



Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction

Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

Report on Testing Reductions

S.L. 2018-32

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DPI Chronological Schedule, 2018-2019

NC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thank you for your dedication to education and successful outcomes for the students of North Carolina. I am pleased to submit to you today my initial report on our efforts to reduce the testing burden on North Carolina's students and educators.

In a recent survey, more than 67,000 parents and educators across the state took the time to respond to us about over-testing. More than 3 out of 4 parents and teachers told us that North Carolina's students are tested too much.

We have collected data about the nature and extent of locally-required assessments, reviewed State policies, and focused first on reductions that do not require statutory changes. We have created an [interactive site](#) where legislators, educators, and members of the public can see how their local school district compares to others in key measures such as the number of assessments, the time required for assessment in each grade, and the type, reason, and source of each assessment. Some sample images from that site are attached.

We are just getting started reforming testing in North Carolina's public schools. This memo will provide an overview of the steps we are currently taking at the Department of Public Instruction, along with next steps and a timeline for final recommendations for legislative action.

Actions Already Taken:

- ✓ Eliminated separate "field tests" – tests that were given to students in some districts to develop items for future statewide tests
- ✓ Reduced the time and frequency of reading tests for Kindergarten through 3rd grade students

Changes in Progress for the 2018-19 School Year:

- Reducing the number of questions on tests
- Reducing the time students must sit for tests
- Changing testing policies to reduce the stress at schools around testing time
- Working with local leaders to reduce the number of locally-required tests
- Working with the State Board of Education to eliminate tests not required by state or federal law
- Giving students other ways to show progress if they have a bad test day
- Using the appropriate amount of technology as a tool for students and teachers to personalize learning and eliminate tests

Next Steps for Spring 2019:

- Collaborate with local superintendents on reasonable goals for reducing the testing burden using the data we have collected on the variation in local testing approaches.
- Specific recommendations to the General Assembly on legislative changes to reduce the testing burden.
- Encourage and enable the use of personalized learning technology, which allows teachers to get the information they need about students' progress using less stressful, interim computer adaptive testing to eventually replace high-stakes standardized testing.

We look forward to continuing to work with local superintendents and state leaders to reform the system of over-testing, so that we can give the teachers the time to do what they entered the profession to do: teach.

Overview of State Testing

The table below summarizes the State and Federal required assessments, the legal authority for the requirement, and whether any actions are underway to change these assessments. The growth measure column indicates whether the assessment is used to generate a growth measurement for teacher evaluation or other purposes.

	Growth Measure?	Federal Law	State Law	State Policy Only	Action
Elementary – Middle School:					
K entry/readiness assessment			X		
K-8 th grades screener for English language learners		X			
K-3 rd grades reading diagnostic assessments	X		X		Shorten
K-3 rd grades reading and math formative assessments			X		
3 rd grade Reading (BOG)	X			X	
3 rd grade Reading EOG retest/alternative test if needed			X		
3 rd -8 th grades Reading (EOG)	X	X			Shorten
3 rd -8 th grades Math (EOG)	X	X			Shorten
3 rd -8 th grades English language proficiency (English language learners)		X			
4 th grade NC Final Exam Science	X			X*	Eliminate
4 th & 5 th grades NC Final Exam Social Studies	X			X*	Eliminate
5 th grade Science (EOG)	X	X			
6 th grade NC Final Exam Science	X			X	Eliminate
7 th grade NC Final Exam Science	X			X	Eliminate
8 th grade Science (EOG)	X	X			
6 th grade NC Final Exam Social Studies	X			X	Eliminate
7 th grade NC Final Exam Social Studies	X			X	Eliminate
8 th grade NC Final Exam Social Studies	X			X	
High School:					
Algebra I or Integrated Math I end-of-course test	X	X			
English II end-of-course test	X	X			
Biology end-of-course test	X	X			Shorten
Algebra II or Integrated Math III end-of-course test	X	X			
High School CTE students: nationally normed test of workplace readiness		X			
10 th grade Career/College Readiness Assessment (Pre-ACT or alternate)			X		
11 th grade Career/College Readiness Assessment (ACT)			X		
NC Final Exams – State required courses without a federally-required test	X			X	See Rec. 3
Career & Technical Education courses	X			X	
Screener for English language learners		X			

