



Raise THE Grade **TOGETHER**

**RESOURCE GUIDE
FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

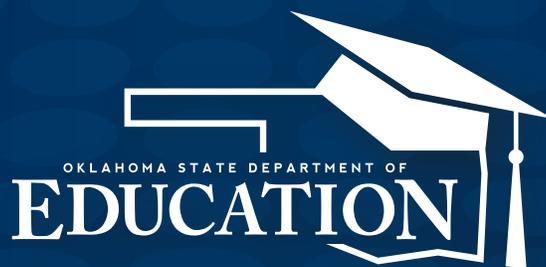


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Introduction: About Oklahoma's A-F School Grading System

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Oklahoma's A-F School Grading System is based on the concept that parents and community members should be able to quickly and easily determine how schools are performing. The new A-F system gives all schools and school districts in the state of Oklahoma a grade of A, B, C, D, or F — similar to grades already given to students.



The A-F grading system will be a much more user-friendly way for parents to determine school performance than previous complex systems, such as the Academic Performance Index, used under the federal *No Child Left Behind* law, which gave schools numerical scores from 0 to 1,500 based on performance measures.

The A-F grading system will be implemented for the 2012-13 school year based on data from the 2011-12 school year and will be reported annually thereafter. The reform offers easy-to-understand and concise information for parents and citizens so that they can access information about schools quickly on the Web.

The new A-F Report Cards are one important way to empower parents and community members with easy-to-understand information. The impact of grades will vary from school to school. Each situation is unique. Broadly speaking, overall letter grades are a good indicator of school performance, but there are other indicators of performance that should be considered as well.

Just as important as the clear and easy-to-understand information provided by the report cards, the letter grades provide an opportunity for everyone to raise the grade together, to look for areas for improvement and to work as a team.

The release of report cards is a chance for constructive and positive conversations. Some schools may receive an overall lower letter grade but demonstrate success in one or more areas. Parents and school leaders can use this information to build on success to achieve better marks in other areas. Some schools may have achieved an overall higher letter grade but aren't doing quite as well in one area. This is another opportunity for a constructive dialogue between parents, school leaders and teachers.

To that end, the State Department of Education is launching **Raise the Grade Together** – an initiative designed to complement the release of Oklahoma's A-F School Grading System in October 2012. **Raise the Grade Together** will strengthen communities and school districts with support. With this **Raise the Grade Together** resource guide, the Oklahoma State Department of Education has provided a number of tools, tactics and strategies for fostering community conversations and planning within school districts. While no guide can be completely comprehensive, we hope this resource booklet serves as a good starting point for work at the district level.



A-F Report Cards (simulated samples)

■ The Way to an A

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Effective school administrators can lead “The Way to an A” by engaging teachers in the development and implementation of a school-wide vision that is shared and supported by the entire school community. The effective school administrator leads progressive change by establishing high expectations for all students, focusing on quality instruction, and promoting a school culture that encourages and motivates the success of all students. Eliciting the buy-in from teachers, students, parents, and community leaders is the result of intentional communication, shared involvement in decision-making, and identification of improvement strategies. It will create a school culture that will yield improvement. Investigating and analyzing together, a faculty can recognize where to intensify efforts that will maximize their progress.

THE WAY TO AN

Successful schools often have similar structures in place that assist them in performing well and making continuous improvements. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight some of the structures and processes that are commonly found in successful schools. Unfortunately, there is no strategic “formula” that will guarantee any school will become an “A” school. However, with careful planning and intensive focus, it is likely that all schools can improve by using a combination of some of the common practices identified here.

COMMON PRACTICE #1:

Organize Data in a Meaningful Way

Successful schools often find that organizing the large amounts of data that are available to them is the key to making the data usable to inform decision-making. A plethora of data sources exist for almost every school, including but not limited to:

- **Demographics** – Not only are student demographics important pieces of data, but so are teacher demographics, community demographics, and the relationships or discrepancies between them.

- **Student Performance Results** – These include results for reading and mathematics, as well as other important content areas. For the A-F Report Card, schools are graded on all state tests (reading, English II, English III, and writing; mathematics, Algebra I, Algebra II, and geometry; social studies, geography, and US History; and science and biology). State test results should be considered for the general assessment, modified assessment, and portfolio assessment.

- **Additional Student Achievement Data** – Local student achievement data includes benchmark testing results, course grades, progress monitoring assessment results, screeners, presentations, projects, demonstrations, and a variety of other components that indicate what children know and are able to do.

- **Student Growth** – Comparing student results from one year to the next can provide insight into school planning. Although reading and math growth are the only ones included in the A-F Report Card, schools may find it beneficial to look at all subject area growth, including growth based on local assessments.

