



# OPERATION POLARIS 2.0

Navigating Students Toward a Brighter Future



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A MESSAGE FROM

# Superintendent Catherine Truitt



Operation Polaris has been the vision for North Carolina public schools since I stepped into this role in January 2021. Formally unveiled before the State Board of Education that April, it was presented as the agency's four-year strategic plan for helping

North Carolina public schools overcome the challenges of the pandemic while also charting a course to improve the state's K-12 education system into the future. It was, and remains, important that Operation Polaris serve as a long-term, proactive and forward-thinking vision for education in the state and that it be one that evolves to fit the challenges and changes facing North Carolina Public Schools.

Many initiatives outlined in the first iteration of Operation Polaris are well underway. Foremost has been the agency's strong commitment to respond aggressively to the needs of districts and schools across the state with data-driven support. The agency created a first-of-its-kind Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration (OLR) to assist districts and schools through evidence-based research. Since its launch, this new research unit has shared findings and strategies to help education leaders overcome the challenges of the pandemic and accelerate student learning through the creation and development of programs, policies, and interventions.

In addition to this work, the state has made great strides in encouraging statewide adoption of best practices grounded in the science of reading, a phonics-based approach to early literacy instruction. During the last year, the agency has established a robust, statewide coaching model reaching nearly 44,000 educators who are learning new skills and mastering old ones to ensure that all students become proficient readers by third grade.

The agency also made progress toward its goal of transforming the pipeline of highly qualified principals in our state. In March of 2022, NCDPI joined other stakeholders to establish a statewide

leadership initiative, called the AP Accelerator Program, aimed at providing targeted leadership development and coaching opportunities to assistant principals. This principal-focused professional development opportunity is a key strategy to prepare promising assistant principals and accelerate their readiness to lead and transform all schools, particularly those with the greatest need of strong leadership.

As we continue with Operation Polaris 2.0, the agency will sharpen its focus on schools designated as low performing. The division previously called District and School Transformation in Operation Polaris 1.0 has been renamed Office of District and Regional Support (DRS) and will continue providing comprehensive, hands-on support for North Carolina's most challenged schools and districts. DRS will diagnose, customize, and mobilize department resources to support the work of local districts to achieve positive educational outcomes for all students, particularly those in low-performing districts and schools.

While the Operation Polaris plan was initially published in September of 2021, the pages that follow outline Operation Polaris 2.0. These new chapters provide an update on the progress that's been achieved to date, while formally outlining the goals and actions of the agency for the months ahead.

As you will see, there is much work ahead, and we continue to be guided by our North Star – that every student deserves a highly qualified, excellent teacher in every classroom. We are endlessly grateful to our state's educators, as none of this work would be possible without their relentless dedication to students and their success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Truitt'.

Catherine Truitt

N.C. Superintendent of Public Instruction



# OPERATION POLARIS 2.0

Navigating Students Toward a Brighter Future

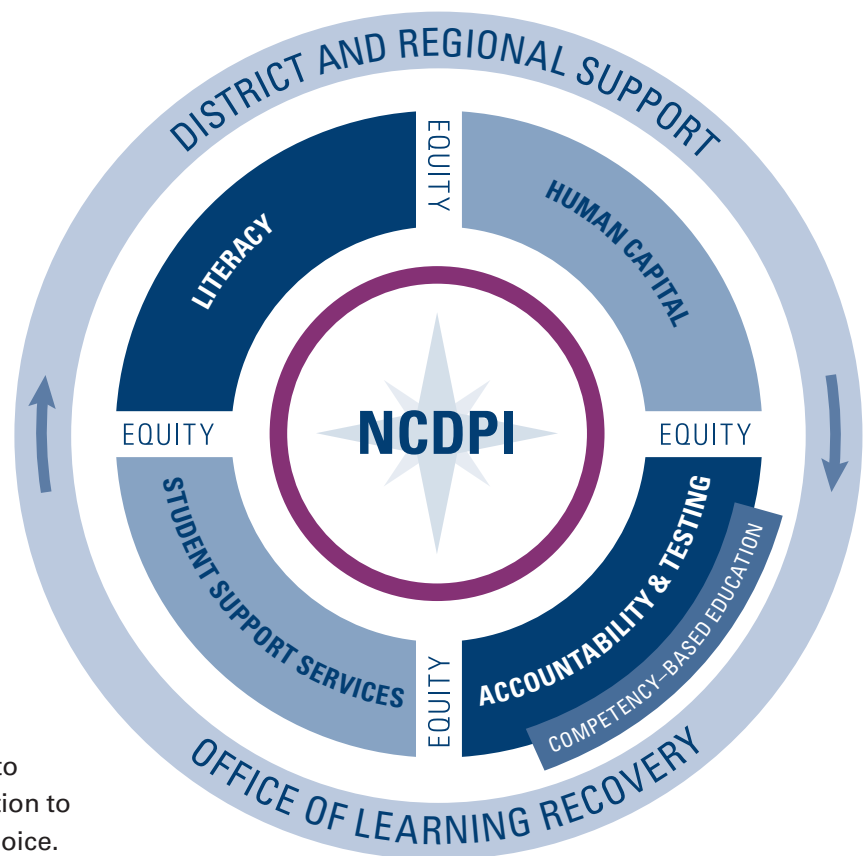
Operation Polaris 2.0 is a four-year strategic vision aimed at improving outcomes for all North Carolina students. The new and enhanced image below represents Operation Polaris 2.0, and highlights core focus areas for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). These core areas serve as the priorities for the agency as they are critical to achieving the North Star: that every student deserves a highly qualified, excellent teacher in every classroom.



## NORTH STAR:

Every student deserves a highly qualified, excellent teacher in every classroom.

Operation Polaris' forward-thinking vision provides the road map to a destination that allows all students to learn, grow, and successfully transition to the post-secondary plans of their choice.



To keep up with NCDPI's progress on Operation Polaris, visit us:

<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/operation-polaris>



## OPERATION POLARIS 2.0 PRIORITIES



### **LITERACY:**

To equip all Pre-K through fifth grade teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators with early literacy instruction methods grounded in the body of research known as the “science of reading” to ensure all children are reading to learn before the fourth grade.



### **STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES:**

To coordinate support services to increase student access to high-quality instructional services through a focus on five key areas that impact student performance: social-emotional, nutrition, school safety, broadband connectivity, and school facilities.



### **ACCOUNTABILITY AND TESTING:**

To redesign North Carolina’s K-12 accountability system to ensure a sound, basic education for every student by measuring success based on preparedness for the workforce, higher education, and robust civic participation.



### **COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION:**

To provide a personalized education experience to all North Carolina students that focuses on ensuring students’ mastery of concepts and content.



### **HUMAN CAPITAL:**

To cultivate multiple on-ramps for a diverse body of educational professionals and build effective infrastructure to recruit and retain high-quality teachers, administrators, and support personnel for every student in North Carolina.



### **DISTRICT AND REGIONAL SUPPORT:**

To diagnose, customize, and activate departmental resources to support district work resulting in sustainable and positive educational outcomes for all students with a prioritization on support for low-performing schools and districts.



### **OFFICE OF LEARNING RECOVERY AND ACCELERATION:**

To identify areas of strength and areas for improvement as districts and schools address learning recovery. To develop and curate programs, policies, and interventions related to learning recovery to provide a menu of solutions for districts and schools. To assist in matching these initiatives to districts and schools and/or consortia of districts and providing technical and other assistance to those who need it via an OLR and DRS collaboration.







# Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration

## VISION:

To identify areas of strength and areas for improvement as districts and schools address learning recovery.

To develop and curate programs, policies and interventions related to learning recovery to provide a menu of solutions for districts and schools.

To assist in matching these initiatives to districts and schools and/or consortia of districts and providing technical and other assistance to those who need it via an OLR and DRS collaboration.

## Background

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Superintendent Truitt created the Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration (OLR) in March 2021 to help recover the lost instructional time resulting from disrupted educational experiences across the state. The mission of the OLR is to serve Public School Units (PSUs) by providing the information and support needed to make evidence-based decisions to mitigate the impact of lost instructional time and accelerate learning for all students.

One important undertaking of the OLR was a report that would measure the pandemic's impact on learning across all grades and subjects for North Carolina's students. This analysis of student-level data, published by OLR in March 2022, is one of the most comprehensive reports done to date on the pandemic's effects on students. Its findings were critical, allowing NCDPI to better target resources and prioritize funding for students who were most affected and for areas of the state most in need.

The OLR continues its work to develop, implement, and evaluate state and district-run interventions that promote effective strategies and support district needs. Additionally, the office provides resources and support to districts and schools to help advance a resilient recovery while working across the agency to fulfill its mission.





## SMART GOALS PROGRESS

During year one, the OLR successfully accomplished all of its Smart Goals, including establishing and convening an American Rescue Plan (ARP) Committee of Practitioners; establishing a research and evaluation team of experts to lead the qualitative and quantitative analysis of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER)-funded programs and initiatives at both the state and local levels; designing and deploying four statewide ESSER-funded programs; hosting a summer convening in partnership with the Educational Value Added Assessment System (EVAAS) team at SAS; continuing strategic planning conversations by launching PSU Learning Cohorts; establishing a protocol for identifying [Promising Practices](#) across the state; and [launching a \\$6.3M NC Research Recovery Network](#) with the NC Collaboratory.

### SMART GOALS AHEAD:

OLR has seven full-time staff to support and coordinate state ESSER II and ESSER III implementation.

- OLR will continue facilitating the design and implementation of more than 20 state- and local-level research and evaluation studies.
- OLR designs and supports summer academic and workforce-aligned programs for all LEAs and all ESSER-eligible Charter Schools.
- OLR hosts an annual ARP PSU summer convening and quarterly webinars focused on the use of data to drive local decisions about evidence-based interventions funded by ESSER III 20% set-aside.
- Local examples, aligned to ESSER priorities and representative of each State Board of Education region, are identified and described in the clearinghouse of [Promising Practices](#).



## METRICS PROGRESS

The OLR was able to strategically align its work and meet each metric for year one, including but not limited to: building out the research and evaluation arm of OLR to include a qualitative and a quantitative analyst; partnering with high-level stakeholders to design a logic model to guide the office's work; submitting two Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee (JLEOC) reports as required by the General Assembly; and launching the Promising Practices dashboard.

