

Alachua County schools make gains in grades even with new grading formula

Alachua County's public schools made gains in their grades for the 2023-24 school year, particularly the district's highest-needs schools.



According to a report released this morning by the Florida Department of Education, eight district schools increased their grades in 2024, 20 maintained their grades and six had lower grades.

The most dramatic gains were made by Metcalfe Elementary, which increased its grade from an F to a C, and Newberry Elementary, which rose from a C to an A. The jump in Metcalfe's grade means there are no failing schools in Alachua County.

Among the other schools categorized by the state as SI (School Improvement) schools, both Lake Forest and Shell Elementary raised their grades from a D to a C, while Terwilliger and Idylwild maintained their C grades. Rawlings, the final SI school, earned another D grade for the 2024-25 school year, while Alachua dropped from a C to a D.

The increase in Lake Forest's grade means the district will not be hiring an outside organization to run the school for the upcoming school year, which would have been required under state rules had the school not earned a C.

The state used a new scale to determine school grades for the 2023-24 school year, a scaled approved just this morning by the Florida Board of Education. This is the first year since the state adopted the new FAST (Florida Assessments of Student Thinking) test in 2022 that learning gains for all students and for the lowest-performing students have been incorporated into school grades. The grading scale was also increased for middle, high and combination schools, such as those serving students in kindergarten through eighth-grade.

"I'm so pleased by the performance of schools that either increased their grades or held steady despite the change in the grading formula," said Superintendent Shane Andrew. "Obviously, there was a lot of hard work put in by teachers, administrators and staff at the schools. We also appreciate the efforts of the students and families, who stepped up to the challenge of a new testing system."

Other schools that increased their grades this year include Williams Elementary (C to a B), Talbot Elementary (B to an A), Ft. Clark Middle (C to a B), and Lincoln Middle (B to an A). Both Eastside High and Alachua eSchool's grades are currently listed as incomplete.

Overall Alachua County Public Schools maintained its B grade despite new higher standards for district grades. The district was just three percentage points from earning an A grade this year.

In addition to the grades, Superintendent Andrew pointed out the learning gains made by local students, particularly those who are among what the state calls the 'lowest 25%' based on their test scores. The scores of the lowest 25% are counted more heavily in Florida's school grading system.

"We saw some spectacular learning gains during the last school year, particularly among students who tend to struggle most with the state tests," he said. "Of course there's always more to do, but we're certainly trending in a very good direction."

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