



VIEWER'S GUIDE

NC Schools + You: What Changes in Our Schools Mean for Parents and Students

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 10 PM | FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 4:30 PM

Whether you are a parent, teacher or administrator – or an interested citizen concerned about the future of our public schools and our state – you probably are aware that there have been many changes in our schools over the last couple of years. There is much to know about teaching and learning in North Carolina, the progress we have made and the challenges that lie before us. It can even be difficult for educators who are in our schools every day to keep up with all of the new programs.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) is pleased to present “NC Schools + You” in partnership with UNC-TV. This is a statewide TV broadcast featuring State Superintendent June Atkinson and colleagues from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). A studio audience comprising parents and business and community supporters have the opportunity to discuss new standards, assessments, accountability, parental involvement and more with Dr. Atkinson and her colleagues during this hour-long program.

This Viewer's Guide contains supplemental information to assist you while you view this program. As with the program, the guide covers:

- **Teaching and Learning:** What Students Are Learning and How
- **Measuring Performance:** New Assessments and Accountability Model; and
- **Parent Engagement:** How Parents Can Support Learning

We hope that you will find this Viewer's Guide helpful to you as you view NC Schools + You. It is important for parents, educators and involved supporters to have as much information as possible about statewide efforts toward preparing our students to graduate ready for college, career and life.

NC Schools + You will be available for viewing after the initial broadcasts. Visit www.ncpublicschools.org to get access.



13 Things to Know about Common Core State Standards in North Carolina

Learn more at: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/core-explained/>

- 1 The **Common Core** is a set of standards for what students should learn and be able to do in mathematics and English language arts from kindergarten through 12th grade.
- 2 The **Common Core State Standards** are North Carolina's *Standard Course of Study* in mathematics and English language arts. The State Board of Education approved the new standards for our state in 2010. Following two years of professional development for curriculum specialists, teachers and principals, the new standards were implemented in all North Carolina classrooms in 2012-13.
- 3 **Teachers participated** in the development and selection of the Common Core State Standards, and **the public provided feedback** before these new standards were selected.
- 4 The **Common Core State Standards** grew out of conversation beginning more than five years ago between state superintendents from across the country and governors from many states. Many of these state leaders felt that it made sense to work together on standards for student learning in these two important subjects that are taught everywhere. As a result, the National Governors Association and Chief State School Officers worked with top experts in these subjects and in education to create the new standards. **The US Department of Education endorsed the standards after the states developed them.**
- 5 Having common standards in these two fundamental subjects means that publishers of textbooks and other learning resources will not need to create different textbooks to match each state's course of study. **The goal is for textbooks and other materials to be better and richer as a result.**
- 6 The Common Core will help students be competitive nationally when they graduate from high school and attend college or universities, and **it allows students who may have to move during their K-12 education to quickly fit into the academic program wherever they go. For military families, this is especially helpful.** The schools operated by the Department of Defense are participating in the Common Core.
- 7 **The Common Core State Standards are more rigorous than North Carolina's earlier standards.** As a result, new student assessments in mathematics and English language arts have been developed by North Carolina educators and were given for the first time during the 2012-13 school year. **These more rigorous standards mean that student test scores overall likely will drop in the first year they are given. This is a normal pattern any time a state increases expectations** for students and has happened before in North Carolina when standards were raised.

This type of scenario is often seen in sports. For example, highly competitive marathon runners in the early 1900s posted times of about 2 hours 45 minutes for the men's marathon races. But, by the mid-1950s, that time would not have been highly competitive. The best runners were posting times of approximately 2 hours 15 minutes. Today, that time for the very best runners is only a few minutes over 2 hours. The standard for elite performance has gone up.
- 8 The new academic standards in mathematics provide a clear focus of content that must be mastered at each grade level, K-8. High School Standards specify the mathematics all students should study to be college and career ready. They are organized by the following **conceptual categories or themes: Number and Quantity, Algebra, Functions, Modeling, Geometry, and Statistics and Data. Equally important are the Standards for Mathematical Practice, describing the behaviors or 'habits of mind' of mathematically-proficient students.**



9 The new academic standards in English language arts are organized by four skill categories:

- **Reading (Informational and Literary)**
 - Includes Reading Foundational Skills for K-5 students
- **Writing**
- **Speaking and Listening**
- **Language**

Students build their skills from kindergarten through high school to prepare them to be good readers, writers, speakers/presenters and listeners who use language appropriately for the task at hand. The new standards provide more opportunities for students to practice language arts skills in other subject areas and to focus more attention on reading material that is technical or non-fiction. Of course, literary text continues to be important in student learning. This aligns with the kind of reading and comprehension that students will be expected to have mastered in the workplace.

