

The school report cards have just been released, and all schools have received a letter grade from A to F. Here are some things you should know about the school report cards and the grading system:

Basics on the Construction of the School Report Card:

- 85% of the elementary and middle school report card grade is derived from the state ELA and math test scores: 55% from changes in the test scores from year to year (“progress”) and 30% from the actual scores (“performance”). However, the Department of Education never mentions the word **test**. It says “progress” and “performance” but never says progress and performance on tests. (Note: the graduation rate and all the Regents exams are used to determine a high school’s progress and performance.)
- 15% of the report card grade is derived from attendance (5%) and parent and teacher surveys (10%).
- Each category – progress, performance, attendance, parent surveys, and teacher surveys – is weighted so that two-thirds of each sub-score is derived from a comparison with 40 peer schools and one-third from a comparison with all city schools.
- An elementary school’s peer group is a collection of 40 schools that have a similar population. The way in which similar schools are determined is 40% based on the percentage of African-American and Latino students in a school; 40% based on the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch; 10% based on percentage of students who receive special education services; and 10% based on the percentage of students who are English Language Learners (ELLs). In the middle and high schools, the peer group is based respectively on students’ 4th and 8th grade ELA and math test scores.

Problems with the Construction of the School Report Card:

- The school report card relies too heavily on test scores.
- The DOE has a very restricted definition of progress so that a student who got one question wrong on their New York State ELA test in 4th grade and two wrong on their ELA test in 5th grade is not considered to have made progress, even though the number wrong falls within the standard error of measurement and the student is obviously succeeding at the 5th grade level. This is also true with other grades.
- In elementary schools, the percentage of students in just two grades – the 4th and 5th grades – who are deemed to have made test score progress is the single most important factor in determining the school’s grade. Third graders’ scores only count as part of the 30% of the score that measures test performance. Students who are not tested (pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, 1st and 2nd graders) can look forward to the DOE’s plan to introduce testing for them very soon. At present they only count very minimally in the attendance score, which is 5% of the grade.
- The school report card does not take into account the many factors that make a great school, for example, whether a school has enrichments such as music, art, dance, chess and language classes; whether it encourages children to learn to work cooperatively; whether children are making academic progress based on measures other than test scores.
- The grades are based on a curve. The DOE predetermined that this year 15% of schools would score an A (though it actually boosted the percentage to 23%); 40% a B; 30% a C; 10% a D; and 5% an F. There is a very complex formula for determining the grade, and there are minute differences statistically between some schools with different grades.

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