



HOW TO READ YOUR DISTRICT REPORT CARD

Just as student report cards provide parents with information on their child's performance, the NC School District Report Cards offer a snapshot of some important information about school districts across the state. This document is designed to help you understand and use the information in your district's Report Card.

DISTRICT PROFILE

Under "District Profile," you'll find general information about your district including school size and average class size.

School Size is important because it can influence the types of academic programs or activities (such as music, advanced courses, or after-school sports) that schools can offer. Large increases or decreases in school populations mean your district will need to make important decisions about managing classroom space and the numbers of teachers it employs.

Class and Course Size may influence the one-on-one attention that teachers provide to students and the level of discipline in classrooms. Compare your district's class and course size averages with those in the state. Ask administrators about your district's targeted class and course sizes and speak with school board members and district administrators to express your support or concern in this area.

Source of Funds (Amount per Student) shows you where your school district's funding comes from and how much money it receives per student from state, federal, and local sources. Education funds are generated mostly through federal and state income taxes as well as county property and sales taxes. When comparing the distribution of funds in your district with the state average, note that state and federal funding are adjusted by the financial needs of communities so the sources of funds may differ substantially from the state averages shown. For an estimate of total spending per student in your district, add the dollar amounts for the three district funding bars together.

Use of Funds provides an overview of district operating budgets. Use this graph to learn more about how your district spends money in operating schools day-to-day.

HIGH STUDENT PERFORMANCE

There are a number of ways to measure student performance in your district: state test results and graduation rates are just two of the measures that are covered in this Report Card. On a school-by-school basis, there are additional ways to evaluate student performance as well. Look at student grades, at the percentage of students earning top grades or repeatedly failing, and ask for information about student projects and academic clubs and activities. These additional measures are important and can help you form a more complete picture of student academic achievement in the schools in your district.

Performance of Students in Each Grade on ABCs End-of-Grade Tests helps you to see what percentage of students passed End-of-Grade reading tests and End-of-Grade math tests in the spring of 2009. In addition, **Performance of Students in Each Grade on ABCs End-of-Course Tests** shows what percentage of

students passed each of the high school End-of-Course tests. Look for large differences in performance across grade levels and between course subject areas. Talk to district administrators about your observations and learn more about how your district is working to improve academic achievement.

Performance of Each Student Group on the ABCs End-of-Grade Tests and End-of-Course Tests display test results so that differences in passing rates (often referred to as achievement gaps) between students of different ethnicities, gender, family circumstances, or racial backgrounds are apparent. North Carolina is working hard to eliminate performance differences between the groups of students listed here and your district's overall performance depends on closing these "gaps." Find out what your school district is doing to close achievement gaps and what you might be able to do to help.

HIGH STUDENT PERFORMANCE, CONTINUED

School Performance — Each year, schools receive one or more ABCs designations based on their performance on the state's End-of-Grade/End-of-Course tests. These designations are awarded based on standards in two areas: 1) performance, the percentage of students testing at or above grade level, and, 2) growth, whether students have learned as much as they were expected to learn in one year. The ABCs school designations are an important measure of how well the schools in your district are meeting the state's performance standards. Use the Report Card to compare the percentage of schools in your district and at the state level receiving each of the ABCs designations. Are there differences between the performances of the district's elementary, middle, and high schools? Consider working with others in your community to set goals for meeting or exceeding the state's average for Schools of Distinction and Schools of Excellence.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Results — Adequate Yearly Progress "sets the bar" for performance by groups of students, and schools can either clear the bar or miss it; there is no partial credit. In order to make AYP, schools need to meet every performance target set for them. Targets are set for student attendance, graduation rates, and for student performance on the state standardized tests in reading and mathematics. Schools work toward targets in each of those areas for the school's performance as a whole and for the following student groups when they contain 40 or more students: white, black, Hispanic, American Indian, Asian, multiracial, economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, and students with disabilities. When schools do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress for two or more years, they are placed in School Improvement Status. To learn more about what Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement Status mean for schools, visit www.ncpublicschools.org/nclb.

SAFE, ORDERLY & CARING SCHOOLS

Under "Safe, Orderly & Caring Schools," you can find measures for school safety, attendance, and access to technology.