10 Having organized standards for student learning in North Carolina is not a new idea. Our state has had a *Standard Course of Study* for more than 50 years. In subjects other than mathematics and English language arts, North Carolina teachers, university professors and business leaders have worked together to develop Essential Standards. Together each subject's set of Essential Standards and the Common Core State Standards make up North Carolina's *Standard Course of Study*, which is available free of charge online at <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/>.

11 Implementing the new *Standard Course of Study* is no more expensive than implementing other past revisions to the state's *Standard Course of Study*. What is different this time is that the State Board of Education chose to implement new standards in every subject at every grade in the same year. In the past, a few subjects were revised or replaced each year, and over time, the entire *Standard Course of Study* was updated a few subjects at a time. Costs for implementation include new textbooks and other resources, professional development for teachers and new assessments for students. Federal Race to the Top grant funds are available to offset some of these costs in North Carolina.

12 The Common Core English language arts standards leave the decisions about the selection of literary and non-fiction texts for students up to school districts and local educators. The standards contain no required reading list for teachers, just suggestions of works that encompass a diverse catalogue of informational and literary text.

13 The Common Core State Standards provide a rigorous level of standards for student learning in math and English language arts, and local school districts still can accelerate learning opportunities for students who are academically gifted. North Carolina's *Standard Course of Study* has always allowed for this flexibility to meet students' needs.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

What North Carolina Students are Learning and How

North Carolina established a *Standard Course of Study* more than a century ago to determine competencies for each grade level and each high school course. The goal of the Standard Course of Study is to provide consistent academic standards for all students, no matter where they live or go to school. From time to time the Standard Course of Study is updated or overhauled to be consistent with current research, exemplary practices and national standards. North Carolina educators seek to provide the most appropriate education possible for all students in North Carolina.

To that end, the state Board of Education adopted the new Common Core State Standards and the North Carolina Essential Standards in 2010. These went into effect as the new Standard Course of Study for North Carolina public schools in fall 2012.



The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers.

The Common Core State Standards address what students learn in mathematics and English language arts. The North Carolina Essential standards address science, social studies, music, art and other subject areas.

It is very important to note the clear distinction between content standards and curriculum. Standards are the skills and competencies that a student must know and master from one grade level to the next. Curriculum is the set of instructional tools that educators use in order to ensure that students meet those standards. While the NCDPI and the state Board of Education provide the Standard Course of Study content standards, local teachers and team leadership have flexibility to craft the curriculum to help students meet standards.

For example, a standard for Grade 3 mathematics is that a student must have developed an understanding of fractions as numbers. There are a number of options for a third-grade teacher to ensure that this standard is met. Teachers have flexibility in relaying this information to students through a combination of textbook material and classroom activities.

For more information on the new Common Core State Standards, please visit <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/core-explained/>. For more information on the *Standard Course of Study*, please visit <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/>.

MEASURING PERFORMANCE

New Assessments and Accountability Model

ASSESSMENTS

Taking tests is a part of learning and a key way to be sure that students are on track with what they need to accomplish. Assessments also give teachers and principals information about how well they are covering the *Standard Course of Study*.

Good testing data helps ensure that students master content and that teachers can focus on specific areas where their students might need extra attention. Good, responsible assessments are crucial to good learning and student success. North Carolina's assessments are aligned to our Standard Course of Study and developed by North Carolina educators.



Students in North Carolina public schools take the following assessments:

Elementary and Middle Grades

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 3 | Reading and Math End-of-Grade Tests | |
| 4 | Reading and Math End-of-Grade Tests | |
| 5 | Reading and Math End-of-Grade Tests | Science End-of-Grade Test |
| 6 | Reading and Math End-of-Grade Tests | |
| 7 | Reading and Math End-of-Grade Tests | |
| 8 | Reading and Math End-of-Grade Tests | Science End-of-Grade Test |

High school students take End-of-Course (EOC) Tests in English II (10th grade), Biology and Algebra I. (Middle school students who take high school courses will take EOC tests in middle school.)

