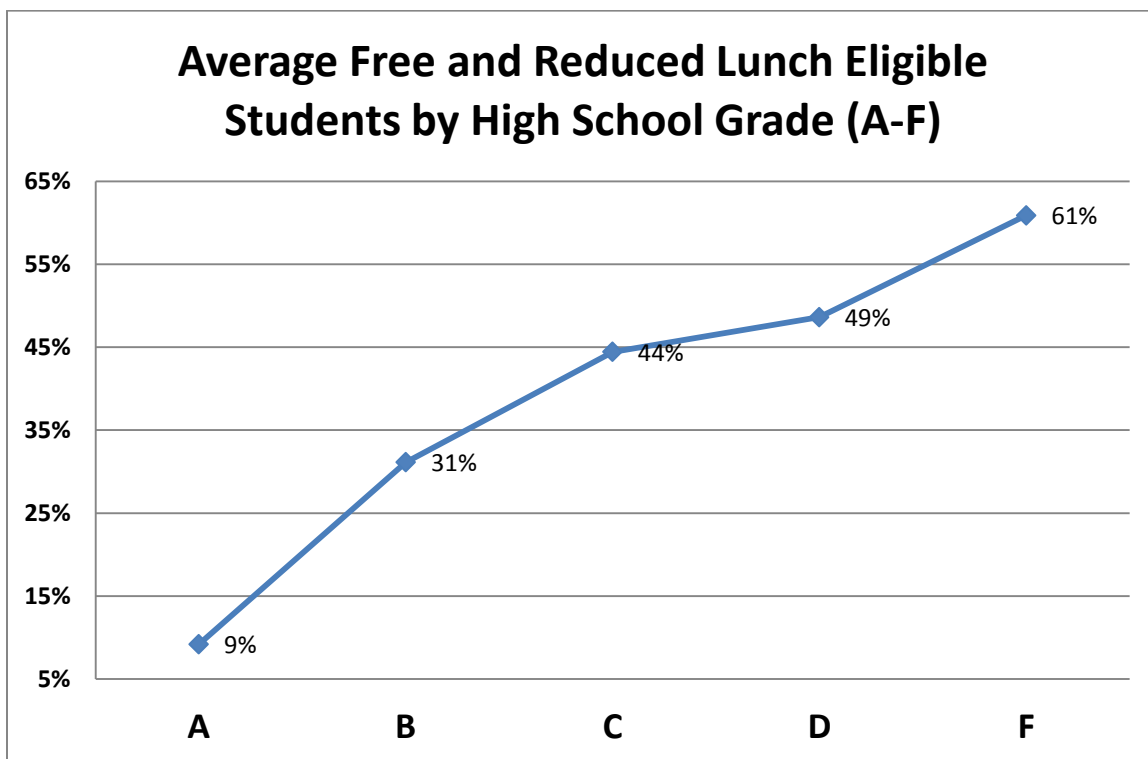


Maine's Flawed Grading System

The Maine Department of Education has released letter grades for each public school in the state. There are many flaws with this system. The question is what exactly does this grading system measure?

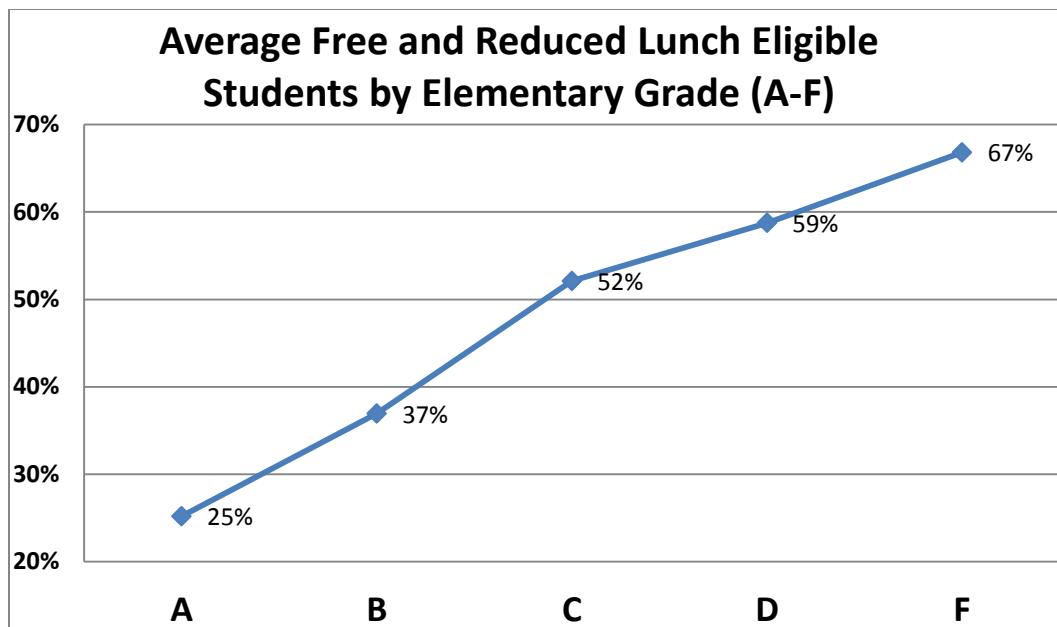
Standardized Tests and Socioeconomic Bias:

- For elementary schools, the grading system is based entirely on standardized test scores. Recent research has demonstrated that standardized test scores are directly linked to socioeconomic status of children and provide very little information regarding the actual achievement of a child or a school.
- In fact, the grades released by the Maine Department of Education show a direct link between the numbers of students eligible for free or reduced lunch¹ (a leading indicator of poverty for school aged children) at a school and its assigned grade.
- **As seen in the chart below, the high schools receiving a letter grade of “A” had an average of 9% of students receiving free and reduced lunch, whereas the average rate of free or reduced lunch students for “F” schools was an astounding 61%.**

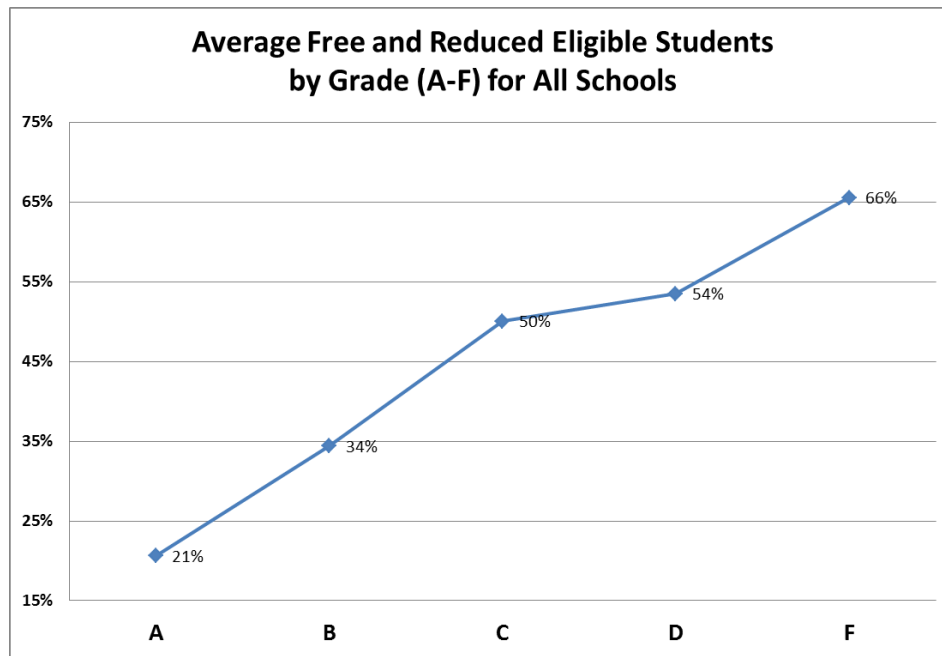


- **The data for elementary schools was equally disturbing. Schools receiving an “F” saw an average of 67% of its students eligible for free and reduced lunch, while the schools receiving an “A” had only an average of 25%.**

¹ Source For Free and Reduced Lunch Information—Maine Department of Education
https://portal.maine.gov/sfsr/sfsrdev.ed534.ed534_parameters



- Some schools receiving an “F” rating had well over 90% of their students eligible for free and reduced lunch, including the Longley School in Lewiston.
- 18 of the 44 schools branded with an “F” had more than 70% of their students eligible for a free or reduced lunch.
- Only 5 of the 44 “F” schools had less than 50% of their student population eligible for free and reduced lunch benefits. This means that 89% of the schools that received an “F” grade had over 50% of their students eligible for free or reduced lunch.
- For high schools, 8 of the 10 schools (80%) that received an “F” grade had more than 50% of the students on a free or reduced lunch. The private academy, Lee Academy, received an “F” grade, but only had 38% of its students eligible for free and reduced lunch.
- Of the high schools that received an “A” grade, only two had more than 10% of its students receiving free and reduced lunch. Scarborough High School has slightly over 12% and York High School has almost 18% of its students eligible for free or reduced lunch.
- Of the 34 elementary schools that received an “F” grade, 30 of them had more than 50% of their students receiving a free or reduced lunch, meaning **88% of the elementary schools receiving an “F” grade had more than half of their students eligible for free or reduced lunch.**
- Conversely, 8 out of the 50 elementary schools that received an “A” had more than 50% of their students on free and reduced lunch. 84%, or 42 out of the 50, of the elementary schools that received an “A” had less than 50% of their students receiving a free or reduced lunch.



