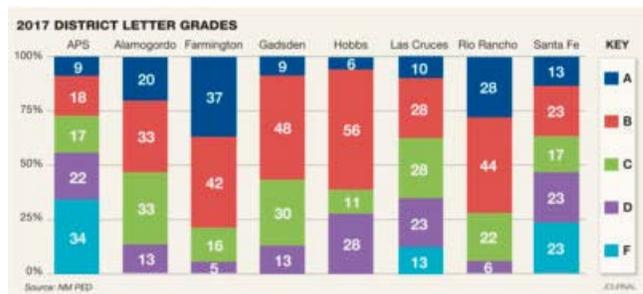


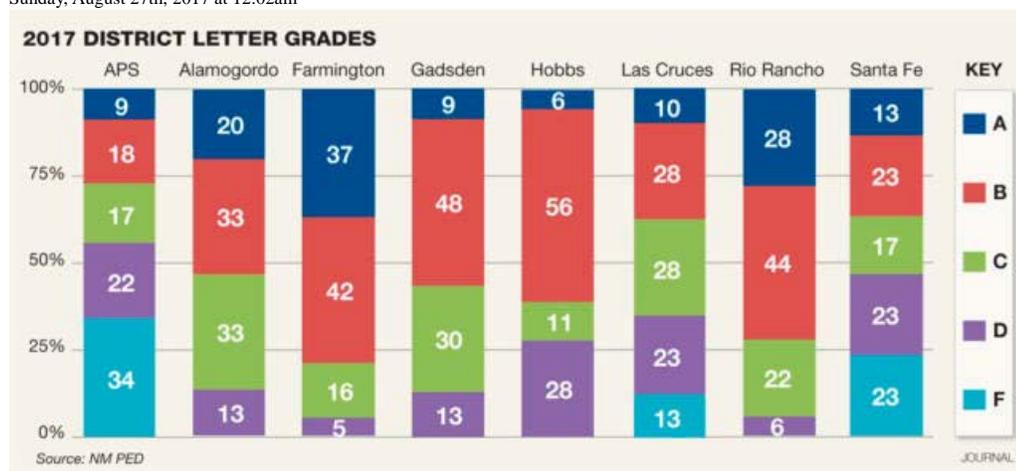
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## Editorials

# Editorial: F schools need to replicate others' successes

By Albuquerque Journal Editorial Board  
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If there's a takeaway from the latest round of school grades, it's that F stands for more than simply failing – it stands for failing your students and failing to get with a program that has proven to work elsewhere.

Because when not just one or two but 56 of New Mexico's 89 public school districts have no F schools – from Alamogordo to Wagon Mound – there are patterns to be followed, and questions to be asked of the districts that now have more F schools than ever.

That includes Albuquerque Public Schools, where more than a third of the schools earned an F this year, up from 25 percent last year.

School grades are based primarily on student improvement (65 percent of the grade of elementary and middle schools, 40 percent of high schools) but also on student proficiency (25 percent this year). Apologists for low expectations, like National Education Association of New Mexico spokesman Charles Goodmacher, would have you believe that “the grades assigned to their local school are more of a reflection on a particular set of policy wonk ideas which reduce the many intangibles of education to a single letter score, than it is about what is actually happening in their schools.”

Except that “single letter” is the result of at least five pages of summary data, and many more pages of initial data, about what is specifically happening in that school, including whether the lowest-performing and highest-performing students are improving, how many students can read and do math at grade level, how many students are graduating and whether the school is delivering better results than in years before.

For example, in APS, the data behind the sixth F in as many years at Hawthorne Elementary (off Copper between Eubank and Wyoming) show just one out of four children in the school can read at grade level; only one out of 10 can do math at grade level; and there was negative academic growth for both the lowest- and highest-performing kids there. Granted, this school and these kids face incredible challenges – poverty, language barriers, crime and lack of family support. But so do many schools and districts that are not falling behind, but rising to the challenge.

Districts including Farmington, Gadsden and Hobbs have eliminated F schools entirely and increased their number of A schools. Gadsden, which stretches along the U.S.-Mexico border, in particular faces challenges as great or greater than anywhere else in the state.

Fifty-eight schools have improved by two or more letter grades. The 100 highest-performing schools cover all grade levels and all quadrants of our vast state.

And the districts that are allowing their students to be left further and further behind must learn from them.

Districts including Santa Fe and Las Cruces have lost dynamic, data-driven superintendents, the former to greener pastures and the latter to a wrong-headed school board. Both district have now earned more F's and fewer A's. APS, which has until recently eschewed reform or replication of success and which Education Secretary-designate Christopher Ruszkowski says suffers from an "aversion to quantitative measurement" of student performance, has just 27 percent A and B schools and 56 percent D and F schools. APS' grades would be slightly higher except that 19 schools were penalized a letter grade for not meeting the required 95-percent student participation rate in PARCC testing. One reason for that high number is that APS actually provides an online how-to-opt-out-of-testing kit.

As Ruszkowski says, encouraging nontesting is "a civil rights issue" because those students and their parents have the same right to know where they are academically and to then demand their school district help them get to where they need to be. Meanwhile, districts that have gone all-in on the state Education Department's Principals Pursuing Excellence and Teachers Pursuing Excellence mentoring programs, and that have successfully implemented student reading and summer programs, have seen impressive gains, including Farmington with fully 79 percent A and B schools, just 5 percent D schools – and no Fs.

The shocking disparity in school grades shows the lie behind the claim New Mexico's teachers can't educate students because they face so many challenges. New Mexico teachers are educating students, more each year, in Animas and Artesia, Hagerman and Hatch, Pecos and Peñasco, Taos and Tucumcari – and in all the other districts that did not have a single F school.

It means districts that have not yet provided all their students with the education they deserve don't have to look very far for the recipe to success: In fact APS has 10 schools within its borders – including Edmund G. Ross Elementary, Hoover Middle and Del Norte High – that improved two letter grades. It has charter schools in the city limits that are delivering amazing results – including the Albuquerque Institute of Math and Science, where students outperformed every nation that took the PISA test, and Mission Achievement and Success. Both stress data-based results.

Struggling schools and districts should be mining these success stories; six years into school letter grades, there's no excuse for failing to do so.

There may be an "F" in "future," but there's no future in New Mexico in failing our students.

*This editorial first appeared in the Albuquerque Journal. It was written by members of the editorial board and is unsigned as it represents the opinion of the newspaper rather than the writers.*