Other assessments given in high school include:

- ACT Explore
- ACT Plan
- ACT
- WorkKeys

Common exams are given in other courses to provide a common final exam for students and to provide an important measure of teacher effectiveness. Why is that important? Because teacher evaluation should include a measure of how much students have grown academically.

In most years, test results are provided to parents before the end of the school year. Because all assessments were new for the 2012-13 school year, results are delayed to allow time for standard-setting.

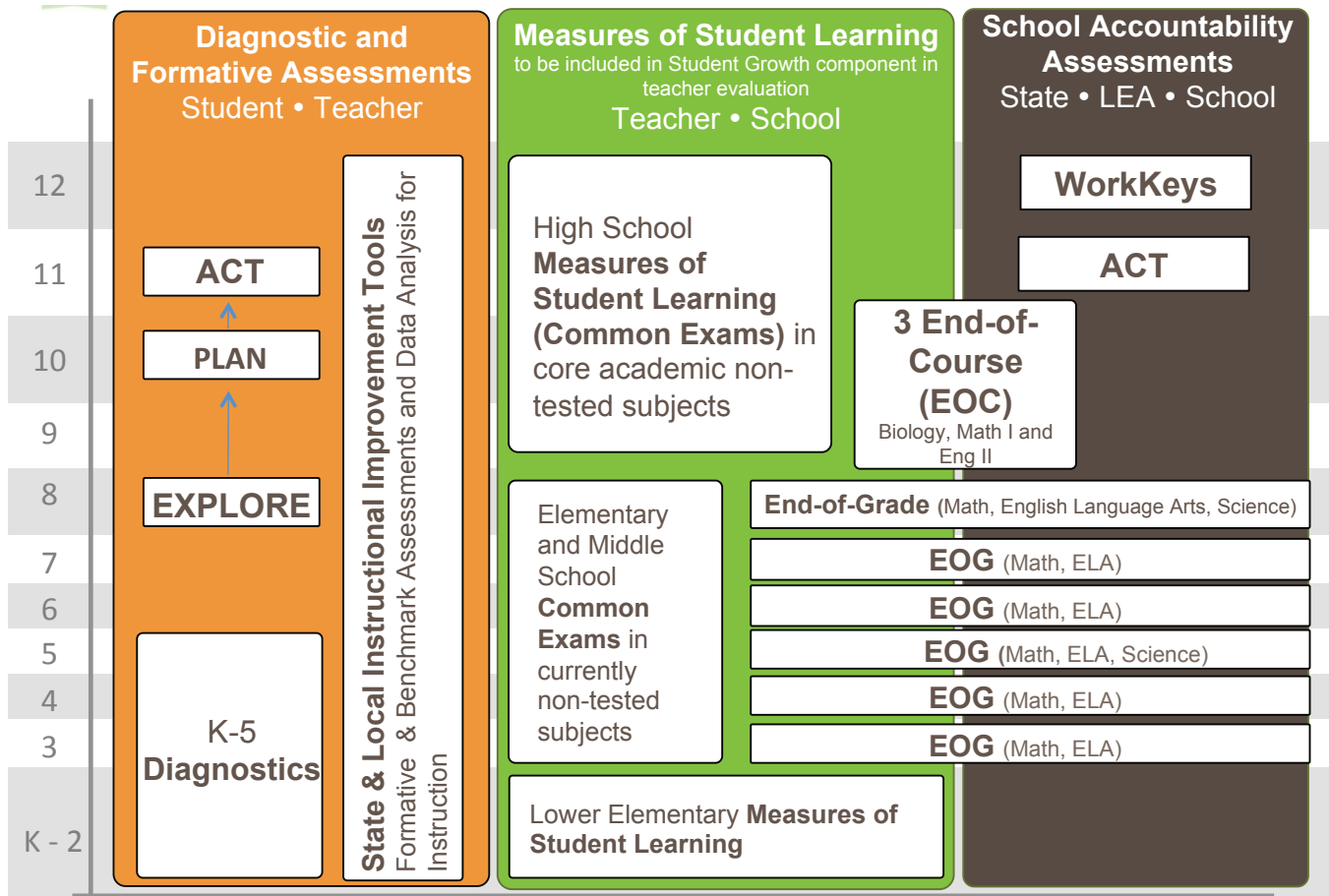
More technical information on the how's and why's of assessments can be found at <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/>.