- **Whole School Performance Data** – The A-F Report Card includes a variety of components for different grade levels for the Whole School Performance section. Successful schools often find that these are critical data points for all grade levels, even if they are not included in the report card. For example, attendance is a critical factor of high school achievement, even though a grade is not issued at the high school level for attendance.

- **Teacher Attendance and Other Teacher Characteristics** – A variety of data on teacher characteristics is available to schools. Teacher attendance, behaviors, evaluations, certifications, qualifications, trends, concerns, and perceptions are all pieces of data that can be beneficial to schools in decision-making.

- **Student Behavior** – Student discipline and behavior data can often shed light on the culture of the school, troubling courses, holes in supervision, and other school concerns.

- **Other Student Characteristics** – Student characteristics such as mobility, special education status, gifted/ talented status, course enrollment patterns, involvement in extracurricular activities, participation in school functions, and level of school spirit can provide good information to schools.

- **Budgetary Data** – Spending patterns of schools can be very helpful information in determining priorities. A close examination of the school budget, including all funding sources, may be helpful.

- **Survey Data** – Qualitative data is also very beneficial to schools. Many schools give surveys on a regular basis. Oklahoma has several surveys that are available to all districts, including the “What Works in Oklahoma Schools Surveys” and the “Oklahoma Climate Survey.”

The large amount of data that is available to schools can be overwhelming if the data is not organized in a way that provides meaning. Most importantly, the data has to be organized so that all decision-makers can understand what they are seeing.

Often, the data needs to be cross-referenced. For example, examining attendance patterns of students based on the courses they are enrolled in could provide information that attendance data alone and course enrollment patterns alone could not provide. Another example might be examining the course grades of students who take modified assessments (OMAAP) for their state tests. Students who are doing well in a course may not need to continue on an OMAAP test but rather could possibly be successful on a general assessment (OCCT or EOI).

COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Organizing the data is the first step in a comprehensive needs assessment. A comprehensive needs assessment should be the centerpiece of any planning process and the database from which the vision for the future is developed. Through the needs assessment, a school identifies its strengths and weaknesses and specifies priorities for improving student achievement. The needs assessment also helps planners focus on school-wide issues and link goals with data. By assessing needs comprehensively, a school gets “the full breadth of information for depth of understanding.”

The process of a comprehensive needs assessment includes the following steps:

Step 1: Establish a planning team

Convene a group of individuals to review the data and make recommendations. This planning team leads the process of developing the school-wide program. The planning team includes parents and other members of the community to be served and individuals who will carry out the plan. This should include teachers, principals, administrators, and if appropriate, pupil services personnel, technical assistance providers, and school staff. If the plan relates to a secondary school, students from such schools could also be members of the team.

Step 2: Discuss the vision for reform

Developing a vision defines the direction the new school-wide program will take. Begin the needs assessment process with a dialogue answering the following questions:

- What are our central goals?
- After implementing the school-wide program, how will the school be different and improved?

Step 3: Identify data sources to utilize for the needs assessment

A school profile is a data-based snapshot that describes the current status of the school. A school profile gathers baseline information in one place so the planning team can identify focus areas. The profile should include quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of sources, such as the ones listed above.

Step 4: Create a school profile

Decide what should be reported and determine who will be responsible for the development of the profile. Write a narrative to describe what is working well in the school that can be strengthened, what is not working well that needs to be modified or changed, and where achievement gaps exist. Include charts, graphs, and tables as needed, and communicate the profile to all stakeholders.

Step 5: Analyze the data

Analyzing data is one of the most important steps in the needs assessment because it determines the goals developed by the planning team. Analyzing the data allows the planning team to identify gaps between the school’s established vision for reform and the current operating state, issues that have a significant impact on student achievement, and priority areas to be addressed in the written plan.

COMMON PRACTICE #2:

Develop a Written Plan

Developing a written plan is important for several reasons: (1) It focuses attention on the most important changes in the school. Since addressing many issues in one year may be difficult, teams may want to prioritize the major topics and address no more than three major issues the first year. If the team identifies more than three major issues, they may want to create long-term plans to meet these goals. (2) It allows all stakeholders to understand the direction of the school and how to participate in the implementation of improvements. Share the plan with all stakeholders in as many ways as possible. (3) It provides accountability. Research shows that schools with written plans are more likely to meet their goals than schools that do not put their plans in writing.

Successful schools understand that strategies for a written plan must be tied specifically to the school's comprehensive needs assessment. Widespread issues require plans that are larger in scope, while smaller issues can be addressed with pinpoint focus.

When trying to determine what to include in a plan, successful schools commonly look for bridges between their areas of strength and their areas of weakness. When a particular strategy is working, it might need to be replicated. For example, if a school finds that its students are reading significantly better than they are able to demonstrate knowledge of science, the school could look for instructional practices in the reading program that can be emulated in the science program.