Testing Changes Underway

INITIATIVE	PROCESS
Reduce the length of required tests	Reduce the number of questions and review historical data on actual time students require to take the online tests
Reduce the stress at schools around testing time	Revising test administration guides: use of proctors a local decision, allow reviewing of testing strategies immediately prior to the test
Reduce the number of locally required tests	Working with local leaders to identify assessments that are useful and contribute to educational planning
Pushing to eliminate tests not required by Washington, D.C.	Continue to review testing requirements with State decisionmakers
Giving students other ways to show progress if they have a bad test day	Providing guidance to districts on how to consider other data beyond test scores and how to scale
Using the appropriate amount of technology as a tool for students and teachers to personalize learning and eliminate tests	Pursuing innovative methods for testing such as embedding assessments in instruction

TEST	OLD TESTING TIME	NEW TESTING TIME
Changes for This School Year (2018-19)		
Math End-of-Grade (Grades 3-8)	3 hours plus additional hour if needed	2 hours plus additional hour if needed
Science End-of-Grade (Grades 5 & 8)	3 hours plus additional hour if needed	2 hours plus additional hour if needed
Biology End-of-Course (High School)	3 hours plus additional hour if needed	2 hours plus additional hour if needed
Changes for Next School Year (2019-20)		
English Language Arts/Reading End-of-Grade (Grades 3-8)	3 hours plus additional hour if needed	2 hours plus additional hour if needed
English II End-of-Course (High School)	3 hours plus additional hour if needed	2 hours plus additional hour if needed

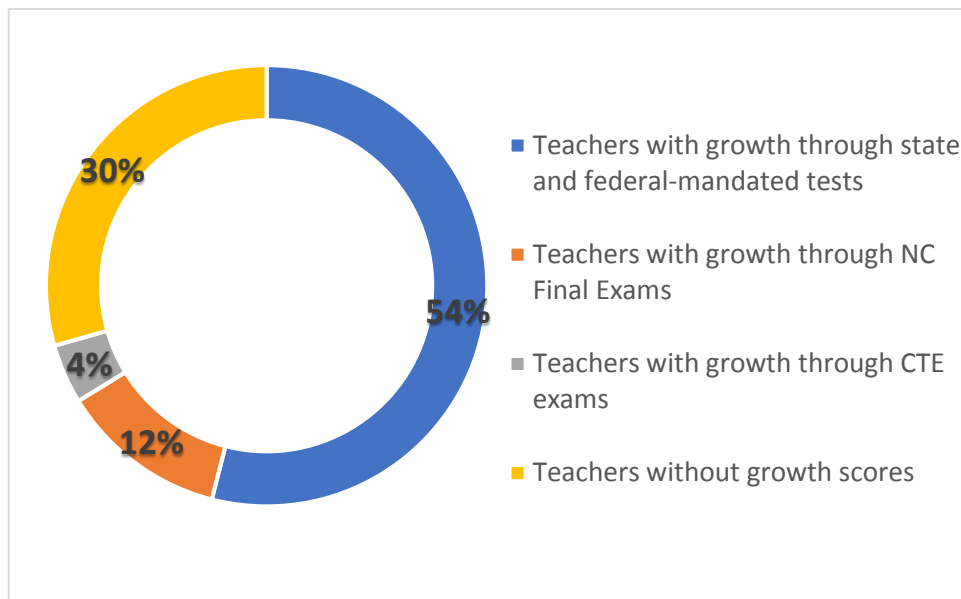
Overview of Assessments Not Required by State or Federal Law

Statewide Assessments Not Mandated by State or Federal Law: NC Final Exams

Middle and high school students throughout the state take several NC Final Exams (NCFEs) each year, even though these exams are not included in the State and Federal accountability model. These exams are required by State Board of Education policy. Currently, there are no state or federal statutes that require NCFEs; however, these exams are used to generate EVAAS growth scores for the teachers who teach those courses, which may contribute to districts' fulfillment of the following requirements:

- § 115C-269.35: The State Board of Education's evaluation of Educator Preparation Programs shall include "Proficiency and growth of students...When available, EVAAS data shall be used to measure student proficiency and growth."
- § 115C-105.27: Requires that school improvement teams use data (specifically EVAAS growth data) to inform their school improvement plans, conduct root cause analyses, and develop appropriate goals for improvement.
- Though Standard 6 in the teacher evaluation process was eliminated, NCFE growth data is used as an artifact for all standards in the evaluation process.