### METRICS AHEAD:

- Staff work collaboratively across the agency to support ESSER recovery efforts.
- Host four ARP learning recovery modules for school leadership totaling 1 CEU.
- Launch ARP 20% set-aside toolkit to include a logic model, communications tool and an intervention tracking tool.
- Support local-level sustainability plans through local data analysis and program evaluation assistance.
- Provide technical assistance for intervention design and implementation.
- Number of students who participate in ESSER-funded interventions or programs.
- Number of credentials earned through ESSER-funded interventions or programs.
- Attainable spend rate for ESSER III at the local level, such that PSUs are spending ESSER funds at a rate that will lead to low-to-zero attrition.
- Number of state and local research and evaluation projects focused on recovery and acceleration included in the NC Recovery Research Network.







## ACTION ITEMS PROGRESS

The OLR selected an executive director, deputy director, and director of research and evaluation to guide the work of the office. In partnership with internal and external stakeholders, the OLR designed and launched a logic model to guide its work. With the launch of the [OLR website](#), PSUs have ready access to technical support documents, publications, and events.

### ACTION ITEMS AHEAD:

- Build a team of experts in the areas of educational programming, research, evaluation, and policy.
- Develop and support the OLR Research and Evaluation Plan to better coordinate state- and local-level research and evaluation studies.
- Design and support summer academic and workforce-aligned programs for PSUs.
- Host an annual ARP PSU summer convening and quarterly webinars focused on the use of data to drive local decisions about evidence-based interventions funded by ESSER III 20% set-aside.
- Further expand the [Promising Practices Clearinghouse](#).

### Next Steps:

Over the next year, the OLR will adjust its approach from providing PSUs triage support to facilitating conversations and action steps around transformation. The office will design and implement more than 20 state- and local-level research and evaluation studies. It will also design and support summer evidence-based academic and workforce-aligned programs for all LEAs and all ESSER-eligible charter schools. The office will then bring together PSUs to continue the conversation on leveraging fiscal resources, research institutions, and networks in their communities to further position North Carolina as a place of data-driven, acceleration-focused public schools.





## Office of District and Regional Support

### **VISION:**

To diagnose, customize and activate departmental resources to support district work resulting in sustainable and positive educational outcomes for all students with a prioritization on support for low-performing schools and districts.

### **Background:**

Operation Polaris has provided the opportunity to rethink the way the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) supports North Carolina's most challenged schools and districts. An allocation of resources from Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) I, II, and III funding has provided key resources for increased support to the state's public school units (PSUs). This was the catalyst for a reset of the entire division, which has been re-named the Office of District and Regional Support (DRS). This office clusters others at the agency that have the greatest responsibility for providing direct support to districts. The goal is to execute the lessons learned through the research of the Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration (OLR) to provide more comprehensive support in the field based on data and the needs expressed by districts.





## SMART GOALS PROGRESS

A model is being developed that tiers district and school services based on needs, guidelines from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and state statutes. The offices of District and Regional Support, Federal Programs, District Operations, Center for Safer Schools, NC Virtual Public School, and the Regional Support Structure align services to support all schools and districts in the state. The Regional Support Structure includes one director per education region and is responsible for providing a communication channel for districts to express their differentiated needs.

During the 2020-21 school year, an intensive intervention known as the CARES Intensive Intervention pilot was implemented in 81 schools spanning 24 school districts. This support is the highest level of intervention within NCDPI. It requires a formal partnership to identify and remedy root cause(s) as well as develop highly focused incremental action steps with performance measures and clear monitored plans for improved governance. Support was targeted based on schools with chronic performance issues (low performing status since 2015-16 designation), high poverty status (defined in WestEd report), and district receptivity to supports.

In September 2015, Session Law 2015-241 House Bill 97 amended definitions for low-performing schools and provided a new designation for low-performing districts. Under this new definition, trend analysis revealed that 181 traditional schools had been on the low-performing list since this 2015 law change. With the secured ESSER I, II, and III funding, DRS developed a customized model of support that involves assigning staff to district and/or schools to provide daily coaching with the goal of improving daily practices that lead to improved student achievement.

During the 2021-22 school year, the Public Schools of Robeson County (PSRC) served as the pilot for the North Carolina Instructional Leadership Academy (NC ILA). This pilot included 12 school leadership teams that consisted of a principal, principal supervisor and additional school leaders. The 12 teams participated in 10 intensive professional development sessions that began during summer of 2021. The vendor, Relay Graduate School of Education, also provided intensive coaching to deepen skills in instructional leadership levers as identified in Leverage Leadership (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012), Get Better Faster (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2016), and Leverage Leadership 2.0 (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018).

During the 2022-23 year, PSRC expanded NC ILA to a district-wide initiative with all 37 schools participating, and all central office members and academic coaches trained. Simultaneously, DRS rolled out the statewide version of this professional development opportunity. The two-year professional development fellowship program aims to build internal capacity within school districts to provide high-quality instructional and strategic leadership coaching across the state.



### SMART GOALS AHEAD:

- DRS will create a complete **continuum of services** and supports based on needs expressed by the school and/or district data, accountability data and Diagnostic Services tools.
- DRS will develop and pilot a prototype for **intensive intervention** that includes how schools will be identified, supports offered and steps for engagement defined.
- DRS will develop a plan for the creation of a **School Leadership Academy** to provide initial and ongoing support to the state's district and school leaders.



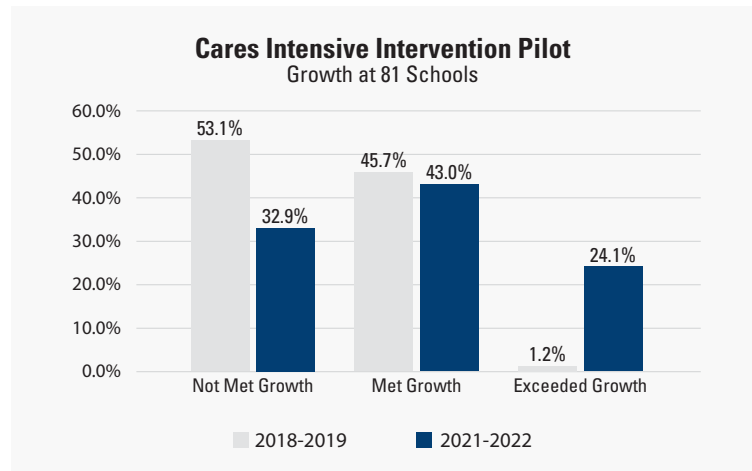


## METRICS PROGRESS

As part of the agency’s ongoing reorganization efforts, DRS houses all offices that have responsibilities for serving districts and schools, effective June 1, 2022.

District leadership coaches who work with district superintendents and central office staff in the pilot, along with the leadership team for DRS, worked to develop both internal and external metrics to assess the work of the pilot. The external metrics will be based on summative data to include student proficiency data, yearly chronic absenteeism comparisons, behavior/discipline data, and culture and climate data as evidenced by the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey.

The most recent school performance data indicated an increase in the number of low-performing districts and schools. There are now 29 low-performing districts, (+9), and 864 low-performing schools, (+488). The OLR has provided data that measured the impact of learning loss and its eventual impact on school and student performance, as also evidenced with the September 2022 release of school performance data for the 2021-22 school year. While this data shows a substantial increase in the number of low-performing schools, efforts of DRS show substantial progress of schools within the CARES model. To the right is a chart that shows the impact of the CARES team of coaches after working in these 81 schools during the first year. Schools that previously did not meet growth decreased from 53.1% to 32.9% and schools that exceeded growth increased from 1.2% to 24.1%.



Approximately 1,500 educators assigned to four NC ILA learning cohorts attended the first session of NC ILA in October 2022. These educators represent 60 school districts and 13 charter schools. Additional session dates have been released for December 2022, February 2023, April 2023, and June 2023 covering Leverage Leadership super levers of Instructional Leadership: Observation and Feedback, Student Culture, Data Meetings, and Planning Meetings.

### METRICS AHEAD:

- Statewide System of Support will tier 100% of schools and districts and provide a support plan based on needs presented, federal and/or state designations.
- Decrease the number of schools and districts designated low-performing by 50% by 2024-25 through the use of internal metrics to show a progression improvement in seven piloted areas: governance; instructional excellence; leadership capacity; human capital; operations; culture; and family and community.
- Build instructional capacity statewide with the development of a North Carolina Instructional Leadership Academy intended to result in improved proficiency and/or growth at participating schools.





## ACTION ITEMS PROGRESS

In April of 2022, ESSER funds were secured from the State Board of Education (SBE) to add supports at the classroom level to the CARES pilot model for intensive support. The instructional coach position was added to the district model of support in November of 2022. Annual CARES meetings are held twice a year with district leadership to assess progress made with the initiative. In the last five of seven meetings held, districts have asked if the support can be expanded to additional schools. The number of schools being supported has increased from 81 to 97.

In August 2022, the executive leadership team and NCDPI directors met to start planning ways to improve the support structure for all districts and schools with an emphasis on low-performing schools. The Ernst & Young Recommendation #6, current ESSA plan, and strategic plans for many offices located within the DRS provided the framework to build the new support system. From that meeting, a plan of action was drafted.

Lastly, the North Carolina Instructional Leadership Academy will continue to train 1,500 educators on building instructional capacity by focusing on topics around observation/feedback, school culture, formative assessments, and lesson planning. In addition, resources and summer professional development is being developed between DRS and Academic Standards to help participants understand the connection with the state’s Standard Course of Study.



### ACTION ITEMS AHEAD:

#### Continuum of Services

- List of available services to schools from each office within DRS based on the tiered support structure.
- Satisfaction surveys of LEAs for customer service and support through Regional Support Structure.
- Create a new organizational and delivery structure to ensure statewide support of NCDPI initiatives, legislative priorities and federal requirements.
- Create a consistent process across the state for how an LEA requests support from NCDPI.
- Create a streamlined data-capturing system to track, monitor and evaluate the service and support requested by LEAs to support effective implementation practices and fidelity of implementation.

#### Intensive Intervention

- Create eight positions needed to add instructional support to the school model through additional ESSER funding approved by the SBE in August 2022.
- Determine if projected human capital needs are effective levers to transform schools in both the school and district model.
- Implement supports suggested for local boards of education for LEAs in CARES pilot model for intensive support.
- Implement job-alike supports, including professional development for specific positions (i.e., financial officers; student support officers; curriculum officers, etc.).

*continued...*



## **ACTION ITEMS AHEAD:** *(continued)*

### **School Leadership Academy**

- Partner with the Office of Academic Standards to create resources and content to assist participants with aligning instruction with the NC Standard Course of Study.
- Introduce a classroom walk-through tool that crosswalks NC ILA learned practices with the North Carolina Education Evaluation System (NCEES).
- Continue to build internal coaching capacity by participating in special professional learning opportunities provided by Relay Graduate School of Education.
- Adopt best instructional leadership practices taught through NC ILA to provide a seamless support effort in helping schools transform.

