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# ACCOUNTABILITY

## KEY ISSUES

North Carolina's accountability methods are designed to support every student in meeting college and career ready expectations. Teachers, students, and schools are all held accountable for the growth and achievement of students.

Developing accountability measures that accurately reflect student performance and the successes of schools and teachers has been an ongoing challenge. North Carolina's current accountability system was developed through several revisions and after a great deal of effort to understand how best to hold schools accountable, support ongoing improvement, and present information that parents can easily understand.

North Carolina recently adopted a school performance grade accountability model, assigning A-F grades to each school in the state based on a calculation combining student achievement and student growth. The formula for calculating the grades, as well as the grades themselves, has been the topic of much debate.

## OVERVIEW

Since North Carolina began to earnestly focus on accountability in 1989, state systems for holding students, schools, and teachers accountable have gone through several iterations.

Measurement and assessment are important components of accountability. Assessments can be "summative," occurring at the ends of grades or courses to capture what students have learned. Or they can be "formative," meaning they are used in the short-term to influence what teachers teach and students learn, sometimes week-to-week, day-to-day, or even moment-to-moment. North Carolina is in the process of developing technology-based platforms that will track student performance and assist teachers and schools in targeting student needs more efficiently. Streamlined information will make accountability clearer and simpler, but it may also improve teaching and learning.

The way accountability measures are shared with the public is another important part of the state's accountability plan. Parents and communities need access to clear and understandable information about the performance of schools, teachers, and students. As policymakers pursue information-sharing as a public ideal, they must also take into account the need for fair and accurate information about performance, and the impact that public transparency may have on the ability of schools to improve and serve students well.

Current accountability standards prohibit schools from 'social promotion' at the end of third-grade, requiring through the state's Read to Achieve program that every student can read at grade level by the end of third grade before moving to fourth grade. At all grade levels, the issue of how to support struggling students so they can progress to more advanced work is something policymakers and educators must continually address.

## SCHOOL PERFORMANCE GRADES: SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL

The Excellent Public Schools Act, enacted by the General Assembly in 2012, included among its provisions a new policy to assign school performance grades to every public school in North Carolina.<sup>1</sup> The first school performance grades of A, B, C, D or F were released in February 2015 based on data from the 2013-14 school year.

The original legislation called for the first year of the school performance grades to be calculated on a 15 point grading scale (A = 85, B = 70, C = 55, D = 40, F = less than 40) and then move to a 10 point scale in subsequent years. Legislation passed in 2014 enabled the 15 point scale to remain for the 2014-15 school performance grades released in September 2015; however, without additional legislation in the 2016 session, the scale will move to 10 points starting with the 2015-16 grades.

As of 2015, North Carolina was one of 15 states nationally and one of eight states in the Southeast to have adopted an A-F grading system. Supporters of these systems say that they hold schools and districts accountable for results, provide parents with an understandable marker of performance, and encourage school improvement efforts. Common complaints include that many A-F grade systems inadequately account for student growth and other important measures of school quality, and that they create incentives for schools to serve students on the borderline at the expense of the lowest- and highest-performing students. In some states, the grading scales and underlying criteria have changed over time, resulting in confusion, inconsistency, and charges of political gamesmanship. Additionally, critics of A-F grading say that the letter grades are too often used to criticize and punish failing schools rather than to target resources and assistance to schools and students that need it most.<sup>2</sup>

### SCHOOL PERFORMANCE GRADE INDICATORS

Elementary/Middle Schools:	High Schools:
EOG Mathematics	Math I EOC
EOG English/Language Arts/Reading	English II EOC
EOG Science	Biology EOC
Math/ELA/Science EOCs (middle schools)	Math Course Rigor
	Graduation Rate
	ACT
	ACT WorkKeys

EOG: End-Of-Grade Test

EOC: End-Of –Course Test

Schools Performance Grades are based on two components: a School Achievement Score and a School Growth Score. A combination of the School Achievement Score and the School Growth Score make up the overall School Performance Grade. Currently, 80% of the School Performance Grade is the School Achievement Score and 20% of the grade is the School Growth Score. Deliberations in the General Assembly have been underway for the past three years re-evaluating the weight given to each of these components.

<sup>1</sup> § 115C-83.15. School achievement, growth, performance scores, and grades. Available at [http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/PDF/BySection/Chapter\\_115C/GS\\_115C-83.15.pdf](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/PDF/BySection/Chapter_115C/GS_115C-83.15.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Public School Forum of NC, Top 10 Education Issues 2015. Available at [https://www.ncforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/PSF\\_TopTenEducationIssues\\_v5\\_web.pdf](https://www.ncforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/PSF_TopTenEducationIssues_v5_web.pdf).