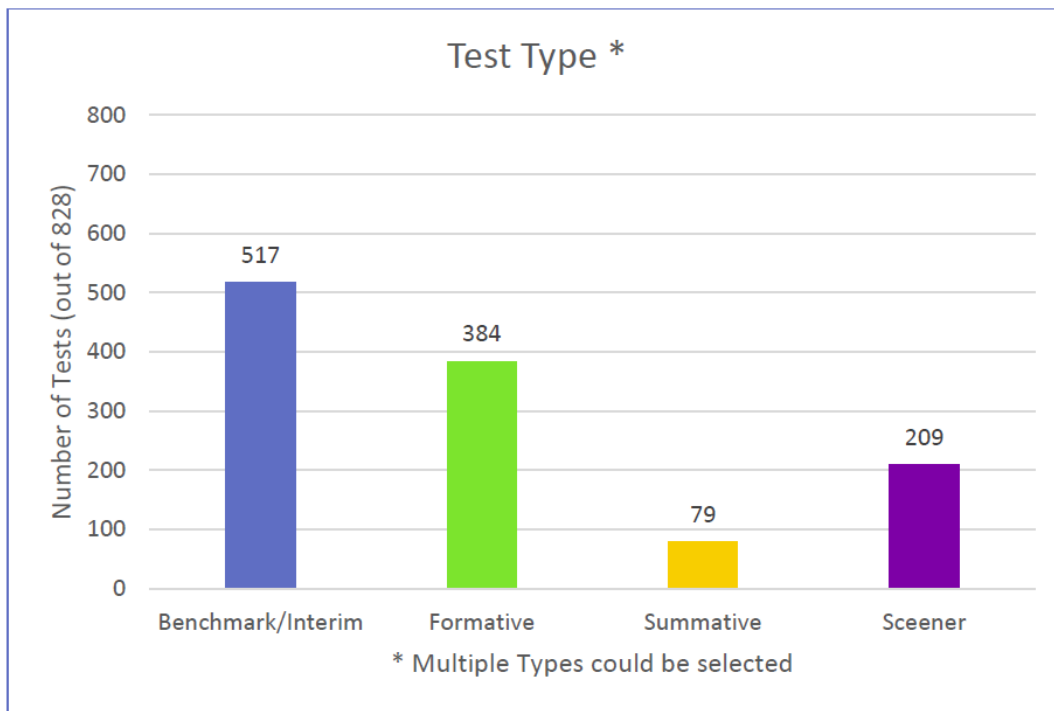
Statewide Assessments and Teacher Growth Feedback: As of March 2018, there were 94,809 teachers employed in North Carolina public schools. Of those, 66,954 teachers (71%) received EVAAS growth measures for 2017-18. Approximately 12 percent of teachers received growth scores due to NC Final Exams.



Local Assessments

While local interim/benchmark assessments are not required by state or federal law, local educators and policymakers depend on such assessments to ensure their students are receiving appropriate ongoing instruction on the state-adopted content standards. Across North Carolina’s 115 local school districts, the focus of their local testing programs appears to be benchmark/interim assessments. Of the 828 assessments that were reported to NC DPI, more than 500 fell into the benchmark/interim category. “Benchmark” and “interim” are two terms used often interchangeably by district and school personnel to describe tests that are administered throughout the school year but not at the end of the school year. These tests, which are designed to measure at a point in time a student’s progress toward mastery of content, may or may not be directly aligned with the state end-of-grade (EOG) or end-of-course (EOC) summative assessments.

The number and type of assessments given vary across districts and grades. The figures below provide some data on the time spent on district-required assessments and the nature of those assessments. This data is collected via an annual survey of all NC school districts. For more information, see the [interactive site](#).