Key Things to Know for Testing and Accountability

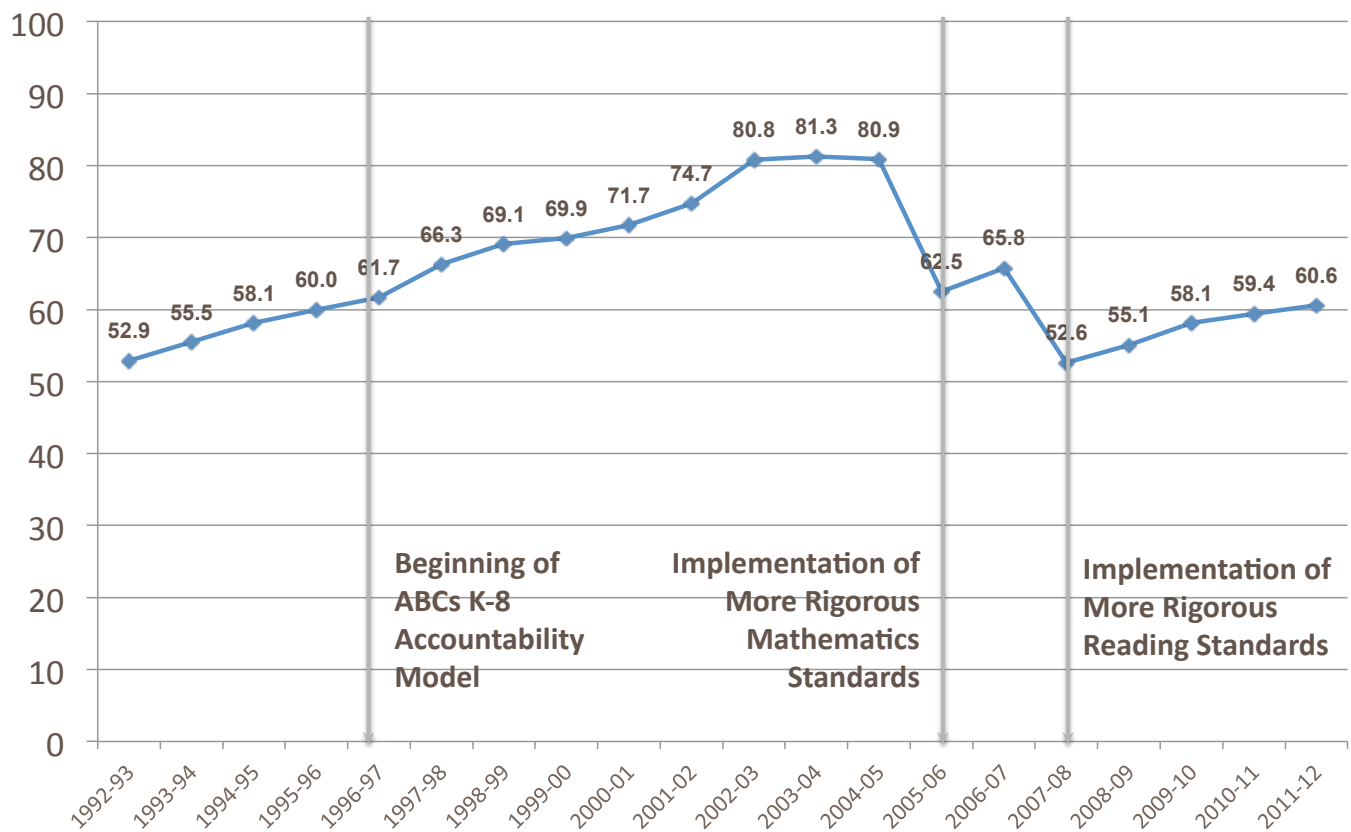
- 1 The key to the transition to new assessments is the complete assessment system which comprises not only end of the year tests, but also classroom assessments and benchmark/interim assessments. The classroom/benchmark/interim assessments provide information on what a student is learning and identify areas where a student may need additional instruction throughout the year. The combination of these assessments ensure students are prepared to be successful at the next grade level, and ultimately prepared for college and career after high school.
 - 2 The foundation of all of these assessments is the State Board of Education's adoption of new content standards. These standards, the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics and the Essential Standards in science, are more rigorous than previous content standards and are aligned to college and career readiness expectations. Thus, the new assessments, aligned to these standards, measure a student's performance on grade level content standards that are more demanding.
 - 3 The new end of year assessments, administered at grades 3-8 and at the conclusion of the Math I (previously Algebra I/Integrated Mathematics I), English II, and biology courses, were implemented for the first time in 2012-13.
 - 4 The new assessments include three new item types: (1) gridded response items on grades 5-8 mathematics end-of-grade tests and Math I end-of-course tests, (2) constructed response items on English II, and (3) technology-enhanced items on the science online assessments. These item types are more engaging for students and they provide an opportunity for a student to respond to the questions in a way that shows (or demonstrates) more of what they know and are able to do.
 - 5 Likewise, there is an online administration option for the science assessments and for the end-of-course tests. Feedback from students who have participated in the online assessments is very positive and confirms that students prefer the online environment to the paper/pencil world of bubble sheets. The goal is to continue expanding the online assessment option, and to eventually have all assessments delivered online.
 - 6 Student scores for 2012-13 are delayed until late fall 2013 while the required statistical analysis and scoring processes are completed. Parents and students can expect to receive score reports in early November. The scores are expected to be lower, as they will reflect the increased rigor of the content standards.
 - 7 The 2012-13 READY Accountability Report will be presented to the State Board of Education at its November meeting for approval. With this report, parents will have access to two important pieces of information about their child's school: (1) the percent of students at each school who met proficiency on the state tests, and for high schools only, other college/career expectations, and (2) each schools' Education Valued Added Assessment System (EVAAS) report which provides a growth measure of student performance.
-