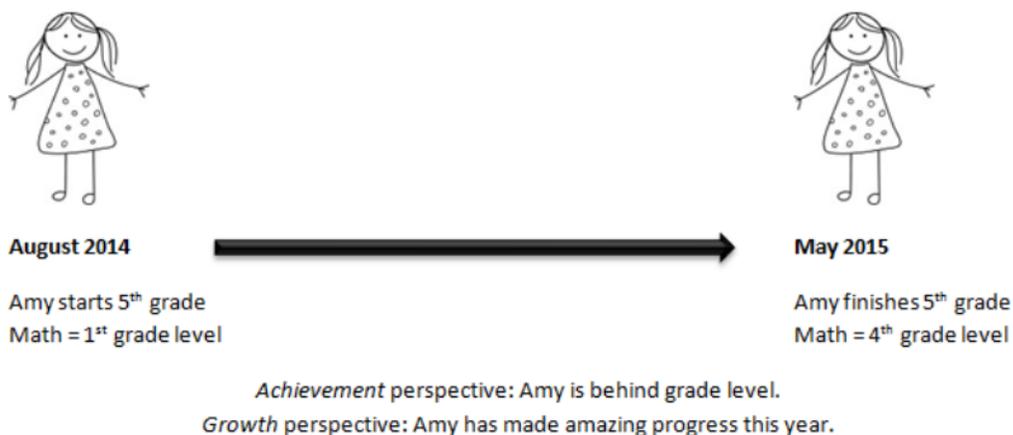
**School Achievement Score.** Schools earn one point for each school-wide percent of:

- Students who score at or above proficient on annual assessments for mathematics in grades three through eight.
- Students who score at or above proficient on annual assessments for reading in grades three through eight.
- Students who score at or above proficient on annual assessments for science in grades five and eight.
- Students who score at or above proficient on the Algebra I or Integrated Math I end-of-course test.
- Students who score at or above proficient on the English II end-of-course test.
- Students who score at or above proficient on the Biology end-of-course test.
- Students who complete Algebra II or Integrated Math III with a passing grade.
- Students who achieve the minimum score required for admission into a constituent institution of The University of North Carolina on a nationally normed test of college readiness.
- Students enrolled in Career and Technical Education courses who meet the standard when scoring at Silver, Gold, or Platinum levels on a nationally normed test of workplace readiness.
- Students who graduate within four years of entering high school.

The total points are then converted to a 100-point scale.

**School Growth Score.** Using EVAAS (SAS® EVAAS™ (Education Value-Added Assessment System) for K-12 is a customized software system available to all North Carolina school districts. EVAAS provides North Carolina's educators with tools to improve student learning and to reflect and improve on their own effectiveness.), the overall growth score earned by schools is calculated. Growth is calculated by weighting achievement indicators used to calculate the School Performance Grade, but only those indicators with growth values (End of Grade and End of Course test scores) through EVAAS are included. The numerical values used to determine whether a school has met, exceeded, or has not met expected growth shall be translated to a 100-point scale.

Many other states place a greater emphasis than we do on growth while deemphasizing achievement. The reason for this is simple: school achievement scores reflect single point-in-time test results, over which schools have far less control than growth, which is designed to measure the impact schools and teachers have on students' academic progress.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Ableidinger, J., A is for Affluent. Available at <https://www.ncforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/A-is-for-Affluent-Issue-Brief-Format.pdf>.

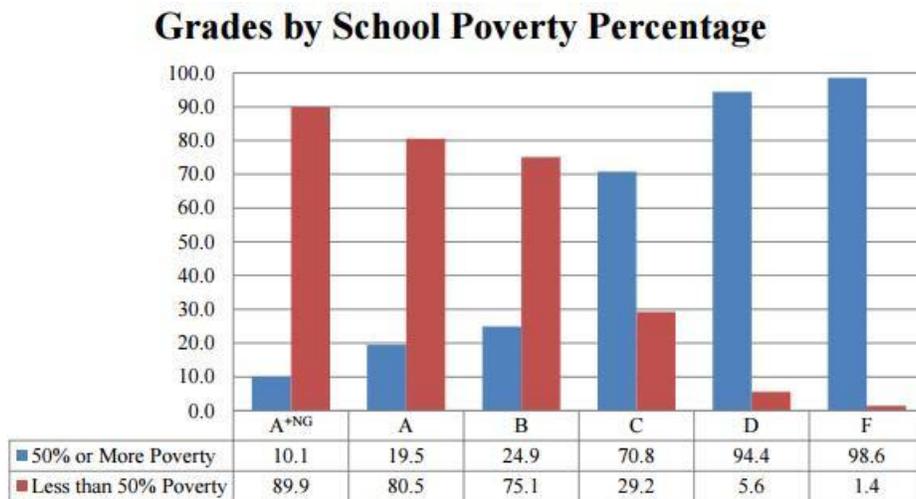
## ADDITIONAL REPORTING

- Growth is reported separately for each school: exceeds, meets, or does not meet expected growth
- A separate achievement score for math and reading is reported for schools serving grades K-8
- The report card that shares the school performance grade for schools serving 3rd graders contains information on the number and percentage of third graders who are retained or promoted based on reading performance

