



TOP 10

EDUCATION ISSUES

2015

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INTRODUCTION

Nearly 20 years ago, the Public School Forum of North Carolina began publishing its annual forecast of the ten issues most likely to impact schools across the state. This year the Forum casts a wary but hopeful eye toward a new year with its *Top Ten Education Issues for 2015*.

Numerous significant issues loom on the horizon. Teacher pay will certainly be a top issue again in 2015. While improved compared with a year ago, average teacher pay still rests well below the national average. We still have too many excellent teachers and school leaders leaving the profession to pursue opportunities in other fields and other states, and perhaps even more worrisome, too few new candidates entering pipelines to replace them. The impending release of North Carolina's first-ever A-F school grades, with a heavy emphasis on single point-in-time test scores as opposed to improved student performance over time, has the potential to demoralize teachers, school leaders, parents, and students, particularly in schools facing the greatest challenges.

One area to watch is state revenues. If early forecasts turn out to be correct, state resources could be stretched at a time when we are asking our public schools to do more than ever before: to implement new, rigorous standards; develop new teaching roles and compensation structures; shift to promising elements of digital-age learning models; offer expanded learning opportunities for students; use data and assessments well to inform and shape classroom instruction; and prepare all students in an increasingly diverse population to persist and succeed in college and the workforce.

Yet there is reason for cautious optimism. In 2014, North Carolinians focused significant attention on teacher pay. State leaders responded by enacting a significant salary increase, weighted heavily toward beginning teachers, who research shows tend to leave in large numbers within their first five years. In public dialogue and draft legislation, members of the General Assembly, Governor McCrory, and outside groups engaged in thoughtful dialogue on several of the issues that now appear on our Top Ten list for 2015. Promising proposals arose last session related to new roles and pay incentives for teachers; increasing the weight given to student growth in A-F grades; focusing on charter school quality, innovation, and accountability; maintaining high standards; funding teacher pipeline programs and afterschool initiatives; and looking critically at the number and type of assessments administered in our state's schools.

The Forum welcomes your partnership as we continue our work as a nonpartisan champion for public education in North Carolina, informing and shaping consensus-driven, evidence-based education policymaking in 2015.

> ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

For each of the Top Ten Education Issues discussed on the following pages, we offer an overview of the issue and a set of principles we hope will guide consideration of the issue by all federal, state, and local leaders who, like us, understand that public schools are the key to our children's futures and our collective wellbeing and prosperity. Our Top Ten Issues focus on K-12 education. The Public School Forum also strongly encourages state leaders to support and build on North Carolina's strengths in pre-K and higher education.

BUILD A PRINCIPLED PATH ON TEACHER COMPENSATION

1

- › Develop highly paid opportunities for teachers to advance in their careers without leaving the classroom
- › Maintain the strong upward salary trend for North Carolina's teachers
- › Target pay incentives to priority areas shown by research to have greatest effect
- › Increase salaries for veteran teachers

MAKE SENSE OF A-F SCHOOL PERFORMANCE GRADES

2

- › Re-evaluate the weight given to student growth in A-F grades
- › Consider revising school performance scores to include indicators of college and workforce readiness and schools' effectiveness closing achievement gaps
- › Improve the A-F system over time without encouraging false comparisons with prior versions
- › Use letter grades to support and improve public schools, not to tear them down

MAINTAIN HIGH STANDARDS

3

- › Adhere to the review criteria in proposing modifications to the standards
- › Support rigorous professional development for classroom teachers to implement new standards

EMPHASIZE QUALITY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOL CHOICE

4

- › Support gold-standard research on who North Carolina charter schools serve and how well they serve them
- › Encourage innovation in staffing and teaching methods
- › Support collaboration and sharing of promising practices among charter and district schools
- › Make equity a guiding force in NC charter sector growth
- › Boost accountability for low-performing and high-performing charter schools
- › Establish fair funding formulas and practices
- › Proceed with caution on virtual charters
- › Limit the use of vouchers to disadvantaged students who have not been served well in public schools

TOP 10

EDUCATION ISSUES

2015 SUMMARY

5

EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN ANY TIME, ANY PLACE, AT ANY PACE

- › Ensure all children and youth have access to a variety of quality Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELOs)
- › Increase innovation in competitive grants for afterschool programs
- › Create and publicize expanded learning career paths
- › Provide access to a quality data collection tool for use by ELOs

6

RECRUIT AND RETAIN EXCELLENT TEACHERS

- › Change the conversation toward valuing teachers as professionals
- › Increase the number of high school students pursuing careers in teaching, particularly in high-need fields
- › Encourage collaboration between colleges of education and training initiatives for beginning teachers
- › Recognize the unique importance of excellent, veteran teachers and create incentives for them to remain in the classroom

7

MANAGE STUDENT ENROLLMENT GROWTH

- › Restore student growth funding to the General Assembly's base budget
- › Release funding to districts in a timely fashion to allow school and district leaders to make effective operational decisions
- › Continue to strategically increase per-pupil spending

8

SHIFT TO ELEMENTS OF A DIGITAL-AGE LEARNING MODEL

- › Consider policy shifts, flexibility, and pilot initiatives to accelerate the transition to competency-based and personalized learning
- › Prioritize equitable access during the transition to digital-age learning models
- › Emphasize preparation of teachers to integrate new technologies into the classroom
- › Encourage and support collaboration among schools and districts in technology selection and purchasing

9

STREAMLINE ASSESSMENTS

- › Promote a balanced assessment system that includes formative and summative assessments
- › Analyze assessments' value to ensure that all required tests have significant and well-defined purposes
- › Review assessments regularly for age-appropriateness in number and scope

10

MEET MILESTONES ON THE PATH TO COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

- › Develop a comprehensive College and Career Readiness Continuum
- › Pilot and study the effectiveness of programs that address major milestones on the path to college and career readiness
- › Track data on postsecondary attainment, and link that data back to K-12 and pre-K programs and other significant inputs

1

BUILD A PRINCIPLED PATH ON TEACHER COMPENSATION

Prior to last year's teacher pay raises, North Carolina ranked near the bottom, regionally and nationally, in many teacher pay categories, including average teacher salaries and beginning teacher salaries. From 1999-2013, North Carolina's teachers as a whole endured a 14.7 drop in their annual salaries, by far the steepest decline in the country. No other state's average salary dropped more than 10 percent in the same period, and no other state in the Southeast fell more than 6.5 percent.