Reported Local Assessment Hours per Student					
Grade and Hours/Student	Maximum hrs. reported	Average hrs. reported	Min. (>0) hrs. reported	# LEAs with no local assessment time	# LEAs reporting hrs. above the statewide average
Grade K Hours Allotted	33.0	6.1	0.3	60	15
Grade 1 Hours Allotted	33.0	5.9	0.5	53	20
Grade 2 Hours Allotted	33.0	6.2	0.5	42	22
Grade 3 Hours Allotted	41.0	14.1	1.0	-	47
Grade 4 Hours Allotted	44.5	12.9	1.0	1	47
Grade 5 Hours Allotted	45.0	15.4	1.5	1	48
Grade 6 Hours Allotted	81.0	13.6	1.0	1	44
Grade 7 Hours Allotted	81.0	13.9	1.0	1	45
Grade 8 Hours Allotted	81.0	16.4	1.5	1	46
Grade 9 Hours Allotted	54.0	10.6	0.8	25	31
Grade 10 Hours Allotted	54.0	11.2	0.8	25	33
Grade 11 Hours Allotted	58.5	10.8	0.8	31	26
Grade 12 Hours Allotted	54.0	10.7	0.8	54	21
Average		11.8			42

See Appendices in this report and the [interactive site](#) for more detail on local assessments.

Recommendations and Next Steps

1. Require Periodic Assessment Reviews by Each LEA.

Throughout 2019, DPI will collaborate with local superintendents on reasonable goals for reducing the testing burden using the data we have collected on the variation in local testing approaches. Priority will be placed on districts who reported hours student spend taking local assessments well in excess of the State average.

As assessments have increased over the past twenty years, particularly the use of local interim/benchmark assessments, testing experts have encouraged periodic review of an assessment system as a check of whether the system continues to function in a way that is most meaningful for students. In 2015, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) published a guide for state agencies and local districts/schools to conduct a review of their assessments. This guide suggests that a team of district leaders (i.e., district test coordinators, school leaders, academic decision-makers, etc.) conduct a review of their assessment program. This review should uncover the amount of time spent on all district-mandated assessments, if the assessments accurately correlated to and predicted success on the summative assessment, and whether there are other ways to meet the need and purpose of any assessment in a more efficient way, particularly by replacing standard exams with computer adaptive exams. The ultimate goal of this review is to make decisions regarding whether or not any non-adaptive assessments should be kept/changed/eliminated in the upcoming academic year.

If there are other ways to meet the need and purpose of any assessment in a more efficient way, districts may eliminate an assessment that diagnoses one thing if that same diagnosis can be found in a broader assessment. For any assessments that require an abundant amount of administration time from the teacher, those assessments may be administered by someone else in the school or district.

Finally, once decisions are made, school leadership should communicate these changes early and often to all stakeholders – especially to parents and teachers. Teachers will ultimately be the stakeholders implementing these changes, so they must be informed of the changes and how they will be expected to implement the assessments with fidelity.

2. Adopt Personalized Learning Technology to Make Assessments Meaningful.

DPI has requested that the General Assembly appropriate resources to train educators and enable them to use new, personalized learning technology, which allows teachers to get the information they need about students' progress using interim, computer adaptive exams without high-stakes testing.

Every teacher should be able to clearly answer the question, "How does this test fit in with the broader progression of learning in my classroom?" Each assessment must provide valuable

feedback to inform actionable changes in the classroom, and school leaders must also be very intentional about scheduling time for teachers to review assessment data and plan for meaningful and individualized learning progression.

The goal of any assessment should be to personalize, not standardize, progress to achievement. Children are not standard. There is no “average” student. Students are unique individuals with different strengths, and their academic progress must be assessed using the appropriate amount of technology as a tool to replace outdated testing methods. Personalized learning technology allows educators to get the information they need about students’ progress without high-stakes testing. Especially in the early grades, progress checks could feel like a normal, engaging lesson instead of an examination. In many cases, students won’t even know we are checking in on their progress. Personalized assessments will validate when students are ready to demonstrate mastery or proficiency and allow for differentiated student support based on individual learning need. Schools should be using the appropriate amount of technology as a tool for students and teachers to personalize learning and eliminate tests.

For example, Cumberland County conducted a review of their assessment program and found that a competency-based assessment like NC Check-ins was the best fit for their 3-8 Math and 4-8 ELA/Reading classrooms. NC Check-ins are essentially instructionally-embedded assessments. In 2017-2018, approximately 50% of schools participated. In the future, the NC Check-Ins model may be integrated into the summative measure for each student. Because this would require computer adaptive assessments, this will require technological changes rolled out over time to ensure strong implementation.