Comprehensive Assessment System



The Comprehensive Assessment System chart provides parents with a snapshot look at which assessments your child will take in a specific grade or grade level. Simply find your child's grade on the far left column and read across to discover which assessments are given.

1992-93 to 2011-12 EOG General Test Multiple Choice Test Results Statewide Percent of Student at or above Level III in BOTH Reading and Mathematics



This chart shows the trends in multiple test scores for reading and mathematics over the last two decades in North Carolina public schools. Typically, when new assessments are introduced, and/or standards for learning are increased, a drop in scores are expected (as was experienced with new math and reading standards in 2005-06 and 2007-08, respectively). With new assessments having been given during the 2012-13 school year, it is fully expected that a drop in scores will occur when results are released in fall 2013.

How do we evaluate teachers?

We know that teachers make a big difference in students' lives. Research shows that an effective teacher has a major impact on how much a student learns each year. On the other hand, an ineffective teacher can hinder student learning, even with residual effects in subsequent years.

North Carolina wants teachers to be strongly prepared to do the best job possible. Teachers in North Carolina must be licensed and have appropriate college degrees to teach specific subjects and grades.

Ongoing professional development helps educators stay up to speed on the latest in instructional practices. This is provided at both the state and local levels. To this end, the NCDPI Educator Effectiveness initiatives provide leadership, technical assistance, professional development resources and additional services to school districts and charter schools.

Teachers and principals are evaluated annually with the goal of continually improving their knowledge, skills and craft. In the past few years, the evaluation tool was changed to include a measure of how much teachers' students grow academically. The tests students take at the end of the year or at the end of the course are used for this purpose. Some of these tests also are used as final exams for students and as measures of accountability for the schools as a whole.

For more information on the Educator Evaluation System, visit <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/effectiveness-model/>.



“They Just Want to Fire Me!”

NC’s Educator Effectiveness Myths Debunked

Anytime we face changes in the way that we are being evaluated on the job, it makes us nervous and raises concerns and questions. For teachers and other educators in North Carolina who are in a new evaluation system, it’s no surprise that questions and concerns are being discussed.

The standards that define excellence in teaching are higher today because the stakes are high for students and our state. Teachers face increasing challenges as they seek to deliver quality classroom instruction, and North Carolina has created several key supports for their work.

It is important not only for educators themselves to know, but also for parents and community supporters of education, that NC’s Educator Evaluation System sets higher standards and also provides educators with a refined, more accurate definition of a job well done. It also offers better information to help teachers and principals focus together on how to elevate teaching and on how to improve teaching practice.

