

## Why A-F school performance grades?

All North Carolina public schools, including charters, have received A-F performance grades since 2013. In 2013, the NC General Assembly passed the Excellent Public Schools Act as part IX of its [Appropriations Act of 2013](#). Section 9.4 of this Act calls for the annual awarding of individual A – F school performance grades based on:

- 80% of the weight of the grade is based on test results (end-of-grade, end-of-course, graduation rate, college/workplace readiness measures)
- 20% of the weight of the grade is based on school growth as measured by SAS EVAAS (Education Value-Added Assessment System)
- Grades & Cut Scores for 2013-14 stay same for 2014-15 & 2015-16 set on a 15 point scale:
- Schools that earn an A designation and do not have significant achievement and/or graduation gaps were designated as an A<sup>+NG</sup> school starting in 2014-15.

## What are the issues surrounding A-F performance grades?

### Supporters of school performance grades believe

- Students will benefit from holding schools more accountable
- Parents will have better data about school performance that they can understand
- Grades will encourage more targeted school improvement

### Critics of a single school measurement believe that grades

- Do not reflect the learning in our schools
- Undervalue student growth and other important measures of school quality
- Could result in more attention to borderline students while underserving the lowest and highest performing students
- Will have negative economic impacts on a community (lower home values/sales)
- Do not come with resources/financial support to improve grades
- Could make it more difficult to attract and retain highly effective teachers and school leaders who could have a positive impact on the students and the community.
- Low grades will stigmatize the schools that receive them and "are more likely to alienate parents from democratic participation in the education of their children than to promote healthy school involvement" (Howe; Murray, January 2015).
- These grades only serve to label schools based on the family income of the students served and do not provide support to help struggling schools improve.
- The A-F school grading system relies too heavily on a school's achievement score which comprises 80 percent of the grade, and not enough on a school's growth score.

### Are all schools subject to receiving an A-F performance grade?

- Public, charter, and alternative schools are graded. Public schools are compared to other schools in the same district. For 2017-2018, 2,537 schools received School Performance grades. Of the schools not included in the SPG report, 94 are schools approved to use the Alternative School Accountability Model.

- Private, Federal, state-operated and other special schools are not graded due to differences in the way data are reported for these schools.
- Per the Department of Public Instruction, “quality teacher data are limited for charter schools due to the flexibility allowed in their operations.” All traditional public school teachers must be certified, while only 50% of charter school teachers are required to be certified.

## Changes for 2017-2018

Changes were made to the state’s accountability measurements for this school year in accordance with the **Every Student Succeeds Act**. Indicators such as school performance grades, growth results and graduation rates are not comparable to past performance. The information below details how grades are calculated.

As required by G.S. §115C-83.15, School Performance Grades (A–F) have been reported for all schools since the 2013–14 school year. Effective with the 2017–18 school year, and to align with the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the calculation of English Learners (ELs) Progress, a measure of English language attainment for ELs is now included. As previously, test scores, **EVAAS** growth, and for high schools, additional indicators that measure college- and career-readiness are included in the School Performance Grades calculation.

The School Performance Grades are based on student achievement (80%) and growth (20%). The indicators and the proficiency standard or benchmark used for achievement include:

1. Annual EOG mathematics and reading assessments in grades 3–8 and science assessments in grades 5 and 8 (Level 3 and above)
2. Annual EOC assessments in NC Math 1 and English II (Level 3 and above), includes achievement and growth
3. The percent of students identified as ELs who meet the progress standard on the English Proficiency assessment
4. The percentage of students who graduate within four years of entering high school (Standard [4-Year] Cohort Graduation Rate)

As required by **ESSA**, the following are School Quality or Student Success indicators:

1. Growth for elementary and middle schools (mathematics, reading and science); high school growth is included in the achievement indicator
2. Annual EOC assessment in biology for high schools (schools with grade 9 or higher)
3. The percentage of 12th grade students who complete NC Math 3 or Math III with a passing grade
4. The percentage of 12th grade students who achieve the minimum score required for admission into a constituent institution of The University of North Carolina on the ACT (composite score of 17) or who meet the Silver Certificate or higher on the ACT WorkKeys assessment

The EVAAS model, which provides the growth measure, uses current and previous student test scores to determine whether schools are maintaining or increasing student achievement from one year to the next. If a school does not have a Growth Score, only the School Achievement Score is used to calculate the Performance Score.

For an indicator to be included in the School Performance Grade calculation, there must be 30 scores or data points. If a school has only one indicator, the School Performance Grade is calculated on that indicator.

For 2017–18, the grade designations are set on a 15-point scale as follows:

<b>A = 85–100</b>	<b>B = 70–84</b>	<b>C = 55–69</b>	<b>D = 40–54</b>	<b>F = 39 or Less</b>
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Of all district schools and charter schools, 2,537 received School Performance Grades (SPG) for the 2017–18 school year. Of the schools not included in the SPG report, 94 are schools approved to use the Alternative School Accountability Model.

