



## **TEA Time: A-F Accountability Results with Commissioner Mike Morath – December 2018**

**Narrator:** Welcome to TEA Time... A podcast about all things about public education from the Texas Education Agency.

As the TEA launched the A-F Accountability System in August 2018, we sat down with Commissioner Morath to discuss his thoughts about the design of the system and what he wanted parents to know. As ratings for the 2017-2018 school year are now final and available online at [txschools.org](http://txschools.org), we bring you an excerpt from those previous conversations.

**Host:** The system is made up of three areas that are look at – Student Achievement, School Progress, Closing the Gaps. Let's look at each one of them individually. What is in the Student Achievement domain?

**Commissioner Morath:** Sure, A through F has been designed to look at campuses three different ways. One based upon Student Achievement. One based upon School Progress. One based upon Closing the Gaps. In this way, we celebrate high levels of student achievement, while also celebrating the impact of highly effective educator teams while maintaining focus on the students that are perhaps in most need of our support. It is a very balanced, fair way to look at performance of campuses.

Student achievement, if we think about that first domain or the first way of looking at performance is about what students know and what they can do at the end of the school year. We look at it in a variety of different ways. We can look at it in terms of what they have achieved? Have they graduated from high school? Are they ready for college as you might see on an AP exam or by taking the SAT? Are they ready for a career? Do they have industry based credentials or welding certification, that sort of thing, or are they ready for the military? Did they actually enlist? In the earlier grades, we can also look at whether they are meeting grade level standards in reading or math or other subject areas as found on the STAAR test.

**Host:** On school progress?

**Commissioner Morath:** School progress is about comparing students, about determining how much better they are . In some cases, it is about how much better they are than they were last year. In that way, you look at the amount of academic growth that a student had. So you can have a student that is significantly below grade level from the prior year but due to the tenacious work of our educators, grows more in the one academic year that they have. That student still might not meet grade level by the end of the second year but you can see that growth. So school progress looks at the growth of our students. It also looks at how much better our schools are performing that schools that look similar to them. So if you are a school that has – as an example – a very high level of student poverty, what we do with school progress is we compare you to similar schools. So if you are the highest performing school with that level of poverty, than clearly you are an A campus and worthy of being celebrated.

**Host:** And finally, closing the gaps. That may be the one that people may not fully understand.

**Commissioner Morath:** Sure, the first two domains look at all students in the aggregate. The closing the gaps domain, though, looks at different groups of students. So it's going to look at different groups of students by race or by income. For example, looking at special education students, because we want to find out whether individual groups of students need more focused support and how well we are doing in closing the gaps between the different groups of students. So, the closing the gaps domain is really about that kind of specific focus on specific groups.

**Host:** How is A through F a system that better informs a parent or school board member or superintendent as opposed to what we had been using, Met Standard or Improvement Required.

**Commissioner Morath:** Sure, the transition from our pass/fail designation that we have now with Met Standard or Improvement Required to a tiered designation of A, B, C, D or F, sets up different levels of performance. Right now, if you go from Improvement Required to Met Standard, that is definitely worthy of celebration but that is the end of the celebration. But what we want to do for all of our kids, regardless of where we are today, we want to be better next week, and even better than that the week after. So the idea of A through F sets up a continuous improvement conversation. So that wherever we are, we can strive to be better and stronger in our academic support for our kids.

**Host:** In addition to just the ratings, there's now a website for parents, school leaders, community leaders, pretty much anyone to go beyond the rating label, whether it be A, B, C, D, F, or Met Standard or Improvement Required – <https://txschools.org>. If someone goes to that website, what will they see?

**Commissioner Morath:** So we tried to design txschools.org to be as easy for folks to understand as possible. So you type in the name of a campus or you type in the name of a school, and immediately you will see that school's overall performance information. And you can stop there if you like, or you can dig deeper. And we've put resources in there to help people understand how the ratings are calculated and the way we look at performance.

Generally speaking, we analyze performance of our districts and campuses in three ways – one based on Student Achievement, this is what students know and can do at the end of the school year; one based on School Progress, that's how much better the students are doing; and one based on Closing the Gaps, how individual groups of students are doing as opposed to sort of the average student. And so you can look at performance in each of those areas individually if you're so interested, or you can just take a quick pulse check for how well performance landed this year. And then next year when you come back to txschools.org, you'll be able to see year over year comparisons, because we will have been on the A-F system for more than one year in a row. Of course, our desire is to keep it the same, year in, year out, to allow for that continuous improvement.

**Host:** Once again, the website is <https://txschools.org>. We encourage you to visit that site. And thank you once again for joining us, Commissioner.

**Commissioner Morath:** Thank you.

**Narrator:** For more on this and other education issues, visit our website at [tea.texas.gov](http://tea.texas.gov). For more TEA Time episodes, visit [tea.texas.gov/podcast](http://tea.texas.gov/podcast) or look for us where you download your other podcasts. Join us again soon for another episode of TEA Time, a podcast from the Texas Education Agency.