## SCHOOL PERFORMANCE GRADES AND POVERTY

An analysis of North Carolina's 2013-14 school performance grades by Duke University's Will Wilson revealed a 61 percent correlation between a school's free and reduced-price lunch population and its achievement score. By contrast, Wilson found only a two percent correlation between that same measure and a school's growth score.<sup>4</sup>

In 2014-15, for schools with at least half of their students living in poverty ("high-poverty schools"), only 11 percent received A's or B's, compared with 63 percent of all other schools. At the other end of the performance spectrum, 42 percent of high-poverty schools received D's or F's, compared with only 3.6 percent of all other schools. In the entire state, only two schools with less than half of their students living in poverty received F's, compared with 143 high-poverty schools.<sup>5</sup>



Source: NC DPI, 2014–15 Performance and Growth of North Carolina Public Schools Executive Summary

## THE READY INITIATIVE

The READY initiative, launched in fall 2012 by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, is North Carolina's comprehensive accountability system. READY is an alignment of educational standards, assessments, and accountability methods designed to meet college and career ready expectations for every

<sup>4</sup> Meyer, G., Common ground on school grades: We need to grade our schools, but we need to grade them differently. Available at <https://www.ednc.org/2015/03/18/common-ground-on-school-grades-we-need-to-grade-our-schools-but-we-need-to-grade-them-differently/>.

<sup>5</sup> NC DPI, 2014–15 Performance and Growth of North Carolina Public Schools Executive Summary. Available at <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/reporting/exsumm15.pdf>.

student. Born out of the ABCs accountability program, READY is North Carolina's new brand of school accountability.

READY is not an acronym, but a goal statement for all students to be career and college ready. The components of the READY initiative include:

- Common Core State Standards and Essential Standards;
- A new state accountability model;
- Additional professional development support for principals and teachers;
- New uses of technology to support learning; and,
- An enhanced teacher and principal evaluation model.

Together, these encompass our state's **READY** initiative.



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## HOME BASE

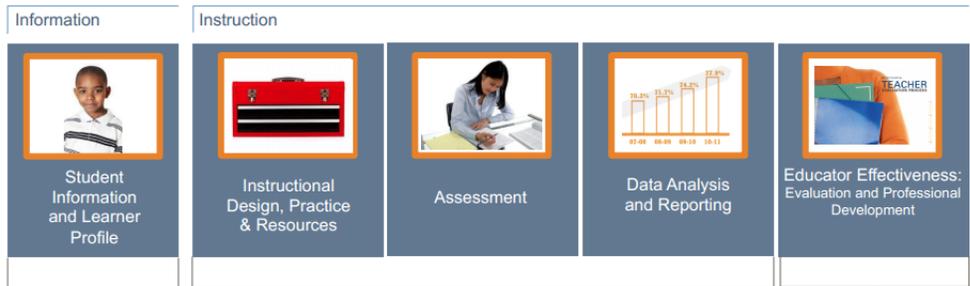
Home Base is the technology platform on which READY is built. Home Base is a statewide, instructional improvement (IIS) and student information system (SIS) for teachers, students, parents and administrators. Teachers use Home Base to access student data, as well as teaching and learning resources. Students can access their schoolwork, grades, and learning activities. Parents are able to view their child's attendance and progress, and administrators can monitor data on students, teachers and schools. Home Base allows for single sign-on access to the integrated system made up of the following components: Learner Profile and Student Information; Standards & Curriculum; Instructional Design; Practice & Resources; Assessment; Data Analysis and Reporting; and Professional Development & Educator Evaluation.

Home Base is a new technology platform for North Carolina, introduced in 2013-14 school year. Prior to Home Base, North Carolina public schools used a technology system called NC WISE for data collection and monitoring.

# HOME BASE<sup>SM</sup>

**Student Information System (SIS)**  
Tools for Information and Data

**Instructional Improvement System (IIS)**  
Tools for Teaching and Learning



## Information

**PowerSchool**  
Student Information

a simpler, **better** information system to replace NC WISE

## Integrated Instructional Solution

**Schoolnet**  
Instructional Tools and Assessment

**OpenClass**  
Collaboration

**Test Nav**  
Summative Assessment

a **new standards-aligned** tool for instruction (e.g. lesson plans, unit plans), assessment and data analysis

## Effectiveness

**Truenorthlogic**  
Evaluation and PD

a simpler, **better** online evaluation system and new professional development system