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Boston City Council approves restaurant grade plan

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By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE STAFF AUGUST 24, 2016

The Boston City Council approved a proposal Wednesday that clears the way for the city to soon start issuing letter grades to restaurants citywide to publicly rate their food-safety practices.

Restaurants will receive either an A, B, or C grade that will be calculated based on the number and severity of violations found during city inspections.

Officials from the Inspectional Services Department, which will oversee the grading system, said Wednesday that they expect to start to issue grades as soon as the next couple weeks. Within several days, the department said, it expects to start doing outreach to restaurateurs to explain the grading system to them and to provide educational materials about best food-safety practices.

“We’ve put together a little program for them so we can let them know what our expectations are. And we have information packets about the sanitary code,” said William Christopher, commissioner of the Inspectional Services Department. “The education piece I cannot stress enough. We want to make sure everyone really understands what’s going on.”

“I’m really excited about this,” he added. “I think it’s going to be a very good thing for our citizens and I think it will also be helping out some restaurants.

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Chart: What’s your favorite restaurant’s grade?

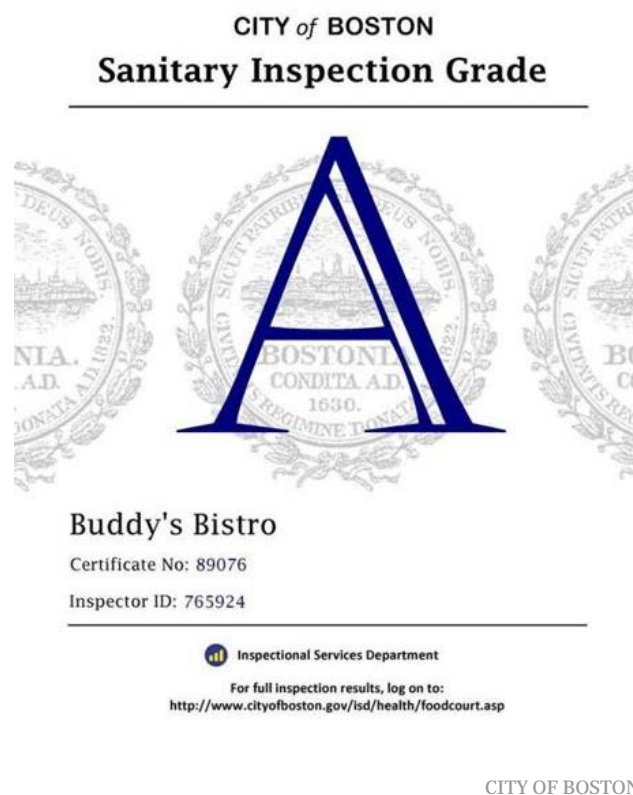
See if your favorite spot earned an A, B, or C, on recent food safety inspections.

Just how clean are Boston's eateries?

Grades will be posted on a rolling basis on the city's website. During the first year, it will be voluntary for restaurants to post the grades in their storefronts. After the first year of grading, restaurants will be required to post in their storefronts the grades they receive. Failing to do so will result in [fines of \\$300 per day](#).

The measure that the council passed Wednesday technically needs approval from Mayor Martin J. Walsh before it becomes official, but a spokeswoman from Walsh's office said he is expected to sign it. The original proposal was presented to the council by Walsh and his administration.

[An analysis by the Globe](#) this month found that 37 percent of Boston restaurants racked up enough violations during at least one inspection in 2015 to earn the equivalent of a C.



A mock-up of what the new letter grades will look like.

For another 23 percent of eateries, the lowest grade they earned in 2015 was the equivalent of a B. The rest, or nearly 40 percent of restaurants, earned the equivalent of straight As last year.

Boston's [program](#) will resemble rating systems that New York, Los Angeles, and other cities have

been using since as early as the late 1990s.

Locally, [Newton](#) launched a similar program in the fall that requires numerical ratings to be displayed inside restaurants.

The practice of grading restaurants has faced criticism elsewhere, including [skepticism](#) over whether the ratings lead to improved conditions, and concerns that the ratings can be [arbitrary and unfair](#).

Local restaurant industry leaders have worried Boston's system could be unfair to restaurants.


The city consulted with the Massachusetts Restaurant Association to develop the new rating system.

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