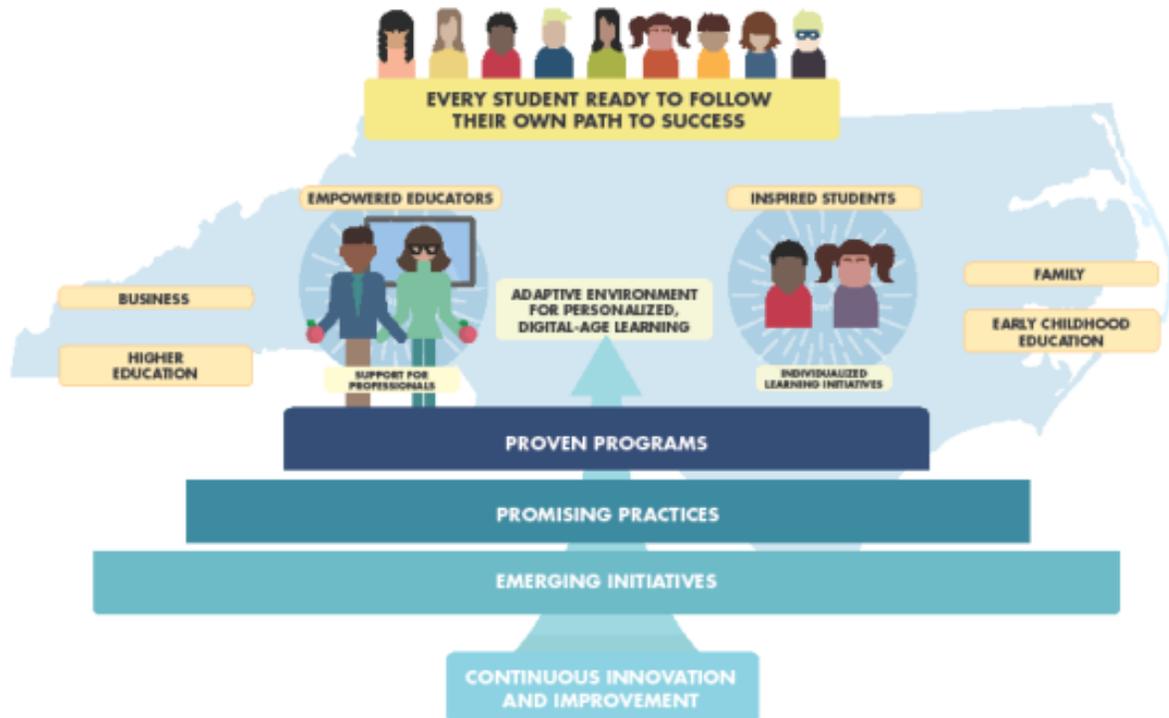


North Carolina Theory of Action



THEORY OF ACTION

North Carolina commits to continue to transform its education system to allow every student to follow the path to success that they decide best fits them.

North Carolina promotes new strategies that translate into emerging initiatives. Once shown to improve outcomes for students, such promising practices will be scaled and replicated into proven programs across the state. By continuously innovating and improving at each step, North Carolina will create adaptive environments for personalized, digital-age learning. Schools will support individualized professional development of educators and empower these professionals to adopt their own innovative ideas and strategies for instruction. In our classrooms, personalized, digital-age learning will allow students to determine the pace at which they learn and will inspire students to take ownership of their preparation for their own path to success through an immediate career, post-secondary education, or both.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

North Carolina's guiding principle is to transform from industrial age practices of providing all students and educators with the same inputs and opportunities to digital-age practices in which all students and educators have access to unique learning experiences based upon their individual needs and aspirations.

ROLE OF ESSA IN OUR THEORY OF ACTION

North Carolina (NC) supports individualized instruction and learning for both students and educators and continues to explore and promote emerging initiatives for personalized learning. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides the state with this opportunity via the commitment in the plan to continuous innovation for students and educators.

DEFINITIONS

Every Student Ready to Follow Their Own Path to Success

Every student will decide their own path toward becoming productive citizens prepared to pursue higher education (through certification, two or four-year degrees), military service, or to immediately embark on a career after high school. Students will take a driving role in designing their learning experiences and tracking their progress to clearly defined goals.

Adaptive Environment

The environment that North Carolina creates to empower educators and inspire students is adaptive. The goal of differentiating learning for both educators and students is accomplished through flexible practices, authentic assessments, and responsive thinking. Educators and students are regularly given the opportunity to develop their skills in adaptive approaches, theories, methods, and practices as the environment should adapt to the needs and aspirations of educators and students.

