

ROCKDALE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

P. O. Box 632, 520 W. Davilla
Rockdale, TX 76567



January 5, 2017

A “what if” report was released to the public today which applies an A-F rating to last year’s accountability. Rockdale ISD has high expectations for all students, and we believe there does need to be an accountability system. However the concern lies in singling out certain groups of students to rank an entire district through comparisons across all school districts. Comparing school districts across the state is impossible as we are all so different. In this new system, small districts are compared to large districts; high socio-economic districts are compared to low socio-economic districts.

According to Texas Association of School Administrators, “To reduce the many measures of school and district performance to a single grade, A–F rating systems rely on pages upon pages of complicated rules and calculations. As a result, no one really knows what a letter grade means. No one can explain the grade, and no one knows what to do to raise the grade. “A” schools have just as difficult a time explaining why they were given an “A” as “D” schools have explaining why they were given a “D.” The difference is that “A” schools don’t have to.”

Initially it is important for everyone to understand this is not final and should be considered as a trial – changes will continue to be made to the system prior to its release for the 2017-2018 school year.

Each school and the district is being given a letter grade for four of the five domains based on last year’s data. So a comparison from the **true** accountability from last year and the proposed accountability using the same data would look like the following:

Rockdale ISD

2015-2016 Rankings

Met State Expectations (Highest Rating)

Five Distinctions

Proposed Rankings

Domain I - C

Domain II - C

Domain III – D

Domain IV - A

The disappointment in this new system is multifaceted. Some immediate concerns include:

- Domain I - No longer are our students simply expected to pass the STAAR test. Now two thirds of the grade received will be based on students scoring well beyond the passing standard set by the Texas Education Agency. This is more than just having high expectations for students.
- Domain II – Districts were told this will not be a bell curve system, yet the following shows the distribution of all schools after this first preliminary grading was complete. A bell curve almost predetermines the scores a school can receive.

F	D	C	B	A
13.90%	19.50%	33.80%	21.20%	11.60%

Receiving points for this Domain are based on progress made. An example would be a student scoring 4333 scale score the previous year and 4000 scale score the current year would not earn a point for the campus in this domain as it doesn’t show progress, yet both of these scale scores are considered above expectations of passing which was a 3550 scale score.

- Domain III is based on the percentage of low socio-economic students and only their scores. These scores are compared across the state to all schools. Again, the expectation is for all students to reach the advanced level on the test which currently only about 10-15% of students in the state reach. The grades given in this Domain do not take into account variables other than scores on standardized tests. These grades will align with wealth or poverty and will likely punish poor schools for being poor.
- Domain IV is labeled as a post-secondary readiness indicator, but attendance is the driving force for elementary and junior high. Districts are not graded on their high attendance rates; instead districts are graded for chronic absences of a few students. For example, you can have a school with a 97% attendance rate which is great, yet if any of the 3% of students who were absent are considered chronic then the school is penalized. Keep in mind chronic absences could be due to things like hospitalization, unforeseen family emergencies or illness.

Overall this new system is based on social and economic barriers that are out of the control of our school district. Great things are happening in Rockdale ISD and great things will continue. Our STAAR scores have been on the rise even with the more stringent passing standards; and our goal is to continue to improve. As we all know there is much more to a district than STAAR scores. This new rating system will be used by our district as another piece of information to guide us in our planning, but in no way will this rating define who we are as a district. In my personal opinion, I continue to question the legislative push to move to a voucher system and now wonder if this new accountability system is just another way to make public schools look inadequate.

Denise Monzingo
Superintendent of Schools, Rockdale ISD