Successful schools also frequently look for connections between strategies and initiatives so that ideas do not seem isolated or disconnected from others. A prime example for the 2012-2013 school year is providing professional development to teachers on the Oklahoma C³ Standards, including the Common Core, through the REAC³H Network, REAC³H Coaches, and local professional development plans. When teachers have more tools for teaching the Oklahoma C³ Standards, Student Performance will likely improve, Student Growth will increase, Teacher and Leader Effectiveness (TLE) Evaluation Scores will rise, and more students will meet Reading Sufficiency Act (RSA) and Achieving Classroom Excellence (ACE) requirements. What may appear to be several different initiatives may actually be connected through one central improvement strategy.

POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

There are some strategies that are used by several successful schools. The following are offered only as strategies to be considered by schools that would pursue "The Way to An A."

Quarterly Benchmark Assessments

Benchmark testing is a formative assessment that brings accountability to schools by measuring student learning against quantifiable standards. Teachers use the results of benchmark tests to modify their instruction as needed and to prepare students for end-of-the-year standardized achievement tests.

Ideally, benchmarks are administered quarterly although teachers should progress monitor between benchmark periods. The goal is to continually monitor whether students are making progress and to provide feedback to the teacher so he/she can modify instruction to meet the needs of the students.

Professional Learning Communities

Over the past two decades, there has been a paradigm shift gathering momentum regarding the professional development of teachers. Fueled by the complexities of teaching and learning within a climate of increased accountability, this reform moves professional development beyond merely supporting the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for teachers. There is scientifically based research asserting that professional learning communities (PLC) are an excellent resource for educators to make the shift to performance at a higher level of accountability (DuFour, 2002).

In education, the term professional learning community has been used for a while now; some would even say it is common place. The term professional learning communities is used to describe many practices such as extending classroom practice into the community; bringing community personnel into the school to enhance the curriculum and learning tasks for students; or engaging students, teachers, and administrators simultaneously in learning. The literature on professional learning communities focuses on five areas of organizational arrangements:

- supportive and shared leadership
- collective creativity
- shared values and vision
- supportive conditions
- shared personal practice

Professional learning communities also are seen as a powerful staff development approach for school change and improvement for teachers and students alike. Therefore, persons at all levels of the educational system, from administrative positions all the way to students in the classroom, that are concerned about school improvement will find that professional learning communities are an excellent way to ensure best practices are being implemented for improving students achievement.

Increased Learning Time

Utilize a longer school day, week, or year schedule to significantly increase the total number of school hours to include additional time for (a) instruction in core academic subjects including English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, art, history, and geography; (b) instruction in other subjects and enrichment activities that contribute to a well-rounded education, which could include, physical education, service learning, or experiential and work-based learning opportunities that are provided by partnering, as appropriate, with other organizations; and (c) teachers to collaborate, plan, and engage in professional development within and across grades and subjects.

Building Capacity

A critical factor in turnaround efforts is having a school leader with specialized competencies to carry out school reforms. In addition, recruiting and retaining highly capable leaders, teachers, and other school personnel are necessary in school turnaround. Provide job-embedded professional development that aligns with the school's instructional program and is designed to ensure that teachers and leaders are equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning to successfully implement reform strategies. Family and community engagement activities and programs support collaboration between school and home and encourage working together to improve student achievement.

Community Schools Initiative

The community schools approach is based on a new mindset about achieving success for students and their families. The challenges today's families and students face in their daily lives often become serious barriers to student success. Overcoming these barriers by addressing the needs of the whole child demands a purposeful partner-

ship involving the entire community, families, and schools, in order to assure the best opportunities for all children. A community school is both a place and a network of partnerships between the school and the community. By sharing expertise and resources, schools and communities act as one to educate the whole child academically, emotionally, physically, and socially.

Family Engagement/Parental Involvement

Research studies point to the need for many more comprehensive, strategic approaches to bringing parents and families into partnerships with schools. The ultimate outcome of these efforts will be increased student achievement. One strategy is expanded learning programs. These programs should maintain parental choice, community involvement, family engagement, and parental involvement. Quality programs succeed because parents/guardians and children choose to fully participate. This forces programs to guarantee learning is meaningful, engaging, and relevant, particularly for older children and youth. Expanded learning time programs can make it easier for working parents to interact with instructors. Other strategies include, hosting school events that showcase student achievement in mathematics, reading or other areas; distributing newsletters with suggestions for parents to support academics at home; inviting parents to library events; and distributing donated books to families so that there is print material at home. A wide body of research points to active parent involvement in their children's education as a factor in student success, and community-based organizations partnering with schools on expanded learning time can help facilitate that involvement.

COMMON PRACTICE #3:

Monitor the Implementation of the Plan

Once a plan is written in a successful school, leaders of the school monitor if the plan is implemented on time and as written. A great plan that sits on the shelf without further review or consideration is not likely to produce powerful results. On the other hand, a plan that is used as a "blueprint" for school activities throughout the year is much more likely to have an impact on school performance.