Personalized Learning

Personalized learning rests on four pillars:

- A student having a “learner profile” that documents and stimulates self-reflection on his or her strengths, weaknesses, preferences, and goals;
- A student pursuing an individualized learning path that encourages him or her to set and manage personal academic goals;
- A student following a “competency-based progression” that focuses on the ability to demonstrate mastery of a topic, rather than seat time; and,
- A students’ learning environment being flexible and structured in ways that support individual goals.

Personalized learning is not about students having “personal education plans.” In North Carolina, the vision for personalized learning is to create a statewide educational system that supports the four pillars of personalized learning. This vision includes the use of digital resources that provide the ability to transfer information freely and quickly. Learning management systems, student information systems, and other digital applications are used to distribute assignments, manage schedules and communications, and track student progress using real-time assessment strategies to inform classroom instruction, as opposed to using extensive, overbearing summative assessments as the main tools to inform instruction.

Empowered Educators

North Carolina defines educators broadly as all persons who engage in the learning process. Educators actively coordinate their professional learning and tailor their training to their unique career aspirations. North Carolina educators build their skillsets so that they can lead others and make an impact that goes beyond the classroom.

Inspired Students

Through personalized learning, North Carolina students will be motivated to own their education, take charge of their learning and be able to describe their own goals and aspirations. They will be flexible and adaptable as they continue to monitor their progress to reach goals.

Emerging Initiatives

North Carolina is researching and piloting the following sample initiatives. They are part of the state's efforts for continuous innovation.

- **B-3 Interagency Council**—Early experiences shape brain development, and early learning provides a foundation for later learning. To make the most of the unique opportunity early education offers to improve future lives will require a transformation of early learning. In response, the 2017 North Carolina General Assembly established the B-3 Interagency Council charged with establishing a vision and accountability for a birth through grade three system of early education that addresses: standards and assessment; data-driven improvement; teacher and administrator preparation and effectiveness; instruction and environment; transitions and continuity; family engagement and; governance and funding.
- **NC Reads**—The NC Reads initiative targets reading support to preschoolers and elementary students across the state. The NC Reads initiative has three goals: 1) ensure that preschool and elementary students have books to read at home; 2) engage schools and community service organizations in collecting books or funding for books to donate to elementary and preschool children; and 3) provide an online resource to connect volunteers and donors easily to local book drives.
- **Whole Child NC**—Acknowledging that students attend schools with numerous factors that affect their success, the NC SBE established an interagency advisory committee known as Whole Child NC. Whole Child NC uses the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model as a framework for reviewing challenges and addressing issues of school age children such as poverty, safety, health and other non-academic barriers to a well-rounded education where students are healthy, safe, supported, challenged, and engaged.
- **Digital-Age Learning**—Given that students are adapting to an ever-changing world, it is imperative that our teachers embrace the change trajectory as well. In 2016, the NC SBE and the NC General Assembly endorsed a set of digital learning competencies for teachers and administrators. These standards for teachers and administrators will serve to identify the needed skills to provide high quality, integrated digital teaching and learning.
- **Global Ready Initiatives**—The NC SBE has also focused on developing infrastructure supports to prepare students to work in a global economy through Global-Ready initiatives. The SBE has adopted implementation rubrics and approved state-level recognition for schools and school

districts that have implemented global education practices that lead to student achievement, development of cultural sensitivities, capability to collaborate in a diverse international setting, both locally and globally, to solve problems, think critically and communicate with people from many different cultures.

- **Innovative School District**—The NC General Assembly in 2016 established in law an Achievement School District (ASD) created to improve continually low-performing elementary schools across the state. This model has been re-envisioned one-year later, with a focus on creating innovative conditions in local communities and schools, where accountable, data-driven partnerships can come together with a single vision for equity and opportunity for all students and was renamed by the General Assembly in 2017 as the NC Innovative School District (ISD).
- **Lab Schools**—The NC General Assembly in 2016 directed the University of North Carolina General Administration to select eight institutes of higher education to establish lab schools throughout the state with a focus on underperforming school districts. Two schools are scheduled to open for the 2017-18 school year.