## How did North Carolina schools fare in 2017-18?

- School grades continue to be strongly correlated to family income levels.
- Schools with greater poverty earned fewer A/A+NG’s and B’s and earned more C’s, D’s, and F’s than schools with less poverty.
- 97.8% of schools that received an F grade had 41% or more poverty.
- In schools with more than 81% low income students, 69% received a D or F grade. Only 1.7% of schools with less than 20% low income student populations received a D or F grade
- In 2017-2018, 73.3% of the elementary and middle schools earned a grade of C or better compared to 92.2% of high schools. The high schools have more measures than earlier grades, which may account for difference.
- The performance of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders on end-of-grade tests declined again this year, following a trend that began in 2013.
- Even though only weighted 20% of the grade, 72.7% of all schools met or exceeded growth expectations for 2017-2018
- The amount of growth of a school’s students demonstrate for the year shows that schools are being successful in improving student achievement -- a key criterion for sustained improvement. Counting growth as only 20% of the overall grade is not balanced view of student success and results in a lower overall grade for schools.
- The two state virtual charter schools received D grades and did not meet growth.
- Little change from 2016-2017to 2017-2018; grades fell as poverty levels increased in a school.

The table below shows overall letter grades.

**Performance Grade by School (Public Schools and Public Charter Schools) for 2016-17 and 2017-18**

Overall Grade	Number of Schools 2016-17	Percent of Schools 2016-17	Number of Schools 2017-18	Percent of Schools 2017-18
<b>A+NG</b>	87	3.5	N/A	N/A
<b>A</b>	94	3.8	185	7.3
<b>B</b>	706	28.5	717	28.3
<b>C</b>	1,030	41.6	1,071	42.2
<b>D</b>	463	18.7	472	18.6
<b>F</b>	98	4.0	92	3.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,478</b>		<b>2,537</b>	

\*Due to rounding, the percent of schools may not total 100%. Data Source: NCDPI.

For the 2017–18 school year, school accountability growth results are presented for 2,506 of the public schools that participated in the statewide testing program. Using all EOG, English II EOC and NC Math 1 EOC test scores, school accountability growth is calculated using EVAAS, a value-added growth modeling tool. Each school with the required data is designated as having exceeded expected growth, met expected growth, or did not meet growth. As shown in Table 6, for the 2017–18 school year, 72.7% of all schools met or exceeded growth expectations.

The table below shows School Accountability Growth

Growth Category	2016–17 Number	2016–17 %	2017–18 Number	2017–18 %
Exceeded Expected Growth	666	26.3	677	27.0
Met Expected Growth	1,200	47.4	1,146	45.7
Did Not Meet Growth	665	26.3	683	27.3
Total	2,531		2,506	

The table below shows that schools with a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students, when compared to the state-level results, earned fewer A’s and B’s and more C’s, D’s, and F’s than schools with lower percentages of economically disadvantaged students.

### Number and Percent of Schools by Letter Grade and EDS Percent Ranges\*

Percent EDS	Measure	School Performance Grade					
		A	B	C	D	F	Total
<b>State Level</b>	Percent	7.3	28.3	42.2	18.6	3.6	2,537
<b>0–20%</b>	Number	79	118	37	4	0	238
	Percent	33.2	49.6	15.5	1.7	0.0	
<b>21%–40%</b>	Number	69	305	189	19	2	584
	Percent	11.8	52.2	32.4	3.3	0.3	
<b>41%–60%</b>	Number	35	239	552	195	28	1,049
	Percent	3.3	22.8	52.6	18.6	2.7	
<b>61%–80%</b>	Number	2	54	273	221	48	598
	Percent	0.3	9.0	45.7	37.0	8.0	
<b>81%–100%</b>	Number	0	1	20	33	14	68
	Percent	0.0	1.5	29.4	48.5	20.6	

Source: 2017-2018 School Performance Grades (A–F) for North Carolina Public Schools Executive Summary, NCDPI

\*Due to rounding, the percent of schools may not total 100%.

Green: +/- 3 percentage points of the state-level percentages  
 Blue: 3 percentage points or more above the state-level percentages  
 Yellow: 3 percentage points or more below the state-level percentages

## How could A-F school performance grades be improved?

The Public School Forum of North Carolina outlines the following suggestions:

- **Recalibrate the formula for A-F school performance grades.** The General Assembly has seen numerous proposals over the years, calling for the A-F school grading formula to be recalibrated so that it emphasizes “growth,” or a measure of year-over-year performance. We agree and believe the quality of a school is better measured by how well educators are able to help children who come from all parts of the educational achievement continuum improve their academic outcomes over time—not how they are doing when they arrive at the schoolhouse doors. At a minimum, lawmakers should change the formula so that 50 percent is weighted toward growth, and 50 percent toward achievement, or consider separate letter grades for growth and achievement.
- **Use the A-F letter grades to identify schools for state support.** When students receive letter grade of a D or F, it signals to teachers that they need of additional support in the classroom. If the NCGA is going to use an A-F letter grades to designate schools that are struggling, they should also provide additional support and resources. If the legislature wants to meet its constitutional obligation to provide every NC child a “sound basic education,” then schools not meeting the mandate should receive more support from the state in the form of curricular and professional development and additional state funding.
- **Consider other indicators of student and school success.** Use proven school-wide indicators of long- term academic success such as school attendance. For example, it is well-established that chronic absenteeism is one of the biggest predictors of academic failure. Another valid indicator of school success could include the use of student surveys, a piloted effort by the NC Department of Public Instruction. **Source:** *Top Ten Education Issues 2018*, Public School Forum NC

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