



State of Arizona
Department of Education
Accountability Unit

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Charter Holders, Principals, and Testing Coordinators

FROM: Yovhane L. Metcalfe, Ph.D.,
Chief Accountability Officer

DATE: August 14, 2014

SUBJECT: **2014 “Pending” Letter Grades**

On Monday, August 4, the Arizona Department of Education (the Department) released over 2000 letter grades for schools and/or local education agencies (LEAs) to the public. The newly established Accountability Unit was pleased to deliver embargoed letter grades to schools a day ahead of schedule on July 29. Approximately 95% of schools received a letter grade under the 2014 A-F Letter Grade Accountability System; however, approximately 128 schools are awaiting a letter grade and remain in “Pending” status.

To uphold customer service to the schools and public we serve, we prioritize accuracy of the accountability determinations and follow the formulae approved by the State Board in a timely manner. The Department utilizes “Pending” labels when the data necessary to make the final accountability determination need additional processing time extending beyond the June 30, 2014 deadline. Rather than issue potentially erroneous accountability labels, the department withholds a final determination for a variety of reasons including but not limited to:

- Arizona Online Instruction (AOI) schools extended fiscal year end
- Development of an AOI accountability model
- Development of an accountability method for extremely small schools
- Schools whose data were delayed by the test vendor
- Schools which require recalculation based on missing components
- Schools whose data require authentication by the Department

The Department is reviewing less than 10 schools in the state for potential data manipulation impacting accountability labels. **All schools whose data require additional verification due to possible fraudulent activity were notified prior to receiving the “Pending” label.**

When a school is identified under two or more of the five criteria below and there is reasonable concern for systemic issues, the Department has withheld the accountability determination and commenced an investigation to determine whether accountability data were manipulated and submitted under fraudulent pretense.



Qualifying criteria:

1. School is flagged on erasure report for the current year
2. School has been previously flagged on erasure report within the previous 3 years
3. Verbal or written allegations of test irregularities received by the ADE Assessment and/or Accountability units
4. Sudden and/or significant changes to student enrollment data which positively impacts an accountability determination
5. Abnormal and/or inexplicable gains in the current year as compared to school's performance in prior years

The test vendor, Pearson, provides the Department with a statewide report identifying test records and/or groups of test records with an extraordinary amount of instances where the wrong answer was erased to the right answer. This *Mark Discrimination Report* (Erasure report) highlights testing irregularities based on how many times an answer is changed from wrong to right, wrong to wrong, and right to wrong and is also used by several other state education agencies. The majority of schools which appear on the report do so with three or fewer test records which meet the alert threshold; these individual records may reflect unconfident or atypical test takers. Because this report is based entirely on the amount of times an answer is changed on the test in relationship to what is normal for the subject and grade level, it is only one component used to trigger an investigation into data manipulation which would cause a delay in issuance of a final accountability determination.

Visit www.azed.gov/accountability for further details regarding actions on behalf of the Department to issue accurate letter grades to the public and protect the integrity of the assessment and accountability systems.