

Grades are in: 2 of 3 local school districts show improvement on Alabama State Report Card

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Two of the three local school systems in Alabama improved on the [second annual report card](#) that uses one score and one letter grade to summarize the performance of the state's public schools.

Russell County leads the local districts with the most improvement, increasing its score on the 100-point scale by 7 points, from 72 in the 2016-17 school year to 79 in 2017-18.

That means Russell County is now tied with Lee County, which improved by 1 point, from 78 to 79.

Russell County and Lee County also surpassed Phenix City, which decreased by 2 points, from 80 to 78.

And that means all three school systems are now below the Alabama state average, which increased by 1 point, from 79 to 80.

The Alabama State Report Card attaches a letter grade to each score, so Phenix City joined Russell County and Lee County as being tagged with a C, while the state average bumped up to a B.

The report card, issued by the [Alabama State Department of Education](#), calculated the scores and grades on this report card by measuring these factors: academic achievement, academic growth, graduation rate, college and career readiness, chronic absenteeism and progress in English language proficiency.

Academic achievement is determined by standardized tests. For schools below high school, reading and math in grades 3-8, plus science in grades 5 and 7, are tested. The Scantron tests were used for this report card; the ACT Aspire tests were used for the previous one. In high schools, the ACT college entrance exam scores of 11th-graders were used for this report card; the pre-ACT exam scores of 10th-graders were used for the inaugural report cards last year.

Academic growth is determined by whether and how much student test scores improved.

Graduation rate is determined by the percentage of students who earn a diploma within four years after entering ninth grade.

College and career readiness is determined by seven indicators: ACT college entrance exams, ACT WorkKeys exams, Advanced Placement exams, International Baccalaureate exams, earning college credit while in high school, earning a career technical industry credential or being accepted into military.

Chronic absenteeism is determined by the percentage of students missing at least 15 days of school in an academic year.

Progress in English language proficiency is determined by the percentage of English language learners who met their growth target on the exam called ACCESS 2.0. This factor wasn't part of the calculation for the scores and grades in the inaugural report card.

In emailed interviews with the Ledger-Enquirer, the local Alabama superintendents answered questions about their school system's results.

Phenix City

In Phenix City, the school system's overall decrease of 2 points (from 80 to 78), includes improvement at three of the nine schools that were graded in the last

report card. Leading the way with a 6-point increase is Central High School (from 74 to 80).

The district's steepest decline is a 9-point drop at South Girard School (from 81 to 72), which educates only eighth-graders.

Among the 11 Phenix City public schools in this report card, five received a B (led by Lakewood Primary's 84), four received a C, and two received a D (Phenix City's Elementary's 65 and Westview Elementary's 69).

[Phenix City Schools](#) superintendent Randy Wilkes, who was [named the Alabama Superintendent of the Year](#) in 2018 for the school system's improvement in multiple areas, contends this report card can't be validly compared to the last one because the calculations are different.

"The assessments, formulas, categories, weights and what students would count are very different," Wilkes said.

Nonetheless, he is pleased with the school system's "[graduation](#) and credentialing rates, [math achievement](#) and decrease in chronic absenteeism. Areas of focus have been and will continue to be reading and English language acquisition."

To improve those skills, Wilkes said, "reading interventionists have been hired, afterschool programs implemented, a personalized reading plan for every student in grades K-8 has been created and implemented, and a prescriptive and diagnostic reading program has been purchased and is in wide use."

The school board in December hired three paraprofessionals to help students who are English language learners, Wilkes noted.

Russell County

In Russell County, the school system's overall increase of 7 points (from 72 to 79) includes improvement at five of the six schools that were graded in the last report card. Leading the way with double-digit growth are Russell County Middle School, which increased by 18 points (from 64 to 82) and Dixie Elementary Schools, which increased by 12 points (from 69 to 81).

The district's only decline is at Oliver Elementary School, where the score dropped by 4 points (from 86 to 82).

Among the seven Russell County public schools in this report card, six received a B (led by Ladonia Elementary's 85), and Russell County High School has the only lower grade, a C at 76.

"We have made significant improvement across the district," said [Russell County School District](#) superintendent Brenda Coley. "Although we have latitude for much growth, we are proud to celebrate great progress."

The results, she said, are "a testament to commitment, teamwork and strong faith among district administrators, school-level administrators, faculty, staff, parents, students and community leaders."