Monitoring a plan involves asking several questions on a consistent basis: (1) Are school personnel and other involved stakeholders completing components of the plan in a timely manner? (2) Are the action steps in the plan

resulting in the required improvements? (3) Are there things that need to be removed from the plan? (4) Are there other things that need to be added to the plan?

One method for asking those questions in a routine methodology is using a calendar-based tool that alerts school leaders to action steps that should have been completed. Such a tool is one component of the WISE Planning Tool discussed later. Another strategy for monitoring a plan is conducting regular data reviews, such as through the Oklahoma Data Review Model.

Oklahoma Data Reviews (ODR)

The purpose of the ODR is to analyze school-level student achievement and other relevant data in a timely manner to ensure effective and timely student interventions in order to improve student achievement. Typically these occur three times a year following quarterly benchmarks.

Data review activities include the review of relevant data, such as quarterly benchmarks for reading, math, Algebra I and English II; student and teacher attendance; discipline and suspension referrals; as well as graduation and drop-out data. Parent and family involvement is also examined during data reviews. During these meetings, discussions are led regarding observations gleaned from the data, action steps needed, and persons responsible for implementing actions. Determining next steps is an important part of the process; these include ensuring an effective roll-out plan is provided to all staff members summarizing the ODR data; utilizing effective classroom interventions that address each skill; and continuous monitoring of interventions by principal, teacher, and other staff.

What are the roles of the superintendent, principals, and teachers in the ODR? The superintendent must ensure resources, including funding, support the frequent review of data. Principals must ensure teacher collaboration time is focused on reviewing student data. Teachers must identify gaps in achievement, adjust instruction, and ensure timely student interventions.

COMMON PRACTICE #4:

Use of Tools Designed to Support Improvement

Oklahoma provides schools with several tools designed to support improvement. One of these is the online WISE Planning Tool to assist in writing and monitoring an improvement plan. This tool includes three critical steps:

Assessing School Indicators, Creating a School Plan, and Monitoring the School Plan. In addition, Oklahoma provides schools with the What Works in Oklahoma Schools Surveys, the Oklahoma Climate Survey, and a variety of professional development opportunities, including webinars and videoconferences posted on the Oklahoma State Department of Education Website and iTunesU. Successful schools commonly take advantage of these resources and opportunities. They also consistently take leadership roles or active participation roles in the REAC³H Network and advisory groups that provide feedback to the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

WISE Planning Tool

WISE stands for Ways to Improve School Effectiveness. WISE is a Web-based system for school improvement planning, but it can also be used for school assessment, peer coaching, and progress monitoring. Oklahoma's Nine Essential Elements provide the framework for WISE. These are essential elements that all schools should have in place to improve student achievement. There are 90 Performance Indicators in the WISE Online Planning Tool that make up the Nine Essential Elements. A helpful feature called "WISE Ways[®]" provides research-based evidence for assessing each Indicator. The WISE Tool guides schools through the school improvement planning process of assessing the Indicators, creating the plan, and monitoring the improvement process to ensure school personnel know where the schools is in relation to the Performance Indicators for improved student learning and achievement. The Nine Essential Elements are:

- Curriculum
- Classroom Evaluation and Assessment
- Instruction
- School Culture
- Student, Family, and Community Support
- Professional Growth, Development, and Evaluation
- Effective Leaders
- Organizational Structure and Resources
- Comprehensive and Effective Planning



Family Engagement Tool

(available for an additional cost from Indistar, the developer of WISE)
The Web-based Family Engagement Tool (FET) guides a school team (including parents) in assessing every aspect of its family engagement programs and practices and creating and monitoring an improvement plan based on indicators of effective practice. The FET's two-year process helps the school determine needs, set priorities, develop a plan, monitor the plan, and strengthen the school community. The Family Engagement Tool:

- Provides rubrics to assess key school policies (or procedural documents),
- Presents a team survey to offer insights into the effectiveness of current practices, and
- Develops a comprehensive plan for family engagement using indicators of effective practice, and enables the team to track progress and generate documents.

For Title I schools, the FET's rubrics use the Non-Regulatory Guidance as the basic measure and demonstrate how the school can move beyond compliance.

