



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release:
Sept. 1, 2022

Fifteen low-performing schools drop off state list, district student achievement begins to bounce back

2021-22 testing data and accountability results affirm the district's "Great Comeback" efforts; leaders note tremendous progress and challenges ahead

Fayetteville, N.C. – Cumberland County Schools (CCS) is proud to announce the district's performance and growth data for the 2021-22 school year, which was released by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) on the morning of Thursday, Sept. 1.

NCDPI's 2021-22 accountability report includes performance and growth data for schools and districts statewide as well as overall state performance. The results are based on an analysis of end-of-grade (EOG) and end-of-course (EOC) tests, which are aligned to the North Carolina Standards Course of Study in English Language Arts/Reading (ELA/Reading) and Mathematics and the Essential Standards in Science. The results provide the percentage of students who scored at Level 3 and above (grade level proficiency), at Level 4 and above (college and career readiness) and at each academic achievement level.

Because of disruptions caused by COVID-19, the 2021-22 accountability report is the first since 2018-19 to feature all components of the state's accountability framework.

"We all know that test results are only one of the many ways that we measure the progress we are making in our district," said CCS Superintendent Dr. Marvin Connelly Jr. "However, the 2021-22 Data and Accountability results affirm the incredible work that is taking place in our schools. The increases in student proficiency confirm that we are on the right track."

Proficiency Highlights

Districtwide, proficiency measures trended upward. In CCS, 98.9% of schools increased their composite proficiency scores on state-mandated assessments. District composite proficiency scores increased from 36.8 to 47.3, an increase of more than 10 points. As a district, every EOG and EOC assessment

proposed increases in all subjects. Increases ranged from 1.8 to 21.3 percentage points.

In grades 3 through 8, the average reading proficiency level increase was 6.1%, while mathematics increased on average by 13.7 percentage points. The average increase in proficiency in science for grades 5 and 8 was more than 12 percentage points. The district's fourth-grade reading proficiency remarkably improved by 12.8 points, and third-grade math proficiency notably increased by 21.1 points. High school EOC proficiency increases averaged 13.25 percentage points, with the highest gains produced in Math 1 and Math 3. Districtwide, high school Math 1 increased by 15.8 percentage points, and Math 3 posted an increase of 21.3 points.

CCS Superintendent Dr. Marvin Connelly Jr. noted the herculean efforts of educators, staff, students, families and community members, despite the challenges presented by COVID-19.

"Together, we *are* rising," said Dr. Connelly. "Three years ago, we made several commitments to the young people in Cumberland County Schools with the development and approval of our [Strategic Plan](#). While we have endured an unimaginable global pandemic, which significantly impacted instruction, our premier professionals, successful students, and committed community partners have risen to the occasion to overcome incredible challenges."

According to NCDPI, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to significantly impact students and schools across the state during the 2021-22 school year. Statewide, student performance on the state's EOG and EOC exams continued to be below levels reported for the 2018-19 year, the last full, in-person school year prior to the pandemic disruptions that began in March 2020.

Tammy Howard, the accountability director for NCPDI, noted that, while the 2021-22 statewide student performance outcomes are predictably lower than 2018-19 (pre-pandemic) and years before, the results also are not objectively comparable to previous years. Given the numerous factors that disrupted instruction during the last three years, she cautioned that the 2021-22 test data must be considered within the context of all COVID disruptions.

"Since March 2020, the changes in instruction, particularly related to time and place, restrict the feasibility of typical comparisons of student achievement across years," Howard said. "Educational data must be viewed as before, during, and eventually after COVID."

Growth Highlights

Each year, the state measures student growth, which is the amount of academic progress that students make during a course or class. In 2021-22, 89% of schools in the district met or exceeded growth. Fifty-five schools exceeded growth, and 21 schools met growth indicating students are maintaining and increasing student achievement.

Dr. Connelly stated, "This level of growth is a testament to the tremendous work that is taking place in classrooms across the district. We are maintaining and increasing student achievement, despite challenging circumstances."

Two schools, Cumberland Polytechnic High School and Jack Britt High School, received the maximum converted growth score of 100. Converted scores are

used to measure growth in the School Performance Grades.

School Performance Grades (A-F)

NCDPI officials stated that the A-F school performance grades that schools received for the 2021-22 year were affected by the formula used to determine those grades because student performance on the state tests far outweighs the credit schools earn for the growth students make from one year to the next. Eighty percent of the grade is based on student achievement, while 20% of the grade is for growth.