Thankfully, the General Assembly and Governor McCrory acted in the summer of 2014 to provide a substantial raise for teachers in the early years of their careers, with more wide-ranging impacts on veteran teachers. The new salary schedule provides teachers in their first five years of teaching a 7.1 percent pay bump compared to the old schedule. The largest increase applies to teachers entering years 6-8, who **receive 11.0 to 17.1 percent more** now than they would have under the old salary schedule. Teachers entering years 11-29 earn anywhere from 0.3 to 7.5 percent more. But a teacher entering year 30 actually **earns 1.1 percent less** this year under the new salary schedule than she would have under the old schedule.¹

Looking at lifetime earnings, a beginning teacher in North Carolina who teaches for 35 years will earn \$63,193 more (\$1,806 per year, on average) over the course of her career under the new salary schedule.

The 2014 raises were a strong step in the right direction. Nevertheless, teacher compensation remains the top education issue for 2015 because there is so much more to be done. Attracting and retaining the best teachers in the nation requires a sustained, dynamic approach to teacher compensation. The state's 14-year, 14.7 percent salary slide cannot be erased overnight or through across-the-board pay raises alone.

STATE	CHANGE IN AVG. TEACHER SALARY, 1999-2000 TO 2012-13 (%)
Wyoming	24.2
North Dakota	16.0
Massachusetts	14.9
Montana	13.9
Louisiana	13.6
D.C.	10.2
Maryland	8.4
New York	8.0
New Hampshire	7.8
Nebraska	7.7
California	6.4
Iowa	5.7
New Mexico	4.7
Nevada	4.0
Minnesota	3.4
Utah	3.4
Oklahoma	3.2
Alaska	3.1
Ohio	2.6
Idaho	2.4
Arkansas	2.2
Vermont	1.8
Oregon	1.6
Kentucky	1.2
South Dakota	-0.4
Kansas	-0.7
Maine	-1.0
Arizona	-1.1
Rhode Island	-1.3
United States avg.	-1.3
Connecticut	-1.4
Delaware	-1.7
Wisconsin	-1.9
Hawaii	-2.1
Missouri	-2.5
Tennessee	-2.7
South Carolina	-2.8
West Virginia	-3.0
New Jersey	-3.2
Mississippi	-3.5
Pennsylvania	-3.8
Alabama	-4.4
Colorado	-4.4
Washington	-4.5
Georgia	-5.7
Virginia	-5.8
Texas	-6.3
Florida	-6.5
Illinois	-6.9
Michigan	-8.2
Indiana	-10.0
> NORTH CAROLINA	-14.7 <

¹ All calculations of teacher salaries under the old schedule include longevity pay, to allow accurate comparison with salaries under the current schedule, which have longevity pay "built in."

> THE IMPACT OF LOCAL SALARY SUPPLEMENTS ON TEACHER PAY

Much attention was rightly paid in 2014 to the state's funding of teacher salaries. But most North Carolina teachers also earn Local Salary Supplements, which range from \$100 up to almost \$6,500. Supplements tend to be higher in large, urban districts. Eight districts—seven of which have populations under 22,000—do not offer local supplements.

SCHOOL SYSTEM	AVG. SUPPLEMENT (2013-14)
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	6,376
Guilford County	4,656
Buncombe County	3,785
Rockingham County	2,076
Surry County	1,284
Gates County	550

The 2014 raises were a strong step in the right direction. Nevertheless, teacher compensation remains the top education issue for 2015 because there is so much more to be done.

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2015

The Public School Forum of North Carolina recommends a multi-pronged approach to build upon the positive steps taken with the 2014 teacher pay raise.

- > **Develop highly paid opportunities for teachers to advance in their careers without leaving the classroom.** State leaders should afford substantial leeway to districts to design and market innovative roles for teachers, and to differentiate pay based on the skills and competencies demanded by these roles. Districts should then develop a process to engage teachers directly in the design and implementation of these new roles. The state should provide sufficient financial support to enable low-wealth districts to take full advantage of this flexibility to attract and retain excellent teachers through redesigned roles. The state should also establish and maintain a fair system for compensating districts for state-funded teaching positions that districts opt to “exchange” for other, newly designed positions or to support higher pay for existing positions.
- > **Maintain the strong upward salary trend for North Carolina's teachers.** In the upcoming legislative session, members of the General Assembly and Governor McCrory should continue investing in the school-based factor shown by research to matter most to student outcomes: great teachers. Our students' long-range success depends on a sustained commitment to teacher pay that raises our state's salaries to be competitive with other states in the Southeast and across the country, and then to keep them there year after year.
- > **Target pay incentives to priority areas shown by research to have greatest effect.** In 2014, legislators and the Governor tailored pay raises to increase pay significantly for teachers in the early years of their careers, in line with research showing that this is when teachers grow most in their effectiveness, and when far too many leave the profession. Moving forward, state leaders should also target pay incentives to reward teachers for obtaining credentials with proven benefits for student learning outcomes, such as master's degrees in math, science, and other specialty areas, and for those opting to teach and remain in high-need subjects or in schools and districts experiencing chronic shortages of highly effective teachers.
- > **Increase salaries for veteran teachers.** It was widely acknowledged after the last session that many veteran teachers received meager raises, at the same time that pay for newer teachers improved dramatically. While years of experience alone should not dictate teacher pay priorities, given the past several years of salary stagnation, state leaders should consider boosting the pay of longer-serving teachers, who benefited least from the teacher pay raises of 2014.

2

MAKE SENSE OF A-F SCHOOL PERFORMANCE GRADES

In February 2015, for the first time, every public school in North Carolina will receive a **School Performance Grade** of A, B, C, D, or F, based on student data from the 2013-14 academic year. For most schools, the grade will be a combination of two factors:

- > **School Achievement Score (80% of overall grade)**
Based on the percentages of students proficient on end-of-grade and end-of-course tests, graduation rate, and college and workplace readiness measures.
- > **School Growth Score (20% of overall grade)**
Based on improvement on the school achievement score factors from one year to the next, using EVAAS, a tool that measures the impact schools and teachers have on students' academic progress.²

In 2013, North Carolina adopted new, rigorous standards that resulted in significant drops in student proficiency scores and growth measures. State and district officials are warning that the School Performance Grades may similarly result in low marks that reflect more on the new grading system itself than on actual student performance. Many are projecting that a large percentage of the state's schools will receive grades of C or lower. Moreover, absent legislative action, next year (2015-16) the cut points for every letter grade will become even stricter, likely resulting in a second round of disappointing grades.

North Carolina is one of 15 states nationally and one of eight states in the Southeast to have adopted an A-F grading system. Supporters of these systems say that they hold schools and districts accountable for results, provide parents with an understandable marker of performance, and encourage school improvement efforts. Common complaints include that many A-F grade systems inadequately account for student growth and other important measures of school quality, and that they create incentives for schools to serve students on the borderline at the expense of the lowest- and highest-performing students. In some states, the grading scales and underlying criteria have changed over time, resulting in confusion, inconsistency, and charges of political gamesmanship. Finally, critics of A-F grading say that the letter grades are too often used to criticize and punish failing schools rather than to target resources and assistance to schools and students that need it most.

