

For immediate release
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More Than a Third of Schools Earn As and Bs in NC Accountability Reporting

More than a third of North Carolina's 2,537 public schools earned As and Bs for 2017-18 under the state's annual School Performance Grade accountability measurement, with nearly three quarters meeting or exceeding expectations for academic progress. About 22 percent of the schools received a grade of D or F.

Accountability results were released today to the State Board of Education along with the four-year Cohort Graduation Rate for the class of 2018. The four-year rate, tracking students who entered 9th grade in 2014, shows that 86.3 percent of the cohort graduated last school year.

Because of changes to the state's accountability measurements required under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, school grades, growth results and graduation rates for the 2017-18 school year are not comparable to past performance during the five years the state has assessed schools using A-F letter grades and 13 years reporting the Cohort Graduation Rate. Schools are now accountable for the progress of non-English speaking students in mastering English skills and are also subject to a number of other changes affecting School Performance Grades, growth calculations and the graduation rate.

In terms of the performance of individual students on state end-of-grade and end-of-course exams, however, calculations for determining rates of Grade Level Proficiency (GLP) and College and Career Readiness (CCR) are unchanged from past years.

Statewide in 2017-18, students in grades 3-8 together continued to make steady gains in math performance, with 48.1 percent achieving the CCR standard (exam scores of level 4 or 5), up from 43.1 percent in 2013-14; and 56.1 percent meeting the GLP standard (scores of 3, 4 and 5), up from 51 percent in 2013-14. In reading, the percentage of students in all grades 3-8 achieving the CCR standard increased to 46 percent, up from 44.7 percent in 2013-14, and 57.3 percent meeting the GLP standard, down slightly from 57.5 percent in 2016-17.

By the performance of individual grades statewide, middle school students in 2017-18 generally gained in both reading and math, particularly seventh and eighth graders, while the performance of students in elementary grades was more mixed. Third graders saw an improvement on math exams, with higher percentages of students meeting the CCR and GLP standards, but their performance on reading exams was down on both standards from the previous year: 45 percent met the CCR standard, compared to 46.1 percent in 2016-17; 55.9 percent met the GLP standard, compared to 57.8 percent in 2016-17.

Among high school students, performance improved on the end-of-course exam in Biology, for both the CCR and GLP standards, but achievement rates for both standards dipped in English II and Math 1.

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State Superintendent Mark Johnson said that while last year was something of a reset year for measuring performance at the school level, student performance shows the state must continue to stress innovation and personalized learning to ensure continued progress.

“We know that students learn best when instruction is tailored to their needs,” Johnson said, “so we’re adjusting our supports for educators at the state level to help make that happen. Teachers are working hard and our state must transform our system to complement their efforts.”

Johnson said also that he was encouraged by a decline in the number of low-performing schools and districts from the previous year.

“The fact that fewer schools and districts are underperforming is positive news in this year’s accountability report,” Johnson said. “We thank teachers and school leaders for their hard work and hope that more effective support from DPI will continue to improve those numbers.”

Low-performing schools are identified annually as those that receive a School Performance Grade of D or F and do not exceed growth. Low-performing districts are districts where the majority of schools received a School Performance Grade and have been identified as low performing. For 2017-18, 476 schools were identified as low performing, down from 505 in 2016-17, and seven districts were low performing, down from 11 in 2016-17. The number of recurring low-performing schools fell from 468 in 2016-17 to 435 in 2017-18.

School grades continue to correlate closely with the poverty levels of schools. Among schools where more than 81 percent of students come from low-income families, 69 percent of the schools received a D or F; in schools with poverty rates between 61 and 80 percent, 45 percent of the schools received a D or F. Conversely, in schools with poverty rates less than 20 percent, only 1.7 percent of schools received a D or F; schools between 21 and 40 percent poverty, 3.6 percent received a D or F. Schools with lower levels of poverty are more likely to earn As and Bs.

The school grades are based primarily on overall proficiency rates on the state’s standardized end-of-grade tests, and to a lesser extent, the growth students make during the year, irrespective of performance level. Eighty percent of the grade is for the percentage of tests earning a score considered grade-level proficient; 20 percent is for growth, measured by a statistical model that compares each student’s predicted test score, based on past performance, against his or her actual result.

In terms of growth achieved by schools this past year, 27 percent exceeded expected growth, 45.7 percent of schools met their expected performance and 27.3 percent fell short of their expected result.

Also reported this year are data on the interim progress that North Carolina schools are making to reach long-term, 10-year goals, a new reporting requirement under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act. The state has overall goals tracking all students and individual groups of students broken out by race, ethnicity, poverty, language acquisition and learning disabilities. The goals reflect the percentage of students achieving College and Career Readiness (Academic Achievement Levels 4 and 5) on the end-of-grade and end-of-course assessments. The long-term goals are intended to reduce the achievement gap between high performing and low performing subgroups. Additionally, 10-year goals for the 4-year cohort graduation rate and English Learner progress were set.

Interim and long-term goals are also set for each school, with their expected progress –interim and long term – based on the state’s rate of improvement.

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For the first year of interim goals, in 2017-18, two of 10 subgroups (including all students in all groups combined) met interim progress goals for grades 3-8 reading and math and for English II (10th grade reading). For Math 1 (counted as 11th grade math), all groups met their interim goals except black students, economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities.

In terms of schools and counting the group that includes all students, 34.9 percent of elementary and middle schools met their interim goals in reading and 38.5 percent in math. Among the all students group in high schools, 29.1 percent met their interim goals for reading and 45.2 percent for math.

In addition to other changes required under the federal ESSA law, the state will also report School Performance Grades for each subgroup within a school when at least 30 students are counted within all tested grades or subjects. Subgroup grades will be reported to the State Board of Education at its Oct. 3 meeting.

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