

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^{+NG} 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
- Are often used by privatization advocates to support school choice measures and state takeovers of schools, removing these schools from local control and community input.
- 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. Of all district schools and charter schools, 2,543 received School Performance Grades (SPG) for the 2018–19 school year. Of the schools not included in the SPG report, 94 are schools approved to use the Alternative School Accountability Model

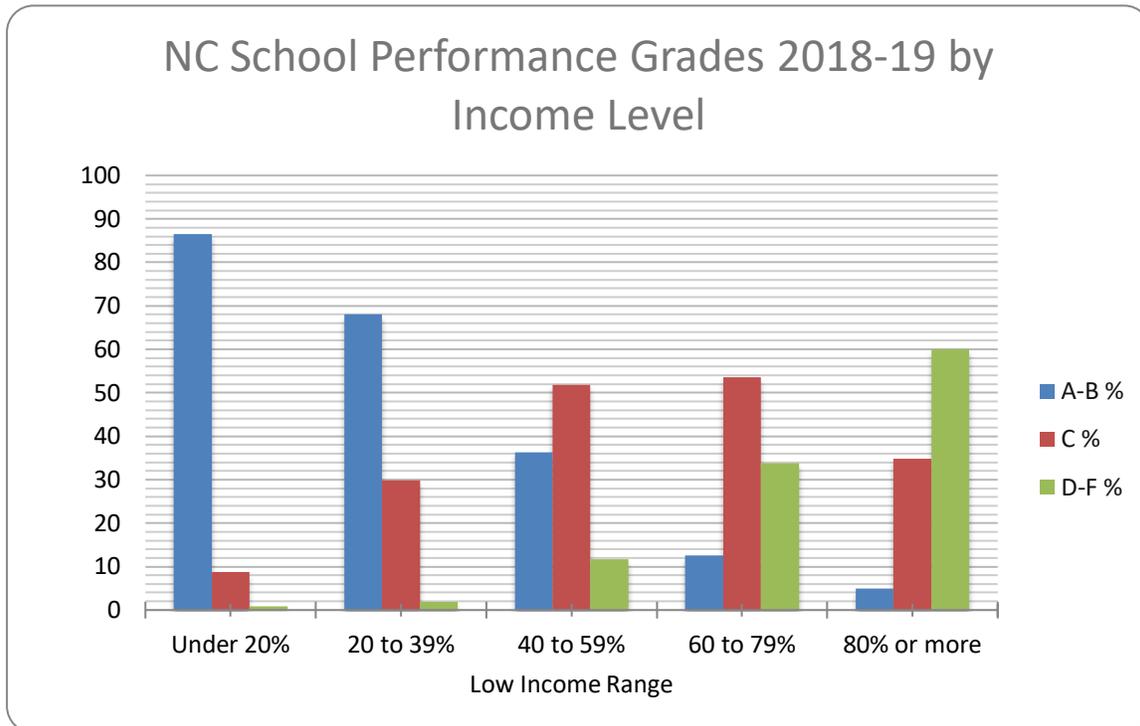
- Private, Federal, state-operated and other special schools are not graded due to differences in the way data are reported for these schools.
- Per the Department of Public Instruction, “quality teacher data are limited for charter schools due to the flexibility allowed in their operations.” All traditional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

How did North Carolina schools fare in 2018-19?

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.
- Of the 21.7 percent of schools receiving a D or F grade, [95 percent were serving high poverty populations](#)
- In schools with more than 80 percent low income students, 60 percent received a D or F grade. Less than one percent of schools with less than 20% low income student populations received a D or F grade
- Of schools with high concentrations (41 percent or more) of students who are economically disadvantaged, [71 percent met or exceeded growth, compared with 79 percent of schools serving fewer students in poverty.](#)
- For the 2018–19 school year, [73.3 percent of all schools](#) met or exceeded growth expectations, a slight increase from the previous year.
- In 2018-2019, 78.4 percent of all schools received a C or better
- In 2018-2019, 74.5 percent of the elementary and middle schools earned a grade of C or better compared to 90.8 percent of high schools. The high schools have more measures than earlier grades, which may account for difference.
- The percentage of 3rd graders receiving a level 3 or greater on end-of-grade reading tests increased slightly this year.
- 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 percent 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 for the fourth year in a row.
- North Carolina’s high school graduation rate was 86.5 percent, about the same as the previous year.
- Very little change from 2017-2018 to 2018-2018; grades fell as poverty levels increased in a school.

Read the full [2018–19 Performance and Growth of North Carolina Public Schools](#)



Source: N&O analysis of Public Instruction data *Due to rounding, the percent of schools may not total 100%. Excludes alternative schools and schools with insufficient data.

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, consistently from House members, 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 in a snapshot of time. 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 a student receives a letter grade of a D or F, that signals to the teacher that he or she is in serious need of additional support in the classroom. If the state is going to use an A-F letter grade system to call out schools that are having a difficult time educating their students, what is the point of doing that without providing additional support and resources to bring that struggling school and its students up from the bottom? If the legislature takes seriously its constitutional obligation to guard and maintain the opportunity for every North Carolina child to receive a “sound basic education,” then schools that are clearly not meeting that

mandate should receive more support from the state in the form of curricular and professional development from DPI and the necessary funding from state coffers to reach this obligation.

- **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

Changes Started in 2017-2018

Changes were made to the state's accountability measurements for last 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:

A = 85–100	B = 70–84	C = 55–69	D = 40–54	F = 39 or Less
-------------------	------------------	------------------	------------------	-----------------------

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.

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

References

National Association of Secondary School Principals, A-F School Rating Systems,

<https://www.nassp.org/policy-advocacy-center/nassp-position-statements/a-f-school-rating-systems/>

NCDPI, 2017–18 Performance and Growth of North Carolina Public Schools,

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/reporting/2018/documentation/chrtgrdrt18.pdf>

WRAL, Schools 'seem to be plateauing': 10 takeaways from NC's school grade results, <https://www.wral.com/schools-seem-to-be-plateauing-10-takeaways-from-nc-s-school-grade-results/17820976>

Public School Forum NC, Top 10 Education Issues 2018, https://www.ncforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/17_17-PSF-Top_10_Education_oneup-1.pdf

NC Policy Watch: The Flawed Formula for North Carolina's A-F School Grades

<http://www.ncpolicywatch.com/2015/02/12/the-flawed-formula-for-north-carolinas-a-f-school-grades/>

North Carolina Public Schools: School Performance Grades 2013-14: Questions and Answers

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/reporting/spgqna15.pdf>

NPR: When a School Gets a Bad Report Card

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/ed/2015/02/13/385480670/when-a-school-gets-a-bad-report-card>

North Carolina Public Schools: North Carolina Report Cards

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/src/guide/>

Why Report Cards Merit a Failing Grade

<http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/pb-statereportcards.pdf>