North Carolina is one of 15 states nationally and one of eight states in the Southeast to have adopted an A-F grading system.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE GRADES AND CUT SCORES

LETTER GRADE	2013-14 (TO BE RELEASED IN FEBRUARY 2015)	BEGINNING 2014-15
A	85	90
B	70	80
C	55	70
D	40	60
F	< 40	< 60

² N.C. Gen. Stat. 115C-83.15 (2014). The law, updated in 2014 (see House Bill 230), contains an "escape hatch" through which schools that have met "expected growth" may choose for the achievement score to count for 100% of the overall school performance grade.



LOOKING AHEAD IN 2015

The Forum recommends leaders focus on improving the A-F grading system.

- › **Re-evaluate the weight given to student growth in A-F grades.** A 2014 House proposal would have flipped the relative weights of performance (to 20%) and growth (to 80%). These and other weights (e.g., 50/50) deserve careful consideration as state leaders determine how best to capture the impact of school-based factors on student learning in performance scores and letter grades. One set of options would involve affording schools multiple grading alternatives. This approach could result in a flexible but fair system that acknowledged and respected differences among schools and student populations while maintaining high standards for all. Another alternative would be to create a grade appeals process such as the one in place in Indiana to respond to schools for which the grading system does not provide an accurate picture of improvement and performance.
- › **Consider revising school performance scores to include indicators of college and workforce readiness and schools' effectiveness closing achievement gaps.** Virginia's A-F grading system, which will be implemented for the first time in 2014-15, bases letter grades 50 percent on proficiency, 25 percent on growth, and 25 percent on growth among the school's lowest-performing students. North Carolina leaders should similarly consider

incorporating indicators into the calculation of school performance scores to reward schools for serving disadvantaged students well. Leaders should also look for opportunities to add indicators that address additional grade levels and subjects and more aspects of student learning than are reflected in end-of-grade and end-of-course standardized tests.

- › **Improve the A-F system over time without encouraging false comparisons with prior versions.** As with any new system, leaders must be open to improving the A-F system over time. At the same time, leaders should be transparent about any changes made and their effect on the ability to compare school performance scores or grades from year to year, to avoid evolution to lower standards and inflated grades, or toward increasingly unattainable targets.
- › **Use letter grades to support and improve public schools, not to tear them down.** Schools that persistently receive low grades under fair and transparent A-F grading systems warrant strong and sustained interventions, including increased funding and incentives for highly effective teachers and leaders to join their teams. Used unwisely, A-F grading systems may destabilize schools that are actually performing well, and demoralize teachers, school leaders, and families, particularly those working in or attending schools that receive low grades.

3

MAINTAIN HIGH STANDARDS

Today's students are preparing to enter a world in which colleges and businesses are demanding more than ever before. Business leaders, policymakers, educators, and parents see the need for high quality standards that improve student achievement and close learning gaps. In 2010, North Carolina adopted the Common Core State Standards for English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics, with statewide implementation beginning in 2012-13. Together, these standards and the NC Essential Standards in all other subjects make up the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*.

Passed in the 2014 legislative session, Senate Bill 812 directed the State Board of Education to review and propose modifications to the ELA and math standards. This legislation also created an advisory Academic Standards Review Commission to conduct its own review and make recommendations to the State Board.

The ELA and math standards engendered deep division in North Carolina in 2014. Rifts arose over whether the standards were age-level and developmentally appropriate, and whether they would facilitate students meeting the level of academic achievement they need to be successful in school, careers, and life.

Supporters maintain that the standards are rigorous academic guidelines that emphasize procedural skill and conceptual understanding; that will provide a foundation for states, districts, and teachers to more effectively collaborate to accelerate student learning; and that will facilitate continuity for students who move from one school district to another, as well as from state to state. By providing a common set of benchmarks, the current standards will also enable comparison of student academic achievement across states. Some of the strongest advocates for the current standards are businesses and educators, with leaders from both groups emphasizing the standards' rigor and connection to skills needed in tomorrow's workforce.³

Opposition to the current standards includes concerns that the standards may dictate curricular choices, and that the standards represent federal overreaching because the Obama Administration has supported the Common Core, prioritized high standards in the Race to the Top grant program, and supported two consortia that have been designing national assessments aligned with the standards. Some argue that certain standards are not age-level or developmentally appropriate, particularly in math and at early grade levels. Others are concerned that the level of rigor sets unrealistic expectations for students. And some, including many educators and others who otherwise support the current standards, have criticized the rollout of the standards, arguing that teachers have not been adequately prepared to effectively implement the standards in the classroom.

> SENATE BILL 812

Senate Bill 812 directs the State Board of Education and a new Academic Standards Review Commission to review the state's ELA and math standards and propose modifications to ensure that they meet the following criteria:

- > Increase students' level of academic achievement
- > Meet and reflect North Carolina's priorities
- > Are age-level and developmentally appropriate
- > Are understandable to parents and teachers
- > Are among the highest standards in the nation

³A partial list of supporters from these sectors may be found at <http://hirestandardsnc.org/who-we-are>.

TIMELINE: EVOLUTION OF NORTH CAROLINA STANDARD COURSE OF STUDY

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2015

The Forum supports the high standards embodied in the current *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*. However, the Forum remains hopeful that the current review process will result in improvements while maintaining the current standards' strengths and rigor.

- > **Adhere to the review criteria in proposing modifications to the standards.** The Academic Standards Review Commission and State Board have been given criteria (see "Senate Bill 812" on previous page) that will allow them to retain what is working with the current standards and modify other elements of the standards to address shortcomings.
- > **Support rigorous professional development for classroom teachers to implement new standards.** Successful implementation of new standards requires intensive capacity building and professional development not only for district leadership, but for teachers and principals. Educators with strong content expertise should lead trainings as part of a robust, long-term professional development program. The state should increase the number of professional development days and funding to allow sufficient opportunity for teachers to thoroughly learn the content as well as effective instructional strategies to meet the needs of students under the new standards.

> 2009

The National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) spearheaded a state-led initiative to develop the Common Core State Standards.

> JUNE 2010

North Carolina adopted the Common Core in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA), becoming one of 45 states to do so.

> 2010-11

North Carolina adopted the NC Essential Standards in Science, Social Studies, Arts, World Languages, and other subject areas.

> 2011-13

Educators prepared to implement the new standards, and taught and assessed students under the new standards in 2012-13.

> 2014

The North Carolina General Assembly directed the State Board to review and propose modifications to the standards, and created the Academic Standards Review Commission to advise the State Board. The current standards will remain in place until modifications are made.

> 2015

The advisory commission will submit findings and recommendations to the State Board and the General Assembly by December 31.



LOOKING AHEAD IN 2015

The Forum supports high-quality charter schools as a part of a vibrant public school ecosystem that prioritizes quality and equity.