### **Next Steps:**

DRS will establish a recurring convening of the Regional Support Structure Committee to finalize NCDPI's leadership recommendations that: redefine Regional Support Team roles, responsibilities and membership; delineate supports based on tiering of services; create a plan for communicating options for support to LEAs and schools.

With funding from the General Assembly, DRS will build out the model to include instructional support and a district liaison to serve as a support for the school model. The current funding structure for DRS will end in September 2024, while the legislative mandates for support to low-performing schools and districts have no time limit. A revision of the state's ESSA plan must be written and approved by state authorities, then submitted to the U.S. Department of Education for final approval. This process will take place in spring 2023 and final approval by USED is expected by June 2023. A request will be made to the General Assembly during the 2024 short session to make the CARES Intensive Support model a permanent structure at NCDPI based on evidence that the model can transform chronically low-performing schools.

DRS will release the 2023-24 NC ILA dates for each learning cohort. Additionally, the NC ILA Advisory Committee will continue to work with the Office of Academic Standards to develop resources and plan additional summer professional development.





# Strengthening Literacy

## VISION

To equip all Pre-K through fifth grade teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators with early literacy instruction methods grounded in the body of research known as the “science of reading” to ensure all children are reading to learn before the fourth grade.

## Background:

Much work has been done in North Carolina to support and improve literacy proficiency among all students. In April 2021, Senate Bill 387: Excellent Public Schools Act of 2021 modified the implementation of the North Carolina Read to Achieve Program to better ensure statewide reading proficiency by third grade. Senate Bill 387 provides a comprehensive plan for turning into practice years of recommendations across education partners and groups. This legislation equips teachers to support students through research-based methods of early literacy instruction.

Also in 2021, the N.C. General Assembly, in House Bill 196, designated Lexia Voyager Sopris Learning, Inc., as the provider for Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) professional learning for teachers in order to improve the literacy and language development of students and build strong foundational early literacy skills by utilizing the science of reading. LETRS professional development is being delivered to educators working with (i) children in the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) program, in consultation with the NC Department of Health and Human Services, and (ii) children in kindergarten through fifth grade.



Learning to read is a continuum of knowledge and skills, beginning at birth with oral language development and progressing to the development of written language skills and knowledge of the world that continues until adulthood. High-quality reading instruction is grounded in the body of research known as the science of reading regarding the acquisition of language (phonology, syntax, semantics, morphology, and pragmatics), and skills of phonemic awareness, accurate and efficient word identification (fluency), spelling, vocabulary, and comprehension.

High-quality reading instruction includes explicit and systematic phonics instruction, allowing all students to master letter-sound relations, and it is guided by state-adopted standards and informed by data so that instruction can be differentiated to meet the needs of individual students. Ultimately, the purpose of high-quality reading instruction is to empower all children to become critical readers who have the foundational skills and word and world knowledge to read and understand increasingly complex text.

While the Excellent Public Schools Act required all Pre-K through fifth grade teachers and one administrator per school to engage in LETRS professional development, North Carolina has been working on a much larger scale. The Literacy Work Group was convened in the spring of 2021 to bring together various stakeholders and begin working on the implementation of the Excellent Public Schools Act.



Using COVID relief funds, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) invested in resources for Exceptional Children and multilingual teachers, as well as one instructional coach per elementary school to support sustainability at the school level. Since approval of the Voyager Sopris contract in August 2021, more than 44,000 educators across the state are at a certain stage of LETRS training. Districts belonging to Cohorts 1 and 2 began in the fall and spring of 2021, respectively, and Cohort 3 started in fall 2022. This far-reaching initiative is supported by federal and state COVID relief funding.



## SMART GOALS PROGRESS

Relating to **LETRS professional development**, during the initial science of reading deployment phase, a [transparent timeline](#) was developed indicating where results would be evidenced throughout each phase of the staggered implementation across North Carolina. The timeline indicates where shifts will begin over time across the continuum. The initial implementation impact is most likely to occur among educator knowledge, followed by instructional shifts, which ultimately will have a positive impact on student outcomes. It is essential that educators be given time to learn the material, then apply what they are learning with fidelity before there is a shift in student outcome data. Knowing what data to monitor during implementation is key to this process. A mixture of qualitative and quantitative data will be used as part of the overall analysis. Additionally, it is important to note that student growth will be evident before overall proficiency is impacted on a large scale.

Select **educator preparation program (EPP)** faculty have completed LETRS Volume 1 (Units 1-4) and begun Volume 2 in August 2022. There is also a small cohort of faculty/lab school teachers who began using the remaining LETRS licenses in September 2022. Effective fall 2022, all EPPs have integrated the UNC System Literacy Framework with course revisions beginning in some institutions. Spring course revisions are nearing completion at some institutions for the January 2023 semester.

Institutions participating in the [literacy innovation leaders grant](#) will begin the second year of their work to include collaboration with K-12 partners for student practicum/internship experiences. UNC-Charlotte and its affiliated lab school, Niner University Elementary, have designed field experiences to take place at the school, integrating science of reading as a priority. Courses are taught at the school with practice opportunities as an immediate follow-up activity.





Per SL 2021-180 (p. 127), EPPs underwent course reviews in fall 2022. The results of the review will be reported to the General Assembly in January 2023. The [Interim Report on Science of Reading Educator Preparation Program Coursework Implementation](#) explains progress thus far in the review.

Additionally, independent EPPs and community colleges are offering LETRS professional development through grants and subgrants, as well as implementing aligned legislative and self-study projects.

In October 2021, the SBE approved the [Literacy Instruction Standards](#) (LIS) as outlined in Section V of Senate Bill 387: Excellent Public Schools Act of 2021. The LIS serve as a framework for the development and alignment of curriculum and instruction for all public schools. These standards are defined as a level of quality and equity to be used consistently within core literacy instruction statewide. While the [NC Standard Course of Study](#) (NCSCOS) sets student expectations, the LIS and their associated instructional practices set expectations for teaching literacy. The LIS are organized by grade band and can be used to ensure that all teachers across North Carolina have a common understanding and delivery of literacy instruction.



To support families on a broader scale during the early literacy shift, the Office of Early Learning (OEL) developed [North Carolina's Digital Children's Reading Initiative](#). This platform is posted on the NCDPI website and linked on every district's local website. This platform shares resources by each essential early literacy skill per grade level Pre-K through fifth grade. The directions are available in English and Spanish. Furthermore, the resources are available in a format that allows districts to print for families without access to technology.

Districts were required to develop **literacy intervention plans** (LIP) to implement and evaluate their literacy intervention systems. These plans must align with the science of reading and are tied to funding. They help guide literacy intervention practices and should be connected to district Multi-Tiered Systems of Support as they focus on supporting all students beyond core instruction. Each school district shall submit a literacy intervention plan annually no later than October 1.

The next layer of support that lies closest to the student is the **individual reading plan** (IRP). This plan is used to document support that schools are offering to individual students who are at risk for reading difficulties. Students who have a benchmark composite score below or well-below level should have an IRP of support. The goal of the IRP is to ensure educators are implementing support based on data as early as possible - early prevention. 2022-23 is the first year the IRPs will be implemented with an annual reporting date of September 1 to the SBE. Currently, training and support are underway for all districts.

### SMART GOALS AHEAD:

- By Spring 2025, complete all Pre-K through fifth grade teachers, coaches, and administrator professional development in the science of reading.
- By 2023-24, provide a comprehensive report identifying educational preparation program (EPP) best practices alignment with the science of reading.
- By 2022-23, all districts will implement a cohesive Multi-Tiered System of Support framework to guide literacy instruction and improve overall student proficiency in kindergarten through third grade.
- By 2023-24, implement a North Carolina Coaching Plan to support and sustain aligned, systematic science of reading implementation with fidelity.





## METRICS PROGRESS

Effective Fall 2022, 100 percent of all school districts are participating in **LETRS professional development**. This includes over 44,000 Pre-K through fifth grade teachers, Exceptional Children resource and multilingual teachers, and one school administrator and instructional coach per elementary school to support sustainability at the school level. All initial cohort participants are still on track to complete the coursework by Spring 2025. Lexia Voyager Sopris and NCDPI collaborate bi-weekly to discuss implementation and assess strengths and gaps, and to problem-solve potential next steps. As part of the implementation plan, the Office of Early Learning at NCDPI will continue to track the number of educators trained each year.

Furthermore, Teaching Strategies Gold end-of-year data indicated that 85.1 to 88.7 percent of North Carolina Preschool children met or exceeded the benchmark requirements. While this data is extremely helpful for general kindergarten readiness information, the Office of Early Learning recognizes the need for an early literacy screener that measures the necessary foundational skills aligned to the science of reading. This discussion is currently underway.

Relating to the **educator preparation program**, the UNC System Office selected eight UNC System faculty who served as Literacy Fellows within the UNC System Literacy Framework Initiative per the requirements of the UNC Board of Governors Resolution on Teacher Preparation. The individuals were selected as Literacy Fellows from a robust pool of applicants who included many strong candidates from across the UNC System representing a wealth of experience, research and knowledge of evidence-based literacy practice. Literacy Fellows collaborated with other literacy experts from within and outside the state, as well as UNC System staff, to develop a comprehensive literacy framework that reflects rigorous research on the essential components of reading and aligns with statutory requirements and other statewide literacy initiatives.

The **Literacy Instruction Standards (LIS)** process is still underway. The LIS form has been developed, shared and district training sessions were offered by the Office of Academic Standards. Districts are currently evaluating their literacy curriculum and instruction methods, making modifications as necessary to adhere to the LIS and making shifts to align with the model literacy implementation plan provided by NCDPI. District evaluations must be submitted for review and feedback by November 2023. Any modifications based on the feedback must be implemented into curriculum and instruction as soon as possible. All modified curriculum and instruction must be in place beginning with the 2024-25 school year.



After the development and training of the **literacy intervention plan (LIP)** template and implementation process, 100 percent of North Carolina school districts submitted drafts in March 2022 for NCDPI’s review and feedback. Based on stakeholder input, the LIP template was simplified and updated for the first official submission timeline. By October 2022, 100 percent of North Carolina school districts submitted LIPs that were approved or approved with recommendations. Every district’s plan showed strong evidence of the shift to align with the science of reading.

District and school training is currently in progress for implementing the **individual reading plans (IRP)**. For many districts, this is a seamless process embedded within their current Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. Since NCDPI is in the first year of implementation with the LIP and the IRP, the OEL will continue to monitor and support implementation, aligned to, and embedded within, each district’s Multi-Tiered System of Support framework.