What Works in Oklahoma Schools (WWIOS) Surveys

The What Works in Oklahoma Schools surveys, created by Dr. Robert Marzano, assist districts with their comprehensive needs assessment. The surveys are part of a toolkit created to be used by Oklahoma principals and teachers to determine the best course of action for their schools and classrooms. The toolkit provides survey questions aligned with Oklahoma's Nine Essential Elements. Many schools choose to use these surveys at the end of the school year to examine practices. The surveys help identify strengths, weaknesses, and critical areas of need that can be prioritized for the next school year. Reviewing all survey responses from teachers and administrators can determine if administrators and teachers have a sense of agreement or disagreement about how well a school is performing with regard to each of the Oklahoma Nine Essential Elements. The WWIOS surveys are available in Google Docs or hard copy and are located on the School Support/School Improvement Website. Links to the Google Docs surveys are listed under Dr. Robert Marzano, What Works in Oklahoma Schools Surveys, and the hard copies can be found in the What Works in Oklahoma Schools, Phase III State Report.

The surveys include:

- Student Survey Grades 3-5
- Student Survey Grades 6-8

- Student Survey Grades 9-12
- Administrator Survey
- Teacher Survey
- Principal Interview Questions
- Teacher Scales for Reflective Practice

Oklahoma School Climate Surveys

The Oklahoma School Climate Surveys provide insight into perceptions of all stakeholders. There are three different types of surveys: student surveys at various grade levels, teacher surveys, and parent/community surveys. These surveys include questions about safety, student engagement, and parental involvement.

School Climate Teacher Survey

School Climate Survey Grades 3-5

School Climate Survey Grades 6-8

School Climate Survey Grades 9-12

Parental Involvement Survey

iTunesU

iTunes U is a dedicated area within iTunes that gives users public access to hundreds of thousands of free lectures, videos, books, podcasts, and courses from learning institutions all over the world. And with the iTunes U app users can download content directly onto their iPhone, iPad or iPod touch.



The Oklahoma State Department of Education earlier this year launched "OSDE on iTunes U" as part of its effort to expand digital learning and professional development resources for students, parents, educators and school administrators across the state. The new iTunes U site is another innovative step in our goal to deliver anytime, anywhere learning, leveraging digital media and taking advantage of innovative free technology resources like iTunes U to meet the needs of students, educators, parents and citizens.

SDE's iTunes U presence currently includes a number of professional development resources — among them breakout sessions from the annual summer conference, Vision 2020.

REAC³H Network

In 2011, the State Department of Education set in motion the new statewide REAC³H Network.

REAC³H –Regional Educators Advancing College, Career, and Citizenship readiness Higher– is part of Superintendent Barresi's overall C³ Plan, which will ensure each Oklahoma student graduates college, career and citizen ready. The plan is built on a number of reforms being implemented over the next few years, including the new curriculum standards, third-grade graduation requirements, Teacher and Leader Effectiveness evaluations, the A-F School Grading System, and a new Student Longitudinal Data System.



The purpose of the REAC³H Network is to provide leadership to Oklahoma schools by creating open communication via REAC³H Summits, providing technical assistance and resources, and assisting schools in collaboration during transition to a new Teacher and Leader Effectiveness system, statewide reforms, and the Oklahoma C³ Standards, including full implementation of Common Core standards and assessments in 2014-15.

More information is available on the State Department's website, sde.ok.gov/Reac3h-network.

COMMON PRACTICE #5:

Fiscal Analysis

When successful schools analyze their processes, they often find that alignment of their funding sources to their most critical needs can make a big difference in school performance.

Performing a needs assessment and regular data reviews will help ensure the school's alignment of spending patterns to academic needs of students. District personnel, school administrators, teachers and other stakeholders should meet annually to discuss the needs of students. During this meeting the areas of greatest need to improve student achievement will be determined. Once the areas of greatest need are determined, LEAs are required to complete a Consolidated Workbook, School Improvement Plan through WISE (if designated as C³, Priority, Focus, or Targeted Intervention), and appropriate applications and budget forms as part of the overall application for federal funds. The application should reflect expenditure requests that align with the needs assessments and will help improve student achievement according to the LEA and school's greatest needs.

In addition to federal funds, successful schools align state and local funds with those same priorities, careful to use funds for their intended purpose. All LEAs should align spending patterns with the school's needs assessment to ensure best practices in improving student learning and achievement.

■ Aligning Funds and Resources to Needs

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Successful schools are aware of available funding sources and know how to efficiently utilize resources to address identified needs. The purpose of this section is to present information regarding available federal funding streams and to highlight potential uses of these resources. There is no single “correct” method or formula for ensuring efficient use of funds; however, through careful planning and aligning needs with suitable resources, schools will be better equipped to provide timely and appropriate interventions to students.

TITLE I, PART A

Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act of 2001, is designed to help disadvantaged children reach high academic standards. As part of the NCLB, states must use academic assessments and other indicators to annually review the progress of each school to determine whether the school makes adequate yearly progress. Funds are recommended to be targeted to the Title I program goal that all students will be proficient in reading and mathematics.