- › **Support gold-standard research on who North Carolina charter schools serve and how well they serve them.** There is little solid research on North Carolina charter school outcomes that takes into account demographics and a variety of outcomes measures. Transparency and good research could also provide a window into whether and to what extent issues like “creaming” top students and excluding students with behavioral issues and certain types of disabilities actually occur.
- › **Encourage innovation in staffing and teaching methods.** The legislative purposes of charter schools emphasize innovation in staffing and teaching methods. Given the scarcity of examples of innovative practices in North Carolina charter schools, state leaders should consider initiatives to incent increased innovation.
- › **Support collaboration and sharing of promising practices among charter and district schools.** State and local leaders should encourage partnership in areas that have historically generated tension (e.g., transportation and food service; students with special needs; funding and facilities challenges; and planning for growth).
- › **Make equity a guiding force in NC charter sector growth.** Researchers should examine NC charter growth to uncover patterns of resegregation or new divisions based on race or socioeconomic status. State leaders should establish guidelines to ensure that charter schools *increase* equitable access to excellent schools.
- › **Boost accountability for low-performing and high-performing charter schools.** Persistently low-performing charter schools should be swiftly turned around or closed, with procedures in place to transition students to better-performing schools. At the other end of the spectrum, charter schools that consistently perform at high levels should be provided with incentives to expand and serve more students well.
- › **Establish fair funding formulas and practices.** Unless there is a compelling justification, per-pupil allocations should not differ based on whether a student attends a district or charter school. The state and districts should develop funding strategies and practices that provide all necessary financial and logistical support for any school—charter or district—that takes on a new student mid-year.
- › **Proceed with caution on virtual charters.** Given their uneven performance history in other states, virtual charter schools should only be allowed to grow if they establish strong track records of serving all students, including disadvantaged students, well. Like the initial criteria for vouchers, enrollment in virtual charters should be limited to those who attended a public school the previous semester.
- › **Limit the use of vouchers to disadvantaged students who have not been served well in public schools.** If the voucher program is held to be constitutional, its use should be targeted to those at greatest risk of failure in existing public school alternatives, and limited to families that could not otherwise afford private school.

5

EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN ANY TIME, ANY PLACE, AT ANY PACE

An Expanded Learning Opportunity (ELO) is any program or initiative offered during out-of-school time to help students excel in education and life. ELO can occur before or after school, on weekends, in the summer, and during the school day (outside of schools). They can take place in a variety of locations – schools, religious institutions, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA facilities, parks or recreational facilities, colleges and universities, museums, science centers, libraries, community-based organizations, or child care centers, or even online.

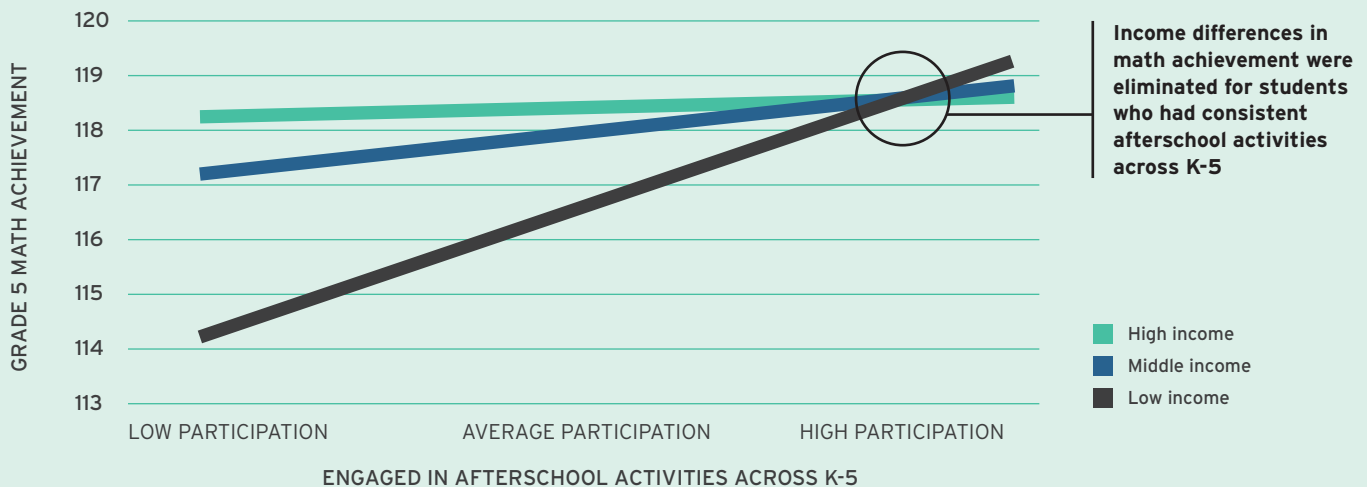
Some examples in which K-12 students participate and benefit from ELO include robotics engineering, creative arts, team collaboration, global awareness, college tours, and job shadowing. Though the number is decreasing, there remain a substantial number of students who are not involved in ELO between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m., a critical time period when students are prone to engage in negative behaviors.

Research shows that high-quality expanded learning programs can improve school performance and developmental outcomes, reduce aggressive behaviors, improve self-efficacy, strengthen work habits, increase attendance, and reduce alcohol and drug use (Auger, Pierce, & Vandell, 2013; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007).

Recently, a research team at the University of California Irvine found that high-quality after-school strategies can reduce the socioeconomic achievement gap through consistency and intensity of programming.

In 2014, the General Assembly appropriated five million dollars to the After-School Quality Improvement Grant Program, to pilot after-school learning programs for at-risk students that raise standards for student academic outcomes. The pilot programs will use an evidence-based model; include rigorous, quantitative performance measures to confirm their effectiveness; prioritize science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning opportunities or reading development and proficiency instruction; emphasize minimizing class size; and expand student access to learning activities and academic supports that strengthen student engagement and leverage community-based resources.

In 2014, the General Assembly appropriated five million dollars to the After-School Quality Improvement Grant Program, to pilot after-school learning programs for at-risk students that raise standards for student academic outcomes.



Source: Pierce, K. M., Auger, A. & Vandell, D. L. (2013). Narrowing the achievement gap: Consistency and intensity of structured activities during elementary school. Unpublished paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Seattle, WA.

295,984

LAST YEAR, 295,984 NORTH CAROLINA CHILDREN (19%) WERE ALONE AND UNSUPERVISED BETWEEN THE HOURS OF 3 AND 6 P.M.



LOOKING AHEAD IN 2015

The Forum supports the funding of innovative efforts to serve disadvantaged students by increasing expanded learning opportunities.

