



# School Accountability and Performance Grades

*Issue Brief*

**2019**



# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

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- 01 BACKGROUND & FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIREMENTS**
- 02 TYPES OF ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS**
  - Summative Systems of Accountability
  - Non-Summative Systems of Accountability
- 03 NORTH CAROLINA'S ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM**
- 04 CONSIDERATIONS & QUESTIONS REGARDING ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS**
  - Balancing Growth and Proficiency
  - Inclusion of Subgroup Performance
  - Questions for Policymakers to Consider



# School Accountability And Performance Grades

## Issue Brief

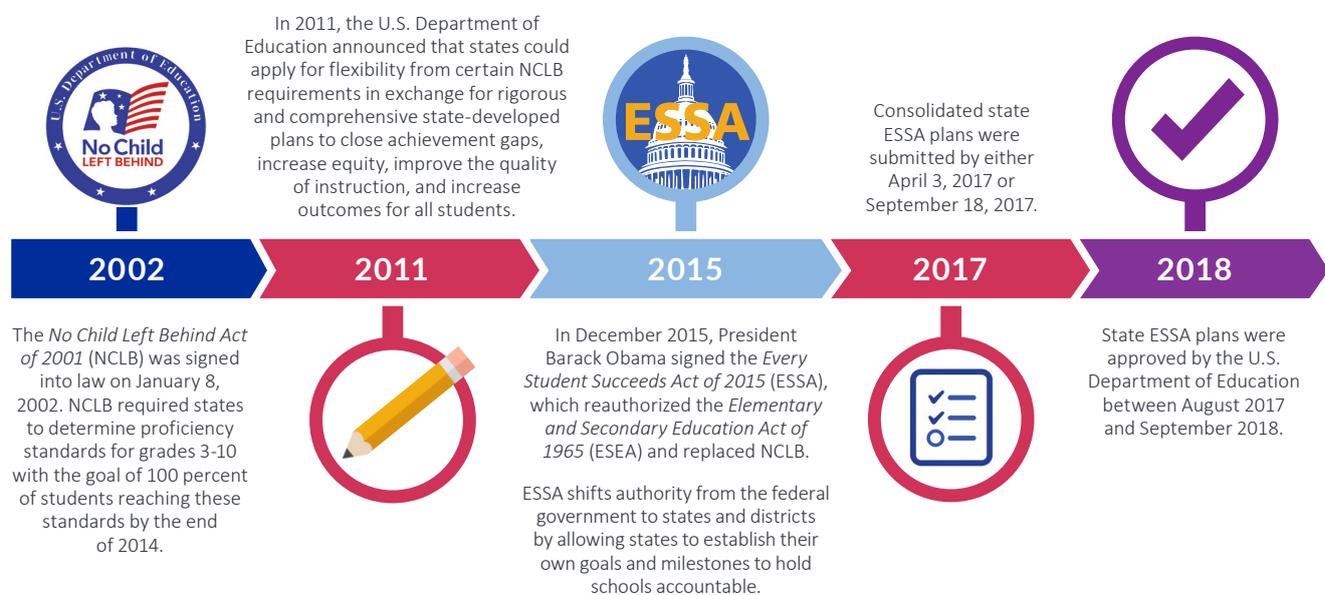
### BACKGROUND

States utilize accountability systems to measure student achievement, hold schools and districts accountable, and communicate results to parents and the public. Accountability data provides an opportunity for states to identify schools and districts that need support in order to improve student outcomes. There are many approaches to accountability, and under the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), each state was given the authority to determine the specifics of what is measured and how those measures are used in school accountability.

### FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIREMENTS

ESSA replaced *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) in December 2015. NCLB required the use of test-based student outcomes for school accountability systems. While ESSA maintains this requirement to a degree, the law gives more flexibility to states to include measures beyond assessments. States submitted ESSA plans to the U.S. Department of Education for approval in either April or September of 2017, and all plans were approved by September 2018.

#### Timeline of Federal Accountability Requirements



ESSA allows states to establish their own accountability systems to measure and report outcomes of school quality and student success. ESSA requires states to include the following five indicators in their school accountability systems:

