

HIGHLIGHTS OF NORTH CAROLINA'S ESEA FLEXIBILITY REQUEST

COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Commitment to Implementing Higher Standards: North Carolina adopted rigorous standards in English language arts and mathematics now in place in 45 other states and the District of Columbia, as well as new standards in other areas such as science, social studies, arts, and career and technical education.

Meeting the Needs of Students with Disabilities and English Learners: North Carolina is promoting Universal Design for Learning and Response to Instruction to ensure access for all students, particularly those with disabilities and English Learners, to content aligned with its college- and career-ready content standards. The State is conducting a multi-year study of the performance of English Learners in their schools in order to examine the impact of local programs, the extent to which achievement gaps are closing, and to better inform decision making about instructional programs.

IMPROVED STATE AND DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPPORT FOR ALL STUDENTS

Ambitious Performance Targets: North Carolina established new performance targets for reading and math to cut the gap to proficiency in half within six years.

Renewed Focus on Closing Achievement Gaps: North Carolina will identify the schools in the State with the greatest challenges for groups of students as “Focus schools” and demand interventions to improve student performance. North Carolina set new performance targets to dramatically reduce the percentage of non-proficient students within six years. These targets require subgroups of students that are further behind to improve at a faster rate to close gaps in performance. North Carolina also lowered the minimum number of students necessary for individual subgroup performance to be considered (known as “n-size”) from 40 to 30. By lowering the n-size, North Carolina has increased the number of student performance targets for all student subgroups across the board thus holding more schools to meeting high expectations for more students.

Aggressive Plan for Turning Around the Lowest-Performing Schools: North Carolina will identify the lowest-performing schools in the State as “Priority schools” and ensure that the districts implement meaningful interventions in these schools. Priority schools will be required to implement one of the School Improvement Grant (SIG) models, or seek teacher, family, and community involvement to implement an intervention model aligned with all the turnaround principles. These principles include a focus on empowering school teachers and leaders, redesigning the use of school time, strengthening instructional programs, improving the use of data, addressing non-academic factors impacting student achievement, and involving families and communities. Schools with intensive intervention needs will complete a comprehensive needs assessment to identify strengths, areas for development, challenges, and successes including a self-evaluation and an external site review to identify customized needs for support.

Building Capacity for School Improvement: To provide substantial support to schools, North Carolina has a system of three interlocking State and regional “roundtables” of expert educators that monitor current initiatives underway in districts, identify common needs, coordinate technical assistance, and target resources to the greatest needs.

Increased Accountability and Support for Districts: North Carolina’s State office provides a comprehensive support system for districts with the greatest need and least capacity that includes comprehensive needs assessment and support services through the District and School Transformation division.

Transparently Reporting on Students’ Progress: For each school, North Carolina will make publicly available an easy-to-read, data-rich report indicating the percentage of students, by all subgroups, who are proficient and whether they meet their performance targets and at the high school level graduation rate and other measures of college readiness (including ACT and WorkKeys performance). These reports will enable educators to target interventions to students’ specific needs and provide parents and the public with information on how well their schools are performing.

Creating a Well-Rounded Education: To encourage schools to focus on a well-rounded curriculum, North Carolina has developed new standards of performance for students in multiple subjects including science, social studies, arts education, and career and technical education. During the 2012-13 school year, North Carolina will implement a science assessment aligned to the new standards. Science achievement will be part of the State accountability system as will additional indicators of college- and career-readiness including ACT and WorkKeys performance, graduation rates and a graduation project in high schools.

SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION AND LEADERSHIP

North Carolina has developed guidelines governing local teacher and principal evaluation and support systems. North Carolina’s guidelines require annual evaluations consisting of six standards for teachers and eight for principals; each a multi-faceted measure of effective teaching or leadership. Teachers and leaders must meet expectations on each standard, including student growth to be rated effective. Information from the evaluation system will be used to improve instruction and drive professional development.