

## What are North Carolina's A-F School Performance Grades?

School performance grades ranging from A through F are assigned to individual schools each year based on a [two-part formula](#) made up of a school's achievement score and a school's growth score. The majority (80%) of the grade comes from the **achievement score** and 20% comes from the **growth score**.

Achievement scores are produced mostly from student results on end-of-grade (EOG) and end-of-course (EOC) assessments and their related NCEXTEND1 alternate assessment versions. *Table 1* specifics the elements in the achievement and growth scores that make up each overall school performance grade.

**Table 1. School Performance Grade Indicators**

Achievement Score Indicators (80%)		
Elementary School	Middle School	High School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading EOG (G3-5)*</li> <li>Math EOG (G3-5)*</li> <li>Science EOG (G5)*</li> <li>EL (English Learner) progress on language proficiency test</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading EOG (G6-8)*</li> <li>Math EOG (G6-8)*</li> <li>Science EOG (G8)*</li> <li>EOC NC Math 1</li> <li>EL (English Learner) progress on language proficiency test</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EOC NC Math I*</li> <li>EOC NC Math III*</li> <li>EOC English II*</li> <li>EOC Biology*</li> <li>EL (English Learner) progress on language proficiency test</li> <li>4-year cohort graduation rate</li> <li>G12 students who have passed NC Math III</li> <li>Scores on ACT/WorkKeys assessments</li> </ul>
School Growth Score Indicators (20%)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EVASS growth index for EOG reading, math and science</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EVASS growth index for EOG reading/ELA, math and science</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EVASS growth index for EOC ELA and math</li> </ul>

\*Includes NCEXTEND1 alternate assessment results. [NCDPI Accountability Indicators 2018-19](#)

If a school does not have a growth score, only the school achievement score is used to calculate the school performance grade. 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.

The combination of achievement and growth scores are converted to a 100-point scale, which are then converted to a letter grade.

**Table 2. School performance score conversion to school performance grade**

Score	85 – 100	70 – 84	55 – 69	40-54	< 40
Grade	A	B	C	D	F

In addition to contributing 20% to the overall school performance grade, the school growth score is compared to growth for students across the state. If the students in a school are progressing far above the state average, the growth is labeled "Growth Exceeded." If the growth in the school is consistent with the state average, it is labeled "Growth Met."

## Who Receives School Performance Grades?

All North Carolina public schools, including charter schools, have received A-F performance grades since the 2013-14 school year. Currently, school performance grades are reported on the [North Carolina School Report Cards portal](#) found on the NCDPI website. An example is shown in *Figure 1*.

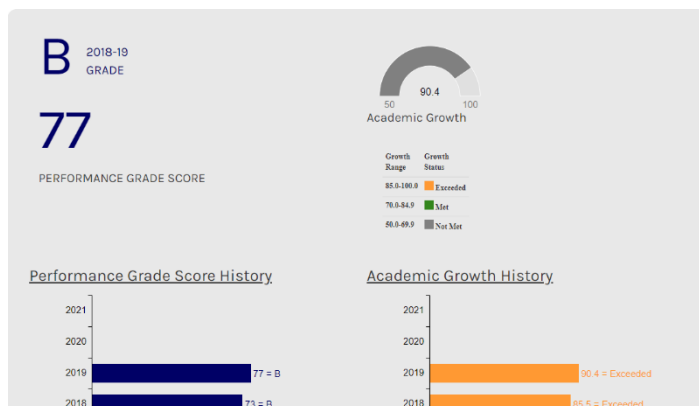


Figure 1. School performance grade display for one school.

The data used in Figure 1 is for 2018-19. Due to the challenges in instruction and assessment during the pandemic, school performance grades were not reported for the school years 2019-20 and 2020-21.

Although private schools currently receive public funds through voucher programs, no reporting requirements for private schools are in place to track school performance.

Many districts operate alternative schools, developmental day centers, or schools for students with significant cognitive impairments or multiple handicapping conditions. Once identified, these schools have several options for participating in [North Carolina's Alternative Schools' Accountability Model](#). One option includes the addition of a persistence score (20%), counting achievement as 20% and using growth as the remaining 60% of the total score. These school performance grades are not included in the NC School Report Cards.

## Background on NC School Performance Grades

School performance grades focusing only on student achievement were first introduced in North Carolina in the General Assembly's 2011-2012 session as part of the [Excellent Public Schools Act](#). In 2013, the NC General Assembly revised the Excellent Public Schools Act in Part IX of its [Appropriations Act of 2013](#) and in Section 9.4(b), established the school grading formula with the overall weights still in place today: 80% achievement and 20% growth. Section 9.4 (c) established the requirement to produce an annual report card for the state and each LEA showing the performance grades.

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 included in the calculation of school performance grades. As a result, comparisons to school performance grades from previous years should not be made.