Reflecting on the reasons for the improvement, Coley mentioned many, such as effective leadership, consistent accountability, quality teaching, high expectations, data-driven instruction and professional development, more focused efforts from students, increased parental involvement, positive learning environment, and visible and supportive board members.

To improve performance even more, Coley noted, the board recently hired a director of elementary school curriculum.

Although the high school's score on the report card improved from 70 to 76 and the graduation rate improved from 74 percent to 81 percent, Coley listed several changes to continue the progress, including making ACT preparatory classes

mandatory, adding advisory groups for proper goal setting and academic tracking, increasing the number of Advanced Placement courses and dual-enrollment participation, **partnering with the Helping Families Initiative to decrease student absences**, and implementing credit recovery, credit advancement and tutoring programs.

Lee County

In Lee County, the school system's overall increase of 1 point (from 78 to 79) includes improvement at eight of the 13 schools that were graded in the last report card. Leading the way with double-digit growth are Smiths Station Junior High School, which increased by 11 points (from 76 to 87), and Beauregard High School, which increased by 10 points (from 67 to 77).

The district's steepest decline is at Beulah Elementary School, where the score dropped by 5 points (from 84 to 79).

Among the 14 Lee County public schools in this report card, nine received a B (led by Beauregard and South Smiths Station elementary schools at 89), four received a C, and Loachapoka Elementary School has the only D with a 63.

"We perceive this report card as a snapshot of what we are doing," said [Lee County Schools](#) superintendent Mac McCoy. "It will be used to commend those who are moving in a positive direction and also be used to identify continued improvement efforts."

The school system improved significantly "in almost all areas," McCoy said, but "we are not satisfied with, nor proud of, the overall system score of a 79. We do so many things that are above average and good for students. It is imperative that we continue to pay close attention to areas of deficiency and make changes in those places that are not making satisfactory progress."

SCHOOL SCORES AND GRADES

Here are the individual scores and grades for Phenix City, Russell County and Lee County public schools in the Alabama State Report Card for the 2017-18 academic year, in which the state’s cumulative grade was a B with 80 points out of 100, compared to the report card’s inaugural year, 2016-17, in which the state’s cumulative grade was a C with 79 points:

PHENIX CITY – 80, B, in 2016-17; 78, C, in 2017-18; decreased by 2 points.

School	2016-17	2017-18	+/-
Central High	74, C	80, B	+6
Central Freshman Academy	Not graded	80, B	NA
Lakewood Elementary	92, A	83, B	-9
Lakewood Primary	Not graded	84, B	NA
Meadowlane Elementary	69, D	70, C	+1
Phenix City Elementary	70, C	65, D	-5
Phenix City Intermediate	76, C	71, C	-5
Ridgecrest Elementary	74, C	70, C	-4
Sherwood Elementary	78, C	81, B	+3

South Girard	81, B	72, C	-9
Westview Elementary	71, C	69, D	-2

RUSSELL COUNTY -- 72, C, in 2016-17; 79, C, in 2017-18; increased by 7 points.

School	2016-17	2017-18	+/-
Dixie Elementary	69, D	81, B	+12
Ladonia Elementary	79, C	85, B	+6
Mount Olive Intermediate	75, C	81, B	+6
Mount Olive Primary	Not graded	81, B	NA
Oliver Elementary	86, B	82, B	-4
Russell County High	70, C	76, C	+6
Russell County Middle	64, D	82, B	+18

LEE COUNTY -- 78, C, in 2016-17; 79, C, in 2017-18; increased by 1 point.

School	2016-17	2017-18	+/-
Beauregard Elementary	89, B	89, B	0
Beauregard High	67, D	77, C	+10
Beulah Elementary	84, B	79, C	-5
Beulah High	73, C	81, B	+8
East Smiths Station Elementary	83, B	82, B	-1
Loachapoka Elementary	66, D	63, D	-3
Loachapoka High	69, D	72, C	+3
Sanford Middle	77, C	78, C	+1
Smiths Station Freshman Center	Not graded	80, B	NA
Smiths Station High	76, C	80, B	+4
Smiths Station Jr. High	76, C	87, B	+11
South Smiths Station Elementary	90, A	89, B	-1

Wahoochee Elementary	78, C	80, B	+2
West Smiths Station Elementary	78, C	82, B	+4

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