TITLE I – USES OF FUNDS

All uses of funds must be in conformity with EDGAR (34 CFR Parts 74-86), and Requirements of NCLB Act of 2001, Sec 1120A: Maintenance of Effort, Comparability of Services, and Supplement-Not-Supplant

- Employee salaries and benefits
- Professional development
- Supplies and educational materials
- Equipment/technology
- Travel and conference costs
- Maintenance/operation costs
- Rental/lease of buildings

REQUIRED USE OF TITLE I FUNDS

- Parental Involvement (NCLB Section 1118)
- Private School Services (NCLB Section 1120)

TITLE II, PART A

The purpose of Title II, Part A is to increase the academic achievement of all students by helping schools and districts improve teacher and principal quality and ensure that all teachers are highly qualified. (ESEA Title II, Part A Non-Regulatory Guidance, October 5, 2006, Page 2)

Title II, Part A provides for a range of activities that may be used to increase teacher and principal quality; pages 28-31 of the non-regulatory guidance provide detail on allowable LEA sponsored activities:

A. Professional Development

Professional development, is defined under section 9101(34)(A)(B) of the ESEA and on page 29 of the non-regulatory guidance. Professional development includes activities that:

- 1.** Improve the knowledge of teachers and principals, and in appropriate cases paraprofessionals, in core content knowledge and classroom practices,
- 2.** Involve collaborative groups of teachers and administrators,
- 3.** Enhance parent involvement in their children’s education,
- 4.** Provide training on how to use data assessments to improve classroom practice and student learning,
- 5.** Improve the technology literacy of teachers and administrators,
- 6.** Improve the quality of principals and superintendents, including the development and support of academies to help them become outstanding managers and educational leaders,
- 7.** Provide teacher advancement initiatives to assist teachers in becoming mentor teachers, career teachers or exemplary teachers,
- 8.** Expand or add to the core subject areas of certification that teachers already possess including necessary classes and test fees, and
- 9.** Pay related costs for paraprofessionals to become certified teachers where allowable under Title II, Part A (i.e. core subject content classes and classroom practices).

B. Recruit and Retention Strategies/Mechanisms

Another aspect of Title II, Part A is the provision to assist schools in effectively recruiting and retaining effective and highly qualified teachers and principals. The strategies supported enable districts to:

- 1.** Provide monetary incentives such as scholarships, signing bonuses, or differential pay for teachers in academic subjects or schools in which the LEA has shortages,
- 2.** Recruit teachers to teach special needs children, including students with disabilities,
- 3.** Recruit qualified paraprofessionals and teachers from populations underrepresented in the teaching profession,
- 4.** Pay costs related to out-of-area recruitment costs and moving expenses related to filling areas of teacher shortage as evidenced by documented, historical evidence in the district. This expense would also have to be reasonable and necessary, and
- 5.** Recruit and retain pupil services personnel, only allowable when the district is meeting its requirements under ESEA section 1119(a)(2) (i.e. the district is 100% staffed with highly qualified teachers).

C. Class Size Reduction

Title II, Part A funds may also be used by districts to reduce the size of classes thereby reducing the student/teacher ratio. The State of Oklahoma, under Title 70, has a class size mandate in place. This mandate must be met before federal funds may be used to reduce class size. It is strongly recommended that class size reduction only be utilized for grades K-3.

TITLE VI, PART B – RURAL EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

The Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) is designed to assist rural districts in using federal resources more effectively to improve the quality of instruction and student academic achievement. It consists of two separate programs – The Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) program and the Rural and Low-Income Schools (RLIS) program. The SRSA program provides eligible districts with greater flexibility in using the formula grant funds they receive under certain state-administered federal programs (REAP-Flex). Districts may use RLIS funds to support a broad array of local activities that support student achievement.

An LEA may use Title VI, Part B funds to carry out activities authorized under one or more of the following programs:

- 1.** Part A of Title I (Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged);
- 2.** Part A of Title II (Improving Teacher Quality State Grants);
- 3.** Part D of Title II (Educational Technology State Grants);
- 4.** Title III (Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students);
- 5.** Part A of Title IV (Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities);
- 6.** Part B of Title IV (21st Century Community Learning Centers); and
- 7.** Part A of Title V (State Grants for Innovative Programs).

Examples of allowable activities which are supported through this program are:

- Teacher recruitment and retention, including the use of signing bonuses and other financial incentives.
- Teacher professional development, including programs that train teachers to use technology to improve teaching and that train teachers of students with special needs.
- Purchase of educational technology, including software and hardware, as long as the purpose is to integrate technology effectively into curriculum and instruction in order to improve student academic achievement.
- Parental involvement activities.

■ Grant Opportunities to Help You Succeed

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In order to assist schools that are attempting to raise their grades, certain grant opportunities are available throughout the year. Four of our largest grant opportunities that may assist schools in raising student achievement and overall school performance are described below.