## METRICS AHEAD

### LETRS Professional Development

- Number of North Carolina teachers, coaches, and administrators trained.
- Percent of proficient preschool students aligned to kindergarten readiness.
- Number of teachers meeting and/or exceeding growth.
- Average LETRS professional content knowledge growth data per cohort.

### Educator Preparation Program

- Number of Educational Preparation Programs implementing the science of reading.
- New teacher survey feedback.
- First-time passing rate of North Carolina Reading Foundations assessment.

### Literacy Instruction Standards, Literacy Intervention Plans, and Individual Reading Plans

- Number of Literacy Instruction Standard submissions.
- Number of literacy intervention plan submissions.
  - (approved, approved with recommendation, not approved)
- Compiled list of interventions.
- Number of district/school Individual Reading Plans.
- Number of kindergarten –through-third grade students at/exceeding benchmark requirements.
  - (composite/subset skills)



## ACTION ITEMS PROGRESS

With the announcement of the approved Lexia Voyager Sopris contract in August 2021, districts completed a survey indicating the cohort timeline that best suited the needs of their district for **LETRS professional development**. Cohorts 1 and 2 began in the Fall and Spring, respectively, and Cohort 3 started in the Fall of 2022. North Carolina is in the first year of statewide science of reading implementation. Every classroom, in every school, in every district, Pre-K through fifth grade has a teacher participating in LETRS professional development. Cohort 1 will complete the full course by August 2023. Furthermore, all districts have received [Program Report Code 085](#) funds to support any new teachers to ensure there is no lapse in training for the districts. The funds may be used to purchase new licenses, materials and professional development, as well as the cost of any makeup sessions. The Office of Early Learning also has regional consultants and North Carolina Literacy Facilitators who have fast tracked to become LETRS facilitators, offering free professional development at least four days weekly. Lastly, many districts have used these funds to pay for local staff to become LETRS facilitators to offer local LETRS professional development sessions.



Within the comprehensive framework, eight components were included within **EPPs** to cover the critical knowledge and skills aligned with the science of reading. Within each component, competencies and sub-competencies of what teacher candidates should know and be able to put into practice were included. To assess the current state of integration of evidence-based reading practice at each UNC System institution, the EPPs conducted an extensive self-study to determine the alignment with the new framework. Each EPP created an action plan to address enhancement and/or changes within current courses to ensure that all competencies and sub-competencies are integrated into elementary and special education-general curriculum programs.

All action items related to the development of **Literacy Instruction Standards, literacy intervention plans, and individual reading plans** have been completed. Since this is the first year of implementation, the plan is to provide ongoing technical support and professional development.

### **ACTION ITEMS AHEAD:**

#### **LETRS Professional Development**

- Hire and assign 115 early literacy specialists for all North Carolina school districts.
- Align, establish and prioritize opportunities for improvement in early literacy using the [NC Partnership Support Cycle](#).

#### **Educator Preparation Program**

- Continue to collaborate with education preparation programs to monitor the science of reading integration plans.
- Continue to ensure all education preparation programs are aware of the science of reading revisions and test alignment.

#### **Literacy Instruction Standards, Literacy Intervention Plans, and Individual Reading Plans**

- Provide district technical support and professional development related to Literacy Instruction Standards.
- Provide ongoing support and feedback on the fidelity of the literacy intervention plan implementation.
- Provide ongoing professional development related to the individual reading plans.

### **Next Steps:**

While NCDPI continues its progress with Operation Polaris, this is the first year of statewide science of reading implementation involving all 115 North Carolina school districts and a large number of charter schools. The Office of Early Learning will continue to monitor many of the initial goals, metrics and action steps from the original plan with a more comprehensive focus. Literacy Instruction Standards, literacy intervention plans, and individual reading plans will be merged within a Multi-Tiered System of Support Framework goal. However, it is essential that the Literacy Task Force add a goal related to the science of reading sustainability.

With the funding approval of 115 early literacy specialist positions (one per district) in June 2022, NCDPI has started collaborating, hiring and filling these positions for additional support and communication across all systems, from state to the district to school level. The Office of Early Learning early education consultants and early literacy specialists are situated to guide alignment across all levels of the organizational structures included in the partnership framework. Applying the partnership model contributes to capacity building and support for implementing core essentials evidenced in the science of reading research. The charge of both the consultants and specialists is to build partnerships that engage stakeholders with a shared mission to embed a comprehensive coaching framework and support structures that systematically transfer theory to practice. The [NC Partnership Support Cycle](#) will be systematically used across all levels of the organization.





# Prioritizing Student Support Services

## VISION

To coordinate support services to increase student access to high-quality instructional services through a focus on five key areas that impact student performance: social-emotional, nutrition, school safety, broadband connectivity, and school facilities.

## Background:

Research indicates that to improve student performance, support services for students are essential. These needed supports are critical to eliminating gaps that often prevent students in poverty from accessing the full scope of opportunities available and benefiting from high-quality instruction.

The North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) recognized this need to be an exigent priority, and as such, its strategic plan for the next five years addresses many issues related to the state's comprehensive remedial plan and the well-being of North Carolina students. Two specific goals outlined by the SBE focus on eliminating opportunity gaps and improving school and district performance by 2025. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has widened gaps thereby hindering student success and performance.

Operation Polaris provides the framework for developing operational strategies to implement the action plan developed by the SBE and to implement solutions to meet student needs in terms of socio-emotional support, nutrition, school safety, broadband connectivity and school facilities. Despite the documented impacts of the pandemic, including significant learning loss for nearly all student groups, several initiatives within Operation Polaris created the opportunity for nearly 50 chronically low-performing schools to exit low-performing status.

The work groups within NCDPI convened to focus on student support services are committed to developing approaches that focus on policy development and implementation that will extend this success to any school experiencing academic difficulties.





## SMART GOALS PROGRESS

There are separate work groups organized around each smart goal within the Student Support Services priority of Operation Polaris.

The work group organized to **develop district-level social-emotional profiles** has made significant strides in its work through securing \$175,000 in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding. Public school units (PSUs) are assisted in developing district-level profiles, which in turn can be used to allow schools to develop school profiles. The development of the profiles will further aid schools in understanding the social-emotional impact on students and where to focus resources to mitigate identified social-emotional barriers. This group continues its work in conjunction with the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work to bring these profiles to fruition.

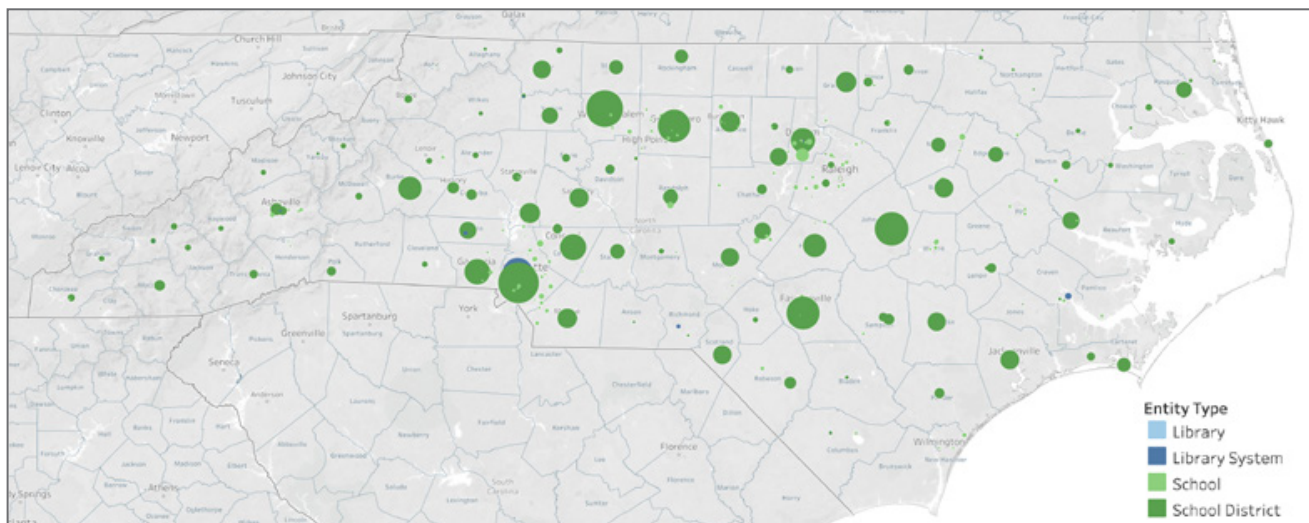
The work group focused on **increasing access to social-emotional professionals** made progress as Superintendent Truitt advocated and secured funding to provide each school district with one full-time psychologist beginning in the 2022-23 school year. This effort has created a substantial impact for districts under 10,000 students, in many cases doubling the number of FTEs allotted for school psychologists.

The work group seeking to **increase access to no-cost meals** made progress as the agency was awarded a Direct Certification through Medicaid. This process allows families to bypass additional paperwork for eligibility and enjoy free/reduced meals at schools if they are enrolled in certain types of Medicaid.

To improve student access to **high-speed internet and devices**, the \$7 billion federal [Emergency Connectivity Fund \(ECF\)](#) was established for eligible schools and libraries to request funding to cover reasonable costs of laptop and tablet computers; Wi-Fi hotspots; modems; routers; and broadband connectivity purchases for off-campus use by students, school staff, and library patrons. NCDPI's Office of School Connectivity assisted 206 PSUs in the filing, review, and audits of 734 separate applications resulting in over \$202 million in funding to facilitate and improve remote learning. The distribution of requests is illustrated below (developed by The Friday Institute on behalf of the Office of School Connectivity):

### All Entities

This interactive map shows ECF funding and pending funding requests for NC schools and libraries. Total Cost Shown: **\$202,346,776**



Last Updated November 16, 2022

[\(North Carolina Distribution of ECF Approved or Pending Applications\)](#)



The Center for Safer Schools (CFSS) work group is **assisting schools and districts in developing comprehensive safety plans** and has made great strides over the year, receiving record-setting funding for the center: \$2 million to fund the center and \$41 million specifically for the School Safety Grant Program. This funding has enabled schools to host training and professional development. Beyond fiscal resources, districts continue to receive high levels of training related to threat-assessment team training, development of School Risk Management Plans (SRMP) and State Emergency Response Applications (SERA) and processes for reviewing and submitting comprehensive school safety plans. The CFSS was also able to train over 100 participants in active-shooter response, suicide prevention, and gang psychology – all critical components needed to develop comprehensive safety plans.