It’s not easy, but the end result has become a stronger evaluation system that clearly measures good teaching, provides better feedback for teachers and incorporates the key outcome of education – student learning – into the system.

It is the goal of the NC Department of Public Instruction to help good teachers get better. But as with any employee evaluation system, there are concerns and myths to address. With those concerns in mind, let’s address some common myths:

MYTH: The goal of the NC Educator Evaluation System is to identify the worst teachers.

FACT: The NC Educator Evaluation System is about identifying our state’s most effective teachers so that everyone can learn from them. The new model also aims to identify teachers who need additional support. Once that identification is made, administrators will strive to provide solid and meaningful support to help teachers improve. Teachers need specific feedback on their strengths and areas for growth so that professional development can be more tailored to needs and less “one size fits all.”

MYTH: I will be identified as a bad teacher if I teach Exceptional Children, low-achieving students or in a low-achieving school.

FACT: Data from the Educator Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) show that some of the most effective teachers in the state are those who teach EC students or students who are struggling with academics. Teachers in low-achieving schools receiving support from NCDPI also tend to fare well on EVAAS scores. It is critical to remember that EVAAS and the NC Educator Evaluation System focus on growth, not proficiency.

MYTH: Common sense will tell us who the good teachers are.

FACT: Anyone who teaches knows that it is a profession that involves a complex set of skills, talents and frequent decisions about serving each student’s needs. There are numerous methodologies, strategies and activities that comprise great teaching.

“Good teaching” manifests itself in a variety of ways. One of the primary ways is in higher outcomes for students. We must assess good teaching by taking a closer look at the five standards that have been employed, with the addition of the sixth standard that measures student growth. This provides a richer, more comprehensive context for evaluation.



MYTH: If some of my students do not show growth during the school year, I am going to be fired.

FACT: NC's Educator Evaluation System requires the use of three years of student growth data – potentially hundreds of students, for a high school teacher – before there are required interventions for teachers who do not make expected growth with students. Those interventions include monitored or directed growth plans and time to improve, but they do NOT include automatic dismissal.

MYTH: Everyone knows that teachers don't improve noticeably after their fourth or fifth year in the classroom. This means that longer-term teachers might be at higher risk with the new evaluation system.

FACT: Some research suggests that there can be a "plateau" effect among teachers who have been in the profession for several years. The NCDPI acknowledges, however, that this does not have to be the case, and that we all are responsible for avoiding this phenomenon.

Teachers, just like our students, should be constantly growing and honing their craft. A closer look at the types of professional development that the NCDPI and local districts can offer teachers must be a part of an overall strategy to retain good teachers and ensure that they grow in their profession, just as we expect students to continually grow in their learning.

MYTH: The new evaluation system will mean that we will be testing students more, in order to assess teachers.

FACT: The only tests that are being added are the common exams, which will provide a method for assessing student growth for subject areas that have not traditionally been tested, such as social studies. These will be important in – but only one part of – assessing teachers' performance. There will be no tests added in courses/subjects that have traditionally required end-of-course or end-of-grade tests. In order for the NC Educator Evaluation System to be fair of all teachers, everyone must have a measure of how their teaching impacts the learning of their students.

Teams of NC teachers are developing the common exams, and they should replace final exams that were previously created by individual teachers.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

How Parents Can Support Learning

Parent involvement in a student's education is important. Simply put, the greater the parents' involvement with their child's learning, the greater the chances of the child's success in school and beyond.