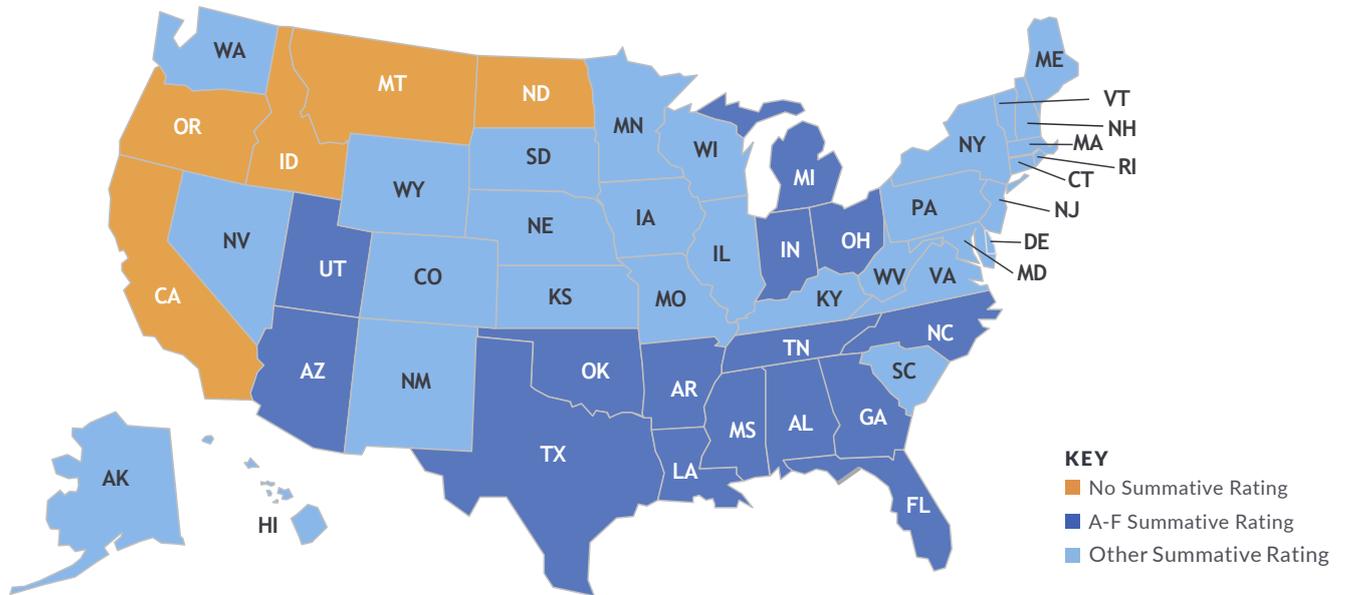
- 1) **Academic Achievement** | Student proficiency on state assessments in math and ELA.
- 2) **Additional Measure of Academic Success (Only required for K-8)** | Either a measure of student growth or another valid and reliable statewide academic indicator.
- 3) **Graduation Rate (High school only)** | At a minimum, states must include the four-year cohort graduation rate.
- 4) **English Language Proficiency** | Progress in achieving English language proficiency for English learners on English language proficiency tests.
- 5) **School Quality or Student Success** | Any reliable, comparable, and statewide measure that allows for meaningful differentiation in school performance.



## TYPES OF ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

States across the country have chosen to use either summative or non-summative accountability systems. **Summative systems** provide a single rating for a school based on the measures selected. **Non-summative systems** provide ratings for each measure or indicator but do not define overall performance.

National Landscape of Types of Accountability Systems



### Summative Systems of Accountability

Nationally, 45 states plus the District of Columbia provide summative ratings for schools using a variety of scales and formats.<sup>1</sup> The following are some examples:

#### A-F Ratings

Arizona designed their **A-F ranking system** with the intention of providing schools with quantitative feedback on areas for improvement, empowering parents with information when making school choices, and holding schools accountable.

#### Descriptive Ratings

West Virginia transitioned away from the A-F report card in 2018 opting instead to utilize a Balanced Scorecard system. This system classifies schools as either **exceeding standards, meeting standards, partially meeting standards, or not meeting standards**.

#### Index Ratings

Hawai'i uses a point-based index with schools receiving a **rating of between one and 100**. Academic achievement and growth, graduation rates, chronic absenteeism rates, school climate feedback, special education inclusion rates, and English language learner proficiency are given points based on the index and then summed to create an overall summative school rating.

#### Star Ratings

Maryland uses a composite score that is calculated numerically in a percentile form, which is then translated into a **range of one to five stars**. The star rating is clearly indicated on the top of a report card and provides a starting point for stakeholders as they understand the overall performance of the school. The score includes student academic growth and achievement, graduation rates, English language learners progress, and postsecondary readiness.

### Non-Summative Systems of Accountability

Only five states have chosen not to include a summative rating of schools. Beginning in 2017, California transitioned to a **color-coded school dashboard**, emphasizing a focus on holistic accountability beyond test scores.



## NORTH CAROLINA'S ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

Under current North Carolina state legislation and the North Carolina ESSA plan, schools receive a School Performance Score on a scale of zero to 100 which correlates to an A-F School Performance Grade. School Performance Grades are based on a 10-point scale; however, an annual waiver allows schools to be graded on a 15-point scale.

The total score calculation, which include the five required categories of indicators described on page one, is weighted heavily (80 percent of the total score) towards **achievement indicators** which are based on a specific level of achievement at one moment in time. The calculation also includes a **school growth index** (20 percent of the total score), representing improvement over time as measured by the school Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) composite index of growth.