Finally, the work group seeking **to address and improve school facility needs** saw significant advancements, as changes were made to the Needs Based Public School Capital Fund (NBPSCF) legislation. These legislative changes greatly help to address school facility needs as previous individual grant funds increased: from \$10 million and \$15 million with a 1:1 and 3:1 local match respectively, to grants now ranging from \$30 to \$50 million with matches as low as 0% and up to 35%. The enhanced NBPSCF application and State Capital Infrastructure Fund (SCIF) grant have produced three funding cycles resulting in \$838 million to address facility needs for many districts statewide.

### SMART GOALS AHEAD:

- **Develop district-level social-emotional profiles** to aid districts in developing school specific profiles that assist in identifying specific student and staff needs at the school level.
- **Increase access to social-emotional professionals** present in schools to assist students and staff.
- Identify various approaches to **increasing access to no-cost meals** for students in the elementary grades, resulting in the alleviation of food insecurity issues that may impact academic performance.
- Identify legislation and resources that allow all North Carolina students to have **access to both high-speed internet and devices** to use curriculum resources other than at school.
- **Assist schools and districts in developing a comprehensive safety plan** for their schools and districts, which will better assist them in identifying safety problems and the resources necessary to mitigate those problems.
- Identify both resources and legislation that allow districts across the state to **address and improve school facility needs** so all students can learn in modern learning environments.



## METRICS PROGRESS

The work group **developing district-level social-emotional profiles** is preparing the profile to identify support-services personnel for students, social-emotional support for staff, risk factors specific to districts and schools based on Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data, and the cost of meeting recommended staffing and service levels. The metric of district profile development requires an extensive data review and will ultimately impact the final development of district-level profiles.

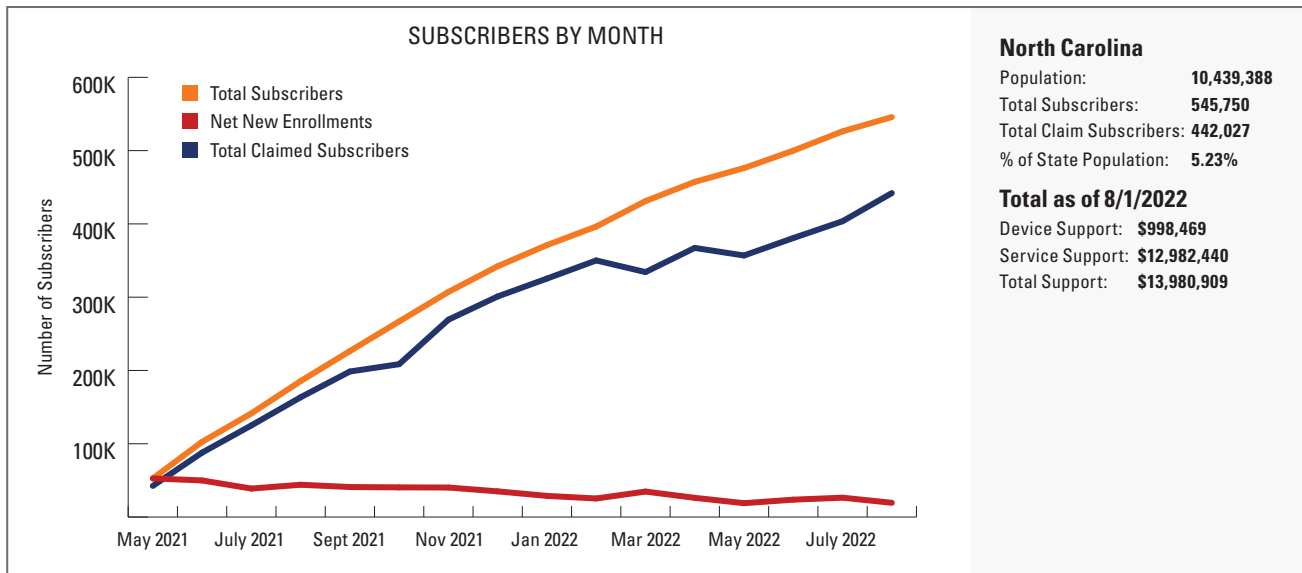
The work group to **increase access to social-emotional professionals** has increased each district's ability to effectively support students through the addition of one full-time psychologist in each school district. The work group assisted in highlighting the need for additional psychologists in school districts, and Superintendent Truitt made this a legislative priority. From there, legislators were able to craft legislation to close the gap and increase the number of positions in each school district.

The work group seeking **to increase access to no-cost meals** was able to reduce the administrative burden affecting some families through a process involving NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) and Medicaid data. The established process will allow students to automatically be eligible for



meal benefits and other resources that are available to economically disadvantaged students. The work group also engaged with the General Assembly to provide \$3.9 million in state funds for meals to be provided to all reduced-price eligible students at no cost to the family.

The work group overseeing **high-speed internet and devices** has seen progress through the federal [Affordable Connectivity Program](#), an FCC benefit program ensuring that households can afford the broadband they need for work, school, healthcare and more. While the program requires eligible residents to request this benefit directly from their service provider, NCDPI assists PSUs in making families aware of this available benefit ([ACP Consumer Outreach Toolkit](#)). The Office of School Connectivity continues to monitor North Carolina’s participation in the program and measures performance against other states. The chart below illustrates the trends from May 2021 through August 2022 of total subscribers (gold), total claimed subscribers (blue), and net new enrollment (red).



The work group **assisting schools and districts in developing a comprehensive safety plan** is working to help address inconsistencies to the SRMP system and school plan submissions. Before work group engagement, in January 2022, 38% of schools had no plan in the system or no evident activity of uploading building schematics and safety plans. Through a series of trainings and collaboration between the CFSS and the NC Department of Public Safety, by September 2022, 92% of schools had entered their plans into the online system.

The work group looking to **address and improve school facility needs** has used NCDPI’s Five-Year Facility Needs Survey as the key component for school construction indices. This district-reported information provides to NCDPI necessary data on statewide facility needs. Additionally, the ability to use ESSER funds for some facility work has directed the use of state facility funding towards projects that meet the grant requirements and away from projects that can be supported with ESSER funding.





## METRICS AHEAD:

### District-Level Social-Emotional Profiles:

- Complete a social-emotional well-being profile of 100% of districts for use during the 2021-22 school year through 2025.
- Provide guidelines for using district profiles to create individual school profiles to measure the relationship between school social-emotional data and student performance data, in spring of 2023.
- Develop sample school-level social-emotional profile.
- Compile a list of future legislative recommendations and NC State Board of Education (SBE) policy changes.

### Social-Emotional Professionals:

- Increase student and staff access to social-emotional professional staff by 5% annually for five years.
- Identify the number of psychologists hired.
- Compile data on workload/type of psychologist staff.
- Establish a needs assessment for areas of access for students that correlate to new academic performance data.

### No-Cost Meals:

- Increase annually the number of elementary-school students receiving breakfast and lunch at no cost with 100% access to no-cost breakfast and lunch by 2025.
- Complete school poverty indices and nutrition profiles.

### High-speed Internet and Devices:

- Advocate for awareness and take actionable steps towards enrollment in the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). ACP provides free connectivity to all eligible families to all internet service providers. Families who qualify for free-and-reduced price lunch are eligible for ACP.
- Continue supporting PSUs in finalizing their purchases and audits through the Emergency Connectivity Fund throughout the next year to achieve 100% funding approval and no return of funding due to audit findings.

### Comprehensive Safety Plan:

- Decrease by 15% the number of schools without a comprehensive safety plan by implementing a school safety review process to guide plan development over the next three years.
- Ensure 100% of school safety plans submitted in the SRMP portal meet all statutory requirements by the beginning of 2023-24 school year.

### Address and Improve School Facility Needs:

- Address annually during the next five years 5% percent of district school needs as listed on the Five-Year Facilities Needs Survey.
- Develop a 5–10-year Comprehensive Schools Facility Needs plans for 100% of Tier One Counties without a plan by 2024.



## ACTION ITEMS PROGRESS

### District-Level Social-Emotional Profiles:

The addition of UNC-CH social work staff will be key to completing district-level profiles. Because the development of a template and district profile is not yet complete, the process of vetting the developed product with key stakeholders is not yet possible. The recent release and approval of school performance data provides an additional data point for correlation of social-emotional data with student performance data.

### Social-Emotional Professionals:

It will be critical to determine the actual impact of newly hired staff and the number of positions that have not been filled.

### No-Cost Meals:

The work group continues to review school nutrition data and examine participation rate differences as a result of the expiration of COVID flexibility measures. Continued data review will help identify the specific kind of data dashboard necessary to assist districts in knowing their data but also informing external



stakeholders of the meal access data and financial impact data on district budgets. Finally, the work group has been able to connect with external researchers examining the relationship between Community Eligibility Program (CEP) participation and student behavior and discipline.

### **High-speed Internet and Devices:**

Additional state efforts to provide connectivity to all students is being achieved through a partnership between NCDPI and the North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) and its Division of Broadband and Digital Equity ([North Carolina Broadband Infrastructure Office \(ncbroadband.gov\)](https://www.ncbroadband.gov)). This division is responsible for awarding the Governor’s GREAT Grant for service providers to deploy fiber in areas of greatest need. ([See NC GREAT Grant Awards](#)). The Office of School Connectivity and The Friday Institute attend quarterly meetings of Digital Equity constituents as well as monitor GREAT Grant award progress. Deployment of fiber is often a slow process and awards have recently been made.



### **Comprehensive Safety Plan:**

Through training sessions and professional development opportunities, the work group was able to determine knowledge gaps that existed regarding plan requirements, the requirement for submission into the SRMP and logistical corrections required by DPS for consistent access to the SRMP system. Data reviews of existing plans provided valuable feedback to districts on required school safety plan updates and identification of district personnel to oversee the district process.

### **Address and Improve School Facility Needs:**

Requirements for NBPSCF application approval changed with each legislative session and NCDPI was able to adapt to these changes. Additionally, questions from districts about what data was used for grant selection criteria were addressed, revealing a need for districts to understand their local demographics and financial data, and how it positions them with other districts. This work revealed that districts need more direction on local capacity, how local districts decide what kind of local financial effort is required and when, and the scoring it adds to an application, but more importantly, how these efforts drive support of facility needs regardless of grant application selection.

## **ACTION ITEMS AHEAD:**

### **District-Level Social-Emotional Profiles:**

- Review next Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) dataset.
- Webinar on school profile development and use for 2023-24 academic year planning.
- Continuous/consistent stakeholder feedback process.

### **Social-Emotional Professionals:**

- Data on impact of newly hired staff.
- Continuous/consistent stakeholder feedback process.
- EPP program grant to boost enrollees in school counselor and school social worker programs.