› **Ensure all children and youth have access to a variety of quality Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELOs).**

Students living in North Carolina's rural areas may have difficulty accessing cultural and community resources, in part due to scarce public transportation. Economic dependence on agriculture and other areas may limit options for mentoring and internships. Policymakers and funders should support expanded learning in these communities and maintain support for existing high-quality programs. Specific support for transportation might involve providing school buses or offering incentives for partners to share transportation resources.

› **Increase innovation in competitive grants for afterschool programs.**

The General Assembly took a powerful step in 2014 by funding the After-School Quality Improvement Grant Program. The state should continue its support for this program and add flexibility to ensure that grant funds are accessible to innovative afterschool programs whether or not they have established relationships with school districts.

› **Create and publicize expanded learning career paths.**

High-quality expanded learning requires staff with specialized training. Policymakers, funders, and program operators should help future ELO professionals envision full careers in the field, including exposing them to relevant training and credentialing programs, and tying compensation and career advancement to acknowledged indicators of expertise and performance. Policy efforts should also target training of expanded learning professionals in high-need areas such as special education, STEM, literacy, academically or intellectually gifted (AIG), and English Language Learners (ELL).

› **Provide access to a quality data collection tool for use by ELOs.**

It is imperative that the state support the use of a tool that will collect quality data and allow service providers and schools to maximize the benefit of ELO. The tool should be easy to use and need minimal updates. Utilization of HOMEBASE by ELO programs, for example, would create a shared system of data support under which schools could access information about students' expanded learning experiences, and ELO programs could tailor activities to student needs as demonstrated during the school day.

6

RECRUIT AND RETAIN EXCELLENT TEACHERS

Education research consistently finds that teachers have, by far, the largest impact of any school-based factor on students' educational attainment and long-term success. It is critical that North Carolina recruit the best and brightest to teach our students, prepare teachers for today's classrooms, and keep excellent teachers in the profession for the long haul.

A growing number of quality teachers will be needed in North Carolina over the coming years due to a growing student population, increasing number of retiring educators, and high teacher turnover, particularly in recent years. Retirements and turnover have hit some of the state's small and low-wealth counties particularly hard, while the challenges of growth have most strongly impacted larger, urban areas.

Alarming, fewer students are entering the University of North Carolina (UNC) system's Colleges of Education. The UNC Colleges of Education have provided between 35 and 38 percent of North Carolina's teachers each year over the past ten years, but the number of candidates entering these schools has been decreasing over the last several years.

CHANGE IN EDUCATION DEGREE ENROLLMENT (2010-13)

UNC SYSTEM PROGRAM	ENROLLMENT CHANGE (# OF STUDENTS)	ENROLLMENT CHANGE (%)
Appalachian State	-641	-16.9%
East Carolina	-328	-9.6%
Elizabeth City State	-241	-36.8%
Fayetteville State	-218	-28.5%
N.C. A&T	-201	-15.9%
N.C. State	-376	-20.7%
UNC-Asheville	-39	-39.8%
UNC-Chapel Hill	-164	-29.1%
UNC-Charlotte	-403	-12.8%
UNC-Greensboro	-481	-20.1%
UNC-Pembroke	-443	-29.0%
UNC-Wilmington	-31	-3.4%
Western Carolina	-330	-17.0%
Winston-Salem State	-237	-39.4%

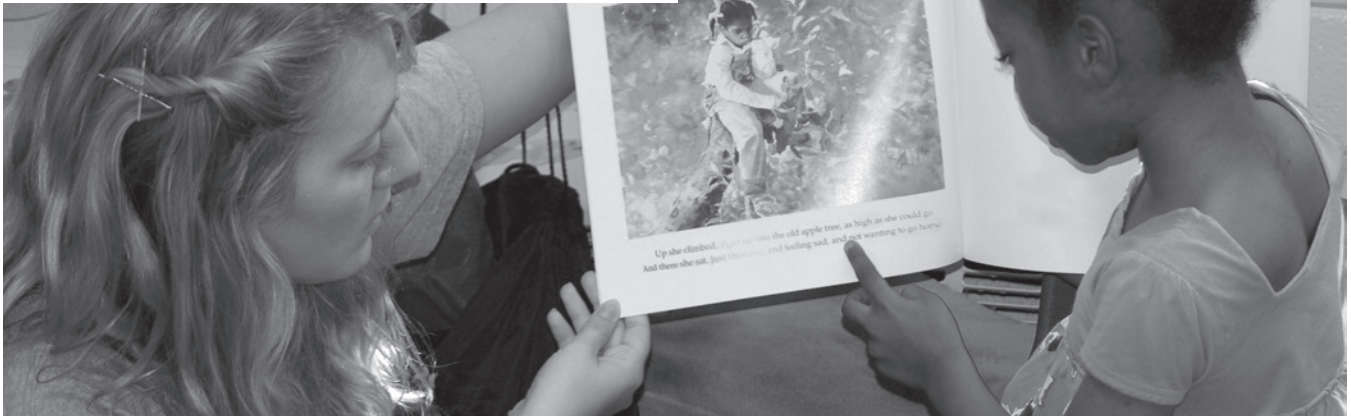
Source: Browder, C. (2014, August 15). "Fewer NC students seeking teaching degrees." WRAL.com.

All of this points to a looming shortfall in the number of teachers entering North Carolina's public schools in the coming years. Teacher pipeline programs are facing the shortfall now, and as teaching candidates complete their programs, graduate, and enter the job market, the shortage will soon extend to the classroom, with predictably negative impacts on students.

Data points to a looming shortfall in the number of teachers entering North Carolina's public schools in the coming years.

Contributing to this pipeline shortage is the 2011 discontinuation of the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program. Established in 1986, Teaching Fellows was one of the premier teacher recruitment and development programs in the nation. The program gave 500 scholarships per year to graduating high school seniors who committed to teaching in North Carolina for at least four years. As of 2013-14, 64 percent of all program graduates were teaching after their service payback. Other teacher recruitment programs including Teach for America and the North Carolina Teacher Corps have opened additional pathways into the profession but will not be able to offset—in numbers, teacher persistence, or quality—the loss of the Teaching Fellows Program or the impact of the dramatic enrollment drop at the UNC Colleges of Education.

Teacher preparation and retention efforts are also major factors in continually staffing North Carolina's classrooms with highly qualified teachers. Prospective teachers need both the formal training of academic programs and hands-on classroom experience. Practical training, mentoring, and rigorous, job-embedded professional development are crucial to their effectiveness and job satisfaction. Retention of excellent teachers benefits the students they teach and is vital for their schools in other ways, since these teachers develop and sustain strong school cultures and have the institutional and content knowledge needed to mentor and provide valuable on-the-job training to beginning teachers.



LOOKING AHEAD IN 2015

The Forum strongly supports efforts to change perceptions and attitudes towards teachers, and to improve recruitment, retention, compensation, career paths, and teacher training.

