

I oppose SB 179 because the timing is wrong.

Last Wednesday, the Indiana State Board of Education passed the most demanding system for grading schools that Indiana has ever seen. Despite the steady progress that Indiana schools have clearly demonstrated on ISTEP scores and graduation rates, the new letter grade system poses a huge challenge for our schools:

- The new system gives D's or F's to 22.6% of our schools, whereas last August, using the same data, 20% of our schools received a D or F. That translates to about 45 more schools that are now in jeopardy of receiving consequences for D and F schools solely because of tougher metrics.
- The new system projected that 24% would get an A, compared to 42% that earned an A last August, again using the same data.
- In a remarkable contrast, only 6% of schools currently receive D's or F's in Florida, the state Dr. Bennett used as a role model to sell the notion of letter grades.

There is no question that the state board has established a tougher grading system, and we all know that if schools falter in their efforts, their very life as a school is in jeopardy. Last Wednesday, February 8th, our schools finally received their marching orders for how to get a high grade. Many who testified at the January 17th hearing asked the board to make this new system effective next year because over half the year is gone and there has been no final word on what must be done to get a good grade. Their requests were ignored, and schools will be graded with the new system for this school year. The heat is on, and the clock is ticking.

The parts of the new grading system most germane to SB 179 are the high school requirements for college and career readiness. These are the new readiness goals that now count for a high grade:

- 1) The number of graduates who passed an Advanced Placement Exam
- 2) The number of graduates who passed an International Baccalaureate Exam
- 3) The number of graduates who received at least 3 hours of college credit
- 4) The number of graduates who received an Industry Certification

High schools that want high grades and do not want to be taken over by the state will be working very hard to expand these programs as they simultaneously strive for higher marks on Algebra 1 and English 10 End of Course Assessments and for higher graduation rates.

The Indiana Department of Education did not put online education on this new list to show "College and Career Readiness." It should be clearly understood that the department could have included in this list, confirmed just last Wednesday, the requirement that students have an online course to show readiness, but they didn't. I don't know why they didn't, but they certainly had the opportunity to do so since they controlled the letter grade rule proposals from start to finish. They made no modifications at all in response to the 35 speakers who asked for various major and minor changes at the January 17th public hearing. They were in control, and they put into the proposal exactly what they wanted in it.

Since IDOE did not make online courses a priority in a list of requirements that they controlled, it is hard to understand why they are asking you to make this a priority when they didn't. You might want to ask the department about their thinking on this. It is certainly well within the State Board's power to amend the rules on their own to add online courses to the "college and career readiness" requirements. The General Assembly has enough to do without doing things that the State Board of Education could do on their own.

So I urge you to let the high schools of Indiana get to work on the new system of grades given to them last Wednesday. Let them focus in the last four months of the year on the four new requirements listed above that were handed to them last week, and not on this new unfunded mandate requiring online courses. For now, our schools have a new grading system to deal with which as you know can lead to state intervention and state takeover if they are not successful. Their plates are full and their existence as community school is at stake. Let them go to work on the new letter grade system, and save this proposal for another year.