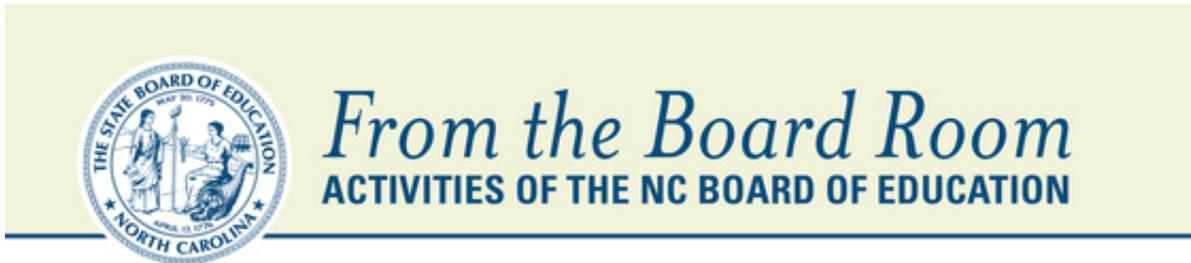


From the Board Room: Activities of the NC State Board of Education

North Carolina Public Schools <NCPublicSchools@public.govdelivery.com>

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To: Lynda Fuller <Lynda.Fuller@dpi.nc.gov>;



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The State Board of Education is comprised of the State Treasurer, the Lieutenant Governor and 11 citizens appointed by the Governor. This newsletter highlights the Board's activities on behalf of the 1.5 million public school children in our state and the more than 100,000 educators who provide services to children. View all State Board of Education member and advisor information [online](#). Current and archived versions of From the Boardroom, also are available on the State Board of Education's [website](#).



2014-15 Graduation Rate Highest in State History; School Grades Released

For the 10th consecutive year, North Carolina's four-year cohort high school graduation rate has improved and is now at 85.4 percent, according to the annual READY Accountability Report. Higher graduation rates translate into economic benefits for students and communities as meeting this gateway standard opens up opportunities for higher education as well as more stable employment.

In addition to the graduation rate release, the State Board of Education received the second set of school performance grades as required by state law. This year 72.2 percent of traditional public schools earned grades of C or better, and 70.4 percent of public charter schools were at C or better.

The grades, based 80 percent on student achievement and 20 percent on student academic growth, provide a snapshot for parents and others to consider school quality. This year, for the first time, some schools received a letter grade of A+NG. This designation reflects schools that earned a school performance grade of A and also do not have any student achievement gaps that are larger than the largest average gap for the state overall. The US Department of Education requires that North Carolina's highest school designation reflect schools that do not have achievement gaps that are larger than the

largest average gap in the state.

“The letter grades give an overview of academic performance,” said State Board of Education Bill Cobey, “and provide a springboard for parents to learn more about the specifics of particular schools’ performance in reading, math and science. I encourage parents to review the [grades](#), visit the school and ask questions about student performance and opportunities for improvement.”

NC’s Race to the Top Final Evaluation Report

In 2010, North Carolina was awarded one of 11 federal Race to the Top grants, beginning an unprecedented period of change and innovation in its public schools.

North Carolina’s RttT plan — dubbed the READY initiative — was ambitious in its scale and participation, addressing new learning standards and accountability measures, a new suite of technology tools to assist teachers, a strengthened educator evaluation model, and efforts to turn around the lowest-achieving schools. All 115 school districts and many charter schools agreed to participate, a rate of buy-in not found in the other grant recipients. Now that the grant is over, the final evaluation reports on its impact are being reviewed and discussed.



State Board of Education members in September received the [final report](#) on the overall impact of the grant and its implementation. Completed by a team of researchers at North Carolina State University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Vanderbilt University, findings show that performance results exceeded expectations, especially in graduation rate improvements, in gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading and eighth grade math, and on SAT math scores.

Nine of the 11 initial grant projects started on time or within a year of the original planned date and the projects enhanced the districts’ and schools’ capacity in each of the four main “pillars” of the RttT project:

- * statewide professional development to assist in the transition to a new Standard Course of Study in every subject and at every grade;
- * an online instructional improvement system (Home Base);
- * a revised teacher and principal evaluation process including measures of student growth;
- * and effective expansion of school turnaround efforts.

Nine of the 11 initiatives have at least three of four sustainability characteristics (structure, personnel, infrastructure and ongoing demand) in place so that momentum can continue even though the funding is over.

Digital Learning Plan Update Focuses on Priorities Needed for Success

North Carolina is poised to be a national leader in digital learning with many schools and districts



making good progress toward a comprehensive digital learning system, but about half of the school districts – including some of the state’s most populous – are still in the early stages of digital learning implementation, according to the summary report on North Carolina’s Digital Learning Plan presented this month.

Although legislation is in place requiring that the state move to digital textbooks by 2017, there are still many steps to fully implement digital learning statewide. To take the state’s digital learning plan to all schools and all classrooms and students will require investments from state, local, foundation and private sectors and the reallocation of existing funding in some cases. Estimated costs are about \$100 per student per year or approximately \$155 million for K-12 students plus a cost of \$60 per student per year for content purchases, licenses and subscriptions.

In addition, necessary professional development and statewide infrastructure are estimated to cost approximately \$106 million. Dr. Glenn Kleiman, executive director of The Friday Institute, noted that there are four major policy issues that need to be addressed:

- updating state policies to provide the support and flexibility needed for local digital learning innovations;
- providing guidance to help educators address privacy, security, copyright and responsible use issues;
- developing new state and local funding models to support and sustain digital-age learning; and
- providing additional supports to ensure equity of digital learning opportunities for all students.

SBE Highlights: A [checklist](#) of Board actions is posted every month immediately after the meeting’s end. The State Board of Education will hold its fall planning and work session on Tuesday, Sept. 29, and Wednesday, Sept. 30. It will hold its full meeting at the Anderson Center, on Thursday, Oct. 1, on the campus of Winston-Salem State University.



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