### **No-Cost Meals:**

- Acknowledge the potential for increased school-meal debt and share data with stakeholders.
- Track student meal debt on a quarterly basis to keep stakeholders informed of the potential impact of student meal debt on each PSU’s general education budget.
- Data dashboard on school nutrition (student access data, FRL percentages, quarterly PSU financial data).
- Provide update on SBE’s Strategic Goal of increasing school breakfast, lunch and at-risk after school snack participation.
- Provide information about the CEP expansion.

*continued...*



## **ACTION ITEMS AHEAD:** *(continued)*

### **High-speed Internet and Devices:**

- Working closely with NC DIT's Division of Broadband and Digital Equity to inform them of student residential needs and provide comments on potential solutions.
- Establish a student-connectivity dashboard.

### **Comprehensive Safety Plan:**

- District updates to EDDIE system to identify correct number of schools in districts and school safety-plan submission.
- Update school safety-plan compliance checklist.
- Continue quarterly regional safety roundtables led by CFSS staff.
- Maintaining agendas and meeting notes.
- Provide DPS with annual EDDIE updates for correct list of schools.

- Establish roundtable sessions with districts completing comprehensive safety reviews and work with those who have not done so.
- Use of fund recommendations tied to district data and needs assessment.

### **Address and Improve School Facility Needs:**

- Develop county/district data dashboard with local financial data, LCS statistics, and debt service parameters.
- Develop enhanced application review standards and share with districts.
- Select new meeting dates.
- Identify new team members.
- Continuous/consistent stakeholder feedback process.

## **Next Steps:**

### **District-Level Social-Emotional Profiles:**

The work group will focus directly on completing and providing district profiles for use by individual schools within a district. Additionally, the work group will examine the scheduled Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) dataset and identify differences in the new survey. There will also be a focus on sharing sample school social-emotional profiles with districts and the options available for student academic planning for the 2023-24 school year. The work group will develop a process for cataloging effective practices for student interventions and staff support. Finally, the work group will determine, through stakeholder feedback, the need for regional support networks and the enhancement of existing support networks.

### **Social-Emotional Professionals:**

North Carolina school psychologist preparation programs produce a small number of available candidates each year. The work group will review current and past enrollment trends and the number of graduates who have taken school positions as opposed to working in the private sector. Vacancy-rate data will be crucial in determining how FTEs are used, and if necessary, determining requests for the redirection of the funds from the restricted use of hiring only psychologists, to a more flexible use of hiring other support personnel such as counselors, social workers or school nurses. The work group also will analyze the number of staff hired from ESSER funds and from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds, as well as offering solutions on how to use funds for hiring through creative means. The work group will also focus on school staff needs in accessing social-emotional professionals, along with surveying for need of access/care and examples of access programs suggested for emulation.



The work group will determine, through stakeholder feedback, the need for regional support networks and the enhancement of existing support networks.



**No-Cost Meals:**

Information will be provided on the CEP Program, in hopes of creating future expansions that would help increase the number of students receiving meals at no cost, while reducing or eliminating current financial disadvantages to eligible districts. This expansion would provide much needed assistance to families/households whose children do not qualify for meal benefits, yet the household income is insufficient to allow students to pay for meals at school.

**High-speed Internet and Devices:**

In September 2023, the NCDPI Digital Learning Dashboard will provide a mechanism to collect home-connectivity metrics to help identify specific areas across the state where students lack access to connectivity. This will provide baseline data in year one and the ability to measure growth annually. After collecting this baseline data, the agency will target the specified gap areas to determine if and what connectivity is available for affected physical addresses and to ensure those families have awareness and understand the funding option available if they desire connectivity.

**Comprehensive Safety Plan:**

The work group will place a greater focus on districts' and schools' understanding of the statutory requirements for plan development, but more importantly, how to create plan implementation fidelity that goes beyond compliance. Additionally, the work group will continue developing regional connections for district personnel and processes for effectively and efficiently using funds based on data assessments. The work group also will determine how to develop the most effective reporting process for sharing information about safety improvements with the GA, SBE, state superintendent, and other local and state stakeholders. Finally, the group will also collaborate with a data analytics group to develop an internal and external dashboard.

**Address and Improve School Facility Needs:**

Moving forward, this work group will focus on local districts developing long-range facility needs plans based on their Five-Year Facility Needs Survey. The goal is to assist districts in developing steps to identify their evolving facility needs and the capacity of local governments to fund and support these projects. The development of a data dashboard will identify all funding being used to address the estimated \$9 billion-\$12 billion facility needs statewide. The dashboard will show both state and local funding efforts, debt levels and revenue-raising capacity. Finally, an updated NBPSCF application review process will be developed to further define quantitative and qualitative criteria for application review, while continuing to meet statutory requirements for application approval.





# Redesigning Testing and Accountability

## VISION

To redesign North Carolina’s K-12 accountability system to ensure a sound, basic education for every student by measuring success based on preparedness for the workforce, higher education, and robust civic participation.

## Background:

The 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 — the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) — 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 and the public should expect more from their schools than these minimum thresholds for student achievement. In 2013, the N.C. General Assembly adopted school performance grades that assign schools a single letter grade: A-F.

School letter grades in North Carolina are based on a combination of achievement and growth scores, both of which are dimensions of state testing results. In most cases, the current overall grade assigned to a school represents the growth score, measuring progress regardless of achievement level, 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.

In the first iteration of Superintendent Truitt’s Operation Polaris, NCDPI laid out a vision to revise major components of the state’s school and student accountability systems. The first goal, to create a statewide portrait of a graduate, was achieved and presented to the public in October 2022. As the agency continues this work, the focus is now shifting to school performance grade redesign and a revised school report card.





## SMART GOALS PROGRESS

The first foundational objective within the Accountability and Testing chapter of Operation Polaris was to build a statewide portrait of a graduate to be used by districts and schools to frame local efforts and define student success. With the help of more than 1,200 design team members from across the state representing students, educators, administrators, parents, higher education, business and social service agencies, State Superintendent Catherine Truitt unveiled the [North Carolina Portrait of a Graduate](#) in October 2022.

The Portrait defines the seven most valuable competencies as defined by stakeholders across the state: adaptability, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, empathy, a learner’s mindset, and personal responsibility. When combined with academic rigor, these competencies will help schools, districts and communities chart a course toward a more intentional strategy for deeper learning and prepare students for a rapidly changing world. The next phases include familiarization (2022-23), operationalization (spring 2023), and deployment (2023-24) for those districts committed to adopting the statewide Portrait or customizing it based on their own local needs and circumstances.

Additionally, efforts to [revise the state’s current school performance grade model](#) and school report cards kicked off in September 2022 with the intent to prepare a plan and to present findings for consideration by the N.C. General Assembly during the 2023 long session.

As a note, the development of a Competency-Based Education model and implementation methodology aligned to the established content standards has been relocated to the Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration. It was previously aligned with Accountability and Testing.

### SMART GOALS AHEAD:

- Present results of statewide work regarding proposed redesign of school performance grades to the N.C. General Assembly in spring 2023.
  - Create a multi-indicator model of school success, based on broad stakeholder input
- Present a revised School Report Card model by June 2024.
- Pilot the school performance grade redesign study in 2023-24.
- Redesign the NC School Report Card.
- Continue to support the development of the North Carolina Personalized Assessment Tool (NCPAT) to refine and operationalize a multi-measure model of student success (including NC Check-ins 2.0).
- Pursue the development of a competency-based assessment model.



## METRICS PROGRESS

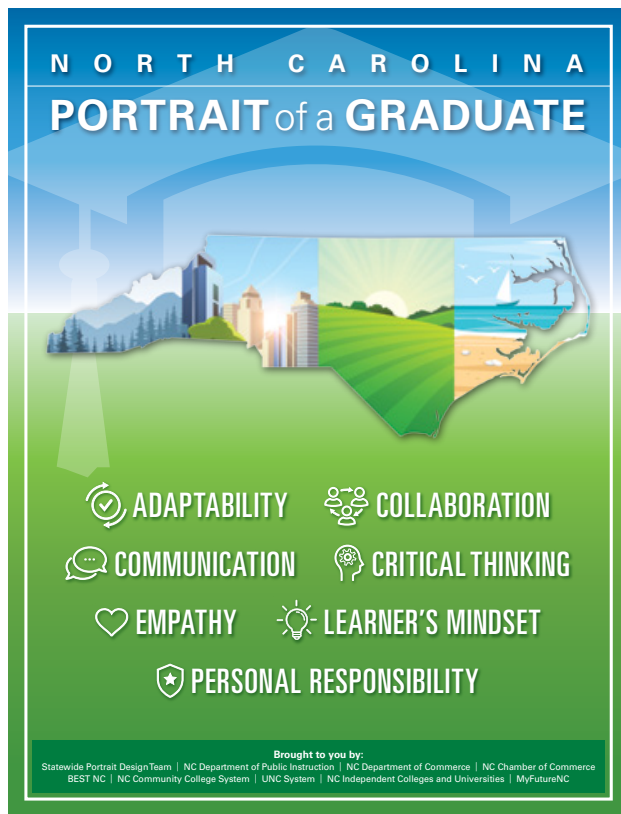
As part of the initial Operation Polaris strategic plan, NCDPI launched a months-long initiative in March 2022 to define the skills and mindsets students need for success after high school. With the help of 1,200 North Carolinians across the state, this grassroots-informed Portrait was presented in October of 2022. The NC Portrait of a Graduate aims to ensure that North Carolina students are well equipped for the broadest range of postsecondary opportunities. Aligning with State Superintendent of Public Instruction’s Catherine Truitt’s 2022 focus on the “[Year of the Workforce](#),” the Portrait can be adopted by schools and districts to better prepare the state’s 1.5 million students for civic life, career or college.



NCDPI began working directly with local school districts to solicit broad participation and engagement from educators, students and families to employers, business leaders, and workforce development boards across all eight of the state’s educational regions. Volunteers were organized into design teams, which collaborated over three months to determine the key competencies that would be included in the final Portrait. The teams specifically included representatives from across the education sector, including the NC Community College System, NC Independent Colleges and Universities, the University of North Carolina System, BestNC, myFutureNC, Communities in Schools, the NC Department of Commerce, the Emerging Issues Institute, Faith Based Network, and the NC Chamber of Commerce.

