

Framework for Change:
The Next Generation of Assessments and Accountability

Draft

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

The guiding mission of the North Carolina State Board of Education is that every public school student will graduate from high school, globally competitive for work and postsecondary education and prepared for life in the 21st century.

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Framework for Change: A Next Generation of Assessments and Accountability

BACKGROUND

North Carolina is known as a leader in innovations in public education. The state pioneered the use of school-based accountability and school assistance in the late 1980s and early 1990s. North Carolina was the first state to administer a teacher working conditions survey for every educator and the first state to partner with the federal Partnership for 21st Century Skills to create a Center for 21st Century Skills focused on revising standards, assessments, and professional development. One out of every four early colleges in the United States now resides in North Carolina, and the state is poised to add over 30 more in the next two years under the state's Learn and Earn initiative. North Carolina has become a leading state in virtual education with both online high school courses and free online college courses for credit offered to any North Carolina high school student.

Today, public education stands at the threshold of major innovations in teaching and learning. As the pace of technological and economic change accelerates, the system of public schooling is being called upon to quicken its response to these changes and ensure our students are well-equipped to find success in 21st century work and life.

Few would challenge that our systems of standards, assessments, and accountability are the most important drivers for accelerating that change and creating fertile ground for major innovations in how we do business in our schools and classrooms. After over a decade of experience with a system of standards and accountability, North Carolina is positioned to once again lead the nation in this arena.

Our system of assessments and accountability has served North Carolina well for over a decade. Achievement in reading and math on state and national tests has risen since school-based accountability began in the state in the mid-1990s. In fact, North Carolina has made more gains in mathematics since the inception of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) than any other state.

Today, it is time to build on the solid foundation that has been laid and construct the next generation of assessments and accountability. This next generation of assessments and accountability must build on what we have learned from more than a decade of experience. Teaching and learning today must be aligned with the 21st century skills that students need for success in their educational, work, and life pursuits. The State Board of Education has a deep commitment to school accountability, to high standards, and to success for all students.

THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION'S 21ST CENTURY MISSION AND GOALS AND THE BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON TESTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In September 2006, the State Board of Education adopted a mission that *every public school student will graduate from high school, globally competitive for work and postsecondary education, and prepared for life in the 21st century*. To support that mission, the Board articulated five goals and a series of strategies¹. Included in those strategies were a number that reflected a vision for a next generation system of standards, assessments, and accountability such as:

- Every student excels in rigorous and relevant core curriculum that reflects what students need to know and demonstrate in a global 21st century environment.
- Every student's achievement is measured with an assessment system that informs instruction and evaluates knowledge, skills, performance, and dispositions needed in the 21st century.

¹ The State Board of Education's mission, goals, and strategies are detailed in Appendix A.

- Every teacher and administrator will use a 21st century assessment system to inform instruction and measure 21st century knowledge, skills, performance, and dispositions.
- Every education professional will use data to inform decisions.

In May 2007, the State Board of Education convened a Blue Ribbon Commission on Testing and Accountability to begin the process of assisting the Board in charting a course for realizing these and other goals. The State Board charged the Commission with conducting a comprehensive review of the current assessment and accountability system and offering recommendations for modifications to the current testing program as well as identifying next steps for meaningful change. The State Board asked that the Commission's work be "visionary and in-depth, searching for credible and practical solutions that will serve us well in public education."

The 26-member Commission, chaired by Dr. Sam Houston, was comprised of representatives of education, business and government. Teachers, principals, central office administrators, superintendents, legislators, representatives of higher education, and business/community leaders met regularly over a seven-month period and heard from a large number of stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, and national experts on assessment and accountability.

In January 2008, the Commission presented a report to the State Board that recommended improvements in the current system of testing and accountability and steps toward a next generation of standards, assessments, and accountability for North Carolina's public schools.

