDOE) 4-Minute video on their website (www.louisianabelieves.com).

Other ways to define a "good" school

If you believe a quality school should be defined by more than just the students' test scores, you are not alone. Community efforts are underway to create alternative ways of defining a quality school. For example, a coalition of community organizations came together to create the New Orleans Educational Equity Index in 2017, which also allows parents to take into consideration the following data when choosing the school that is right for their child:

- Enrollment costs
- If transportation is provided
- Student-to-teacher ratio
- Number of incidents reported to police

There is also additional data on LDOE's website which can help you decide what school might be a good fit for your child (www.louisianaschools.com).

How did Orleans Parish grade?

'C'

is for
'concerning'

The entire Orleans Parish district got a C letter grade, with a corresponding school performance score of 66.2.

In Orleans Parish, 40% of schools are in the D and F range compared to a quarter of schools statewide.

Half the schools in New Orleans are B or C, and just a handful are rated A.

In addition to the overall school performance and progress score, some key data LDOE provides is:

- How many students are free from suspension
- How diverse the teachers are
- How particular groups of students are performing at the school

Is it really about performance?

Finally, grading schools with school performance scores often simply amounts to grading schools on the money they have or do not have. For example, a well-funded school that can afford more books for the students to take home, additional staff, and lower teacher-student ratios will likely have better scores. So the concern is that what is really being measured is how much funding a school has, which of course, is deeply and historically tied to racism and segregation.

Need help advocating for your child?

Call or Email 504-708-8376 or fflic@fflic.org