The Portrait can be adopted by school districts to enhance classroom learning, as it pairs academic rigor with the skills and mindsets that will help prepare North Carolina students for an ever-changing world. It gives school leaders and teachers the framework to design instruction that promotes real-world competencies and job readiness. Long term, the Portrait of a Graduate provides a framework for designing a multi-measured system of accountability that emphasizes strong academic outcomes as well as the durable skills and mindsets students need to pursue the post-secondary plans of their choice. As determined by the Portrait design teams, the statewide Portrait identifies seven competencies (listed above) that students should possess upon graduation from high school to thrive in a 21st century world. These include: Adaptability, Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking, Empathy, Learner’s Mindset and Personal Responsibility.

Moving forward, the Accountability and Testing work group will focus on school performance measurement. The pandemic revealed vulnerability in the current system of school performance when measured solely by growth and achievement. Many schools were identified as low performing, despite heroic efforts to lift student success during the most disruptive period in public school history. Additionally, the current model doesn’t examine other ways schools serve students nor does it reflect the work of teachers who do not teach tested subjects. These shortcomings underscore the need for a more balanced, multi-indicator school quality model.



### METRICS AHEAD:

- Staff will use a variety of tools to gain input to inform the development of the redesigned school performance grade model including: surveys, small group conversations, stakeholder engagement, and research on other state models.
- A new school report card that will help parents, students, and school districts understand the individual strengths, gaps, and readiness for civic life, career and/or college will complement and demonstrate success toward the redesigned school quality model.
- Additional data from the NCPAT will help NCDPI and external stakeholders make data-based decisions and ensure that a sound basic education is being measured and achieved in the newly designed accountability measures.





## ACTION ITEMS PROGRESS

The work group was able to complete many action items since the initial roll out of Operation Polaris, including reviewing a portrait of a graduate from other states to determine the potential for developing a similar approach for North Carolina students and schools. As part of the effort to craft a statewide Portrait, the work group reviewed existing Local Education Agency (LEA) portraits to understand structure, concept and to ensure alignment. During the process to develop the Portrait, the work group met and spoke with NCDPI leadership and presented regular updates on the timeline and the progress to the NC State Board of Education.

### ACTION ITEMS AHEAD:

- Build Superintendent's Advisory Group, a multi-sector leadership team that will inform, preview, and curate recommendations to redesign school performance grades.
- Create a project management framework to include communication and stakeholder engagement plan to ensure all voices are heard and engaged in the work.
- Identify work streams within NCDPI agency to prepare and support the deliverables and timeline.
- Redesign the NC School Report Card to reflect sound, basic education criteria and preparedness for civic life, career, or college. The resulting template should be easy to communicate and understand. The new school report card should allow for more visibility on school strengths and weaknesses.
- Continue to pilot NCPAT in districts to define new approaches to student testing methodology.

### Next Steps:

This year, the agency will operationalize the NC Portrait of a Graduate and focus on School Performance Grade redesign. This work will be characterized by deep stakeholder engagement with schools, teachers, parents, and students, and collaboration with sector partners, educational and business nonprofits, and the N.C. General Assembly. The agency will also partner with the education news organization [EdNC](#) to help gather data and insights for both the Portrait and the redesign.

For the North Carolina Portrait of a Graduate, the Agency will continue its work with Battelle for Kids to facilitate a rubric design process aligned to the seven competencies in 2023. Then in the following year, the team will create assessments that build upon the rubrics and pilot in select districts.

For School Performance Grade Redesign, next steps include narrowing the number of academic and non-academic indicators, assessing them for validity and reliability, and then applying various weighting formulas. NCDPI will outline and report feedback to the N.C. General Assembly to create a multi-indicator school performance grade model.







# Piloting Competency-Based Education

## VISION

To provide a personalized education experience to all North Carolina students that focuses on ensuring students' mastery of concepts and content.

## Background:

The first version of Operation Polaris concentrated on providing personalized learning to all students to ensure their individual needs were met and to support the acceleration of learning beyond COVID-19 pandemic impacts. This intentional focus on student learning lived in two areas within Operation Polaris – Accountability and Testing Reform and in the Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration. In this latest iteration of Operation Polaris, the emphasis on personalized learning and mastery has been distilled to a stand-alone priority: Competency-Based Education (CBE). According to a definition developed collaboratively by the Regional Educational Laboratory Program Southeast and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), Competency-Based Education is “a personalized learning approach that provides a flexible and engaging learning environment in which progression is based on mastery of explicit learning objectives, or competencies, as demonstrated through evidence of student learning, rather than the time spent in a course/topic.” This definition will guide the agency’s work as it implements Competency-Based Education in the state.





## SMART GOALS PROGRESS

Over the past year, much of the work regarding Competency-Based Education has involved planning and collaborating with stakeholders across the state to identify specific instructional needs related to transitioning schools to a CBE approach. As the agency moves from planning to implementation of Competency-Based Education, the following goals will guide the agency's strategy.

### SMART GOALS AHEAD:

- Identify a Competency-Based Education digital tool by January 2023 to support PSUs who pilot the platform with the transition to Competency-Based Education in middle grades math and English language arts.
- Deploy the chosen Competency-Based Education digital tool by March 2023 for pilot schools.
- Develop a North Carolina Competency-Based Education road map by August 2023.
- Develop a competency-based model and implementation methodology aligned to the established content standards, to be deployed in the 2024-25 academic year.



## METRICS PROGRESS

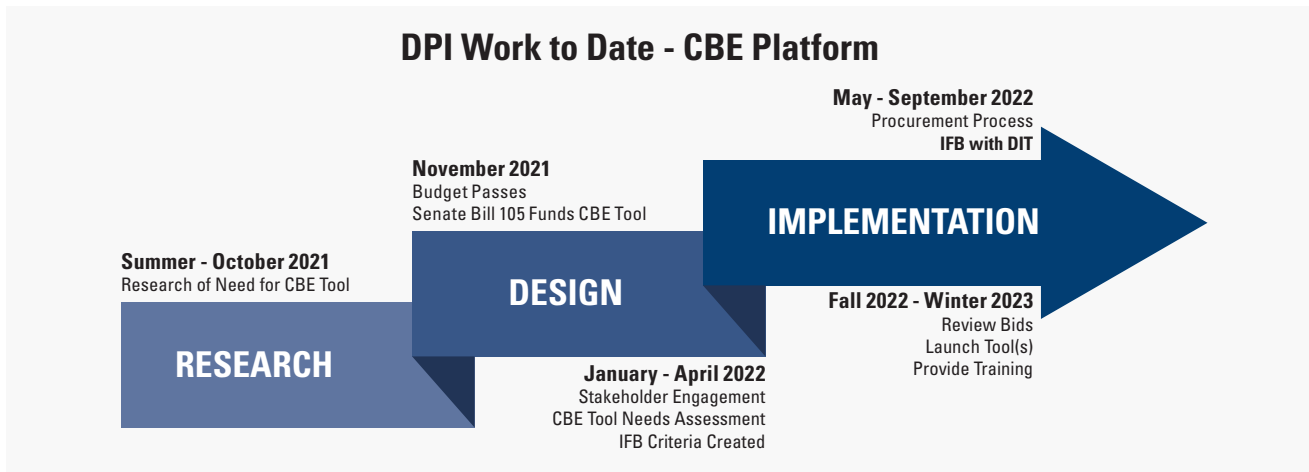
Several milestones surrounding Competency-Based Education were reached in the past year. The criteria for a Competency-Based Education technology platform to support CBE practices in schools were developed. The initial steps toward developing the criteria have been completed and a vendor will be selected in the coming months to support this initiative across the state. Additionally, in March 2022, a [report](#) to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee highlighted the progress of the working group on implementing Competency-Based Education. In September 2022, the committee received an update on progress to date. Below is a list of additional metrics that will be used to measure the agency's implementation of this work.

### METRICS AHEAD:

- Number of schools participating within the North Carolina Competency-Based Education School Network.
- Number of schools participating in the pilot of the new Competency-Based Education digital platform.
- Teacher and student usage levels of the Competency-Based Education digital platform.
- Number of Competency-Based Education resources made available to educators across North Carolina.
- Number of teachers and administrators participating in professional learning offerings on Competency-Based Education.
- Teacher and administrator feedback on Competency-Based Education resources (qualitative).



## DPI Work to Date - CBE Platform



## ACTION ITEMS PROGRESS

To achieve the goal of implementing Competency-Based Education in North Carolina, several steps are required. The overarching strategy is to initiate the work through a pilot process with schools and districts that have begun work around personalized learning for students. Through the development of a North Carolina Competency-Based Education School Network, educators and administrators will help craft the vision and direction of Competency-Based Education in the state. Below is a specific set of action items to achieve the goal of implementing Competency-Based Education in North Carolina.

### ACTION ITEMS AHEAD:

- Establish a North Carolina Competency-Based Education School Network.
- Identify a Competency-Based Education digital tool to support school's transformation to Competency-Based Education.
- Implement the chosen digital tool within the North Carolina Competency-Based Education School Network.
- Convene the North Carolina Competency-Based Education School Network to identify the needs of schools to move to Competency-Based Education.
- Develop the North Carolina Competency-Based Education road map. The CBE Road map will provide a long-term plan for implementing the various elements of CBE across the state including goals, strategies, timelines, and milestones.
- Survey PSUs to understand their levels of preparedness for Competency-Based Education.
- Develop a cohort model, based upon PSU readiness, to implement Competency-Based Education resources. Resources are being deployed and implemented with districts who are ready to move to CBE.
- Develop resources and professional development for PSUs administrators and educators differentiated for the varying levels of readiness.

### Next Steps:

Over the next year, the Competency-Based Education working group will convene key stakeholders to both pilot the Competency-Based Education digital platform and develop the state's road map. There will be a specific focus during this phase on stakeholder engagement with teachers and administrators to understand their readiness for Competency-Based Education and to identify any needed training and resources. By using a pilot model and subsequent differentiated cohort model, the agency will scale best practices surrounding Competency-Based Education across the state.







# Transforming the Human Capital Pipeline

## VISION

To cultivate multiple on-ramps for a diverse body of educational professionals and build effective infrastructure to recruit and retain high-quality teachers, administrators, and support personnel for every student in North Carolina.

## Background:

The North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) in February 2021 adopted the recommendations from the state's Human Capital Roundtable group, which was facilitated by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and focused on developing a "new and fresh approach" to teacher licensure to address teacher shortages and insufficient diversity. The Human Capital Roundtable envisioned a teacher licensure and compensation system that was based on demonstrated competencies of teachers and positive impact on students as the fundamental basis for the career and professional growth of teachers. The Board agreed with the roundtable group's conclusion that current licensure policies do not adequately address the staffing challenges facing public schools, nor do they meet the needs of our children and our communities. The state's public schools face similar challenges in administration, student support, and classified areas.