Promising Practices

The following are a few examples of practices already implemented statewide. North Carolina has multiple years of data on these practices:

- **EL Support Team**—English learners are students who need specialized support in accessing content standards while learning English. The NCDPI sponsors the EL Support Team to train educators to personalize instruction for students learning new content in a second/non-native language. The Support Team offers training and coaching opportunities across the state utilizing effective theory-based concepts and best practices. The team can provide support for academic language development, second-language acquisition, literacy, authentic formative and summative assessments, technology integration, and data-driven decision making for English learners.
- **NC Read to Achieve**—North Carolina has invested funds to support all students' progress in third grade reading. Created by statute, NC's Read to Achieve is a program that targets interventions for students struggling in reading beginning in kindergarten. Multiple opportunities for added supports are in place for third-grade students who are not reading at grade level by the end of the year. Students receive focused instruction, including summer reading camp and other interventions, to make sure that they are ready to read and understand content in the fourth grade and beyond.
- **NCStar**—The NCStar system assists schools in their move to create a culture of continuous improvement. NCStar is a web-based tool utilized by schools to help manage their school improvement processes and track progress. NCStar contains over 100 research-based effective practices (indicators) and allows schools flexibility to personalize their school improvement plans to meet their distinct needs. The NCDPI has also released a version of the tool that may be used by LEAs to manage their district plans.
- **Multi-Tiered System of Support Framework**—MTSS is a multi-tiered framework that promotes engaging research-based academic, behavior and social emotional practices designed to maximize growth for all students. This framework supports the use of data to promote high quality instruction/intervention. Responsiveness to Instruction (RtI) and Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) are long standing NCDPI multi-tiered systems of support. The

NCDPI MTSS framework is the integration of critical features of both frameworks to create an integrated system of support for all students.

- **Data Systems**—Data to make informed decisions regarding student performance and program effectiveness are needed to continue to improve North Carolina’s education initiatives. The P-20 longitudinal data system (NC SchoolWorks) will greatly enhance North Carolina's ability to track student performance across years and sectors, help evaluate institutions and program performance, and analyze data in more detail to validate or improve performance.

Proven Programs

The following are sample programs that are in the full implementation stage with many years of data and evidence that these programs improve teaching and learning.

- **NC Pre-K**—Administratively housed in the Department of Health and Human Services and operating in collaboration with the NCDPI through the state’s infrastructure of local education agencies and network of private child care providers, pre-kindergarten is an effective strategy improving school success for the state’s most vulnerable four-year-old population. Multiple longitudinal studies have validated the significant positive impact of pre-kindergarten on student achievement at third grade and beyond and a narrowing of the achievement gap.
- **Smart Start**—A public/private partnership funding independent, private organizations that work in all 100 North Carolina counties through The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., and 75 local partnerships. Governing boards, co-chaired by local partnership executive directors and local school superintendents, determine the best approach to achieving outcomes related to 1) increasing the quality of early care and education; 2) supporting families; 3) advancing child health; and 4) expanding early literacy.
- **Career and College Promise**—Career and College Promise (CCP) is North Carolina’s dual enrollment program for high school students. This program allows eligible NC high school students to enroll in college classes at NC community colleges and universities while still in high school. Students choose pathways focusing on college transfer or career technical education and/or enroll in Cooperative Innovative High School (CIHS) as they work toward their post-secondary plans and career development. Students who successfully complete college courses earn technical certificates/diplomas, associate’s degrees, or transferrable college credit while in high school. NC continues to be a leader in this area with an ever-growing CCP program, including one of largest networks of CIHS/Early Colleges in the country.
- **Home Base**—Home Base is a secure and comprehensive suite of digital learning tools and resources. Home Base consists of a student information management system, educator evaluations, and professional development resources for teachers as well as access to online learning resources aligned with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.
- **North Carolina Virtual Public School**—NCVPS has been in operation for ten years. NCVPS offers high-quality online courses taught by certified North Carolina teachers for students in grades 6–12 from across the state regardless of their zip codes. NCVPS offers over 150 courses including any course a student would need to meet North Carolina graduation requirements.
- **Positive Behavior Intervention and Support**—PBIS incorporates social and emotional learning with strategies that promote healthy and positive school climates. PBIS implementation provides high quality eLearning environments for all students.

- **North Carolina Educator Effectiveness System**—The NCEES includes the professional standards and evaluation processes associated with every educator in NC. Data for the NCEES are captured annually in an online tool, and the information is included in the Educator Effectiveness data reported at the state level. The NCDPI also provides technical support and professional learning opportunities to supplement the tool.
- **Statewide System of Support**—One key component of the Statewide System of Support is Intensive Support with Modeling for the state's lowest performing schools and districts. Through a blended model of coaching and professional development aligned to the NCStar indicators for school improvement, schools receive on-site and virtual support.

SUMMARY

Through the implementation of this Theory of Action, North Carolina will prepare every student ready to follow their own path to success. North Carolina's plan, along with its accountability model in response to the Every Student Succeeds Act, describes the long-term goals and interim progress measures that will be used to monitor how successful the state is in accomplishing its goals. The emerging initiatives, promising practices, and proven programs within the ESSA plan will continue to provide North Carolina students with adaptive environments for personalized learning.