



## BACKGROUND BRIEF: 2021 North Carolina Annual Testing Results

This briefing paper provides basic background information to help you understand the 2020-21 school test data, including how the test data are used under the state's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) State Plan and important changes in the data being reported for 2020-21 due to COVID-19.

At the September 1 State Board of Education meeting, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction will report state-level scores on the required end-of-grade and end-of-course tests for the 2020-21 school year. However, because of a waiver North Carolina was granted by the U.S. Department of Education (USED) due to impacts on teaching and learning last year, certain accountability elements have not been calculated and will not be reported. Not included in the reporting for the 2020-21 school year are School Performance Grades (SPG) for schools

and school-level subgroups, growth indicators and long-term goals for schools to improve achievement and reduce performance gaps.

Given the various circumstances of the 2020-21 school year, comparisons to the 2018-19 school year, though provided as a reference point, are not recommended. Districts and schools operated various instructional schedules, and the assessments were administered during a much wider time frame than typical. These two factors prohibit comparisons. However, the 2018-19 data give a context for discussions on how to address instruction in the 2021-22 school year. This data release is focused on transparency to parents and the public as required by the USED waiver. The focus is not on comparisons or accountability metrics as the USED waived these requirements for the 2020-21 school year. The following explanation of the data being released is consistent with the requirements of the waiver.

### Data Reported for 2020-21

Outcome data being reported for the 2020-21 school year include student performance on end-of-grade and end-of-course assessments, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, poverty, students with disabilities and English learners; participation and non-participation on state tests, also disaggregated; the percentage of students identified as English learners who met the exit criteria from such status; and the cohort high school graduation rate for the class of 2021. In addition, assessment results from 2020-21 will include disaggregated data for 11th grade students who participated in the ACT and disaggregated data for students who participated in WorkKeys.

All of the presented data will be reported by school and by district on the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) website on

September 1 and later on state and local NC Report Cards. When released this fall, the NC Report Cards will contain all required information based on the USED waiver and any changes in state law. More information will be provided when the report cards are released since some of the requirements are not testing measures.

Per ESSA, schools that do not meet performance standards must be identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement and for Targeted Support and Improvement. However, because of the federal waiver from school accountability measures for 2020-21 and the waiver from all testing in 2019-20, schools identified during the 2018-19 school year for Comprehensive Support and Improvement and for Targeted Support and Improvement will retain that status for the 2021-22 school year.

### Student Performance on State Assessments

In the 2020-21 school year, new end-of-grade reading tests were administered in grades 3-8. As with any new tests, a standard setting was held in July 2021 where panels of teachers and other content experts reviewed the content standards and the associated test items. The process yielded recommended academic achievement levels for reporting the results of the reading tests. The recommendations were approved by the State Board of Education at its August meeting.

Previously, the reading tests, and the math and science tests, had five academic achievement levels. Beginning with the new mathematics tests in 2018-19, student performance is based on four academic achievement levels: Level 5, Level 4, Level 3, and Not Proficient. Similar levels were applied to reading and science tests in the 2020-21 school year. The chart below provides the reporting structure for the 2020-21 assessments that are included in the accountability reports.

Previous scoring levels	New scoring levels
Level 5: Superior Command	Level 5: Comprehensive Understanding
Level 4: Solid Command	Level 4: Thorough Understanding
Level 3: Sufficient Command	Level 3: Sufficient Understanding
Level 2: Partial Command	Not Proficient: Inconsistent Understanding
Level 1: Limited Command	

Achievement Level 3 identifies students who have a sufficient command of grade-level knowledge and skills in the tested content areas (English language arts, mathematics and science) to move on to the next grade but who may need additional support. With continued learning and progress, achievement Levels 4 and 5 indicate students are on track to be career and college ready by the time they graduate from high school.

The percentage of students meeting Level 3 and above and Level 4 and above will be reported to the State Board of Education, along with the percentage of students at each of the four academic achievement levels. The one exception to this is Grade 3 Reading. To meet Read to Achieve requirements for students to have additional assessment opportunities and instruction throughout the 2020-21 school year and summer 2021, results for the 3rd grade reading end-of-grade tests were reported based on five achievement levels instead of four. All associated reading assessments will be reported on the four approved academic achievement levels beginning with the 2021-22 school year.

**Here are the state assessments that students take:**

GRADE	ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA)	MATHEMATICS	SCIENCE	OTHER
3	Beginning-of-Grade/End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	–	–
4	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	–	–
5	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	–
6	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	–	–
7	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade	–	–
8	End-of-Grade	End-of-Grade/NC Math 1	End-of-Grade	–
9	–	NC Math 1	–	–
10	English II	–	–	Pre-ACT
11	–	NC Math 3	Biology	ACT
12	–	–	–	WorkKeys

With the waiver from accountability requirements, accountability indicators including School Accountability Growth, the combined ACT/WorkKeys indicator, and Math Course Rigor will not be reported for 2020-21.

## RESOURCES

### DATA BY STATE/DISTRICT/SCHOOL –

[www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/testing-and-school-accountability/school-accountability-and-reporting/accountability-data-sets-and-reports](http://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/testing-and-school-accountability/school-accountability-and-reporting/accountability-data-sets-and-reports)

### NORTH CAROLINA STANDARD COURSE OF STUDY –

[www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/classroom-resources/k-12-standards-curriculum-and-instruction/standard-course-study](http://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/classroom-resources/k-12-standards-curriculum-and-instruction/standard-course-study)

### TESTING PROGRAM

#### GENERAL INFORMATION AND POLICIES –

[www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/testing-and-school-accountability/testing-policy-and-operations](http://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/testing-and-school-accountability/testing-policy-and-operations)

#### RELEASED TEST FORMS AND ANSWER KEYS FOR END-OF-GRADE AND END-OF-COURSE TESTS –

Parents and educators can see firsthand the rigor of questions on the assessments.

[www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/testing-and-school-accountability/state-tests](http://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/testing-and-school-accountability/state-tests)

## 2021 INFORMATION CONTACTS

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