

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## EDUCATION

# Find your school's state report card and understand how to read it



**[Anna Staver](#)**

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## Key Points

Ohio schools will no longer receive letter grades

Schools will now receive star ratings

Schools can earn up to 5 stars in each category

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Ohio is releasing its annual report cards for public schools and districts Thursday, but they aren't going to have letter grades.

Instead, the revamped report cards will feature star ratings along with new categories and new calculations.

The hope is that this new system will be fairer for schools and easier for parents to understand.

## Find your Ohio school district's report card

Here's how to interpret the results:

### What do the report cards measure?

Ohio's Department of Education collects a lot of information from the state's 610 public school districts and funnels the data into six categories: achievement, progress, early literacy, gap closing, graduation and readiness (college, career, workforce, military).

Schools can earn up to five stars in each category, and half-star ratings are possible.

"This helps give Ohio parents and schools a snapshot of the quality of education being provided to students," according to the department's website.

But only if parents understand what these categories mean.

## **Achievement**

This measures how students did on statewide tests and whether their schools met established thresholds.

What this means is when students take statewide exams their scores get combined into an overall result for their school. That number then gets averaged with the totals for all other statewide tests administered in that building and the result earns the school up to five stars.

More stars mean higher achievement, but it's important to note that three stars mean the school met statewide expectations. Four stars are for exceeding expectations and five stars mean significantly exceeding expectations.

"I think that point is one of the reasons why the state moved away from A through F grades," Sen. Andrew Brenner, R-Delaware, said.

Schools used to be given a "C" for meeting expectations and some districts believed parents interpreted that negatively.

## **Progress**

This category tracks how children are doing year over year instead of how well they score on statewide exams.

A child who is "way behind" could make a lot of progress in a year and still not pass his or her statewide exam, Brenner said.

It's a category that's been on Ohio's school report cards for years, but it got a little tweaking for the 2021-2022 academic year. High achieving districts had been dinged on previous report cards for not progressing when their students exceeded statewide achievement standards.

"If a kid is at the top, you aren't going to get any additional growth," Brenner said. "Those things were taken into consideration."

Progress can also show whether a school is "trending in the right direction." A school with two or three stars for achievement and five for progress is doing much better than it has in previous years.

## Early Literacy

This category is relatively straightforward. It measures reading improvement and proficiency for students in kindergarten through third grade.

The thing to keep in mind about this category is that a five doesn't mean every student in that school or district read at or above their grade level. It means the vast majority were proficient and were promoted to fourth grade.

Three stars in this category means the school met statewide standards.

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## Gap Closing

This component looks at several data points such as how many students are chronically absent, qualify for gifted programs, and whether certain subgroups of students (Black, Hispanic, disabled, economically disadvantaged) are meeting statewide standards.

And while the overall star rating in this category is important, Brenner said the most interesting numbers to him were the ones for specific subgroups.

"If you don't dig in, you may not see some of the trends with particular groups," he said.

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For example, a school may score well overall but is failing their students with disabilities or those who test as gifted.

"Gifted and talented students should be extra challenged," Brenner said. "What are they doing for kids who are already going to exceed expectations?"

## Graduation

The category looks at the percentage of students who graduate with a regular or honors diploma.

Here's how the star ratings work in this category:

One star means a graduation rate of less than 84%

Two stars mean a graduation rate of 84-89%

Three stars mean a graduation rate of 90-93.4% (This is the statewide standard for schools.)

Four stars mean a graduation rate of 93.5-96.4%

Five stars mean a graduation rate of 96.5% or more

## Readiness

This is a new category on the report card and won't have an overall star rating for the 2021-2022 academic year.

"We didn't quite come to an agreement on it," Brenner said. "We have time to analyze the data over the next few years and make adjustments."

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Broadly speaking, the category is supposed to evaluate whether students are "prepared for what comes next" after they graduate high school. That could mean college, trade school, the military, an apprenticeship or a job.

To answer that question, schools submitted the number of students graduating with honors diplomas, AP credits, 12 or more College Credit Plus credits and state-recognized licenses.

The scores, when they become part of the overall ratings, will be calculated by the number of "students who achieve one or more of the component measure goals," according to the Ohio Department of Education.

*Anna Staver is a reporter with the USA TODAY Network Ohio Bureau. It serves the Columbus Dispatch, Cincinnati Enquirer, Akron Beacon Journal and 18 other affiliated news organizations across Ohio.*

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