ELEMENTARY & MIDDLE SCHOOL INDICATORS			HIGH SCHOOL INDICATORS		
	Weight	Measure		Weight	Measure
Total Proficiency 80%	20%	ELA Proficiency	Total Proficiency 80%	10%	ELA Proficiency
	20%	Math Proficiency		10%	Math Proficiency
	20%	English Language Proficiency		10%	English Language Proficiency
	20%	Science Proficiency		10%	Biology Proficiency
Total Growth 20%	20%	Growth in ELA, Math, and Science		10%	ACT (students achieving UNC system minimum composite score of 17) OR ACT WorkKeys (students earning Silver Certificate or higher)
				10%	4-year Graduation Rate
				10%	Students passing NC Math 3 Courses
			10%	English Language Proficiency	
Total Growth 20%	20%	Growth in ELA and Math	Total Growth 20%	20%	Growth in ELA and Math

School performance grades are reported publicly every September and are included on each school's report card. An example of a school performance grade report below illustrates how this information is shared with families and the public.



**NORTH CAROLINA  
SCHOOL REPORT CARDS**

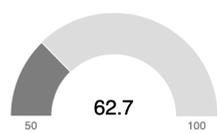
**Bunn Elementary,  
Franklin County Schools**

2016-17 Overall Performance i

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C

2016-17  
GRADE



62.7

ACADEMIC GROWTH

**Grade History** ↻

Growth Range	Growth Status
50.0-69.9	Not Met
70.0-84.9	Met
85.0-100.0	Exceeded

63

PERFORMANCE GRADE SCORE

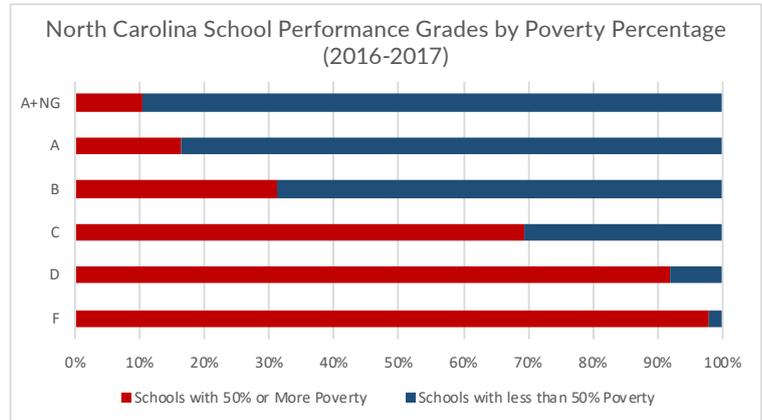


## CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

### Balancing Growth and Proficiency

Nationally, there has been a debate about the use of growth versus proficiency measures in school accountability systems. Previous federal policies such as NCLB focused primarily on measuring student proficiency. However, studies have found that proficiency scores are highly correlated with poverty, which means that low-income schools rated primarily on proficiency will likely get the worst scores.<sup>ii</sup>

North Carolina currently assigns 20 percent of the overall School Performance Score to growth for all schools, but a number of states take different approaches to growth. For example, under the Illinois ESSA plan, **academic growth is given increased importance with 50 percent of a school’s A-F grade being determined by student growth.** In Alabama, growth is weighted differently depending on the school level as **elementary and middle schools have a growth weight of 50 percent, while high schools have a growth weight of 30 percent.**



### Inclusion of Subgroup Performance

While ESSA requires that data be reported by subgroup, it does not require that subgroup performance be used as part of the overall school performance calculation. **North Carolina is one of 12 states that do not include subgroups in all school performance ratings.**<sup>iii</sup> Using average rates rather than disaggregating data by race and economic status can mask variations in performance among subgroups. In the 2017-2018 school year, 22 percent of schools that received summative ratings of “A” received D or F grades for a subgroup of students, while 85 percent of schools that received summative ratings of a “B” received D or F grades for a subgroup of students.<sup>iv</sup>

## QUESTIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS TO CONSIDER

- 1 How would overall ratings for a high performance/low growth school compare to a low performance/high growth school in the current accountability system? What incentives does this system promote?
- 2 How can accountability systems be used to identify specific areas where schools are in need of improvement?
- 3 Are school performance grades communicated to parents in a way that is accessible and easy to understand?
- 4 How are changes to the school accountability system being communicated to schools, parents, and the public?

## RESOURCES | For Further Information

<sup>i</sup>Education Commission of the States, “50-State Comparison: States’ School Accountability Systems”

<sup>ii</sup>Reardon, Sean. “The Widening Academic Achievement Gap Between the Rich and Poor: New Evidence and Possible Explanations.” *The Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children’s Life Chances*. Edited by Greg J. Duncan and Richard J. Murnane. 2001. Pg. 95.

<sup>iii</sup>The Alliance for Excellent Education, “Too Many States Minimize Student Subgroup Performance in ESSA Accountability Systems.”

<sup>iv</sup>NC Department of Public Instruction: 2017-18 School Performance Grades





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