- › **Change the conversation toward valuing teachers as professionals.** In order to recruit and retain more great teachers, North Carolina must demonstrate that the state values teaching as a profession. A competitive salary is significant, but it is not the only factor. State leaders must reaffirm that they value teaching, in their words and actions. They must help schools create cultures of respect and opportunities for career advancement that reward teachers for their impact on student learning.
- › **Increase the number of high school students pursuing careers in teaching, particularly in high-need fields.** Existing programs are not incentivizing enough high school graduates to pursue teaching, particularly in high-need fields. The General Assembly should expand funding for proven and promising teacher pipeline programs, and should consider creating new targeted scholarship programs for high school seniors and college sophomores, providing scholarships for undergraduate and graduate education in exchange for students committing to teach in high-need fields or high-need areas of North Carolina.
- › **Encourage collaboration between colleges of education and training initiatives for beginning teachers.** Teacher preparation programs must adjust to new standards, the state's teacher evaluation system, and the changing demands of the workforce. Colleges of Education should be encouraged to continue to support graduates in their early years of teaching. It is critical for beginning teachers to have the support and guidance of experienced teachers and other professional mentors.
- › **Recognize the unique importance of excellent, veteran teachers and create incentives for them to remain in the classroom.** The state should develop incentives targeted to retaining excellent veteran teachers by giving them opportunities to advance and earn more without leaving the classroom.

7

MANAGE STUDENT ENROLLMENT GROWTH

North Carolina is one of the nation's fastest growing states, ranking 6th in population growth from 2000 to 2010. During that time, the state's population increased 18.5 percent, almost double the national growth rate. North Carolina is projected to gain about one million residents each decade through 2040, becoming the 8th most populous state.

With this population increase, the number of children in North Carolina's public schools is increasing in tandem. The state has seen an increase of over 140,000 students over the past 10 years, to a total of almost 1.5 million students enrolled last year.

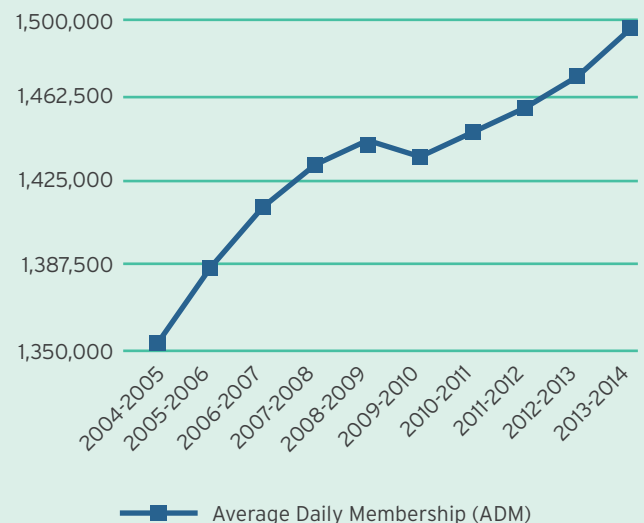
Traditionally, North Carolina has funded its public schools by providing an amount of funding per student to districts based on Average Daily Membership (ADM), a calculation of the number of students attending school. This funding has historically included projected enrollment growth calculated using legislated funding formulas. Funding for current students, as well as anticipated growth, has been a part of the General Assembly's base budget, also known as the "Continuation Budget." The funding in the Continuation Budget is subject to change from year to year, but to make changes, the General Assembly has to take specific action and a vote. In the 2014 legislative session, the General Assembly eliminated language that made enrollment growth part of the Continuation Budget. As a result, the base budget no longer includes funding to maintain current levels of support for the new students North Carolina schools anticipate enrolling next school year.

As a result of the change, the financial support for new students is now part of the "Expansion Budget." Items in this part of the budget must be debated and voted upon before they are funded. As a practical matter, this means that funding for enrollment growth will compete with other state priorities. Charter schools are also affected by this change, since their allowable growth has historically been part of the Continuation Budget.

Even if enrollment growth is ultimately funded at the same level as under the previous system, the change leaves districts unable to effectively plan for the upcoming school year since they cannot be confident of their funding for growth until the Governor signs the final budget. Some schools, particularly year-round schools that start school during the summer, may begin the year not knowing whether they will receive funding for increased student enrollment, which will affect teacher hiring and other aspects of school operations.

Amidst all of the attention being paid to funding enrollment growth, educators need to keep in mind the larger questions: how much funding does North Carolina provide per student, and how has it changed over time? Per-pupil spending in North Carolina was \$8,884 per student in 2012-13, more than 21 percent below the national average of \$11,308. North Carolina's per-pupil spending rank dropped to 44th in 2012-13, down six places from 38th in 2007-08.⁴

NC STUDENT ENROLLMENT



⁴National Education Association (2014). *Rankings of the States 2013 and Estimates of School Statistics 2014*. It is too soon to tell where North Carolina will rank after taking into account investments made in education here and in other states in 2014.

Source: NC Department of Public Instruction. Average Daily Membership. Retrieved from: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/accounting/data/>

> PUBLIC SCHOOLS STUDENT POPULATION GROWTH NO LONGER IN THE BASE BUDGET

PRIOR TO 2014 CHANGE*

Student Population Growth was automatically included in the Base Budget and funded unless the General Assembly took action to reduce the funding level.

MOVING FORWARD

Student Population Growth is no longer included in the budget automatically. The General Assembly must take action to appropriate funding for Student Population Growth in the Expansion Budget.

*SL2014-100, s.6.4 (a) & (b)

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Financial and Business Services (2014). *Public Schools Student Population Growth No Longer in the Base Budget*. Raleigh, NC: Author.

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2015

The Forum supports timely funding of student enrollment growth and increasing per-pupil spending to the national average.

- > **Restore student growth funding to the General Assembly's base budget.** With growth funding in the Expansion Budget, schools are in the unfortunate position of having to compete with other budgetary priorities just to maintain their per-pupil allotment in the face of student enrollment growth.
- > **Release funding to districts in a timely fashion to allow school and district leaders to make effective operational decisions.** In the past,

when enrollment growth was accounted for in the Continuation Budget, districts were aware of their projected funding in early March, allowing them to build their local budgets in the spring. In light of recent changes, districts will now have trouble planning for the coming year, including recruiting highly qualified teachers to be in place for the start of school, since they will not be able to project with confidence their level of per-pupil funding until the state budget passes, possibly in July or later.

- > **Continue to strategically increase per-pupil spending.** State leaders should commit to fund growth and to increase per-pupil spending to the national average.

8

SHIFT TO ELEMENTS OF A DIGITAL-AGE LEARNING MODEL

North Carolina has recently pioneered numerous advances of technology for public schools. Providing computers and high-speed Internet access for students, offering online courses to students across the state, transitioning student data onto more advanced platforms, and preparing teachers to integrate technology into the classroom are just a few of the ways North Carolina is working to expand and improve the use of technology in schools.

