



SCHOOL PERFORMANCE GRADES – 2013-14: Questions and Answers

Beginning with the 2013-14 school year reports, the annual North Carolina School Report Cards will display a letter grade of A, B, C, D or F for each school in the state. Other details about school performance, school faculty characteristics, school safety and other information will continue to be available on the North Carolina School Report Cards as usual.

How are the new letter grades determined?

As required by state legislation, 80 percent of school grades will be based on the percentage of student tests scores that are at or above grade-level performance, and 20 percent will be based on academic growth.

Why do we now have letter grades for schools?

North Carolina has had a school accountability model since 1996-97 and designations were given to schools depending on overall performance and academic growth, plus how well the schools met federal performance requirements.

In 2013-14, a letter grade system was implemented to comply with a new state law (G.S. § 115C-83.15) passed by the NC General Assembly directing the State Board of Education to assign letter grades of A-F to schools based on school achievement and growth. Growth is weighted as 20 percent of the grade and performance as 80 percent of the school's grade. There is an exception to this, however: in cases where a school has met or exceeded the state's expected growth and that particular school's overall letter grade would decrease after including growth in the calculation, that school's grade will be based only on academic performance. In other words, for schools meeting or exceeding growth expectations, growth is included in the letter grade only if it would mean no difference in the letter grade or if it would improve the letter grade.

What measures are included in the accountability model?

Under federal law, states are required to measure student academic performance in mathematics, English language arts (ELA) and science. Measures that are included in the state's accountability model include these, plus a few other college- and career-readiness indicators as follows:

Elementary Schools		
3rd Grade Math	3rd Grade ELA	
4th Grade Math	4th Grade ELA	
5th Grade Math	5th Grade ELA	5th Grade Science
6th Grade Math	6th Grade ELA	
7th Grade Math	7th Grade ELA	
8th Grade Math	8th Grade ELA	8th Grade Science

High Schools
Math I
English II
Biology
The ACT
ACT WorkKeys
4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate
Percentage of graduates successfully completing Math III/Algebra II/Integrated Math III

What is growth? What is performance?

Performance is defined as the percentage of students/student test scores that are considered to be at grade level or on track to be college and career ready. In North Carolina, that would be the percentage of student scores at Achievement Levels 3 (grade level), 4 and 5 (college and career ready).

Growth is calculated using the SAS EVAAS system, which calculates how much academic growth a school made as compared to the typical rate of growth for the state overall. Growth is important because it demonstrates the rate of change in student learning, regardless of where students were at the beginning of the year. For example, some schools may have a large number of students who begin school less prepared for success than the students in other schools. These students may learn at a rapid rate over the course of the school year and still not catch up to other students who began the year with more preparation. The use of growth as part of the letter grade is in recognition of this circumstance.

What happens to schools with low letter grades?

Legislation did not identify any sanctions or consequences for schools with low letter grades. North Carolina has however, provided additional support and interventions to the lowest-performing schools since 1997. This effort has been improved and strengthened over the years, and a successful school transformation model is now in place to improve teaching and learning in low-performing schools. Resources allow intervention only in the lowest-performing schools. Schools that receive a D or F School Performance Grade are required to notify parents in writing.

Can a good school receive a C grade or even lower?

Because the model weighs performance more heavily than it weighs academic growth, a school with many students who entered school unprepared or behind their peers academically may have an overall proficiency rate that is low. This is true even if teachers in that school have helped students make academic growth that is more rapid than the state's growth rate. Because growth is weighted as just 20 percent of the school's grade, schools that serve many students who are not yet performing at grade level may receive lower grades overall.

Is there recognition or benefit for schools that earn an A or B?

The only recognition or benefit for A or B schools is the public recognition of a high grade. The School Performance Grades legislation did not provide incentives for high performance grades.

Do charter schools receive letter grades? Do private schools that qualify for tuition tax credit vouchers receive letter grades?

Charter schools in North Carolina are public schools, so they receive School Performance Grades. Private schools will not receive grades as they do not operate under the same reporting requirements.

If my child's school receives a D or F, can I move my child to another school?

Local school boards set student school assignments. At this point, there is no requirement in the legislation to provide public school choice.

What should I do if my child's school receives a low grade?

It is important to look carefully at details about your school to fully understand the school's situation. If your child's school had high academic growth, that is a strong sign that student learning needs are being addressed – even if the school's grade is low overall. Your school principal also can provide key information about special efforts to help your child and other students in the school. Key factors to consider include your child's grades, your child's scores on state tests and any other tests that your school district may choose to use, and your child's teachers' appraisal of how your child is learning. Test scores are just one indicator of how well students are learning. Other factors should be taken into consideration in judging the quality of a school. That is why the North Carolina School Report Cards include the School Performance Grades along with many other types of information highlighting teacher quality, school technology and school safety.

My school did not receive a grade. Why is that?

Schools that do not have data available to calculate at least a School Achievement Score will not receive a grade. For example, K-2 schools would not have data to generate a grade. Also, alternative schools and other schools approved to use the Alternative Accountability Model will not receive a School Performance Grade, but they may elect to do so starting in 2014-15 (reported in fall of 2015).