The Commission's findings and recommendations have helped to isolate the major next steps needed to transform our approach to standards, assessments, and accountability in North Carolina. The Commission's recommendations for dramatic changes in testing and accountability called for:

- deepening the curriculum and defining more specifically the essential content standards in the core subjects and reflecting 21st century skills in both content standards and aligned assessments;
- moving to a system that includes formative assessments (not just summative assessments or end-of-grade and course tests) which will equip teachers and administrators with data and feedback needed to align instruction to individual student's needs;
- revising the K-8 accountability model and transforming the high school accountability model to focus on graduation rates and student readiness for college and work, not just on performance in core subject areas; and
- providing much greater transparency for educators, parents and the public about expectations, assessments, and results.

The State Board of Education believes that critical improvements can be made immediately to the current system that will lead to greater effectiveness, understanding, and transparency for students, educators and the public at large. In addition, the Board is committed to building a next generation of standards, assessments, and accountability to support student learning and quality teaching that reflect the 21st century assessment and accountability systems outlined in the *Partnership for 21st Century Skills Milestones for Improving Learning and Education*² and serve as a model for other states and the nation. This next generation must be characterized by: 1) assessments that are learner-centered, diagnostic, performance-based, and that provide evidence of student performance in core subjects and 21st century skills; 2) accountability measures that focus on both student achievement and learning outcomes; and 3) transparency that provides parents, teachers, and other stakeholders with meaningful information about the expectations, assessments, and performance of students.

² *The Mile Guide for 21st Century Skills, Milestones for Improving Learning and Education* can be found at: http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/downloads/P21_MILE_Guide.pdf

ACTION STEPS FOR IMMEDIATE IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEXT GENERATION OF STANDARDS, ASSESSMENTS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

What follows are actions that the State Board of Education is directing the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to implement. These actions fall into two categories: 1) immediate improvements to our current system, and 2) steps to build the next generation of standards, assessments, and accountability.

Progress in implementing the action steps adopted by the Board will be monitored monthly through the Board's Globally Competitive Students (GCS) Committee.

Immediate Improvements

The State Board of Education directs DPI to take the following actions to modify and improve assessments and accountability:

1. **Release one form of each test on an annual basis.** DPI will release one form of the test for each grade level and subject tested to the school districts and the public to provide transparency on the state's assessment program.

Effective: 2008-09 school year.

2. **Enact a moratorium on the content standards revision/test development cycle.** DPI will suspend the revision cycle of content standards and development of new tests based on the revised standards. As reflected in the next section of this report, DPI is to undertake a comprehensive revision of content standards.

Effective: immediately.

3. **Make results from new tests comparable to prior tests.** When a test is rescaled to meet higher standards, scale scores and proficiency in both the old standard and the new standard are to be provided for a one-year transition period.

Effective: 2007-08 school year.

4. **Move to a five-year graduation rate for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) purposes.** North Carolina will continue to report four-year cohort graduation rates as agreed to in the compact with the National Governors Association. However, if approval is granted by the US Department of Education (USED), for AYP purposes, the high school cohort graduation rate is to be redefined so that it includes students who graduate in five years or less.

Effective: 2007-08 school year.

5. **Count retest scores in performance composites.** Any student who scores at Achievement Level III on a retest of an end-of-grade test (EOG) or end-of-course (EOC) test for grades or courses included in the Student Accountability Standards is to be counted as proficient for the school's ABCs performance composite and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) purposes.

Effective: 2008-09 school year.

6. **Eliminate the redundancy in EOC (End of Course) and EOG (End of Grade) testing by allowing EOC scores to count as EOG scores in middle grades.** Middle school students who score proficient on an EOC test are to be counted proficient on the comparable EOG test without having to

take the EOG (e.g., middle school students taking Algebra I and scoring proficient on the Algebra I EOC are to be counted as proficient on the math EOG).

Effective: 2008-09 school year.