School Safety is critical to learning. Are incidents of crime or violence concentrated at a particular level of schools (elementary, middle, or high) in your district? Knowing where, when, and what incidents occur also is important to understanding issues of safety in your district. To answer those questions and to find out more about safety, talk to school or district administrators.

School Attendance is an important part of academic achievement. When students are absent from school, they miss the instruction that their classmates receive. Frequent absences can make it more difficult for children to master school work in the same amount of

time as the rest of their class. School and district administrators are good people to talk to about attendance rates and what might be done to improve them. Find out if the same students are absent from school each day. Repetitive absences are a larger concern in terms of school performance than periodic absences.

Access to Technology in school buildings can help you understand more about the instructional resources available in your district. In addition to knowing the information provided here (percent of classrooms connected to the Internet, number of students per instructional computer, number of students per Internet-connected computer), you might also ask administrators about the speed of Internet connections, the age of computers, and how teachers make use of technology in instruction.

QUALITY TEACHERS

Most people—parents and education experts alike—agree that good teachers are critical to students' success in learning. By looking at some measures of teacher qualifications, you can better understand the overall quality of the teachers working in your district.

Fully Licensed Teachers — One measure of teacher quality is whether or not a teacher has been granted a teaching license. The types of teaching licenses vary as teachers progress from beginning to more experienced. When a teacher is called "fully

licensed," he/she has met all of the requirements and teaching standards set by North Carolina's State Board of Education.

National Board Certified Teachers — National Board Certification is not required for teaching in the state of North Carolina, but it is a voluntary way for teachers to gain additional professional credentials that recognize their advanced teaching skills and techniques. National Board Certification is the highest level of teaching certification a teacher can hold.

QUALITY TEACHERS, CONTINUED

Years of Teaching Experience — Examine the distribution of teaching experience in your district. Teaching experience is often associated with professional expertise, but it is best to consider this data in the context of additional information. By talking to administrators, you may learn that many of the less experienced teachers in your district are the most active with students, or that they have the most current knowledge of educational research and new teaching practices.

Teacher Turnover Rate — It is important to look at teacher turnover as a measure of staff and school stability. Large amounts of teacher turnover are a drain on a school district's most valuable resources: teachers are at the foundation of a district's ability to provide instruction and promote student learning. Before drawing a conclusion about the frequency with which teachers leave, gather more information from district administrators. You may learn that teacher turnover was quite high because of an early retirement incentive or some other circumstance.

QUALITY ADMINISTRATORS

Successful schools often depend on strong school leaders. Use the following measures to learn more about the qualifications of principals in your district, but don't stop here. Learn more about the many aspects of how principals do their jobs: the ways they cultivate and lead high quality instruction in their school, the ways in which they work with families and school communities, and the ways in which they work with students on a day-to-day basis.

Principals with Advanced Degrees — Principals are required to hold at least a Master's degree in School Administration in order to become licensed in the State of North Carolina. Ask district administrators what types of advanced degrees the principals in your district hold. This data does not distinguish between master's degrees and doctoral degrees and that additional information might be useful.

Years of Administrative Experience — Like the teaching field, years of administrative experience are often associated with professional expertise, but a lack of experience does not necessarily

mean that an administrator is weaker than his/her more experienced colleagues. Ask questions and learn more: you may find that a number of the less experienced administrators in your district are very involved with their schools and with parents, or that they have valuable current knowledge of state and federal education laws and programs that benefit their schools and the district.

Principal Turnover Rate — As with teachers, principal turnover in your district is a measure of staff and school stability. Frequent principal turnover—the loss of schools' leaders—can have a tremendous impact on school instructional programs and operating procedures. Equally important, ask district administrators about the process for replacing departing principals. Does your district recruit from experienced talent in neighboring school systems when it has a vacancy? Do assistant principals within the district or the school building generally replace the principals who leave? A well developed district "succession plan" for school leaders can be very effective in controlling the disruptions that accompany changes in school leadership.

KEEP IN MIND...

Use state averages as reference points in reading district-level data. Remember that these averages only provide an indication of how favorable the data might be. In many instances, it would be a mistake to judge a school district as "better" or "worse" based only on slight differences in this data.

Additional data about your district are available through your district's web-based Report Card at www.ncreportcards.org. Use your online District Report Card to learn more about schools and school districts and to link to additional tips for understanding and using Report Card information.