3. Reduce or Eliminate Statewide Testing Not Required by Law.

There are two ways to reduce NC Final Exam statewide assessments that are not required by law: eliminate entirely or reconfigure and reduce.

Option 3A – Eliminate NCFEs. The State Board of Education, or the General Assembly, could eliminate the mandated use of NC Final Exams. Under this Option, approximately 12% of teachers will not receive an EVAAS score. These teachers are not included in the approximately 54% of teachers who receive an EVAAS score from state/federally mandated assessments.

Option 3B – Reconfigure and Reduce NCFEs. Reconfigure the NC Final Exams to focus more on content and to provide summative assessments of cumulative material learned over multiple courses. This would provide accountability checkpoints to ensure NC Standards are being taught, while reducing the testing burden on students and teachers. Specific changes would include:

- Reduce English assessments from four assessments to two by keeping only the English II End of Course test and the English III Final Exam that includes a writing component.

- Reduce History assessments from four assessments to two by combining American History I, American History II, and Founding Principles, Civics, & Economics into one summative, content-based assessment.
- Use a certificate-bearing assessment for the new proposed Financial Literacy course.
- Retain the two Math End of Course assessments, eliminate Final Exam for Math II, and require students to only take a Math Final Exam in 12th grade.

Specific recommendations for reducing NCFEs are contained in the bullets and the table below. (Note: Yellow highlighted cells are NC Final Exams, Red highlighted cells are End of Course exams required for State and Federal Accountability.)

Area						
English	English I	English II	English III	English IV		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Eliminate NCFE for English I; keep English II EOC (red) ➤ Keep English III NCFE, which has a writing component; eliminate English IV NCFE 					
History	American History I	American History II	Founding Principles, Civics, & Economics	World History		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Combine NCFEs for AH I, AH II, Founding Principles/Civics; rewrite assessment to focus more on specific content ➤ Financial Literacy & Economics to be combined in separate course with test for certificate 					
Math	Alg. I/ Math I	Math II	Alg. II/ Math III	Discrete Math	Precalculus	Advanced Functions & Modeling
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Keep EOCs (red), keep all NCFEs but only require students to take the one associated with their 12th grade math course 					
Science	Biology	Physical Science	Chemistry	Physics	Earth/ Environ. Science	

Appendix A: Definitions

Summative assessments are used to evaluate student learning and academic achievement, as defined by state-adopted content standards, at the conclusion of a defined instructional period—typically at the end of the course or a grade level with the purpose of providing achievement data to schools, districts, and state policymakers for subsequent program evaluation and improvement.

A **formative assessment** is a planned, ongoing process used by all students and teachers during learning and teaching to elicit and use evidence of student learning to improve student understanding of intended disciplinary learning outcomes and support students to become self-directed learners.

An **interim assessment** is a form of assessment that educators use to (1) evaluate where students are in their learning progress and (2) determine whether they are on track to performing well on future assessments, such as standardized tests or end-of-course exams.

Benchmark assessments are given throughout the year - typically three to four times a year - and focus more on student growth and progress than on cumulative student achievement. These assessments provide more individualized student-level data.

Classroom assessments are assessments that are internal to a school or classroom, often designed by teachers to assess mastery of specific learning objectives.

Federally-Mandated Assessments. The Every Students Succeeds Act charges North Carolina to test students in reading and mathematics annually in grades 3-8 and once in grades 9-12, to test students in science once in grades 3-5, 6-8, and 10-12, and charges individual schools, school districts, and states to publicly report test results in the aggregate and for specific student subgroups, including low-income students, students with disabilities, English language learners, and major racial and ethnic groups.

State-Mandated Assessments. North Carolina's statewide testing program has three purposes: to assure that all high school graduates possess those minimum skills and that knowledge thought necessary to function as a member of society, to provide a means of identifying strengths and weaknesses in the education process in order to improve instructional delivery, and to establish additional means for making the education system at the State, local, and school levels accountable to the public for results. All assessments must be aligned with state standards and provide accurate information regarding student proficiency.

Locally-Required Assessments. In addition to the required assessments above, local school districts may assess students throughout the academic year. These assessments and timing of assessments are determined by local school districts and schools and are used to monitor student progress and to provide feedback to teachers and other educators. These are sometimes misperceived as being state-required.

Appendix B: Sample Local Assessment Data – See [website](#) for more information