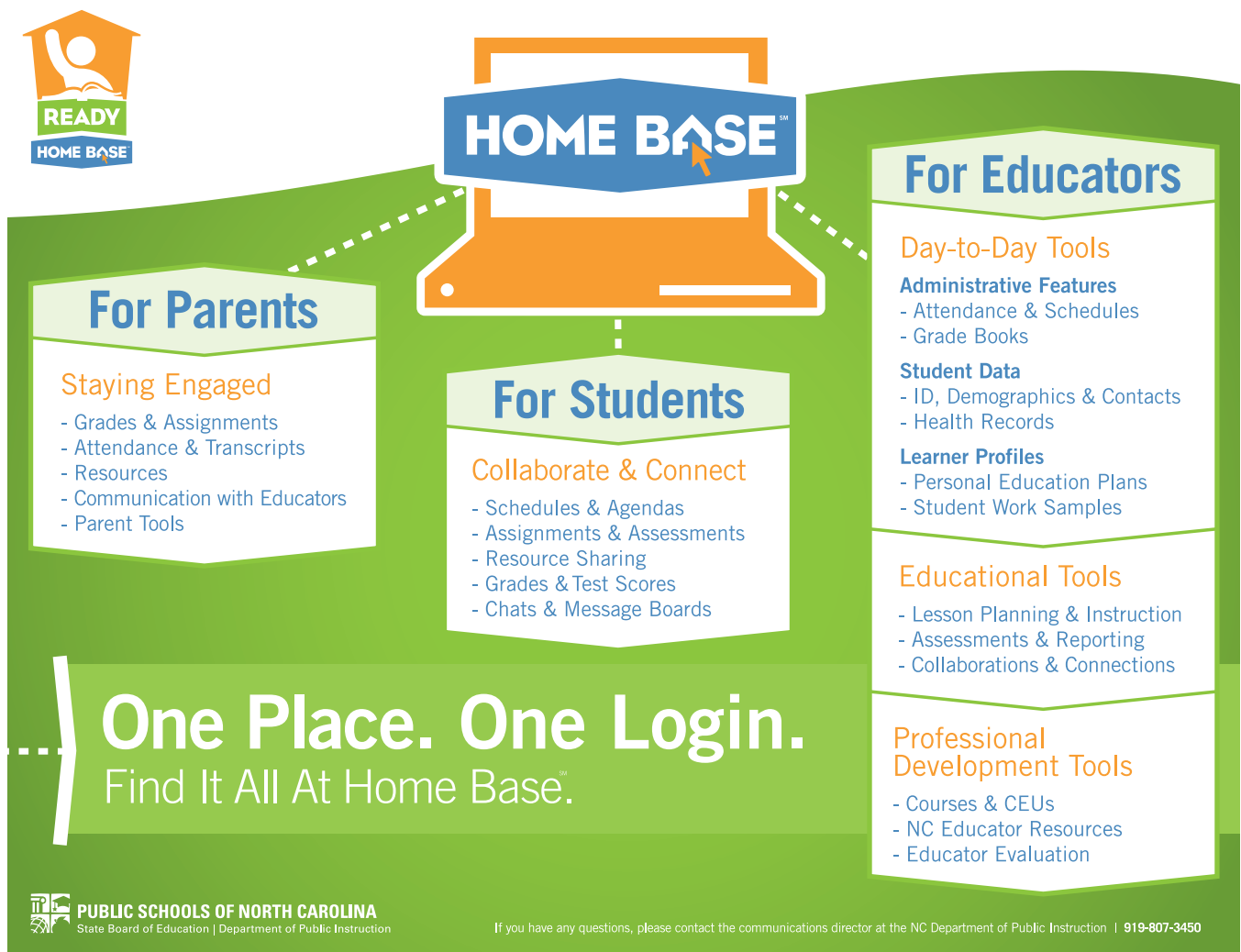
Educators know that parental engagement and support in learning can make all the difference, and they welcome a deeper level of involvement. And with technology, time and distance are not the barriers they once were.

Below are some resources that can help parents as they seek to increase support of their children's learning experience.

HOME BASE

Home Base is a statewide, instructional improvement (IIS) and student information system (SIS) for teachers, students, parents and administrators. Teachers now use Home Base to access student data and teaching and learning resources. Students access their schoolwork, grades, and learning activities. Parents view their child's attendance and progress, and administrators can monitor data on students, teachers and schools.

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/homebase/>



ELEVATING TEACHING AND LEARNING

The READY plan empowers educators and parents to give our children an education that properly prepares them for their next big steps after graduation – college, career and adulthood. The plan is part of North Carolina’s commitment to providing the tools we need to most effectively achieve that goal.

READY’s Home BaseSM technology platform is an all-encompassing resource to elevate the craft of teaching and help our children succeed. Think of Home Base as the starting point for success.

SUPPORTING EDUCATORS

Educators play the most important role in our students’ learning. To help them reach their full potential, educators need a tool to help them, instructionally and professionally.