7. **Change the current approach to writing assessment.** To elevate the importance of writing throughout the curriculum, the current 4th, 7th, and 10th grade writing assessments are to be replaced with a K-12 writing assessment system that includes authentic and on demand writing assignments appropriate to each grade level. The DPI is to provide rubrics for LEAs to use in assessing these K-12 writing assignments. Writing samples will be housed and scored locally, and DPI staff will conduct random audits to ensure compliance with on-going writing assessments. The DPI is to provide training and professional development to educators to ensure fidelity to the writing assessment process at each grade level.

Effective: 2008-09 school year.

8. **Replace the current English I EOC with a high school English assessment given in grade 10.** The test will be used for ABCs and No Child Left Behind AYP accountability purposes and reflect the communication skills that high school students should have. The assessment is to include performance-based and authentic, real-world tasks.

Effective: 2010-11 school year.

9. **Revamp the current Computer Skills Test to ensure it measures 21st century Information Communication Technology (ICT) literacy.** The current computer skills test is to be reviewed and revised to ensure it measures 21st century ICT literacy. The testing window for students to take the test is to be expanded to allow administration anytime between the sixth and eighth grades, depending on student readiness. Scores are to be banked for accountability purposes.

Effective: 2008-09 school year.

10. **Eliminate the misalignment of assessment for the integrated math courses.** The DPI is to develop appropriate EOC assessments for integrated math courses. The assessments are to include performance-based and authentic, real-world tasks.

Effective: Development is to begin in 2008-09 school year. The assessments are to be available for use by the 2010-2011 school year.

11. **Shorten the timeframe for reporting results after new tests are administered.** The DPI is to explore options for setting “cut” scores in the most timely manner possible and report to the Board on options.

Effective: Report due by October 2008.

Developing the Next Generation of Standards, Assessments, and Accountability

The State Board of Education directs the DPI to begin immediately the development of a detailed implementation plan for the action steps detailed in this section. The plan is to include timelines, resources needed, and strategies for involving appropriate stakeholders, including the business community, in the development process. In developing the next generation of standards, assessments, and accountability, the DPI is directed to:

- include the participation of teachers, content specialists, and technical experts in the development of the actual assessments;
- provide for the development of briefs/guides for each assessment and release of sample questions before new assessments are administered; and
- provide for the release of at least one form of each assessment on an annual basis.

The comprehensive implementation plan is to be presented to the State Board by October 2008.

1. **Overhaul the PreK-12 Standard Course of Study (SCOS) to focus on essential standards in order to narrow and deepen the state's curriculum.** The DPI is directed to conduct a comprehensive review of the PreK-12 content standards. This should include:

- articulation of the skills, understandings, and learning experiences critical at each grade level;
- inclusion of the skills, understandings, and learning experiences necessary to satisfactorily complete the graduation project;
- infusion of writing, 21st century content, thinking and learning skills, and life skills³ throughout the content standards; and
- reflection of rigor, relevance, and relationships between and among subject areas.

Upon adoption of the essential standards by the Board, the Department is to develop appropriate curriculum support materials and professional development, utilizing appropriate technological tools for delivery.

2. **Develop a next generation assessment system which includes formative, benchmark and summative assessments based on the new standards.** The DPI is directed to develop new and aligned assessments based on the essential standards. This includes appropriate extensions for students with disabilities. The new assessment system must:
 - be aligned with the graduation project;
 - include performance-based, authentic, real-world tasks; and
 - provide diagnostic information to teachers on individual students.
3. **Allow LEAs to develop and pilot 21st century assessment models.** The DPI is to present a plan for approving assessment pilots that allow LEAs to develop alternative approaches to assessment that are consistent with the Board's 21st century mission and goals.
4. **Create a comprehensive, customized professional development system to provide teachers and administrators with the skills and understandings needed to use data to inform instructional practice and make formative assessments a daily practice in the classroom.** The system is to include professional development on the essential standards, diagnostic and formative assessment, and technical assistance on using data to inform instruction. The plan for the professional development system is to include an assessment of resources currently available.
5. **Update the analysis of the technology infrastructure needed to support a 21st century curriculum and assessment system and to move additional testing to appropriate technology formats.** This analysis will allow the transition from a paper-based assessment system to one that takes greater advantage of technology.
6. **Examine the K-8 accountability model with a 21st century focus.** This examination should include consideration of whether the model appropriately reflects 21st century skills and understandings and

