

# The Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township

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Education Center

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## Board of Education

November 5, 2013

To the Indiana State Board of Education:

What is the purpose of an A-F grading system? Can you create such a system for Indiana schools without first answering this fundamental question? The current, most prevalent answer is that the A-F grading system is a measure of a school district's "accountability." But is it, or does it simply label a school district and its surrounding community?

The MSD of Wayne Township Board of Education is proud to represent its school district and its community. Our teachers, administrators, and support staff have one goal: providing all that is necessary for our children to develop to their full potential. This was true long before there was an A-F grading system, and it would not diminish if the A-F system ceased to exist. We have long been seen as a district that sets the bar for others around the state. However, because the A-F grading system is based almost entirely upon ISTEP scores -- a *quick glimpse* of the work being done to fully develop our children -- we are labeled a "C" district.

We do not and will not strive for an "A" for the sake of the label; we strive for excellence for the sake of our children. While this is a great truth of our district, the negative side of being labeled is also true. Being labeled a "C" district has made it more difficult to attract and keep the high quality teachers that have always been the hallmark of MSD Wayne. This label has also made it more difficult for our community to attract new homeowners and businesses.

If "accountability" is the purpose, we suggest you include in your system all the ways that MSD Wayne excels in being accountable in the welfare and education of our children. Our district has a 78% poverty rate and a 30% mobility rate. Our children (and their parents) come from many different cultures; we currently have 75 different languages spoken in our community. In the face of these challenges, we have a growing graduation rate, which most recently was 88.3%. Included in this rate is our success in doing what even "A" schools consider to be impossible: eradicating the so-called "achievement gap" by graduating a larger percentage of African-American students than white students. Many of our students earn college credits, with approximately 20,000 earned by our 2013 graduates. Last year alone, more than 100 graduates earned their associate's degrees along with their diploma. MSD Wayne is *accountable* to its children and community in ways that are the envy of many "A" schools.

The A-F grading system does not help us do more for our students. When one of our schools, Lynhurst 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Center, was in danger of state takeover due to being labeled an "F" school, the IDOE sent in teams of experts to help. Working within the system, our teachers and administrators were

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open to any ideas the experts from IDOE could give to them. The response from the teams of IDOE educational experts was that they could not see, think of, or imagine doing anything that we were not already doing. What can you conclude from this?

Regardless, you are still tasked with creating an A-F grading system. It is our hope that the system you create does more than simply label a school and its community. We have ample evidence, both anecdotal and statistical, that poverty is the number one indicator of a child's ISTEP outcome. The poverty rate must, therefore, be included in any calculation of a district's *accountability*.

Enclosed with this letter, please find excellent examples of the numerous studies that tie poverty rates to test scores. These were done by Advanced Placement statistics students and International Baccalaureate math students at Ben Davis High School, but many more resources on this topic are available. Our AP statistics and IB math students also recommend that measures of college and career readiness be weighted more heavily than ECA exams in determining a high school's grade, and that measures in addition to ISTEP scores be considered for elementary and middle level students.

It is our hope that you will accept your responsibility toward all Hoosiers in a manner that reflects the facts before you, your knowledge, and your compassion by creating a system of accountability which accurately and thoroughly reflects the efforts being made to develop Indiana's children to their fullest potential.

Sincerely,

MSD of Wayne Township Board of Education

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