



Dear <First Name>,

As you are most likely aware, last month a coalition of business and community groups unveiled their own report card system for schools, in which every Colorado school has been given an A-F letter grade. We wanted communicate key points to our principal and assistant principal about this initiative, which is modeled after the package of Florida reforms instituted by Governor Jeb Bush.

*What is the School Grades Organization?*

Some 18 organizations joined together to help fund the School Grades effort. Schools were graded on a curve that arbitrarily determined that 10 percent would receive A's no matter how well schools performed. In addition, they decided that 5 percent of schools must receive F's regardless of how well they did. And, their process will always make that happen even if all schools perform well.

The letter grade approach shifts attention toward a single measure, away from the broader, and much more accepted, presentation of information offered by CDE. School Grades is a private effort that does not have any oversight by CDE, or any statutory basis for its work.

State data were used to determine the grades, but the groups behind the initiative developed their own cut points, which are different than what CDE uses to determine school performance and growth. This is confusing to parents and other interested parties who want to understand school performance. In addition to their website, School Grades has launched an aggressive media campaign that includes TV commercials, billboards, and extensive coverage on 9News.

***What can you do?***

- We think you should encourage parents to click on the widely accepted state accountability system that is at [www.schoolview.org](http://www.schoolview.org). There you can see comprehensive information that includes academic achievement and growth, postsecondary and workforce readiness, graduation and dropout rates, achievement gaps, comparison data based on other schools, and performance indicators in specific academic subjects. If this is all too complicated, as some claim, then we suggest that you set up a way to help your parents to understand how it works.
- If asked about School Grades, here are some things you can say:
  - As public educators, we welcome accountability. We have a state system that has been rated a perfect 100% on the recently released Quality Counts edition by *Education Week*.

- The School Grades framework is a privately developed system that takes state data and applies new cut points based on an arbitrary bell curve.
- A bell curve approach conflicts with our goal of helping all students achieve proficiency in a standards based system.
- A number of factors go into determining the quality of the school and we do not think that those should be distilled into a simplistic letter grade.
- The state moved away from a similar approach and has already committed to developing a more user friendly interface to the comprehensive data contained on SchoolView.
- Public educators were not included in the formation of this system or any of their school grade determinations.
- Parents can learn more about their schools by contacting principals and teachers and seeing schools for themselves. A letter grade cannot possibly capture the all of the reasons why a child should attend a particular school.

To learn more about CASE's perspective on School Grades, click [here](#).

CASE will continue to support fair and complete accountability for public education. I have met directly with several individuals who are directly involved in this effort in order to share our concerns and to learn if I was missing something. I believe this letter accurately states my understanding.

We know how hard you work each day on behalf of kids, and we are so appreciative of all your efforts. We think any effort to improve accountability should include the voice of school principals in planning and implementation. While School Grades ignored your expertise, we see this process as ongoing.

To share your thoughts about School Grades or if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me at [bcaughey@co-case.org](mailto:bcaughey@co-case.org).

Sincerely,

Bruce

Bruce H. Caughey