

In state takeover, Manual High School breaks F streak

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After eight straight years of Fs, Manual High School is no longer a failing school.

Up to a D-rated school this year, it was the only school to improve its state accountability grade of the five schools whose chronic struggles led to state takeover.

The other four — Gary's Roosevelt High School, and Indianapolis' Arlington High, Howe High and Emma Donnan Middle — remained F-rated schools for another year, according to

annual A-F school grades approved by the state Wednesday.

"We're just really, really proud of the work that's being done and are looking forward to long-term success," said Sherry Hage, chief academic officer for Charter Schools USA, the national organization hired by the state to turn around Manual, Howe and Emma Donnan.

"People are going to feel really good about what happened at Manual," she added. "We are well on our way to bringing this school back to the glory days it had in the past."

The 2013-14 accountability grades reflect the second full year of turnaround efforts.

In 2011, the state stepped in at the five failing public schools, separating them from their districts and placing them under outside management. Under state law, the schools had become eligible for intervention after six consecutive years of F grades.

It was and remains a controversial reform tactic. Rocky relations with one outside operator, Tindley Accelerated Schools, have left Arlington High in limbo. And with political climate change, districts have stepped up to pitch alternatives to state-mandated intervention strategies.

Accountability grades this year at IPS schools with lead partners, a milder form of state intervention, stayed stagnant: John Marshall Community High School put up another D. George Washington Community High School, which this year is transitioning to IPS-led turnaround, received an F, as did Broad Ripple High's junior high grade levels.

In their first year of intervention last year, [the takeover schools continued to earn Fs](#). But Manual's step up to a D this year follows [gains for all five schools in ISTEP scores](#).

Hage attributed the progress at Manual to individualized student attention, particularly with personal learning plans in which each student outlines goals.

"We really saw those students begin to take ownership," she said.

She was hesitant to compare Manual's improvement with the situations at Howe and Emma Donnan but said both schools still recorded significant academic gains, even if their grades didn't jump.

"Each school is different, with its own unique set of opportunities and challenges," Hage said.

There's still work to be done, she acknowledged, but she takes the better grade at Manual as a sign that turnaround efforts are working.

"This is a remarkable event for the turnaround initiative in Indianapolis," Hage said. "This means that reform can happen when the operators are committed to student achievement — when they're committed to the long-term goal of seeing students being successful."

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