³ Defined in Appendix B.

how the model affects school designations and recognition. While additional components may be considered, **the focus must remain on student achievement and academic growth.**

7. **Develop a new high school accountability model that includes the high school graduation rate, participation in the high school Future-Ready Core, student performance in core subjects, and other measures of readiness for postsecondary education and skilled work.** To more meaningfully and transparently reflect progress toward graduating students who are future-ready and prepared for life in the 21st century, the DPI is directed to develop a new accountability model for high schools. An advisory committee with appropriate technical expertise should guide the development of the model. **The focus of the new model must remain on student achievement and academic growth.**

THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION'S COMMITMENT TO HIGH STANDARDS FOR STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS

As North Carolina moves to the next generation of assessments and accountability, the State Board of Education's commitment to high standards for students is **unwavering**. The Board recognizes that today's students live in an ever-changing, global economy. Without a doubt, students will enter a workforce and a world that is different than the one that exists today. It is clear to the State Board of Education that the State's expectations for student learning must increase accordingly.

The Board understands that North Carolina's system of assessments and accountability must support the kind of teaching and learning that prepare students for the future. As the Board and the DPI implement the action steps described in this document, it may also consider and identify additional steps to be implemented in moving to the next generation of assessments and accountability. For example, it may consider ways to provide students, parents, and other stakeholders with more meaningful information about how North Carolina's students perform in comparison to other students globally. In all deliberations, the Board will be guided by its mission. It will seek input from and the involvement of stakeholders, including the business community, which is a critical partner as we develop the next generation of assessments and accountability.

APPENDIX A
NORTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
MISSION AND GOALS

Draft

North Carolina State Board of Education Mission and Goals

The guiding mission of the North Carolina State Board of Education is that every public school student will graduate from high school, globally competitive for work and postsecondary education and prepared for life in the 21st Century.

Goal 1: NC public schools will produce globally competitive students.

- Every student excels in rigorous and relevant core curriculum that reflects what students need to know and demonstrate in a global 21st century environment, including a mastery of languages, an appreciation of the arts, and competencies in the use of technology.
- Every student's achievement is measured with an assessment system that informs instruction and evaluates knowledge, skills, performance, and dispositions needed in the 21st century.
- Every student will be enrolled in a course of study designed to prepare them to stay ahead of international competition.
- Every student uses technology to access and demonstrate new knowledge and skills that will be needed as a life-long learner to be competitive in a constantly changing international environment.
- Every student has the opportunity to graduate from high school with an Associates Degree or college transfer credit.

Goal 2: NC public schools will be led by 21st century professionals.

- Every teacher will have the skills to deliver 21st century content in a 21st century context with 21st century tools and technology that guarantees student learning.
- Every teacher and administrator will use a 21st century assessment system to inform instruction and measure 21st century knowledge, skills, performance, and dispositions.
- Every education professional will receive preparation in the interconnectedness of the world with knowledge and skills, including language study.
- Every education professional will have 21st century preparation and access to ongoing high quality professional development aligned with State Board of Education priorities.
- Every education professional will use data to inform decisions.

Goal 3: NC public school students will be healthy and responsible.

- Every learning environment will be inviting, respectful, supportive, inclusive, and flexible for student success.
- Every school provides an environment in which each child has positive, nurturing relationships with caring adults.
- Every school promotes a healthy, active lifestyle where students are encouraged to make responsible choices.
- Every school focuses on developing strong student character, personal responsibility, and community/world involvement.
- Every school reflects a culture of learning that empowers and prepares students to be life-long learners.