School Improvement Grants (SIG) 1003(g)

School Improvement Grants (SIG), authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Title I or ESEA), are grants to states that are used to make competitive subgrants to districts that demonstrate the greatest need for the funds and the strongest commitment to use the funds to provide adequate resources in order to raise substantially the achievement of students in their lowest-performing schools.

SIG schools make major changes to their structure, curriculum, staffing assignments, instructional time, and/or professional growth opportunities for educators. These major changes typically lead to rapid improvements in both student achievement and overall school performance. Future federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding is uncertain at this time. Announcements are generally made in the late spring as to whether the funding will be made available.

Reward School Grants

The Reward School Grant is a statewide program that establishes mentors for Priority Schools via partnerships with Reward Schools through a competitive grant process. Grants will be awarded to schools that are identified as Reward Schools for the 2012-2013 school year and are willing to partner with a Priority Schools to assist with improvement efforts in the Priority School. Partnering schools will be required to establish partnership activities that are likely to benefit both the Reward School and the Priority School.

The purpose of the Reward School Grant is to offer a financial reward to schools that are identified as High-Performing and High-Progress Reward Schools while

incentivizing partnerships between Reward Schools and Priority Schools. Schools will collaborate to seek continuous improvement in student learning, school culture, and professional growth with the ultimate goal of seeing schools removed from the Priority School list and additional schools included on the Reward School list.

The Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) and Oklahoma State Board of Education (OSBE) believe that collaboration between peers is a highly effective methodology for school improvement; thus, the Reward School Grant is one component of the Raise the Grade Together Initiative.

21st Century Community Learning Center Grants

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative is the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to afterschool programs. Each state receives funds based on its share of Title I funding for low-income students.

Grants support afterschool programs that provide the following services to students attending high-poverty, low-performing schools:

- Academic enrichment activities that can help students meet state and local achievement standards.
- A broad array of additional services designed to reinforce and complement the regular academic program such as drug and violence prevention programs; counseling programs; art, music, and recreation programs; technology education programs; and character education programs.
- Literacy and related educational development services to the families of children who are served in the program. (U.S. Department of Education, 2003)



An analysis of 68 studies of afterschool programs concluded that high-quality afterschool, before-school, and summer learning programs can lead to improved

school attendance, behavior and coursework. Students participating in a high-quality afterschool program went to school more often, behaved better, received better grades and did better on tests compared to non-participating students. Afterschool programs also keep young people safe between the hours of 3 to 6 p.m. and help working families. Our 21st CCLC programs are a key to helping our students become college, career and citizen ready!

The grant application process usually begins in the spring for the following school year; however, when additional funds become available, more grants may be awarded in the fall.

AP/Pre-AP Grants

Advanced Placement grants are offered to schools for the purpose of establishing, organizing, and administering programs designed to improve the course offerings available to high school students throughout the state and to prepare students for admission to and success in a post-secondary educational environment

The available grants are:

- First Time Materials and Equipment Grants for AP courses in Oklahoma public high schools. (\$5,000)
- Second Time Materials and Equipment Grants for AP courses previously receiving a first time grant and demonstrating at least four (4) years of successful implementation. (\$2,500)
- Vertical Team Grants for Grades 7-12 in curricular areas leading to an AP course. (Up to \$25,000)
- Training Grants for Grades 6-12 in curricular disciplines leading to an AP program. (Up to \$25,000)

Applications will be available in September on our website at <http://ok.gov/sde/ap-grants> and must be postmarked by December 15th.



■ Parent Power: Parent and Community Engagement

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A crucial goal of the A-F reform is to foster more parent and community engagement in schools. Parents and community members can join in the effort to raise the grade together by taking the mission of educating children as a community approach.

A school community's purpose is to ensure that each student gains the knowledge, skills, habits, and attitudes necessary for success. This community forms the bond between the home and school where responsibility for students' academic, social, and emotional learning is shared.

PARENT POWER

When a school functions as a *community rather than in a community*, its stakeholders have the opportunity to interact with one another and share common values about the education of their children. This requires many people to work together including students, teachers, administrators, parents, family members, and volunteers to support the student.

A "sense of community" doesn't just happen automatically within a school but is instead thoughtfully and intentionally built by making every member feel welcomed and honored.

Beyond the Bake Sale author Anne Henderson notes that a school community is based upon the shared belief that:

1. All parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them;
2. All teachers are inspired by professional standards and personal conviction to see each child succeed;
3. Student success is reinforced when parents, teachers, and other members of the school community work together on their behalf; and

4. School leaders are the prime movers in establishing and nurturing the processes and practices to intentionally strengthen the school community.

In short, a school community rests upon mutual respect, strong relationships and focused attention to students' academic, personal and emotional learning.

