



LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER

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What's Up with Student Achievement

Student Performance: In some good news as we slide into the Labor Day weekend, student performance got better marks on state tests year, with improvements noteworthy on elementary school math and science exams. Overall, the state's four-year high school graduation rate inched higher, from 85.6 percent to 85.8 percent.

Still, standardized tests data the State Board of Education released Thursday, show uneven progress in reading. The state has emphasized elementary reading over the last few years. A 2012 law requires that most students read proficiently by the end of third grade.

Background: The test results show that the percentages of third and fourth graders reading well enough to succeed at the next grade dropped slightly from last year. At the same time, the percentages of students passing math increased in all elementary and middle grades. Public school students take standardized reading and math tests at the end of third through eighth grades, and science tests in fifth and eighth grades. High schools students take state tests in biology, Math I and English II.

These tests, along with student growth calculations, are blended to create school performance grades of A-F. Across the board, grades are improving. The state has fewer 'F' and 'D' traditional and charter schools than it did last year, and more 'C', 'B,' and 'A-plus' schools.

Test scores encompass 80 percent of grades for elementary and middle schools. Student growth makes up the remaining 20 percent of their grades. High schools use standardized test scores, the percentage of students who pass Math III, and other factors to determine performance grades. Historically, the results show a connection between school poverty and letter grades. Out of 167 schools, 68 percent met or exceeded growth expectations. That's up from 61 percent the previous year. Statewide, 74 percent of schools met or exceeded academic growth targets in the 2015-16 school year, according to The News & Observer.

Virtual Schools Not Doing as Well: The state's two new virtual charter schools earned Ds in their first year of operation. That's because of low test scores and lack of student growth. Students' math scores hurt the schools' performance. Both schools received Fs in math and Cs in reading. N.C. Virtual Academy had a passing rate of 30 percent in math, and N.C. Connections had a 36 percent math passing rate. Statewide, 54.7 percent of students in third through eighth grades passed end-of-grade tests in math, and 60.5 percent of students passed the end-of-course Math I test.

State House Leadership Changes

New Look: On Tuesday, the House Republican Caucus elected Rep. John Bell of Goldsboro as its new majority leader and Rep. Dean Arp of Monroe as the majority whip. Rep. Pat McElraft of Emerald Isle was named deputy whip. "The caucus is very much united," House Speaker Tim Moore of Kings Mountain said at a brief news conference at the NC GOP headquarters in Raleigh, where the caucus votes were taken. Republicans currently hold 75 seats in the 120-member House. Democrats hope to make inroads there in November and eliminate the GOP super-majority.

Bell works in business development for North Carolina Community Federal Credit Union in Goldsboro and is expected to easily be re-elected in November to the legislature. He said he looks forward to traveling the state to get the Republican message out to voters ahead of the Nov. 8 elections, when all state House and Senate seats are on ballots across the state. Arp, an engineer, called his selection "humbling and overwhelming." "Together we have a great story to tell," he said. "We've proven ourselves that we have great ideas on jobs and the economy."

The majority leader position opened with the resignation of former Rep. Mike Hager of Rutherford County this month. The majority whip position opened up with the election of Bell, who had been in that post. The new leaders will serve only through early December, when the caucus is expected to select leaders for the 2017-18 biennium.

Other News

Charter School: North Carolina's first charter school educating only children of a single gender is opening. One hundred sixth-grade girls are the first students to attend the Girls Leadership Academy of Wilmington. About 80 additional girls will be enrolled each year until the school has full enrollment in 2022 with students in grades 6 through 12. The school is a spinoff of similar schools started 20 years ago in East Harlem, New York. The state school board approved adding the school to North Carolina's roster of nearly 170 charter schools, which are taxpayer-funded

public schools allowed to operate with fewer rules and more freedom to innovate than traditional schools.

Quote of the Week

"I don't know how you ever take politics out of politics."

- House Speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, when asked about the prospects of an independent commission taking over the redistricting process in North Carolina (The Insider, 8/30/16)



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