

One-Dimensional Grading: Maybe Bad for Children, Maybe Career-Ending for Public Servants

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[Grading schools](#) on average performance on tested subject matter can be useful, narrowly applied, but it can also be misleading and harmful. One-dimensional notions of quality, talent, and ability can defeat right-minded thinking about problems and solutions. It harms schools that do not choose to operate in a way that fits a one-size-fits-all grading scheme, and it can end the careers of public servants that adjust the grading scheme to eliminate such effects.

While State Superintendent of Indiana's Public Schools, Tony Bennett changed his state's school grading criteria after it became apparent that it would harm chartered public schools with unique missions; supposedly one school in particular. Even if his motives were pure, an apparent conflict of interest and [the ensuing flap](#) over the basis for the grading system changes probably ended Bennett's career as a prominent, pro-transformation public servant. To lose a great public servant to a task of dubious, at best, very limited value, is as sad as losing great educators to the [extremely difficult, unnecessary job of school district superintendent](#).

The point here is that attempts to characterize multi-dimensional schooling services with a single metric is a hazardous task, not just for the consumers of the product, but also its producers. In the [discussion of the cause of Bennett's demise](#), RiShawn Biddle's second point is especially instructive:

"A-to-F grading isn't ready for prime time. Because it doesn't accurately break out for families, especially from poor and minority backgrounds, how well schools serve their children in all aspects of learning, it isn't very useful for making smart decisions."

In other words, we need to describe/rate schools with much more than a single metric, and inform the subjective assessments parents must make on behalf of their children. In the school system we

need – a dynamic menu of schooling options as diverse as our children – it will be much more difficult for governments to compare schools, and much easier for parents to compare them.