The state's Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission (PEPSC), staffed by NCDPI's Office of Educator Preparation, Licensure and Performance, has spent the last year developing a plan for transforming North Carolina's licensure and compensation system.

Additionally, efforts to expand partnerships focused on recruiting and supporting educators are also progressing, particularly with respect to TeachNC, Grow Your Own initiatives (with the expectation that successful programs are replicated), and the Assistant Principal Leadership Accelerator Program.





## SMART GOALS PROGRESS

The Office of Educator Preparation, Licensure and Performance continues to support PEPSC in its development of the licensure-compensation reform initiative, [the Pathways to Excellence model](#). The Office of Financial and Business Services is working to align existing salary grades to the NC Office of State Human Resource's current class and compensation system. Job descriptions related to those classified roles will be updated and modernized.

Staff is also working with the professional development group DigiLEARN to develop a state standard for micro-credentials to ensure rigor and relevance for professional learning in North Carolina. In addition, the Office of Educator Preparation, Licensure and Performance, is working to develop and deploy dashboards related to human capital areas. The Operation Polaris work groups will collaborate to ensure that dashboards are relevant and available to all public school units (PSUs). Input from local human resource leaders will be solicited and support for use of the dashboards for decision-making will be provided.

A survey by the education news site EdNC about the state's school performance grade system found that 81% of more than 19,000 respondents favored a school climate measure and 61% wanted a parent engagement/satisfaction indicator in the model. The Operation Polaris' Accountability and Testing work group is determining the feasibility of student, parent, and community surveys as an additional metric in the state's report card model.

North Carolina also has a long history of using biennial teacher working conditions surveys to help inform efforts to improve retention of educators and improve schools. Measures of student perceptions that are correlated with improved academic outcomes have now been piloted and validated. This work is ongoing, and additional updates will be provided once the next steps have been finalized by the work group.



Lastly, to more fully develop, cultivate, and leverage collaborations aimed at strengthening the educator pipeline, an additional smart goal has been added. Through partnerships with districts and institutions of higher education, a primary focus will be to develop scalable opportunities for grow-your-own initiatives that approach students as early as 8th grade.

The need for high-quality, well-supported principals is critical. As such, NCDPI has partnered with North Carolina Principal and Assistant Principals Association (NCPAPA) to [launch](#) the Assistant Principal Leadership Accelerator Program (AP Accelerator). The program provides training, support, and mentorship to accelerate readiness for the rigorous demands of the principalship.

After they are placed as principals, participants will continue to receive personalized support during their first year.

### SMART GOALS AHEAD:

- Transform compensation system for educators by 2025 so it is based on competencies, skills and evidence of impact on student learning.
- Redesign the licensure process to allow for a tiered, competency/skill-based progression by developing multiple measures tied to student outcomes and allowing for a range of advanced professional roles for educators and career advancement within five years.
- Align classified salary grades with classification and compensation revisions from North Carolina Office of State Human Resources by Dec. 31, 2023.
- Enhance the educator feedback model by adding metrics on well-being, workplace climate and other indicators by 2023 that correlate with student and school success.
- Develop data resources (e.g., visualization dashboards) and training for PSUs to use in human capital processes (e.g., hiring, evaluation, placement, professional learning, retention, advancement) within two years.
- Cultivate new partnerships and strengthen existing ones to increase the number of potential educators within multiple grade and age spans (i.e., middle schoolers, high schoolers, career changers, etc.).



## METRICS PROGRESS

As the PEPSC subcommittees move forward with their work, revisions to the Pathways to Excellence model have been made as needed. PEPSC presented a “blueprint” of Pathways to Excellence to the State Board of Education in December of 2022. The Board’s acceptance of this blueprint allows further work on the model to be completed by multiple groups, including PEPSC, State Board legal counsel, and the NCDPI, with the prospect of a legislated pilot for the 2023-24 school year. To support NCDPI’s efforts to strengthen the educator pipeline, the General Assembly provided funding for a full-time position to focus on educator recruitment and partnership development. These partnerships include working with public school units and institutions of higher learning to develop grow-your-own initiatives.

Another effort to strengthen the educator pipeline is through the work of [TeachNC](#), which is also now housed within NCDPI. TeachNC was launched in 2019 to elevate the profile of the teaching profession and increase the quantity, quality and diversity of teachers entering North Carolina’s classrooms. In service of this mission, TeachNC includes a full suite of strategic recruitment activities, including a robust communications campaign, a comprehensive website encompassing all existing resources in the state, and one-on-one personalized support for teacher candidates.



Finally, superintendents from across the state nominated more than 60 promising school leaders for the [Assistant Principal Leadership Accelerator Program](#). After an exhaustive selection process, [25 candidates were selected](#) for the first cohort. To date, 17 of the initial 25 participants already have been hired as school principals. These principals have entered the second phase of the program, during which the AP Accelerator will provide targeted coaching and mentorship during the participants' first, and arguably most-challenging, year in the principalship. The demographic breakdown for cohort one is:

- 48% persons of color and 52% white
- 76% female and 24% male
- 3 years median experience as assistant principals

### METRICS AHEAD:

- Improved retention of effective educators, administrators and support personnel.
- Revised North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions (NC TWC) Survey feedback model.
- Data portal for human capital (HC) decision-making.
  - A comprehensive list of HC data elements that have been identified by experts
  - NCDPI operational data store (ODS) is operational and all HC data elements included
  - Completion of HC dashboards
  - Completed training for all North Carolina public school units (PSUs)
  - Data usage reports/surveys for how the PSUs are using the dashboards to inform decision making, including evidence that the dashboard itself is an effective tool
- New routes to career advancement that are tied to student outcomes.
  - Pathways reform work: The percentage of the Pathways reform work that has been completed by PEPSC and approved by the State Board of Education
  - The percentage of required revisions completed of SBE policies and state statutes that are required to support/allow the reformed licensure and compensation
  - The percentage of measures approved for measuring teacher effectiveness/ impact that have met validity and reliability standards
  - The extent to which the performance requirements for each pathway transition point and level of tiered license/advance roles have been completed



## ACTION ITEMS PROGRESS

NCDPI is continuing its work to establish both quantitative and qualitative measures of effectiveness for educators. In partnership with DigiLEARN, NCDPI is working on the standards for micro-credentials and how they can be used to establish competency standards for licensure and promote professional learning that leads to greater instructional efficacy for educators. As a support to PEPSC, NCDPI staff is working on the development of multiple measures that will allow all educators to progress through the licensure process and demonstrate their impact on student learning.

NCDPI's Finance Office is now engaged with the Budget Subcommittee of PEPSC to quantify the budgetary impacts of a new teacher compensation model. The Office of Educator Preparation, Licensure, Evaluation/Performance has [created a dashboard](#) for the state's educator preparation programs, the diversity of the state's teaching force, and provides data and technical assistance for the SBE's dashboard.



# NC Educator Preparation Program Dashboard

Developed by the NCDPI Educator Recruitment and Support Division

## Explore These Trends in Educator Preparation

Click a card to go to its dashboard.

### Overview

Welcome to the NCDPI's EPP Dashboard, a comprehensive set of interactive data displays illuminating educator preparation in our state.

The dashboard covers a number of topics, tracing candidates from enrollment to their effectiveness at the end of their third year of teaching.

For each topic, you will be able to compare results for all EPPs or just the ones that interest you. You can fine-tune your results by type of EPP, candidate pathway to licensure, licensure group, race/ethnicity, and/or gender.

Get started by clicking on one of the cards to right!

For more information on EPPs in our state, visit NCDPI's educator preparation page.

If you are someone interested in a career in teaching, visit TeachNC.



EPP data through: June 30, 2021

## ACTION ITEMS AHEAD:

- Finalize compensation structure of Pathways to Excellence model. (December 2022 - March 2023)
- In partnership with DigiLEARN, develop a policy brief on micro-credential implementation for the SBE. (December 2022 - January 2023)
- Identify and validate measures of student feedback that are correlated with student achievement and well-being. (2023-2024 academic year)
- Train PSUs on existing data visualizations to inform data-driven decision making on issues related to human capital. (2023-2024 academic year)
- Continue to support PEPSC in the refinement of the Pathways to Excellence model and the development of teacher effectiveness measures.
- Identify and revise policies and statutes necessary for the implementation of the Pathways to Excellence model.
- Prepare protocols for piloting the Pathways to Excellence model (and its associated measures) in PSUs across the State.
- Develop data resources and trainings to support PSUs in data-driven decision-making with respect to their Human Capital processes.
- Develop standardized memoranda of understanding for grow-your-own initiatives.
- Create an assessment tool that tracks graduating high school students of grow-your-own programs who are transitioning into educator preparation programs.
- Identify needs of each region to help target districts that could benefit from developing grow-your-own initiatives.
- Partner with PSUs and institutes of higher education (IHEs) to craft a framework for implementation, execution, and assessment related to grow-your-own initiatives.
- Create a repository of information related to grow-your-own initiatives (sample agreements, programs of study, course descriptions, etc.) on the NCDPI website.
- Work with human resource leaders to update/modernize job descriptions to more accurately reflect the work of the schools' classified workforce. (January 2023 - July 2023)



## Next Steps:

Based on the final version of the Pathways to Excellence model, once approved, NCDPI will create an effective educator profile that clearly articulates the expectations of the teaching role. Additionally, NCDPI will provide information on the multiple evidences that educators may use to establish their effectiveness and advance their careers while remaining in the classroom. NCDPI will work with educator preparation programs (EPPs) and PSUs to pilot these measures and partner with experts to conduct validity and reliability testing of the piloted measures. NCDPI will also create a permissions-based portal to data visualizations that will allow transparency to the PSUs, EPPs, and the public on the data that NCDPI collects related to student growth and human capital.

Additionally, NCDPI will work with stakeholders from those groups on how the data visualizations can be improved or enhanced to support the field. From a recruitment perspective, efforts to solidify frameworks for grow-your-own programs will continue. In addition, the Office of TeachNC and Educator Recruitment Partnerships will lead the charge to create a robust marketing plan that highlights the benefits of becoming an educator. Coaching and mentorship for participants in Cohort One of the Assistant Principal Leadership Accelerator Program (AP Accelerator) will continue. The new cohorts began in November 2022 and will participate in a fully facilitated AP Accelerator curriculum, developed by the Leadership Academy, with a combination of in-person and virtual monthly sessions focused on research-based turnaround competencies and actions. Cohort one post-placement support will include in-person and virtual coaching, with school visits that are focused on improving school culture, building staff capacity and launching successful turnaround strategies. Mentoring around the North Carolina School Executive Standards and the 21 Competencies of Effective School Leaders will also be provided.







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