Implementation of the state's Race to the Top grant has crystallized North Carolina's status as a leader in education technology. Examples of recent state-led initiatives, many of which were made possible by Race to the Top funding, include the School Connectivity and K-12 Cloud Computing initiatives; the North Carolina Virtual Public School, the nation's second-largest state virtual school with nearly 105,000 course enrollments in 2013-14; Home Base, which enables access to student data and learning resources by teachers, students, parents, and administrators; and the North Carolina School of Science and Math's online program focused on high school science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) courses.

North Carolina has also been a visionary leader in education technology through the state's e-Learning Commission, the State Board of Education's Strategic Plan, the work of the House Study Committee on Education Innovation, and the efforts of numerous businesses, universities, and nonprofit organizations. North Carolina also maximizes the benefits of the federal E-Rate program, which helps make telecommunications and information services more affordable for schools by providing discounts for eligible services. Many North Carolina districts and charter schools have pushed the envelope on innovative uses of technology as well. Mooresville Graded School District, for example, is routinely referenced as a national model for effective use of education technology.

Recent legislation set in motion a transition from textbooks to digital materials, and called for the development of digital teaching and learning standards for teachers and administrators. The legislature also made it a requirement that every student take at least one online course. And legislative leaders and the State Board have agreed on the need for statewide standards and plans related to wireless connectivity and broadband capacity.

To move its digital learning priorities forward, the state has contracted with the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University to develop the North Carolina Digital Learning Plan, a comprehensive effort to envision and prepare for the transition to digital-age education. The transition will involve "changes in instructional practices, new types of educational resources, changes in classroom and school management, revised school staffing models, enhanced school and district technology infrastructure, Internet connected devices for all students and teachers, and educator training and support tailored to specific district and charter deployments."⁵ The Friday Institute's work will culminate in a Final Report to be completed by August 1, 2015.

To move its digital learning priorities forward, the state has contracted with the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University to develop the North Carolina Digital Learning Plan, a comprehensive effort to envision and prepare for the transition to digital-age education.

⁵The William & Ida Friday Institute for Educational Innovation (2014). North Carolina Digital Learning Plan: Policy Brief, June 2014. Raleigh, NC: Author.

ELEMENTS OF THE DIGITAL-AGE LEARNING MODEL



Advancement based on demonstrated **mastery** of the content and **competency** in applying what has been learned.



Digital content providing interactive, flexible, and easily updated educational resources.



Anywhere and anytime learning, inside and outside of schools, 24/7, with most learning blending face-to-face and online activities.



Assessments integrated into learning activities to provide ongoing information about students' achievement that can be used to improve teaching and learning.



Personalized learning and flexible resources optimized for each student.



Parent portals provide 24/7 access to their children's assignments, grades, and records, as well as a means to communicate with teachers and administrators.



Student-centered instruction, combining large group, small group and individualized learning, with teachers.



Project-based and community-based learning activities connecting to students' lives outside of school.

Source: The William & Ida Friday Institute for Educational Innovation (2014). North Carolina Digital Learning Plan: Policy Brief, June 2014. Raleigh, NC: Author.

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2015

The Forum applauds the ongoing efforts of the Friday Institute to develop the North Carolina Digital Learning Plan, and the priorities outlined in the State Board of Education's Strategic Plan related to technology and digital learning.

- › **Consider policy shifts, flexibility, and pilot initiatives to accelerate the transition to competency-based and personalized learning.** The state should continue exploring strategies to move away from seat-time based advancement and toward competency-based, personalized learning, including through the expanded use of the state's Credit by Demonstrated Mastery (CDM) policy.
- › **Prioritize equitable access during the transition to digital-age learning models.** State leaders must make every effort to keep unequal access to technology and connectivity from deepening racial, economic, and geographic achievement gaps. All digital learning initiatives should be planned and rolled out in a way that prioritizes the success of implementation in schools facing the greatest challenges.
- › **Emphasize preparation and support for teachers and school and district leaders as they integrate new technologies into the classroom.** The state must support efforts to train teachers and school and district leaders on how to implement technology tools well without foregoing existing strong instructional practices, and provide ongoing support for teachers as they master new technology-enabled practices.
- › **Encourage and support collaboration among schools and districts in technology selection and purchasing.** The state and private funders should support efforts to share information about the quality of educational technology options so that schools and teachers can make smart choices in allocating technology dollars. They should also facilitate the sharing of information and purchasing efforts to help schools get strong deals in the ed tech marketplace.

9

STREAMLINE ASSESSMENTS

Assessments measure student learning and progress toward academic goals. Used well, they can inform instructional practices and make education more responsive to student needs. However, schools administered 194 assessments to students in grades 4-12 in 2012-13, and last year the Read to Achieve law added 36 reading tests for third-graders. With this many tests, teachers and parents are concerned that over-testing, and particularly schools' increased focus on end-of-course and end-of-grade tests, may place undue pressure on children, particularly in younger grades. Parents also worry that the extreme focus on assessments has led teachers to "teach to the test" at the expense of engaging students in classroom experiences that promote deep engagement and types of learning that aren't easily measured on existing tests.

Over-testing, and particularly schools' increased focus on end-of-course and end-of-grade tests, may place undue pressure on children, particularly in younger grades, and has led teachers to "teach to the test."

Assessments are often grouped into two broad categories: formative and summative assessments. **Formative assessments** are those used to inform classroom practice by providing feedback to students and teachers about mastery of skills and knowledge, and areas where additional work is needed. Formative assessments tend to be low-stakes tests, and may or may not count toward student grades. Their primary function is to guide what happens next in a student's educational experience. **Summative assessments**, by contrast, are used to gauge student learning after completion of a period of time or a body of material. Traditional midterm and final exams are summative assessments, as are end-of-course and end-of-grade tests. Both types of assessments may be used in concert to effectively measure student progress.

The federal government and the state of North Carolina require certain assessments to measure student progress. The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) mandated that by 2005-06 states must annually assess students' reading and mathematics performance in grades 3-8, and by 2007-08, students must be tested in science in elementary, middle, and high school. North Carolina currently has a flexibility waiver from many of the NCLB provisions, but these testing requirements remain.

Since 1990, North Carolina has participated in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments. Also known as "The Nation's Report Card," NAEP is "the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas."⁶ North Carolina's NAEP assessments are conducted in mathematics, reading, science, and writing for grades 4 and 8.

From 2009 to 2012, several assessments were eliminated from the North Carolina Testing Program.⁷ However, other tests were added during the same time period. The Read to Achieve program has brought a great deal of attention to assessments for young students. Under this program, students who are not reading at grade level by the end of third grade receive special help, including summer reading camp and other interventions, to make sure they can read well enough to understand fourth-grade material. The original 2012 Read to Achieve legislation required 36 tests to assess whether third-graders were at grade level in reading comprehension, all administered in the second half of the year. But in June 2014, a new law gave school districts more flexibility in how and when they test students.