While 89% of schools in the district met or exceeded growth in 2021-22, the A-F performance grades of many schools were hugely impacted by decreased percentages of students earning a score of 'grade-level proficient.' As expected, the school performance grades in CCS and across the state have shifted downward, consistent with the impact of the pandemic on test scores.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt emphasized that last year's school performance grades must be viewed within the context of the pandemic and its impact on student learning and performance.

"I share the same concerns of many educators, parents and others who have raised concerns for years about the fairness of the grades," said Truitt. "The current accountability model does not do justice to the hard work that teachers and students put in every day in schools across the state, and I look forward to working with stakeholders to consider other metrics important to determining school quality."

Designated Low-Performing School Highlights

Of the 23 low-performing schools, as identified by NCDPI, 15 of them have been removed from the current low-performing schools' list. Fourteen of the 2021-22 low-performing schools exceeded growth, and two others were within 14 hundredths of a point of also exceeding growth. There will be 16 identified low-performing schools for the 2022-23 school year. Eight schools have been newly identified.

High School Graduation Rate and ACT

Consistent with the state's 2021-22 four-year cohort graduation rate decline, the district's 2021-22 four-year cohort graduation rate trended down slightly to 82.8%, compared to 84.2% in 2020-21.

According to NCPDI, high school performance grades were impacted by a higher minimum ACT score now required for admission to University of North Carolina (UNC) campuses. The UNC Board of Governors has raised that score from 17 to 19, resulting in lower percentages of students achieving the new benchmark across the state. The percentage of CCS 11th graders achieving the new UNC minimum of 19 was 34.3, compared to 48.1% in 2020-21 at the previous minimum score of 17.

Opportunities for Continuous Improvement

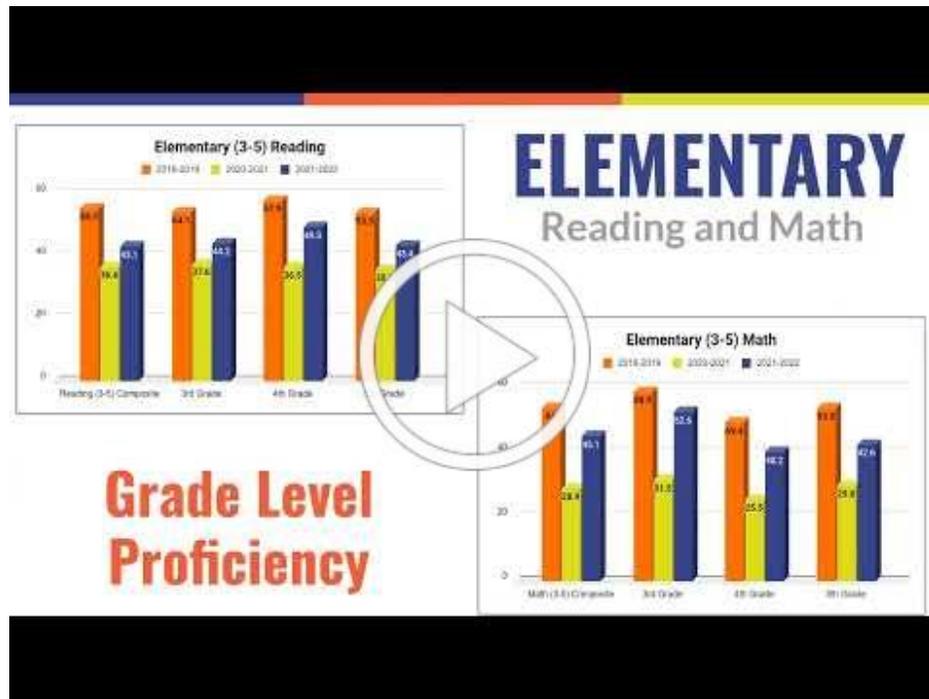
While state Data and Accountability results show the tremendous progress being made across the school system, district officials noted that there is still much to do.

CCS leaders have created a support structure called PASE which stands for Performance, Accountability, Support, and Empowerment. This is a 5-tier system that district leaders created to designate our schools based on the amount of support needed. Tier 1 schools, which are designated as low-performing by the state, receive increased support in terms of frequency and intensity as they create focused school improvement plans with measurable standards and goals.

“While we certainly have much more work to do, we must pause and take a moment to celebrate the progress that we have made as a district,” said Dr. Connelly.

“It is obvious that our PASE school-support structure is working,” noted Dr. Connelly. “However, we will deepen support at Tier I and Tier II PASE schools as we continue to focus on increased proficiency for all subgroups.”

To access the media briefing report, click [here](#).



Kim Nash, CCS' executive director of Data and Accountability, sheds light on the data shared in the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's 2021-22 Accountability Report.

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