

Perhaps more than any other reform, equipping the public with fair and transparent information about the status of their schools has the potential to change the culture of education in West Virginia. It will shine a bright light on quality and that, in itself, promises to create a catalyst for change and promote measurable student benefits. Put even more succinctly, what gets measured gets done.

In most states, the process of measuring school performance is part of the state's accountability and accreditation system. Research has shown that effective accountability systems are designed to incentivize the improvement of all schools and advance the state's rankings in such national measures as NAEP and ACT. Quality systems annually communicate the level of student performance and school quality in all schools according to that performance in a transparent manner. After years of ambiguous and unclear labels, some states are moving to an A-F grading system for schools. Under the A-F system, every school is expected to demonstrate annual growth and improvement. As a result, parents and community members have a better understanding of schools' performances as compared to the terminology heretofore used in rating schools. A-rated schools often become a source of pride among parents, students and the community. While schools that earn a D or an F receive additional support that they desperately need.

The Education Alliance supports this type of statewide measuring system that allows local boards of education to annually evaluate the growth and improvement of their schools and differentiate supports and resources accordingly to needs.

Progress Update: In 2013, Governor Earl Ray Tomblin sponsored legislation that removed many of the legislative mandates for School Accreditation and charged the State Board of Education with revising the school accreditation system. In his 2014 State of the State address, he charged the State Board with implementing an A-F grading system for schools. State Board policy outlining those requirements (Policy 2320) was approved in May 2014. Currently a baseline audit of the new accreditation system is being piloted in all schools through 2015-16.

Recommendations:

To fully realize the benefits of a transparent A-F school grading system, we recommend the following fundamental principles be infused in the revised accountability system:

1. Establish fair, rigorous and transparent reports for all schools in order to annually earn A, B, C, D, or F grades
2. Continue to monitor the metrics of the new system to ensure multiple measures of student learning that are objective and focus on outcomes, and a balance of student proficiency and growth measures.
3. Utilize the results of the new system to support a school climate of meaningful, engaged student learning that: discourages "teaching to the test," rewards personalized, deeper learning and values a community-based approach to improvement.
4. Continue to engage students, families, businesses, communities in rallying support to focus attention on the learning growth of their students with specific, intensive support given to the lowest performing students, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status