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## Should schools get A-B-C-D-F grades, too?

### Senator urges 'letter grades' for school district report cards

By [Bob Watson](#)

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Many students know the letters: A means you're a good student; B means you're pretty good; C means you're average; D means you're in trouble.

And F means you're failing the class.

State law requires school districts to report their progress to parents and patrons every year — and state Sen. Ed Emery told the Senate's Education Committee Wednesday those report cards should carry the same letter

grades that many already are familiar with.

“Where this has been implemented in other states, it’s had some real positive effects,” Emery, R-Lamar, testified. “We have also seen significant improvements in other areas, once these grading scenarios were implemented.

“In one state, when they initially implemented letter grades for the schools, almost three-quarters of their schools were graded C or below. At the end of about 10 years, about three-quarters of their schools were graded A or B, and in those 10 years they had increased the standards at least twice.”

Emery also said the more familiar letter-grading system “helps parents get involved” in their children’s schools “more easily.”

Lobbyist Kit Crancer, representing Missouri Students First, supported the proposal, telling committee members: “I think that everyone’s agreed that parental involvement is key, and community involvement is key to success.

“If you’re going to empower parents to make a decision as to where their kids are going to school, or as to which school they’re going to select, I think that transparency is important.”

He agreed the information also could be used to help parents decide which teachers their children should have.

However, Mike Lodewegen of the Missouri Association of School Administrators told the committee: “The thing we have found in other states that have adopted this is, it’s actually acted as a deterrent for parental involvement.”

Emery’s original bill had included changes to teacher tenure laws, and how teachers are evaluated and paid.

But the substitute version he presented to the committee Wednesday had removed those other issues, leaving only the proposed letter-grading system, with the percentages tied to the same number levels that the state Elementary and Secondary Education department uses in accrediting school districts.

Sen. Maria Chappelle-Nadal, D-University City — and a member of the University City School Board — told committee members: “This would just be consistent with what school districts are already provided, but put in plain English.”

Kate Casas, state director of the Children’s Education Council of Missouri, said knowing a school’s letter grade might help parents ask better questions during parent-teacher conferences.

But Carl Peterson, a member of the Ferguson-Florissant school board, said neither the letter grades nor the statistics they would represent provide enough information to help people know a district’s quality or problems.

“As an engineer, this is like chalk on a board to me, because you cannot have an evaluation system that doesn’t consider cost,” Peterson testified.

He cited differences in student bodies, property tax income and district budgets among several St. Louis County districts as evidence that district report cards need more basic information.

Otto Fajen, representing the Missouri National Education Association, urged lawmakers not to “make it harder to run a complex district.”

He added: “The Legislature should be very careful not to impose artificial constructs that undermine the ability of the district to make the changes that it needs to, to have the flexibility to meet the needs of kids.”


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