Regional Poverty Indicators:

The Governor's grading system has labeled 44 schools with an "F" grade. Clearly, this designation will have severe implications for the students in these schools and the communities they serve. Towns in the vicinity of these school districts will likely face declining property values. When schools are judged to be failing students may find less motivation to enter higher education and may face new, uncertain obstacles. What's more, a closer examination of these schools reveals that many of them are located in the communities that are struggling the most in our state, begging the question if the Governor's grading system really is any type of reliable measure of a school's impact on student outcomes or is simply a measure of a communities relative economic standing.

Important Facts about Schools Receiving F Grades:

- **Washington County had the highest number of schools receiving an "F" grade.** 7 of Washington County's 37 schools received an "F" rating, meaning 19% of the schools in the entire county graded were given an "F" by the Department of Education. **Washington County has the highest unemployment rate in the state.** As of March 2013, 11.7% of the population in Washington County is unemployed.
- Piscataquis County saw 30% of the schools in the county receive an "F" grade. Piscataquis County has the third highest unemployment rate in the state at 10.5%.
- Washington, Piscataquis and Somerset had the highest number of schools graded with an "F", and have the 1st, 3rd and 4th highest unemployment rates in the state respectively.
- York, Kennebec and Sagadahoc all have among the lowest unemployment rates in the state, and none of the schools from these three counties received a grade of "F."

County	Number of "F" Schools	Total Number of Schools in County	Percentage of Schools with an F Grade per County	Unemployment Rate as of March 2013
Piscataquis	3	10	30%	10.50%
Washington	7	37	19%	11.70%
Somerset	5	28	18%	10.00%
Waldo	4	24	17%	8.90%
Lincoln	2	18	11%	8.00%
Aroostook	5	46	11%	9.30%
Oxford	3	31	10%	8.50%
Androscoggin	3	34	9%	7.20%
Penobscot	5	63	8%	7.60%
Cumberland	5	75	7%	5.90%
Knox	1	20	5%	7.80%
Hancock	1	32	3%	10.70%
Franklin	0	15	0%	8.60%
York	0	49	0%	7.30%
Kennebec	0	48	0%	7.19%
Sagadahoc	0	16	0%	6.60%

• **Conversely, the number of schools receiving a letter grade of "A" can be found among the communities with the lowest unemployment rates.**

- For example, of the 59 schools in Maine that received an "A", 19 of them (32%) were in Cumberland County, which has the lowest unemployment rate in the state.
- Piscataquis and Somerset Counties with the 3rd and 4th highest rate of unemployment rate in the state, did not have a single school receive an "A" grade.

County	Number of "A" Schools	Total Number of Schools in County	Percentage of Schools with an A Grade per County	Unemployment Rate as of March 2013
Cumberland	19	75	25%	5.90%
Franklin	3	15	20%	8.60%
Lincoln	3	18	17%	8.00%
Hancock	5	32	16%	10.70%
Knox	3	20	15%	7.80%
York	7	49	14%	7.30%
Kennebec	4	48	8%	7.19%
Washington	3	37	8%	11.70%
Waldo	2	24	8%	8.90%
Aroostook	3	46	7%	9.30%
Penobscot	4	63	6%	7.60%
Sagadahoc	1	16	6%	6.60%
Oxford	1	31	3%	8.50%
Androscoggin	1	34	3%	7.20%
Piscataquis	0	10	0%	10.50%
Somerset	0	28	0%	10.00%

- Perhaps equally telling of this grading system is the clustering that can be found in certain communities. For example, all of the schools that were graded in Cape Elizabeth, Falmouth, Cumberland (RSU 51) and Yarmouth all received an “A” grade. Schools in Kennebunk (RSU 21), York and Scarborough all received As and Bs only.
- Hancock County appears as an outlier in the chart above but a closer analysis provides greater clarity. Of the 5 schools that received an “A” grade, all of them are located on coastal communities. 3 of them are on or near Mount Desert Island, including the Connors-Emerson School in Bar Harbor, the Mount Desert Elementary School and the Islesford School. The other two include Lamoine Consolidated School and Surry Elementary. **The MEA believes a closer inspection of the data will reveal a direct connection between the “A” grades and the more affluent coastal communities of Hancock County.**

Conclusion:

The Governor’s grading system is deeply flawed. Not only does it use a measuring stick that is biased and incomplete, but it oversimplifies the extremely complicated process of educating children into a sound bite. However, hopefully what policymakers can gain from this ill-conceived and poorly executed public relations gimmick is that there are deep socioeconomic divides in Maine that have tremendous influence on our children and our public education system. These divides deserve greater scrutiny and interrogation as we proceed to make all public schools in Maine successful.

For more information, contact the MEA Government Relations Director, John Kosinski at jkosinski@maineea.org or call 207.458.1312