Sam Redding states in his article *Parents and Learning*, that a school community is built and continuously strengthened with six building blocks:

1. Leadership that is shared among its members;
2. Goals and roles that guide its members in doing their part relative to student learning and their relationships to one another;
3. Communication among its members that is two-way, interactive, and clarifies their roles and responsibilities;
4. Education of its members that builds their capacity to fulfill their roles and responsibilities;
5. Connections among its members that enhance their personal relationships, strengthen their bonds to one another and to the school, and foster mutual pursuit of success for all students; and
6. Continuous improvement because a school community is never completely built. It is always building capacity for strengthening the bond among its members and achieving outcomes for students.

To achieve their full potential, communities and schools can join forces. The school's mission and goals may need to broaden. Roles for families and schools may need to be redefined.

Teachers need to be knowledgeable about student culture and local community to draw on these in their lessons. They must reach out to parents and community members. Parents should not be requested to be involved; they should be expected to be involved.

Be intentional – Build a culture of Parental Involvement! That’s the culture that school leaders must establish within the school – an open and welcoming climate that creates trust and opportunities for families to communicate their insights, concerns, and hopes for their children. This two-way communication informs and empowers families to support their children’s education, and it helps the teachers to better understand the external factors that can influence students’ learning and engagement.

An example of a way to open up these avenues of communication could be a brief survey at the beginning of the year. This allows the teacher to learn more about students’ home lives and their families’ goals and concerns.

Ask the parents if their jobs or careers would allow them to share an “expertise” with classes. Many parents may want to share but have never been asked. Be very flexible and creative with this survey to find out what works for different families.

There are four key characteristics of effective school-family communications:

- 1.** Child-centered communication that is highly individualized. This is of the most interest to the parents or family members because it welcomes the child and parents to the class and builds relationships with a child’s family.
- 2.** Constructive communication that is meaningful and useful because it provides families expectations for the coming year.

- 3.** Clear and concrete communication that is beneficial to families in supporting children’s actual learning. This focuses on a child’s specific strengths and struggles and provides families with practical suggestions. Positive language on solutions helps families remain optimistic. These should give specific examples and clear guidelines using simple language and minimal text. Keeping this principle in mind may help to minimize miscommunications resulting from differences in literacy, language, and culture.

- 4.** Continuous communications that keep families informed about their child’s development and in sync with classroom practices and policies. This is all year– weekly folders, phone calls, emails.

The full potential of these efforts cannot be realized if schools and families continue to engage in separate and parallel efforts. Students succeed best when all the key adults in their lives work collaboratively to support them in all developmental domains.

When schools, school systems, and school communities make a concerted effort to act together, they are best positioned to support coordinated school-family-community partnerships that reinforce the social, emotional, and academic learning of their students.



■ The Big Picture: How the A-F School Grading System Fits into the C³ Plan

Janet Barresi

State Superintendent of Public Instruction



At the beginning of this school year, I had the special opportunity to deliver a diploma to 95-year-old Lois (Roberts) Turner in Ponca City. Thanks to the administration and staff of Ponca City Public Schools.

Turner was orphaned when she was seven, pulled out of school after the fifth grade, and enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War II. Lois is a

hero, and giving her a diploma was a great way to start a new school year. After receiving her diploma, Lois commented she wanted this occasion to underscore the importance that every student should work hard to graduate from high school prepared for work. I couldn't agree more.

As we look ahead to the release of the state's first A-F report cards for schools, I want to encourage students, empower parents, and thank teachers and administrators for all that they do.

Oklahoma is on track to improve our schools for everyone.

Recent test results demonstrate that our state is making gains in student achievement – in fact, Algebra II scores were up 21 percentage points compared to 2008, while other end-of-instruction tests showed significant improvements as well.

We're moving in the right direction, but we must stay the course with reforms. That's why earlier this year the State Board of Education passed a resolution for what we're calling the C³ Plan – with the goal that by the year 2020, every student graduating from an Oklahoma high school will be college, career and citizen ready. The C³ plan is built around a simple but powerful idea – that students must be prepared for real life in the 21st Century.

All of the reforms Oklahoma is pursuing are a part of the C³ plan – whether it's remaining firm on Achieving Classroom Excellence (ACE) high school graduation requirements or new reforms to ensure third-graders are reading on grade level.

With the unveiling of new A-F report cards for schools, we can continue on this reform path. While the intention of releasing these reports cards is not to point fingers at anyone, it is an opportunity that will allow parents, citizens and all stakeholders to determine how a school is performing without having to interpret complicated information.



The report cards also will be an important piece of information parents can use when deciding the best educational options for their own children.

The reform also will offer a way for every school to improve. This is a call to action. This provides an opportunity for each and every one of us to join in the effort in our own communities to work with educators on assuring the success of each child.

The release of the report cards is a chance for constructive and hopeful conversations. The end result should be that we celebrate success, challenge others to improve, and raise the grade together – to ensure every school in our state succeeds for the benefit of each child.

 **Raise THE Grade
TOGETHER**