## Pros and Cons of School Performance Grades

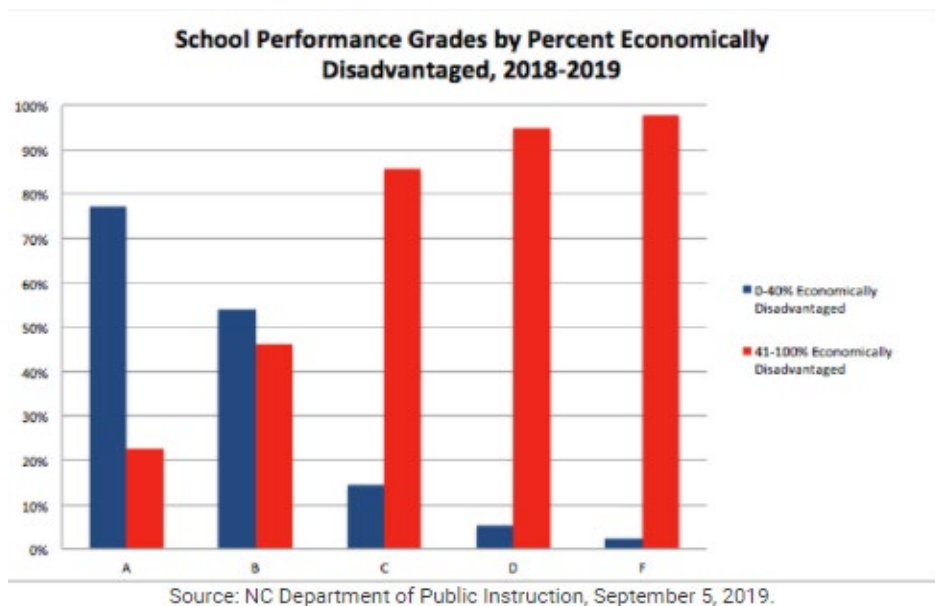
Supporters of school performance grades believe that:

- Students will benefit because schools will be held more accountable
- Parents will have data about school performance that they can understand better
- School performance grades will encourage more targeted school improvement

These beliefs rest on an assumption that the school performance grade is an accurate and reliable measure of school performance. While a number of states have implemented school performance grades, the [heavy weight placed on achievement scores in NC's grading system is rare](#). All states except Louisiana have either completely abandoned the A-F system, have lowered the stakes associated with it, and/or have weighted achievement scores more equally with other multiple measures of important school factors.

Critics of the NC school performance grading system claim that the school grades are not an accurate or reliable measure of school performance. The system's over-reliance on a few test scores produces grades that are a better indicator of the economic advantages of students than the learning that takes place within the schools. *Figure 2* below shows this clearly. Schools with 0-40% economically disadvantaged students

(blue) are much more likely to get As than Fs and the reverse is true for schools with 40% to 100% economically disadvantaged students (red).



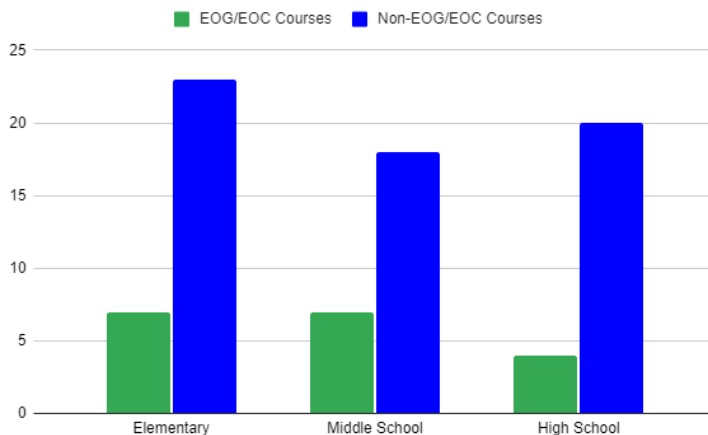
Lindsay Wagner's report "[Yes, 'A' Still Stands for Affluent in NC School Performance Grades](#)" charts the close relationship between the school grades and poverty. The performance grades, "simply highlight systemic inequities that impact high poverty schools, rather than how effective those schools are in educating a vulnerable population of students."

A reason for their continued use may be found in the fact that the A-F performance grades are routinely used to promote school choice and privatization efforts.

**Figure 2. School performance grades by percent economically disadvantaged**

Critics of the NC school performance grades also note that the scores used to assign grades come from a small proportion of a school's overall offerings and do not offer a true picture of the school quality.

Figure 3. shows the disparity in the number of courses used to calculate a school's achievement score. Middle school had the highest percent (28%) of total courses contributing to the achievement score. With such a small percentage of classes contributing, it is hard to believe a claim that the school performance score reflects total school quality.



**Figure 3. Number of courses in school performance grades**

There are a number of additional issues with the school performance grades:

- They undervalue student growth and other measures of school quality.
- They do not reflect learning that takes place outside of tested classes and in the overall school community.
- They result in more attention to borderline (passing) students to the detriment of the lowest and highest performing students.
- They are used by privatization advocates to support school choice measures and state school takeovers.
- They make it more difficult to attract and retain highly effective teachers and school leaders who could have a positive effect on the students and larger community.

- They stigmatize schools that receive low grades and will be more likely to alienate parents from being involved in the school.
- They do not generate additional resources/financial support to help schools improve.

## How Should the NC A-F School Performance Grades be Improved?

The Public School Forum of North Carolina's [Top 10 Education Issues for 2018](#) has several suggestions.

- **Recalibrate the formula for A-F school performance grades** so that it emphasizes “growth,” or a measure of year-over-year performance. 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.** 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 to fulfill this obligation.
- **Use additional indicators of student and school success.** Proven school-wide indicators of long-term academic success such as school attendance could be included in the formula. 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.

In the absence of immediate change, the NC school performance grades should be used with extreme caution if at all.

## Resources and References

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