



School Grades Issue Brief

A-F Grading System

North Carolina implemented A-F school performance grades in the 2013-14 school year as part of the Excellent Public Schools Act.¹ The General Assembly required A-F letter grades be included as a component of end of year report cards for each school. North Carolina is one of fifteen states that have established public school letter grade accountability systems.²

For public schools in North Carolina, two components make up the composite score: 80% school achievement and 20% school growth.³ To calculate a school achievement score, North Carolina's A-F letter grading system assigns points as follows⁴:

Elementary and middle schools

- 1 point for each percent of their students in grades 3 through 8 who achieve proficiency (scoring at Level III -V) on annual assessments in math, reading, and English language;
- 1 point for each percent of their students in grades 3 through 8 who progress in achieving English language proficiency;
- 1 point for each percent of their students in grades 5 through 8 who achieve proficiency on annual science assessments.

High schools

- 1 point for each percent of their students who achieve proficiency on required end of course (EOC) Algebra I, Integrated Math I, English II, and Biology assessments;
- 1 point for each percent of their students who successfully pass Algebra II or Integrated Math III;
- 1 point for each percent of their students who achieve the minimum score on a nationally normed test of college readiness (ACT) required for admission to a school in the UNC system;
- 1 point for each percent of their students who graduate within four years of entering high school;
- 1 point for each percent of their students who demonstrate workplace readiness on a nationally normed test of workplace readiness (ACT WorkKeys);
- 1 point for each percent of their students who progress in achieving English language proficiency.

A school's overall grade is to be calculated based on the following 15-point scale through the 2018-19 school year.

A = 85–100 **B** = 70–84 **C** = 55–69 **D** = 40–54 **F** = 39 or Less

The grading scale is set to revert to a 10-point scale for the 2019-20 school year.⁵

¹ S.L. 2012-142, Sec. 7A.3.

² Foundation for Excellence in Education (ExcelinEd), Education Playbook – 2018, School Accountability Policy Brief.

³ G.S. 115C-83.15(d).

⁴ G.S. 115C-83.15(b).

⁵ S.L. 2016-94, Sec. 8.19.

Bonuses and Growth Scores

The General Assembly began tying salary bonuses for teachers to student growth scores in 2016 with the creation of the Third Grade Read to Achieve Teacher Bonus Program.⁶ The bonuses based on student growth scores in FY 2018-19 are as follows:

- Third Grade Read to Achieve Teacher Bonus - \$5 million is appropriated for teachers in the top 25% of teachers in the state and top 25% in their LEA in student growth index scores for third grade reading (State bonus capped at \$3,500, but LEA can match this amount).⁷
- Fourth and Fifth Grade Reading Teacher Bonus - A teacher can earn \$2,000 bonuses if they are in the top 25% of teachers in the State or the top 25% in their LEA according to the student growth index score for fourth or fifth grade reading from the previous school year. (State bonus capped at \$4,000).⁸
- Fourth to Eighth Grade Math Teacher Bonus - A teacher can earn \$2,000 bonuses if they are in the top 25% of teachers in the State or the top 25% in their LEA according to the student growth index score for fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, or eighth grade math from the previous school year. (State bonus capped at \$4,000).⁹

For principals, both salary and bonuses are tied to school growth scores. The 2018-2019 principal salary schedule is based on average daily membership and whether the school met or exceeded growth in prior years as follows¹⁰:

Avg. Daily Membership	Base	Met Growth	Exceeded Growth
0-400	\$66,010	\$72,611	\$79,212
401-700	\$69,311	\$76,242	\$83,173
701-1,000	\$72,611	\$79,872	\$87,133
1,001-1,300	\$75,912	\$83,503	\$91,094
1,301+	\$79,212	\$87,133	\$95,054

The principal bonus is awarded to principals who supervised a school for most of the previous school year if that school was in the top fifty percent (50%) of school growth in the State during the previous school year.

NCSBA Position

NCSBA believes that if student growth scores are a major factor in teacher bonuses and principal salary and bonuses, then student growth should be a larger percentage of the overall school performance score and grade. Increasing the current weight of student growth from 20% will more accurately reflect the school's impact on increasing student achievement.

Additionally, the General Assembly should make permanent the 15-point scale for A-F grades that have been in place for three years. The public has become familiar with the current grading system and the change to a 10-point scale will cause some schools' letter grades to drop when there has been no change in student achievement.

⁶ S.L. 2016-94, Sec. 9.7.

⁷ S.L. 2017-57, Sec. 8.8C.

⁸ S.L. 2018-5, Sec. 8.11.

⁹ S.L. 2018-5, Sec. 8.12.

¹⁰ S.L. 2018-5, Sec. 8.2.