Home Base was designed with input from educators to ensure they have access to actionable student insight, teaching best practices and collaborating with their fellow educators across the state. It will set them apart from the rest of the nation as a model of how an intuitive, robust technology tool enables them to make more meaningful teaching decisions, which will greatly impact the success of their students.

We know each educator has his or her own methods and needs. That’s why we built Home Base with the teacher in mind. Teacher input and involvement are vital to its success. The more a teacher puts in, the more he or she will get out. As Home Base continues to grow and evolve, individualization and ease of use are always the top priorities.

Home Base is quite literally their home base, where they can easily find instructional and professional tools in one place – under one login. It’s where they take attendance, post grades, create lesson plans, and communicate with students, parents and other educators. There is access to assessment data, as well as the ability to create and deliver assessments. They can earn Continuing Education Units through Home Base, as well as have access to professional development resources and educator evaluation data. All of this and more will be available in a suite of technology tools housed in one place.

This is merely skimming the surface of what Home Base is and will become. As it rolls out in phases, we will always be mindful of elevating educators’ craft with the focus always on student achievement.

HELPING PARENTS AND STUDENTS THRIVE

As a parent, you are critical to your child’s success. Your involvement in his or her education not only supports your child but also teachers. In turn, Home Base supports you and your child with a technology tool that better prepares him or her for the next level, whether that’s the next grade or the next big steps after graduation.

At its most basic, Home Base lets you view your child’s grades, assignments and attendance. But it’s much more robust than that. If your child is having problems with a particular subject or homework assignment, Home Base enables you to search for specific resources that can help him or her succeed. You can also reach out to other parents for help and insight, as well as communicate privately with teachers.

For students, Home Base can make the difference between doing well at school and excelling. In the broadest sense, you will gain valuable skills that set you apart by interacting with such an advanced technology tool. Not only will you have access to your schedules, class agendas, assignments, grades and test scores, but Home Base also is the hub where you store your work and turn in assignments. You will be empowered to collaborate and share helpful insight with other classmates, and you will have access to textbooks and other digital resources.

Our state is committed to helping better prepare our children for the world they will live in. As we all recognize, the skills they need today and tomorrow are much different than the ones needed yesterday. Together we must embrace this change to elevate our students, and Home Base is a major step in making sure they will succeed.

NCPTA RESOURCES

The North Carolina PTA (NCPTA) provides tools to help local PTAs, families, educators and youth who are committed to helping children learn in a healthy environment. NCPTA collaborates with statewide and local organizations and business to provide families in NC with current public education information and important parent engagement resources. <https://ncpta.org/index.php/resources/>



COME ON, GET INVOLVED!

Everyone knows that reading to and with your child will help to enhance learning. A child who knows how to read and read well has the foundation needed to master all other subject areas.

There are, however, many other tips for parents to help their children in school that might seem simple but not always readily apparent. Here are a few links to resources to help:

- 44 Proven Ideas Parents Can Use to Help Their Children Do Better in School (from Reading Is Fundamental) – Simple ideas for how to help improve study habits and reinforce learning at home to increasing motivation and building responsibility. <http://www.rif.org/us/literacy-resources/articles/44-proven-ideas-parents-can-use-to-help-their-children-do-better-in-school.htm>
- Parent Partnership Resources (from the National Education Association). How to navigate a parent-teacher conference; working to improve school conditions; and downloadable brochures on helping your child succeed academically. <http://www.nea.org/parents/>

WEB RESOURCES

READY – <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ready>

Basics about the NCDPI's READY initiative, the time line for our work and how all the pieces fit together.

Home Base – <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/homebase>

An overview of the state's new suite of technology tools for teachers, parents and students.

Race to the Top – <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/rttt/>

North Carolina's Race to the Top plan and all the technical details, including RttT contacts.

Educator Effectiveness – <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/educatoreffectiveness/>

Professional Development resources for educators in public and charter schools.

Common Core Explained – <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/core-explained/>

A portal for presentations, podcasts, videos and other helpful resources related to the Common Core State Standards.

Assessments and Accountability – <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/>

Discover information around new assessments and the new accountability model.

District and School Transformation – <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/schooltransformation>

See how and where the NCDPI's DST division is intervening to help in schools of greatest academic need.

NC PTA Brochures – <http://www.ncpta.org/parent/CommonCoreStandards.html>

Find printable brochures on the new Common Core State Standards for all grade levels.