Goal 4: Leadership will guide innovation in NC public schools.

- School professionals will collaborate with national and international partners to discover innovative transformational strategies that will facilitate change, remove barriers for 21st century learning, and understand global connections.
- School leaders will create a culture that embraces change and promotes dynamic continuous improvement.
- Educational professionals will make decisions in collaboration with parents, students, businesses, education institutions, and faith-based and other community and civic organizations to impact student success.
- The public school professionals will collaborate with community colleges and public and private universities and colleges to provide enhanced educational opportunities for students.

Goal 5: NC public schools will be governed and supported by 21st century systems.

- Processes are in place for financial planning and budgeting that focuses on resource attainment and alignment with priorities to maximize student achievement.
- Twenty-first century technology and learning tools are available and are supported by school facilities that have the capacity for 21st century learning.
- Information and fiscal accountability systems are capable of collecting relevant data and reporting strategic and operational results.
- Procedures are in place to support and sanction schools that are not meeting state standards for student achievement.



APPENDIX B
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
CONTENT AND SKILLS

Draft

Twenty-First Century Content and Skills

21ST CENTURY CONTENT

Global Awareness

- Using 21st century skills to understand and address global issues.
- Learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work and community contexts.
- Having the ability to utilize non-English languages as a tool for understanding other nations and cultures.

Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurial Literacy

- Knowing how to make appropriate personal economic choices.
- Understanding the role of the economy and the role of business in the economy.
- Using entrepreneurial skills to enhance workplace productivity and career options.

Civic Literacy

- Being an informed citizen to participate effectively in government.
- Exercising the rights and obligations of citizenship at local, state, national and global levels.
- Understanding the local and global implications of civic decisions.

Health Awareness

- Having the ability to access health information and services, navigate health institutions and act as an effective advocate to improve health for self, family and/or community.
- Understanding preventive physical and mental health measures, including proper diet, nutrition, exercise, risk avoidance and stress reduction.
- Demonstrating understanding of national and international health.

THINKING AND LEARNING SKILLS

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills

- Exercising sound reasoning in understanding.
- Making complex choices.
- Understanding the interconnections among systems.
- Framing, analyzing and solving problems.

Communication

- Articulating thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively.

Information and Media Literacy Skills

- Understanding, managing and creating effective oral, written and/or multimedia communication in a variety of forms and contexts.
- Analyzing, accessing, managing, integrating, evaluating and creating information in a variety of forms and media.

Creativity and Innovation Skills

- Demonstrating originality and inventiveness in work.
- Developing, implementing and communicating new ideas to others.
- Being open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives.

Collaboration Skills

- Demonstrating ability to work effectively with diverse teams.
- Being willing to be helpful and make necessary compromises to accomplish a common goal.

Contextual Learning Skills

- Having the ability to take advantage of education in a variety of contexts both inside and outside the classroom; understanding that knowledge is acquired within a context.

ICT literacy

- Using technology in the course of attaining and utilizing 21st century skills.

LIFE SKILLS

Leadership

- Using interpersonal and problem-solving skills to influence more than one person toward a goal.
- Having the ability to leverage strengths of others to accomplish a common goal.

Ethics

- Demonstrating integrity and ethical behavior in personal, workplace and community contexts.

Accountability

- Setting and meeting high standards and goals for one's self and others.

Adaptability

- Adapting to varied roles and responsibilities.
- Tolerating ambiguity and changing priorities.

Personal Productivity

- Utilizing time efficiently and managing workload.
- Being punctual and reliable.

Personal Responsibility

- Exercising personal responsibility and flexibility in personal, workplace and community contexts.

People Skills

- Working appropriately and productively with others.

Self Direction

- Monitoring one's own understanding and learning needs.
- Demonstrating initiative to advance professional skill levels.
- Having the ability to define, prioritize and complete tasks without direct oversight.
- Demonstrating commitment to learning as a lifelong process.

Social Responsibility

- Acting responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind.