



Low-Performing Schools Issue Brief

Background

North Carolina first implemented the A-F school performance grades during the 2013-14 academic year. In most cases, two components make up a school's composite score – 80% student achievement/20% student growth.

For a school to be designated as low-performing during academic years 2013-15, it must have failed to meet the minimum growth standards (below growth) and had more than 50% of its students not performing at grade level. A provision in the 2015 State budget changed the definition of a low-performing school to one that receives a school performance grade of D or F and a school growth score of “met expected growth” or “not met expected growth.” So a school that receives a D or F grade can still be considered “low-performing” even if its students are achieving expected levels of year-to-year growth.

There is a strong correlation in school performance and percentage of economically disadvantaged students. The *2017-18 Performance and Growth of North Carolina Public Schools* states, “...schools with a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students, when compared to the state-level results, earned fewer A's and B's and more C's, D's, and F's than schools with lower percentages of economically disadvantaged students.” And then goes on to state, “... Table 12 shows a consistent distribution of growth across schools with varying levels of economically disadvantaged students, except for schools with the lowest percentage of economically disadvantaged students. When compared to the state-level results, schools with the lowest percentage of economically disadvantaged students had a higher percentage of schools designated as exceeded and a lower percentage of schools designated as did not meet. Likewise, schools with the highest percentage of economically disadvantaged students had fewer schools that did not meet growth.”

NCSBA Position

The current definition of a low-performing school should be modified. NCSBA believes a school that is meeting expected student growth targets should not be labeled as low-performing. It is misleading to say that an A or B school not meeting expected growth is doing better by its students than a D or F school that meets expected academic growth. According to the 2017-18 State accountability report:

- 81 schools with an overall grade of A or B DID NOT meet expected growth.¹

¹ DPI, 2017-18 Performance and Growth of North Carolina Public Schools, p.10

- 227 schools with an overall grade of D or F met expected growth.²

Students in those A and B schools (1st bullet) are clearly testing better. However, the classroom staff/administrators in those D and F schools (2nd bullet) are outperforming their colleagues in the higher graded schools that did not meet expected growth. So, why should a D school that happened to have poor performing students show up on day one be penalized even though those teachers are growing their students more than the B school that randomly had better prepared students register there?

The current definition of low-performing is not in-line with the intent of the A-F grading system – to hold schools accountable. D or F schools that meet growth have students that are low-performing, “the school” (classroom staff/administrators) is not low-performing. It does not benefit students or educators to over-identify schools as “low-performing.” If a school is at least meeting minimum growth levels it means that the teachers/administrators are still improving student learning even if the test scores remain low by absolute standards.

Low performing schools are not acceptable and need to be held accountable. That is why NCSBA believes grants for additional interventions should be made available for schools and districts that are not making the grade. The grant process would require applicants to develop an innovative and sustainable plan to improve student outcomes before funds are distributed.

² DPI, 2017-18 Performance and Growth of North Carolina Public Schools, p.10