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (2014). *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Overview*. Washington, DC: Author.

⁷ See, e.g., N.C. Gen. Stat. 115C-174.11, which in 2011 eliminated statewide standardized testing except as required by federal law or as a condition of a federal grant.

NORTH CAROLINA STATE TESTS

GRADE LEVEL	ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS/ READING	MATHEMATICS	SCIENCE	OTHER
3	Beginning-of-Grade 3 English/ Language Arts/Reading Test			
3	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade		
4	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade		
5	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	
6	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade		
7	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade		
8	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	ACT Explore
9		Math I End-of-Course		
10	English II End-of-Course		Biology End-of-Course	ACT Plan
11				ACT

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2014). *North Carolina Testing Program, Required Testing 2014-2015*.

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2015

› **Promote a balanced assessment system that includes formative and summative assessments.**

Both types of assessments have strengths and provide value to teachers, parents, and students. Formative assessments hold great promise to inform instructional choices and serve as markers on the path of student progress. Summative assessments bring increased transparency, accountability, and information about what a child has learned.

› **Analyze assessments' value to ensure that all required tests have significant and well-defined purposes.**

Many changes have occurred in recent years in the North Carolina Testing Program, and changes will continue as the state's schools continue implementing new standards. It is important to

ensure that each assessment has a clear purpose and, wherever possible, that it provides specific, actionable data and feedback to improve student learning. Assessments should be aligned with existing standards but flexible enough to evolve as standards change.

› **Review assessments regularly for age-appropriateness in number and scope.**

The General Assembly listened to superintendents, parents, and others regarding the challenges of Read to Achieve, and provided schools with more flexibility. Legislators should solicit and take seriously the concerns of these groups over assessments in general. They should adopt strategies to avoid over-testing and reduce the emphasis on "high-stakes tests."

10

MEET MILESTONES ON THE PATH TO COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

Major milestones exist on the path to college and career readiness, including being able to read on grade-level at the end of third grade and completing high school prepared to attend and persist in college or to successfully enter the workforce. In order to meet the demands required in many lines of postsecondary work, a high school diploma is no longer sufficient. Many 21st century jobs will require skills and knowledge uniquely acquired through postsecondary education and/or certifications.

These data highlight the need for postsecondary education and training, but statistics tell similar tales for students who don't meet earlier milestones. A child who reaches the end of third grade unable to read on grade level has significantly lower prospects for meeting later milestones, as do those who falter at the transition points between elementary, middle, and high school, and those who dropout before high school graduation or graduate with significant need for remediation in order to effectively engage at the postsecondary level.

In 2008, the state's education leaders created the Accountability and Curriculum Reform Effort (ACRE). A critical component of ACRE was to require all juniors to take the ACT and all career and technical education students to take WorkKeys, a career readiness assessment. Students who take the WorkKeys test can earn career readiness certification from the state. Since the state began issuing this certification, employers' training time and recruiting time have decreased, and employers are more satisfied.⁸

Since the state began issuing career readiness certification, training time and recruiting time have decreased, and employers are more satisfied.

Several initiatives exist to help North Carolina improve pathways to college and careers. North Carolina New Schools, a public-private partnership, has helped establish nearly 80 early college high schools, which blend high school and college classes, and is working on creating a series of career-focused schools.⁹ The state-led initiative *Career and College Promise (CCP)* provides qualified high school-aged students the opportunity to pursue a two- or four-year degree, certificate, or diploma while they are attending high school, serving as a catalyst for success in careers or college. *Read to Achieve* provides opportunities and support to help all students read at grade level by the end of third grade. In 2013, the General Assembly directed the State Board of Education to form the North Carolina Advanced Placement Partnership, which pays testing fees for AP exams and the PSAT, and provides professional development to teachers and administrators.¹⁰



⁸ See, e.g., Triangle Worksource (n.d.). *North Carolina's Employers Support Career Readiness Certification*. Locate in Carolina (n.d.). *WorkKeys and NC Career Readiness Certificate (CRC)*.
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¹⁰ Foundation for Excellence in Education. *State of reform: North Carolina, College and Career Readiness*.

> WHY POSTSECONDARY
READINESS MATTERS

38.4%

OF NORTH CAROLINA'S 5.1 MILLION WORKING-AGE ADULTS (AGES 25-64) HELD A TWO- OR FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE IN 2014.

80%

OF JOBS IN NORTH CAROLINA INVOLVE MIDDLE OR HIGH-LEVEL SKILLS THAT REQUIRE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OR TRAINING.

ONLY 6

NORTH CAROLINA COUNTIES HAVE MORE THAN 45% OF THEIR ADULT POPULATION AGES 25-64 WITH AT LEAST AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE. SIX COUNTIES HAVE LESS THAN 20% OF THEIR ADULT POPULATION WITH AT LEAST AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE.

27% HIGHER

THE MEDIAN LIFETIME EARNINGS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE ARE 27% HIGHER THAN THE MEDIAN EARNINGS OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES. THE MEDIAN LIFETIME EARNINGS OF THOSE WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE ARE 65% HIGHER THAN THOSE OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES.

ONLY 54%

AMONG THOSE NORTH CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES WHO ENTER PUBLIC COLLEGES IN THE STATE, ONLY 54% PERSIST ON TO THEIR SOPHOMORE YEAR AT TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS, AND ONLY 78% MOVE ON TO BECOME SOPHOMORES AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS.

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2015

The Forum supports efforts to prepare all North Carolina students to become college and career ready.

- > **Develop a comprehensive College and Career Readiness Continuum.** North Carolina students will benefit from development of a continuum that reflects college and career readiness indicators (such as setting clear standards, implementing a strong assessment structure, ensuring equity in access to rigorous coursework; investing in promising early childhood programs that improve student prospects for success; developing an "early warning" system for at-risk students; and creating competency-based pathways for student progress).
- > **Pilot and study the effectiveness of programs that address major milestones on the path to college and career readiness.** Legislators and educators should continue improving programs like CCP and Read to Achieve to address issues that arise during implementation, in order to ensure that these programs continue to serve their intended purposes. The state and private funders should continue to support initiatives such as those currently led by North Carolina New Schools, which help guide students on the path to college and career success.
- > **Track data on postsecondary attainment, and link that data back to K-12 and pre-K programs and other significant inputs.** Future funding will be most effectively targeted if legislators and practitioners have a strong sense of what works. This will only be possible if the state invests in systems that can track information about programs and other inputs that can be linked to outcomes. The state should work closely with appropriate groups to manage concerns about student data privacy while collecting and maintaining student activity data.

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