



# **A Study of North Carolina's Accountability System**

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**Submitted by the Southern Regional Education Board  
to the North Carolina State Board of Education**

## Contents

Background.....	1
Context.....	1
Need for Common Goals and Alignment .....	2
State Reviews .....	7
Weighting Considerations .....	11
Retest Scores .....	21
Alignment of Accountability to State Plans .....	21
Conclusion .....	22
Endnotes.....	23

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# A Study of North Carolina's Accountability System

## Background

Across the 16-state region served by the Southern Regional Education Board, North Carolina has long been viewed as a state with focused leadership and expectations. Over the past two decades, the state has maintained this focus as it has responded to education reform and the guidelines set forth by federal acts and guidelines. North Carolina has also had a long history of engaging school and community leaders in continuous improvement efforts. The Governor's Office, the General Assembly, the North Carolina State Board of Education, teacher and principal associations, BEST NC, myFutureNC and other shareholders have worked hard to set and support high expectations for students and schools. Unfortunately, these expectations have been set independently and do not communicate a unified vision across all state entities and shareholders.

In an effort to maintain expectations and regain focus across shareholder groups, the North Carolina General Assembly, per Session Law 2019-154, asked the North Carolina State Board of Education to conduct a study of the state's accountability system. What's more, a 2019 WestEd report, *Sound Basic Education for All – An Action Plan for North Carolina*, identified a review of the accountability system as a critical need for the state: "The system should produce data to inform the evaluation and continuous improvement of educational programs and to enable the Court to track progress, identify areas of concern, and monitor compliance with the Leandro requirements."<sup>i</sup>

In the fall of 2019, based on the request of the General Assembly and recommendations from the WestEd report, the North Carolina State Board of Education asked SREB to conduct a study of the state's accountability system. This study was to review (a) the state's current approach to accountability as part of its School Performance Grades, (b) the state's plan for the federal Every Student Succeeds Act and (c) the measures reported on the state's annual school report cards.

This report on the study's findings also offers the North Carolina State Board of Education a brief discussion of other states' accountability models and feedback offered by the North Carolina Accountability Working Group.

## Context

SREB helps states make continuous progress and meet their education goals by measuring and reporting on education outcomes related to schools and students. Since 1988, SREB has focused on the role state accountability systems serve in ensuring that all schools measure up to the needs of the students they serve. That focus has helped SREB identify key accountability tenets that support efforts to increase college and career readiness among the SREB region's future high school graduates.

Policymakers and education leaders in SREB states have long understood that setting expectations for public schools, districts and states and measuring performance over time leads to sustained improvement. For decades, SREB states have led the nation in developing education accountability systems that support strong reform and continuous improvement.

It is no surprise that every SREB state implemented policies in the 1990s to hold public schools accountable for reporting results by 2000 — before the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required them to do so. The most recent reauthorization in 2015 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 — the Every Student Succeeds Act — provides states with the flexibility and responsibility to redesign their state education accountability systems to meet current challenges. Although ESSA establishes minimum requirements for state accountability systems, state leaders should expect more from their schools than these minimum thresholds for student achievement.

The most important responsibility of state accountability systems should be to ensure that schools and districts are accountable for increasing the percentage of high school students who graduate with the academic knowledge, critical thinking skills, and technical, technological and workplace readiness skills they need to be successful after they graduate.

North Carolina has long been a leader in setting high expectations for its schools and districts. The legislature has supported these high expectations and played a key role in determining the weights and reporting components of school performance. In 2013, the General Assembly created school performance grades that assign schools a single letter grade, A-F. School letter grades are based on a combination of achievement and growth scores. In most cases, the current overall grade assigned to a school represents the growth score weighted at 20% and the achievement score weighted at 80% to render a score out of a total of 100. The numerical score corresponds to a letter grade using the following cut offs: 0-39 = F, 40-54 = D, 55-69 = C, 70-84 = B, and 85 – higher = A.

To ensure North Carolina continues to meet the requirements of ESSA, provides a sound basic education for all and ensures transparency in reporting a school's strengths and weaknesses, the state needs to review its current accountability model and determine needed revisions to that model.

## **Need for Common Goals and Alignment**

Labor market economists predict technology has changed and will continue to change the American workforce. Employers need fewer low-skilled workers to do the jobs that machines are able to do and will be able to do in the future. Employers need more workers to fill so-called “middle-skills jobs,” jobs that require more advanced education — more than high school but less than college completion. Although states all across the nation face this increasing need for workers with middle skills, the South faces the greatest challenges because its economy for decades has provided many low-skilled jobs for many undereducated workers. Simultaneously, American businesses nationwide will find it increasingly hard to fill the positions they have open for highly educated workers, especially in high-tech and STEM-related fields.

As such, public education and workforce training programs in America face a new challenge. They need to keep up with the economy's fast-paced changes and prepare each person to contribute to an increasingly technologically advanced workforce. American workers need a foundational secondary education that culminates in a high school credential. They also need job training, industry credentials and postsecondary education that will enable them not only to participate in the current labor markets, but also to anticipate the skills they will need to take advantage of emerging opportunities and lead future innovations. By 2030, SREB predicts that the North Carolina will have as many as 1.6 million unemployable people if specific policies are not put in place to retrain and prepare this more highly skilled future workforce.<sup>ii</sup>

Three recently reauthorized federal laws supporting public education, training and services from kindergarten through adulthood offer the South an opportunity to align its education and training options. These acts include the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015; the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act of 2018, also known as Perkins V; and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014.

Though states have received funds through these statutes for decades, their current iterations require states to coordinate their work and create a unified plan for raising achievement and fostering career development from childhood through the workforce. Aligning these efforts will enable states to:

- Shape disparate programs and services into a coherent system
- Concentrate educators' efforts, making them more efficient
- Provide individuals with smoother transitions to and through their education and careers
- Converge state plan development cycles so state leaders can coordinate their plan development processes and align their work

This process will also allow states to allocate their resources more efficiently, bringing better outcomes for more individuals and industries. States can stage their work to align their ESSA, Perkins V and WIOA plans a year at a time as they submit plans, until all three plans are fully aligned.<sup>iii</sup>

Table 1 displays the goals found in North Carolina's three federal state plans and goals established by BEST NC in its myFutureNC report. Table 2 provides a summary of accountability indicators by statute for the state.

**Table 1: North Carolina Summary of Goals by Statute/Initiative**

ESSA	PERKINS V	WIOA	Other State Entities
<p>Attainment year: 2027</p> <p>Academic achievement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 66% of students in Grades 3-8 will be proficient on the state ELA assessment, and 74% will be proficient on the math assessment</li> <li>• 71% of students in high school will be proficient on the ELA assessment, and 73% will be proficient on the math assessment</li> </ul> <p>English language proficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 60% of English learners will meet annual growth targets on the state English language proficiency assessment, or reach proficiency within four years</li> </ul> <p>High school graduation rate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will go from 86% to 95% of all students – and each student subgroup – graduating in four years</li> <li>• Includes expectation to close gaps and increase each year for the “All Students” group</li> </ul>	<p>Attainment year: Not clearly stated</p> <p>To establish the required goals, CTE programs will work toward the various goals of the</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-12 state board of education</li> <li>• Community college system</li> <li>• UNC system</li> <li>• NCWorks Commission</li> </ul> <p>The state’s Perkins V plan also cites Governor Cooper’s goal: By 2025, North Carolina will be a “Top 10 Educated State,” by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing the percent of 4-year-olds enrolled in high-quality pre-K</li> <li>• Raising the high school graduation rate</li> <li>• Increasing the percent of individuals with post-secondary degrees and credentials</li> </ul>	<p>Attainment year: Not clearly stated</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create an integrated, seamless and customer-centered workforce system</li> <li>2. Create a workforce system responsive to changing economic needs</li> <li>3. Prepare workers to succeed in the North Carolina economy and continuously improve their skills</li> <li>4. Use data to drive strategies and ensure accountability</li> </ol> <p>The state’s WIOA plan also cites Governor Cooper’s goal: By 2025, North Carolina will be a “Top 10 Educated State”</p>	<p><b>myFutureNC</b> Attainment year: 2030</p> <p><b>Goal: Two million North Carolinians will have a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential</b></p> <p>Focus areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closing gaps in postsecondary attainment</li> <li>• Aligning educational programming and business and industry needs</li> <li>• Improving the quality of educational opportunities for all North Carolinians</li> </ul> <p><b>State Board of Education</b> Attainment year: 2025</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Eliminate opportunity gaps</li> <li>2. Improve school and district performance</li> <li>3. Increase educator preparedness to meet the needs of every student</li> </ol> <p><b>BEST NC</b> Attainment year: Not clearly stated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting student readiness to learn</li> <li>• Elevating excellent teachers and leaders</li> <li>• Providing globally competitive education</li> <li>• Setting high standards and promote meaningful accountability</li> <li>• Uplifting underperforming schools and students</li> <li>• Personalizing teaching and learning</li> </ul>
<p>Source: SREB’s review of North Carolina’s state plans for ESSA, Perkins V, WIOA and other entities. <i>Note.</i> All three statutes empower states to set additional goals beyond those required by statute, to address state priorities and align efforts across the statutes.</p>			

**Table 2: North Carolina Summary of Accountability Indicators by Statute/Initiative**

ESSA	Perkins V	WIOA	Other State Entities
<p><b>All Schools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic achievement: Schools must meet the 95% participation rate for all students and subgroups</li> <li>English language proficiency: Progress on state English language proficiency assessment</li> </ul> <p><b>Elementary and Middle Grades Schools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic achievement: Proficiency on state EOG ELA and math assessments</li> <li>Other academic indicator: Proficiency on state EOG science assessments</li> <li>School quality or student success: Student growth on state EOG ELA, math and science assessments</li> </ul> <p><b>High Schools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic achievement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proficiency on state ELA and math EOC assessments</li> <li>Student growth on state ELA and math EOC assessments</li> </ul> </li> <li>Graduation rate: 4-year adjusted cohort rate</li> <li>School quality or student success: Students meeting each college- and career-readiness benchmark <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ACT composite score of 17 or higher</li> <li>WorkKeys Silver or higher</li> <li>State EOC science assessment proficient score</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Secondary CTE concentrators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Graduation rate: 4-year cohort graduation rate, as measured under ESSA</li> <li>Proficiency in the challenging academic standards for ELA, math and science adopted under ESSA</li> <li>Percentage of graduates who, in the 2nd quarter after exiting from secondary education, are in postsecondary education or advanced training, military service or other service program or the Peace Corps, or are employed</li> <li>Indicators of program quality: students graduating from high school having <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>attained a recognized postsecondary credential</li> <li>met proficiency on CTE course proof of learning assessment, in courses that have such assessments (<i>optional indicator</i>)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Percentage in programs and programs of study that lead to non-traditional fields</li> </ul> <p>Postsecondary CTE concentrators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percentage who, during the 2nd quarter after program completion, remain enrolled in postsecondary education, are in advanced training, military service, other service program or the Peace Corps, or are placed or retained in employment</li> </ul>	<p>Adult programs:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment rate during the 2nd quarter after program exit</li> <li>Employment rate during the 4th quarter after program exit</li> <li>Median earnings during the 2nd quarter after program exit</li> <li>Attainment rate of postsecondary credential or secondary school diploma or recognized equivalent, during program participation or within one year after exit</li> <li>Participation rate during a program year in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and rate of achievement of measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment</li> <li>Effectiveness in serving employers; and reporting on employers' and participants' satisfaction with services</li> </ol> <p>Youth programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation in education or training activities, or in unsubsidized employment, during the 2nd quarter after program exit</li> </ul>	<p><b>myFutureNC indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-K enrollment</li> <li>4th and 8th grade NAEP proficiency</li> <li>ACT composite score of 17 or higher</li> <li>P-12 student chronic absenteeism rate</li> <li>Graduation rate: 5-year adjusted cohort rate</li> <li>Share of qualified high school seniors completing the FAFSA</li> <li>Postsecondary enrollment rate, ages 18-24</li> <li>Postsecondary persistence rate</li> <li>Postsecondary completion rate, ages 25-44, for 2- and 4-year institutions</li> <li>Share of 16- to 24-year-olds in the school-to-workforce continuum</li> <li>Labor force participation rate, 25- to 64-year-olds</li> <li>Share of 35- to 44-year-olds with family income at/above a living wage</li> <li>Workforce demand – current <i>and</i> forecasted</li> </ul>

ESSA	Perkins V	WIOA	Other State Entities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Math 3 course passing grade</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage who receive a recognized postsecondary credential during their participation in the program or within one year of completing the program</li> <li>• Percentage in CTE programs and programs of study that lead to nontraditional fields</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in education or training activities, or in unsubsidized employment, during the 4th quarter after program exit</li> <li>• Indicators #3-6 for adult programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–compared to supply of graduates by market sector</li> </ul> <p><b>State Board of Education indicators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lists 19 different indicators</li> </ul>

Source: SREB's review of North Carolina's state plans for ESSA, Perkins V, WIOA and other entities. *Note.* Each statute empowers the state to align the indicators with those established under the other two statutes.



SREB strongly recommends that North Carolina policymakers and education shareholders establish a clear and common vision for their public education system and set and measure key indicators of progress. North Carolina and the South lead the nation in public school enrollment growth, dramatic demographic changes and shifts in economic opportunities. All shareholders need to look closely at the state's accountability system and ensure that as many students as possible have the needed academic, occupational and employability skills to make successful transitions in life. We recommend that shareholders ask themselves:<sup>iv</sup>

- How many students in your state have access to high-quality prekindergarten?
- How many students in your state are ready for first grade on day one?
- How many students can read proficiently no later than fourth grade? What about English language learners and those from low-income families?
- How are all eighth graders performing in reading and math?
- What percentage of eighth graders are successfully making the transition to high school?
- What percentage of high school students have access to advanced course work (e.g., Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, quality dual enrollment courses or advanced career and technical education courses like Advanced Career)?
- What percentage of historically underserved high school students have access to advanced course coursework (e.g., AP, IB, quality dual enrollment courses or advanced CTE courses like Advanced Career)?
- As high school graduation rates have improved, have gaps narrowed for students of racial and ethnic groups, for students from low-income families and for students with disabilities?
- What percentage of high school graduates measure up on benchmarks of college and career readiness?
- What percentage of recent high school graduates are enrolling in postsecondary institutions?
- What percentage of students entering college make it to their sophomore year?
- What percentage of high school graduates are eventually earning a credential?
- How many working-age adults in your state do not have a high school credential?
- How many working-age adults in your state have some type of postsecondary credential?

## State Reviews

The first step in SREB's study was to review weights for student achievement and accountability rating types in all 50 states. Our review indicates that North Carolina and Vermont are the only two states that have set a student achievement weight of 80%. North Carolina's academic achievement includes additional measures, limiting comparisons to other states whose academic achievement is reading and mathematics test scores only. Table 3 provides information about academic achievement weighting for all 50 states.

**Table 3: Academic Achievement Weighting for 50 U.S. States**

State	Academic Achievement				Additional Detail
	K-12	Elementary/ Middle	Middle	High School	
Alabama		40%		20%	
Alaska		30%		60%	
Arizona		30%		30%	
Arkansas		35%		35%	High School 35% achievement is weighted
Delaware		30%		40%	
Florida		200/800 points	180/1000 points	600/1100 points	Or Elementary - 25%, Middle - 18%, High School - 54.5%
Georgia		30%		47%	
Hawaii		40 points		30 points	
Idaho		36%		45%	
Illinois		15%		15%	
Indiana		43%		15%	
Iowa		14%		50%	
Kansas	Kansas does not assign weights for the indicators being used for annual meaningful differentiation. Instead, each indicator is assessed every year relative to the interim goals the state has set to meet its long-term goals. Based on this assessment, each school is assigned an annual determination: Below Expectations, Meets Expectations or Exceeds Expectations.				
Louisiana		50%	46.67%	20.83%	
Maine		42%		40%	
Maryland		20%		30%	
Massachusetts		60%		40%	
Michigan		32.22%		29%	Michigan's index-based identification system designates a single index value (0-100 points) based on school performance in up to seven areas: Proficiency, Growth, Graduation Rate, English Learner Progress, School Quality/Student Success, General Participation and English Learner Participation. Each indicator is on a scale of 0-100 points for percent of target index met.
Minnesota	Minnesota uses a stage-based decision process to meaningfully differentiate between all public schools. This stage-based decision process includes all indicators and evaluates each student group against each indicator.				

State	Academic Achievement				Additional Detail
	K-12	Elem/Middle	Middle	High School	
Mississippi		190/700 points	190/700 points	570/1000 points	For high schools, the 570 points include 190 points for Academic Achievement, 190 points for Reading Growth and 190 points for Math Growth.
Missouri		40%		40%	
Montana		25/100 points		30/100 points	
Nebraska		25%		25%	
Nevada		25%		25%	
New Hampshire		*		*	
New Jersey		30%		30%	
New Mexico		33%		25%	
New York	New York does not weight indicators. Instead it uses a rule-based methodology to differentiate between schools.				
North Carolina	80%				Note: Growth is on a 50-100 scale and therefore carries somewhat more weight than the 20% weight would have if on a 1-100 scale.
North Dakota		30%		25%	
Ohio		27.5% in grades K-3	21.88% in grades 4-8	17.25%	For high schools 17.25% = 5.75% for ELA + 11.5% for Math
Oklahoma		30%		30%	
Oregon		2 of 9 (22%)		2 of 9 (22%)	Oregon's accountability index is based on a 9-point scale
Pennsylvania	The state will categorize schools as eligible for identification based on performance in two domains - academic achievement and academic growth. To establish the lowest-performing 5% of all schools, Pennsylvania will examine the performance of low achievement and low-growth schools on the remaining accountability indicators: chronic absenteeism; other possible indicators, depending on school configuration and subgroup size, include career readiness and progress in moving ELs to proficiency.				
Rhode Island	Rhode Island is using a rule-based methodology which emphasizes the Academic Proficiency and Growth Indexes. Each star rating of the classification system requires schools to meet all the criteria associated with the star rating. This methodology does not assign specific weights or allow performance on one indicator to compensate for lower performance on another. Each star rating indicates minimum requirements for all indicators. If a school misses any one rule, they are not eligible for that star rating.				
South Carolina		35%		25%	
Tennessee		25%		23%	
Texas		40%		50%	
Utah		25%		55%	33% Student Achievement (includes Student Growth) + 22% Science Achievement/Growth

State	Academic Achievement				Additional Detail
	K-12	Elem/Middle	Middle	High School	
Vermont		80%		40%	70% Student Achievement + 10% Science Achievement/Growth
Virginia	Virginia indicators are based on a three-step methodology that includes achievement and growth (greatest weight), EL progress (less weight), and indicators of school quality or student success (get the least weight).				
Washington		40%		30%	
West Virginia		28%		25%	
Wisconsin		37.5%		37.5%	
Wyoming		25%		20%	

Source: SREB's review of 50 states' accountability systems. *Note.* \* = New Hampshire's input-based and performance-based accountability systems differ from the models described above. Contact [jeff.gagne@sreb.org](mailto:jeff.gagne@sreb.org) for more information.

ESSA regulations give states flexibility to create their own educational visions and incorporate new measures of school quality or student success into their accountability systems while maintaining a core expectation that states, districts and schools will work to improve academic outcomes for all students, including subgroups of students. Although states and districts will continue to be required to take comprehensive action to turn around struggling schools, they have new flexibility, working closely with shareholders, to choose evidence-based interventions tailored to local needs.

ESSA also allows states to decide how much weight to give their accountability system components, such as student test results and English learner proficiency, but require that academic factors, in the aggregate, be given more “substantial weight” than nonacademic indicators. So, if a state were to measure school innovation and school climate as part of its accountability system, results on state assessment and English learner proficiency rates would have to be given greater weight.

The feedback received from the North Carolina Accountability Working Group suggests that the state must include multiple measures in a new accountability model. In the interim, this group recommends keeping achievement and growth measures separate. The North Carolina Accountability Working Group would also prefer to provide schools with both an achievement grade and a growth grade so each measure has equal levels of importance and visibility.

One educator on the Working Group stated:

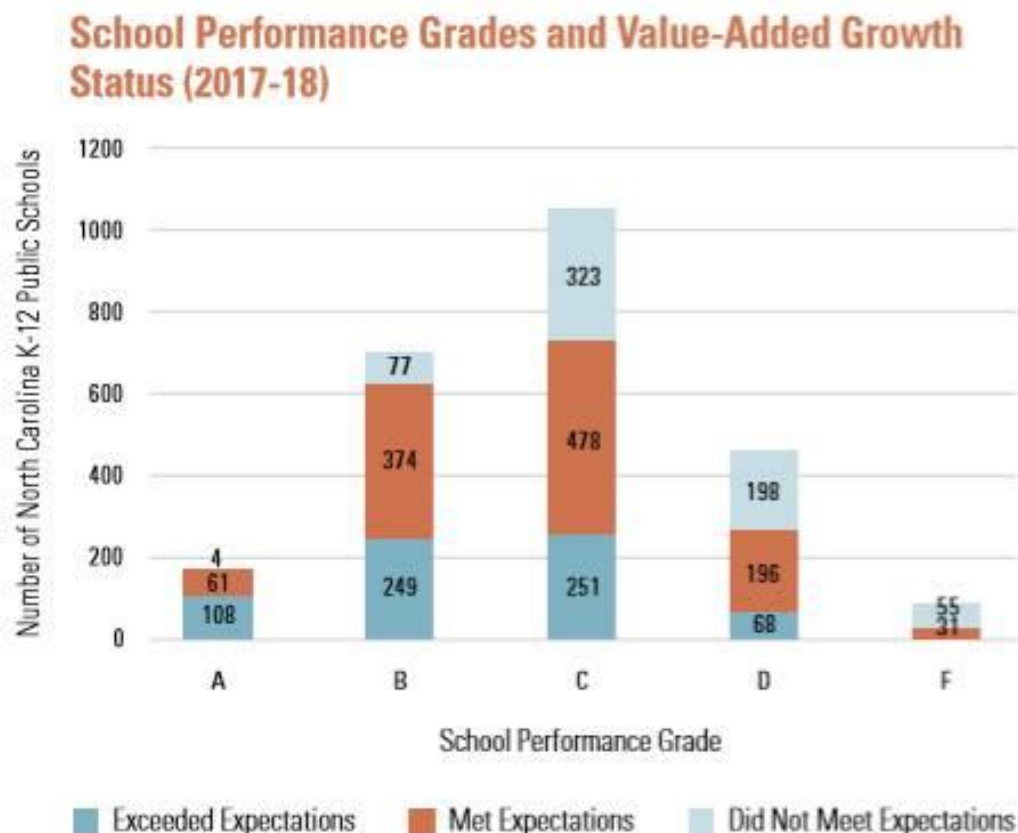
“North Carolina’s current school performance grades do not provide parents and other stakeholders adequate transparency because scores are not itemized on the report cards to reveal how letter grades are calculated. As a result, school performance grades are overly simplistic and do not capture the nuances of a school’s strengths and weaknesses. The growth score is a better indicator of how educators in a school are impacting children.”

Another member said, “By combining student achievement measures with student growth, we mask the fact that the students in those schools are exceeding expected growth; there will always be information that is hidden by combining these very distinct measures.”

## Weighting Considerations

As previously stated, North Carolina uses the highest weighting of student achievement when compared to other states. The current weighting of student achievement and growth has created obstacles within the state’s reporting system. With current weighting percentages, it is possible for schools that have high student achievement results and no growth to still receive an A designation. In fact, 81 schools received either an A or B designation and did not meet expected academic growth (according to 2017-2018 data). Similarly, it is currently possible for schools to exceed expected growth and receive a designation of D or F. Using 2017-2018 data, 68 schools receive a D or F designation while exceeding expected academic growth. Figure 1 below provides a summary of school performance designations as related to growth status. By combining student achievement and growth into a single letter grade, the system masks critical nuances about *both* measures and ultimately hides valuable information that would be more transparently seen if each measure was reported separately.

**Figure 1. School Performance Grades and Value-Added Growth Status.** Source: BEST NC.



Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division

### School Grade Calculation

80% School Achievement Score and 20% Value-Added Growth Score\*\*

School grades are assigned on a 15-point scale:

A = 85-100; B = 70-84; C = 55-69; D = 40-54; F = < 40

\* A+NG schools earn an A rating and have no significant achievement gaps between student groups.

\*\* The value-added growth model designates a school as having exceeded, met, or not met student performance expectations. Schools meet performance expectations if students in the school maintain their relative academic standing compared to students across the state with similar performance on previous state tests.

Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division, EVAAS Statistical Models 2010 White Paper

To address the area of weighting, the following two recommendations should be explored.

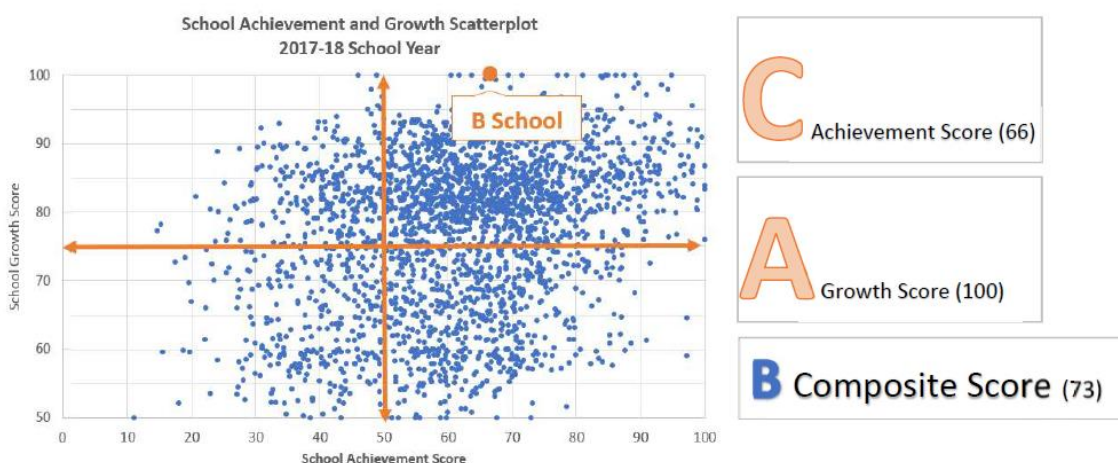
First, the board is encouraged to explore a short-term solution to address clarity within the current reporting system. A solution would be to report both student achievement and growth as

separate measures within the current system. By reporting the two measures separately, the state would communicate the importance of both measures and reduce the data masking that occurs by combining the measures. During a North Carolina Accountability Working Group meeting, BEST NC shared scatterplots (see Figure 2 below) and samples of school grades using both student achievement and growth as separate measures. Reporting achievement and growth separately would elevate the importance of each measure and eliminate the masking that occurs when the measures are combined into a summative score. Including a scatterplot with multiple years of data and descriptive information for each school (e.g., grade levels) would also provide trend information as well as insights into achievement and growth amongst comparable schools to, for example, identify best practices.

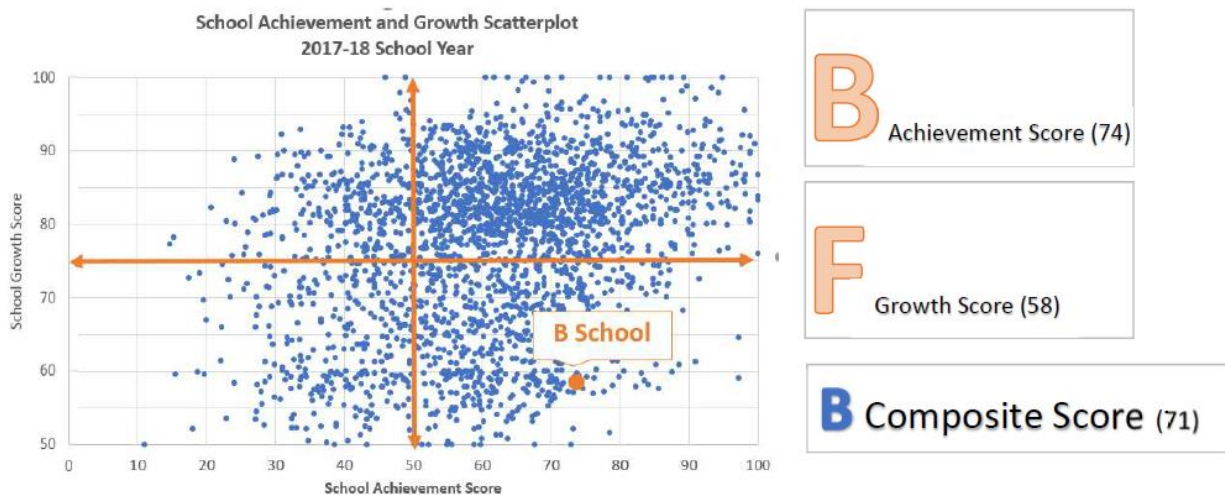
Figure 2 provides two examples of current “B” schools and how their placements on the scatterplots and split letter grades can provide important context for their overall grade. These scatterplots provide a sample using 2017-2018 data and are for illustration purposes only.

**Figure 2. Sample scatterplots showing school achievement and growth.** Source: BEST NC.

### B School Examples







**NOTE:**

Achievement Letter Grades based on 15-point cuts on a 1-100 scale.

Growth Letter Grades based on 10-point cuts on a 50-100 scale.

Composite score based on current weighting of 80% achievement and 20% growth.

According to BEST NC, by “providing each school with both an achievement grade and a growth grade, each indicator would enjoy an equal level of importance and visibility. Specifically:

- Achievement is currently reported on a 1-100 scale. The achievement grade would continue with the 15-point cut scores to provide an A to F letter grade for achievement.
- Growth is currently reported on a 50-100 scale, so the growth grade would use 10-point cut scores to provide an A to F letter grade for growth.
- Further, by displaying each school on a scatterplot, stakeholders would be able to see where both grades sit relative to one another and would be able to compare schools across the district and state.”

BEST NC also provided a summary of the distribution of school performance scores, reporting achievement and growth separately, as shown in Figure 3. Please note that 2017-18 data was used to illustrate the distribution of school performance scores provided in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. Model of distribution of school performance for achievement and growth.**  
Source: BEST NC.

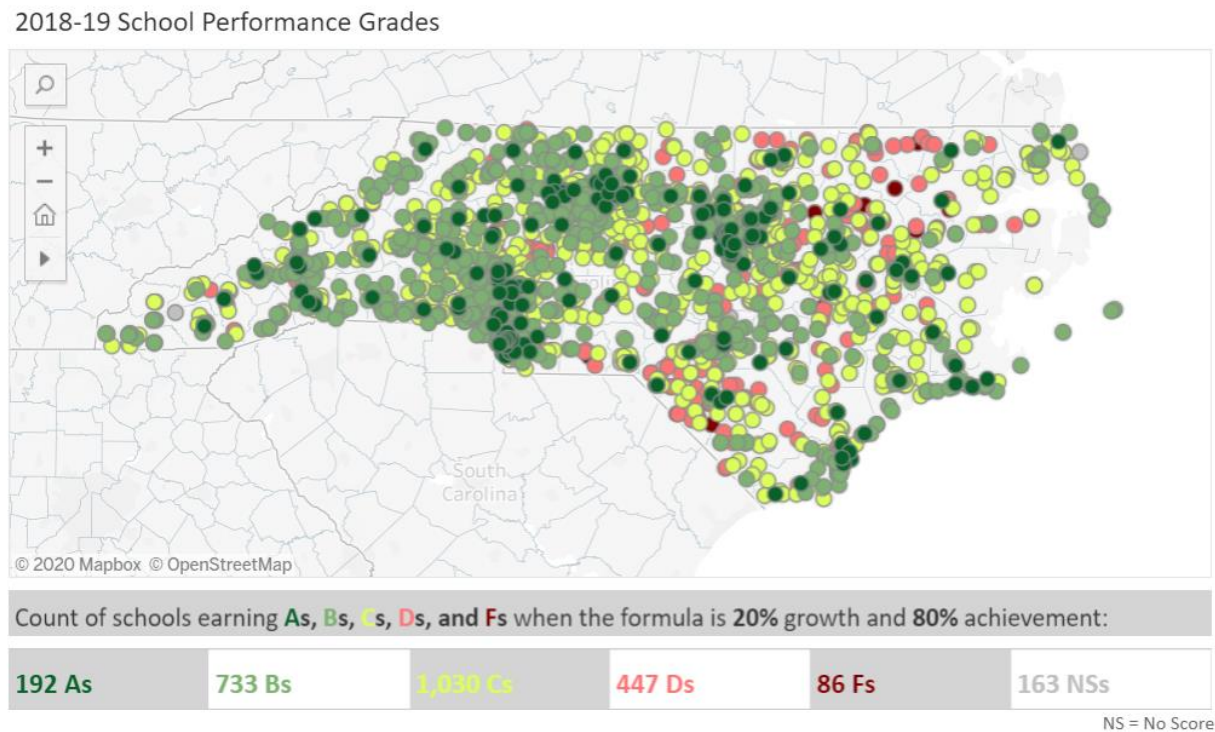
		GROWTH (10-pt, 50-100 scale)						
ACHIEVEMENT (15-pt, 1-100 scale)		A	B	C	D	F		
	A	35	93	30	9	3	170	
	B	75	245	137	62	33	552	
	C	100	362	213	145	117	937	
	D	46	200	147	109	78	580	
	F	6	64	59	46	60	235	
		262	964	586	371	291	<b>2,474</b>	

	A	B	C	D	F
A	1%	4%	1%	0%	0%
B	3%	10%	6%	3%	1%
C	4%	15%	9%	6%	5%
D	2%	8%	6%	4%	3%
F	0%	3%	2%	2%	2%

A second recommendation is to adjust the current weighting from 80/20 to better align with weighting calculations seen in other states. As an example, SREB explored the impact of adjusting to a 60/40 weighting, reflecting the trend of weighting being used nationally. To assist with this review, SREB accessed the EdNC website,<sup>v</sup> which provides a graphical representation of school grades across the state. The website also allows users to adjust the weighting assigned to student achievement and growth to determine the impact that changes would have. Figure 4 shows current grades for schools across the state, using the existing 80/20 weight.

**Figure 4. School performance grades using the 80/20 weight.** Source: EdNC website data.



The second graph below shows the distribution of grades if the weighting was modified to reflect 60% achievement and 40% growth.

**Figure 5. School performance grades using the 60/40 weight.** Source: EdNC website data.

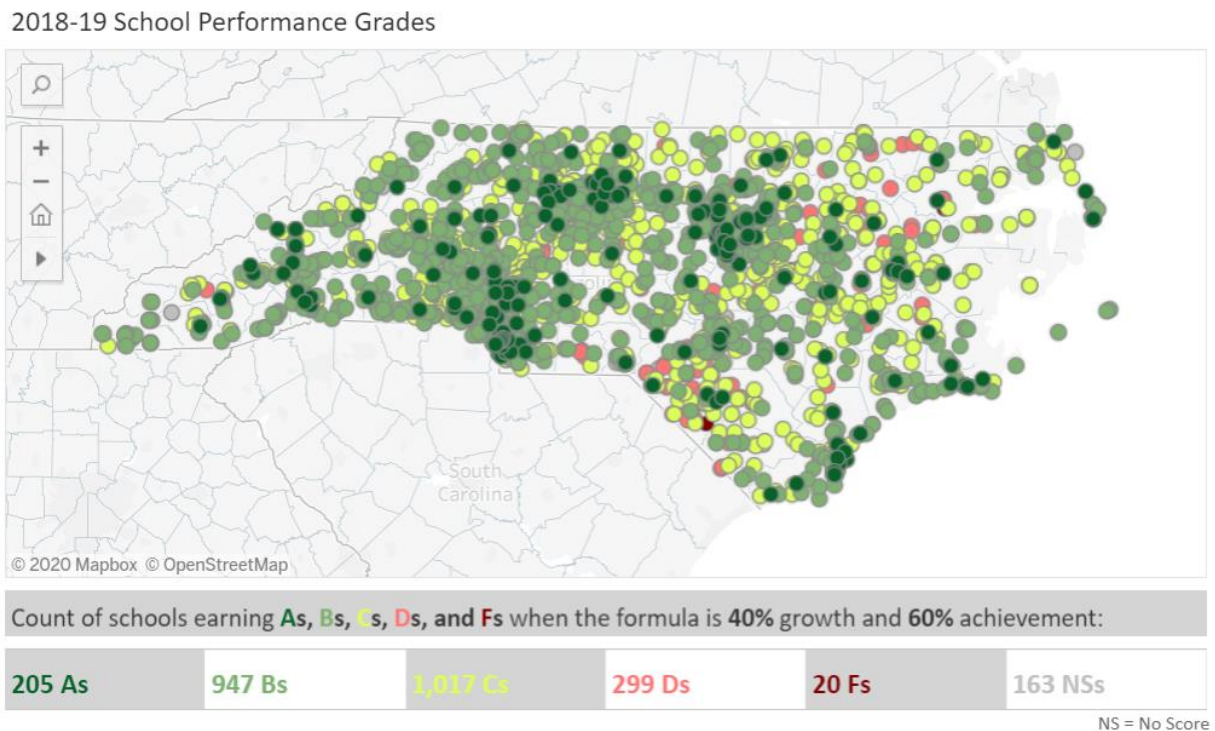


Table 4 provides a comparison of the grade distribution using both the 80/20 and 60/40 calculations.

**Table 4: Comparison of School Grade Distributions Using 80/20 and 60/40 Weights**

Number of Schools at Each Grade Designation Using 80/20 Calculations	Letter Grade	Number of Schools at Each Grade Designation Using 60/40 Calculations
192	A	205
733	B	947
1,030	C	1,017
447	D	299
86	F	20
163	NS	163

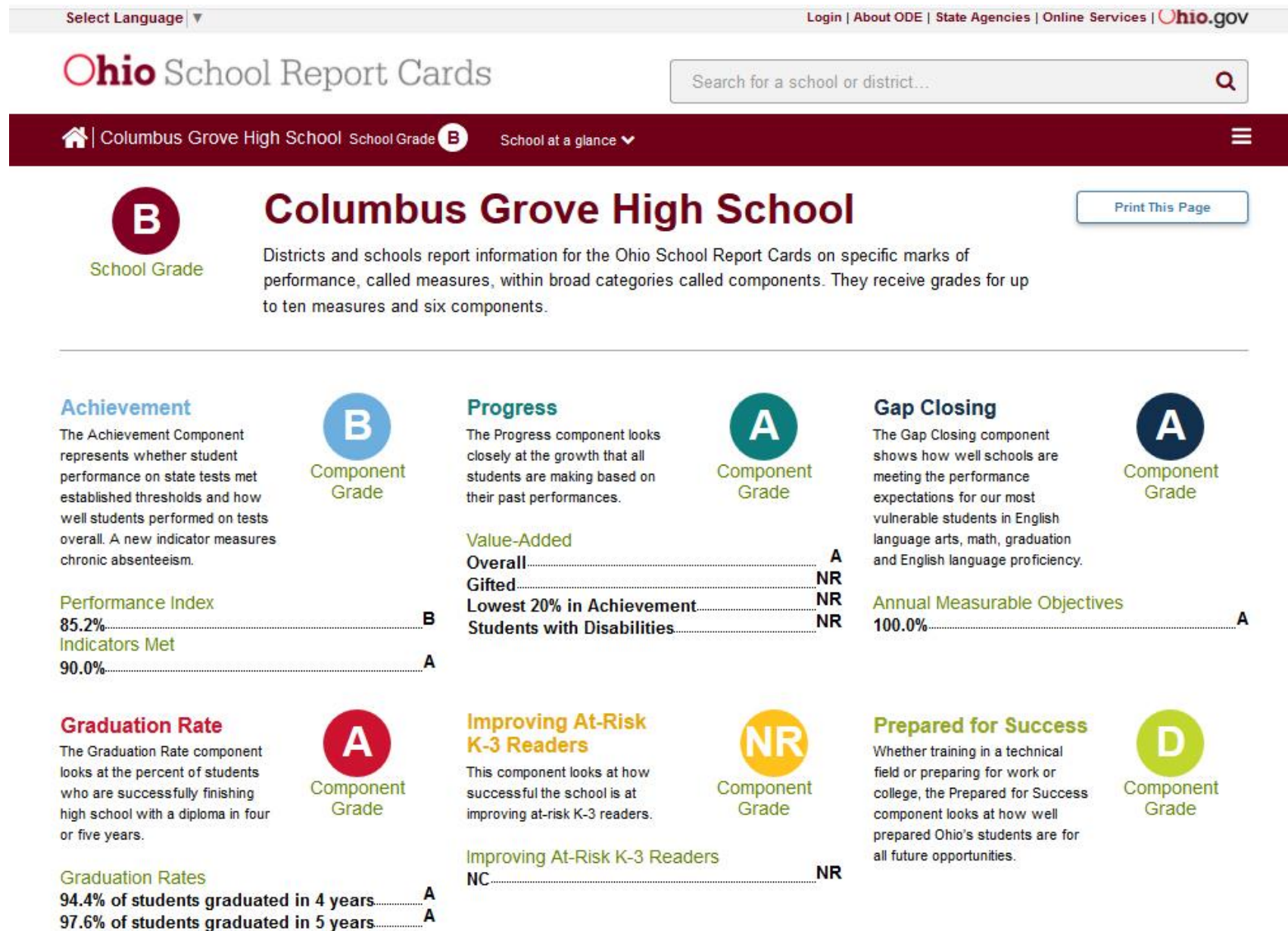
Source: EdNC data.

The current weighting system designates 74% of schools at or above the grade of C. By adjusting the weighting to 60/40, 82% of schools would be designated at or above the grade of C. The state should keep in mind that the adjustment of weighting can continue to mask the performance and growth of students and schools because the two measures would continue to be combined.

The state also has flexibility in setting or stretching the cut scores for each letter grade. Currently, the School Performance Grades use a 15-point scale, e.g., 85-100 is an A, 70-84 is a B, and so on. As the state moves forward in evaluating a weighting system that communicates a school's standing, state leaders will also have to analyze the impact of cut scores.

The Working Group gave high praise to the school report card model shared by Ohio. The data found on Ohio school report cards aligns with the state's ESSA plan. Each report card has an overall school performance grade along with six subscores. A shareholder can find additional information by clicking on each subscore. The overall school performance grade is found at the top of the page and is followed by grades for subscores related to achievement, progress, gap closing, graduation, improving the performance of at-risk K-3 readers and preparation for success.

Figure 6. Sample Ohio School Report Card.





According to the National School Board Association, “ESSA requires that state report cards be concise and presented in an understandable and uniform format accessible to parents with disabilities and parents with limited English proficiency. The mandate makes it easy for parents to find data, but the question here is what data parents may be interested in.”<sup>vi</sup> One of the first items that parents often review is the overall rating of school. States may determine the rating type it assigns to school performance.

As shown in Table 5, our review of accountability reporting types found the following:

- 12 states use A-F grades – 7 of 12 are SREB states
- 12 states use an index – 2 of 12 are SREB states
- 11 states use a descriptive format – 3 of 12 are SREB states
- 5 states use 1-5 stars – 2 of 5 are SREB states
- 4 states use summative ratings
- 6 states use tiers of support

**Table 5: Review of State Accountability Rating Types**

State	Accountability Rating Type
Alabama	Tiers of Support
Alaska	Index
Arizona	A-F
Arkansas	Index
California	No summative rating (Performance levels for indicators: Red, orange, yellow, green, blue)
Colorado	Tiers of Support
Connecticut	Index
Delaware	Descriptive
District of Columbia	1-5 Stars
Florida	A-F
Georgia	Index
Hawaii	Index
Idaho	No summative rating
Illinois	Descriptive
Indiana	A-F
Iowa	Index
Kansas	Descriptive
Kentucky	1-5 Stars
Louisiana	A-F
Maine	Descriptive
Maryland	1-5 Stars
Massachusetts	Descriptive
Michigan	Index
Minnesota	Descriptive
Mississippi	A-F
Missouri	Index
Montana	Other
Nebraska	Descriptive
Nevada	1-5 Stars

State	Accountability Rating Type
New Hampshire	Tiers of Support
New Jersey	Descriptive
New Mexico	A-F
New York	Tiers of Support
North Carolina	A-F
North Dakota	No summative rating
Ohio	A-F
Oklahoma	A-F
Oregon	No summative rating
Pennsylvania	No summative rating (Tiers of Support for Title I Schools, including charter schools)
Rhode Island	1-5 Stars
South Carolina	Descriptive
South Dakota	Index
Tennessee	A-F
Texas	A-F
Utah	A-F
Vermont	Descriptive
Virginia	Tiers of Support
Washington	Index (1-10)
West Virginia	Descriptive
Wisconsin	Index
Wyoming	Index

Source: SREB's review of state accountability systems.

