

Our Schools

The recent publication of the “preliminary work-in-progress report noting potential grades” for schools and districts has caused uproar from school leaders across the state. Many boards of trustees have passed resolutions calling for the legislature to repeal the A-F system.

Unfortunately, the purpose of the school ratings and the process for assigning grades are not pure or complete. At a recent legislative conference for school administrators, a member of the House of Representatives spoke candidly about the priorities that the legislature has assumed. She noted that it is a shame when the politics of adults hurt kids. It is important to Sealy ISD that we as a community do not allow the A-F system to hurt our kids or our community.

Sealy ISD is proud of our students, staff, schools, and community. We believe the core purpose of education is to provide an avenue of opportunity for all. We embraced this mission three years ago in establishing our aim for all students to be engaged and for all students to have an expansive perspective on the doors that are open to them upon graduation. We take our work seriously. Teams of teachers, administrators, parents, and community members work regularly throughout the year to consider the input received from stakeholders, review our performance data, consider our needs, establish our goals, and implement steps for continuous improvement.

The A-F rating of our schools does not reflect favorably for Sealy. Prior to release of the ratings, we as a district knew this would be the case. The system used to formulate present ratings is not fully developed. The Texas Education Agency has already released proposed revisions to the process for calculating school grades in the future. The present model does not fully account for the educational challenges associated with socioeconomic status, disability, and language acquisition. Sealy ISD serves a population of students for which 53.7% are identified as economically disadvantaged, 13% are English Language Learners, 43.4% are classified as At-Risk, and 21.2% are enrolled in Special Education or 504 services.

A complete list of letter grades assigned to schools and districts across the state can be found on the Texas Education Agency’s website.

While the A-F grading system is flawed, Sealy ISD has not entirely discredited the awareness and urgency that it presents for us and the work that we do. However, there are inconsistencies with the state’s A-F grading system that cause concern. For example, our high school received a distinction for post-secondary readiness in 2015 and surpassed the target standard by 12 points in 2016. In comparison to the region, Sealy High School has more students participate in college-readiness assessments such as AP exams, ACT, and SAT than most other schools. We have invested in both requiring and paying for our students to take these assessments. We also offer 15+ Advanced Placement and Dual Credit courses, 30% of our students leave with college credit, and we offer 21 career pathway programs with a 100% graduation rate. Yet our high school received an F for post-secondary readiness.

We knew in August, with the receipt of our Texas Academic Performance Report and Accountability Report that there was work to be done. We have been rigorously doing that work day in and day out since before school began. We will continue along our path, which for Sealy has included implementation of a vertically aligned instructional support and growth monitoring system, one-one-one goal setting conferences with students and staff, daily classroom observations and reflective conferences, expansion of course offerings, expansion of career preparation programs, and enhancement of student support services. This list is merely a few of the efforts we have put forth to ensure the success of our students.

Sealy ISD is not opposed to standards of accountability. However, a system generated to compare and rate schools without regard for the needs and challenges faced by each and which serves a politically grounded alternative agenda rather than promoting continuous and comprehensive improvement of school systems is not something that we can quietly accept. Therefore, at the next regularly scheduled meeting of trustees for Sealy ISD, we will consider a resolution to request the legislature to repeal the A-F grading system and join the voice of the 152 others across the state who want to promote the work done by our school systems for our kids and communities.