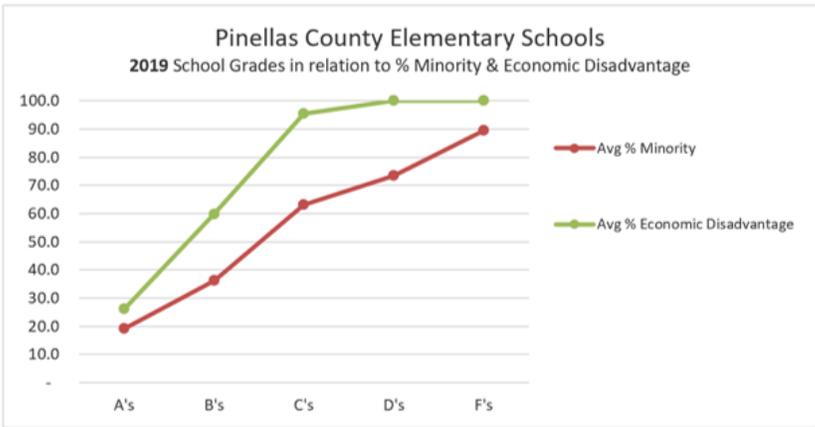


School Grading System

I believe four things around this:

1. That our statewide school grading system is flawed (though it is the measure we have for now, so we refer to it);
2. That the grades of schools are more a direct reflection of the percentage of minority and economically disadvantaged students than of curriculum and teaching; and
3. Using this kind of language, labeling and calling a school a “D/F school” or “low-performing school,” is demoralizing to the educators, families and students of those schools. The teachers are performing their pants off. And students are, too, given all factors. The words we use matter.
4. Let’s remake it.

In the five years that I have been deep into public education, I keep hearing that Florida schools are “bad.” After doing a good bit of reading and research, including analysis of state and local data sets as well as searching out thoughtful commentary and investigative reporting such as the *Tampa Bay Times’* impactful “Failure Factories” series, it seems to me that we do not have an education problem per se. We have a poverty problem – which disproportionately impacts Black and other minority students more than it does white students. This graph that I make each year of the state-determined school grades for elementary schools in Pinellas County demonstrates the correlation.



Acknowledging this, if we want to achieve the “high quality education” required by our state constitution, improvements must be made; focus on these schools must be a priority. Contrary to the way the high-stakes state grading system is

set up, carrot-and-stick/one-size-fits-all/academics-related bonuses and penalties are not going to move the needle. We will move the needle by identifying and customizing the amelioration of socioeconomic barriers.

Further, we measure what we value. We need to ask ourselves in Pinellas County what we value in the education experience. Is it just the one state test a year? I believe it is much more than that. I propose that we create a new grading system for our schools. We did this thought work at North Shore Elementary, where our children are in school. We asked ourselves, "What do WE value?" We came up with five areas and how we would measure those areas. Those areas were: High Quality & Effective Teachers, School Leadership, After-School Enrichment & Extra-Curricular Activities, School Climate/Culture, and the Statewide Test. I would like for the County to go through this same kind of exercise. What do we value in our schools? There are the measurables in the Strategic Plan, in the Bridging the Gap Plan. How might those measurables be incorporated into a county school grade?

Grade our schools, ok. But do it in a way that measures what we value.