After reviewing the data, many Working Group members expressed concern with the use of A-F designations and indicated a preference for a star rating or a dashboard-like visual display of current progress on growth and achievement. The Working Group was also interested in receiving additional information about the descriptive format used by 11 states. Several times during the Working Group discussion, members identified the need for a descriptive means of communicating definitions as well as innovative practices within schools.

As stated by Working Group members, schools may be stigmatized as F schools, but comprehensive descriptive data can help dispel that stigma. South Carolina is a state that uses a descriptive rating for academics on its school report card. The state rates schools in two areas – Academics and School Environment – with subcomponents for each. The subcomponents for Academics are achievement, preparing for success, English Learners and graduation rate. The subcomponents for School Environment are student engagement, classroom environment, study safety and financial data.

Here is the overall rating scale for academics and school environment:

*Excellent* (School performance substantially exceeds the criteria to ensure all students meet the Profile of the SC Graduate); *Good* (School performance exceeds the criteria to ensure all students meet the Profile of the SC Graduate); *Average* (School performance meets the criteria to ensure all students meet the Profile of the SC Graduate); *Below Average* (School performance is in jeopardy of not meeting the criteria to ensure all

students meet the Profile of the SC Graduate); and *Unsatisfactory* (School performance fails to meet the criteria to ensure all students meet the Profile of the SC Graduate).

To view a sample report card from South Carolina, visit <http://bit.ly/SCReportCard>.

## Retest Scores

During a Working Group meeting, members discussed the current system for retesting students. The timeline related to state assessments and the end of the school year create challenges for providing interventions to students who did not meet proficiency and administering retests. The current testing window is too short to provide adequate supports to students between the first test administration and the date in June in which schools must complete retesting. The current limitations cause districts to provide support students within a two-week window (10 days).

Research has shown that retesting students has little impact unless one of two conditions exists: Students are within one to two questions of reaching proficiency on the test, or there is a substantial remediation session – the equivalent of 20 days of support.

In some states or districts, retests are important because of the high stakes associated with the assessment. For example, there are some places where a student must meet proficiency on an end-of-course assessment in order to graduate from high school, or a student in the elementary or middle grades must meet proficiency to avoid retention.

Based on the challenges and research findings, the Working Group did not express an interest in revising the state's current retest policy and practices.

## Alignment of Accountability to State Plans

The WestEd report found a lack of alignment between North Carolina's assessment system and the state's theory of action as articulated in its ESSA plan. SREB's study found the same to be true for the alignment between the state's accountability system, its ESSA plan and the North Carolina State Board of Education's strategic plan.

The Working Group reviewed the Board's strategic plan and identified data related to each goal and objective. The Working Group came to a consensus on data that should be used to generate a school's overall performance rating and data that should only be reported. Table 6 presents the Working Group's recommendations.

**Table 6: Recommendations from the Working Group Related to the North Carolina State Board Strategic Plan**

<b>Include as Accountability Measures:</b>	<b>Report for Each School/District:</b>
<b>Goal 1 – Eliminate Opportunity Gaps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing average composite score on college entrance exams</li> <li>Increasing access, readiness and attainment of early postsecondary opportunities</li> </ul>	<b>Goal 1 – Eliminate Opportunity Gaps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percentage of 4-year-olds in Pre-K</li> <li>Suspensions and expulsions</li> <li>Measures of community school climate</li> <li>Number of educators of color</li> </ul>
<b>Goal 2 – Improve School and District Performance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growth measures by subgroup</li> <li>Students meeting ESSA yearly measures of interim progress (ELA and math) for all grade levels</li> </ul>	<b>Goal 2 – Improve School and District Performance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Science Proficiency</li> <li>Summary of students' access to technology</li> <li>Financial data dashboard</li> </ul>
<b>Goal 3 – Increase Educator Preparedness to Meet the Needs of Every Student</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No objectives were identified as a measure for accountability</li> </ul>	<b>Goal 3 – Increase Educator Preparedness to Meet the Needs of Every Student</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measures to communicate Advanced Teaching Roles</li> <li>Measure to communicate learning for educators</li> </ul>

Source: North Carolina Accountability Working Group.

SREB highly encourages the state to consider additional accountability measures and reporting elements such as non-degree credentials of value, access to high-quality CTE programs of study in high-demand industry sectors and K-3 readiness.

## Conclusion

North Carolina has a unique opportunity to set and promote a unified vision across all state entities and education shareholders. SREB recommends that North Carolina shareholders come to an agreement on a vision and goals for public school graduates. The state should also develop a vision for its workforce. What must North Carolina's workforce of 2030 look like?

The state's goals should be ambitious, targeting high achievement for all groups of students and emphasizing the need for states to close achievement gaps. Efforts to meet these goals are complicated by rising enrollment, dynamic population changes and an increasing number of students whose primary language is not English.

North Carolina has already come a long way. In the past decade, the state has made gains in publicly funded pre-K access, reading and math achievement, and high school graduation rates.

Once the state establishes a shared vision and goals, it should consider implementing multiple measures of school performance including achievement, growth, K-3 readiness, gap, college and career readiness, and school quality. North Carolina will then be able to determine a weight for each measure that provides a more holistic view of achievement and growth. SREB strongly recommends that these steps take place prior to February 2021 so the state can submit changes to its ESSA state plan.



## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.wested.org/news-events/announcements/sound-basic-education-for-all-an-action-plan-for-north-carolina/>

<sup>ii</sup> Crowe, M. (2019). *Unprepared and unaware – Upskilling the workforce for a decade of uncertainty*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board.

<sup>iii</sup> Anderson, K. (2019). *Three federal statutes, one state plan* (Policy brief). Atlanta, GA: SREB.

<sup>iv</sup> Gagne, J., & Lord, J (2018). *North Carolina state progress report – Looking closer*. Atlanta, GA: SREB.

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.ednc.org/map/2019/10/mapping-the-2018-19-school-report-cards/>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.nsba.org/News/2019/State-Report-Cards>