

# Expanding Excellence through Advanced Coursework

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# Desired Outcomes

**Celebrate** North Carolina's momentum by recognizing **record gains in Advanced Placement participation and qualifying scores** that reflect the power of expanded access and student readiness.

**Examine** statewide, regional, and subgroup trends to uncover **bright spots and persistent gaps** that reveal where growth is strongest and where opportunity must deepen.

**Explore** strategies and success stories that demonstrate how intentional partnerships, targeted supports, and instructional alignment drive **equitable access** to advanced coursework.

**Identify** next steps to sustain growth, build educator capacity, and **expand equitable access** to advanced learning.



# ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL **EXCELLENCE**



Prepare Each Student  
for Their Next Phase  
in Life

Focus Area 3 | Promote Excellence for All

## **ACTION 1**

Support PSUs in **expanding access to rigorous pathways**, such as **AP**, International Baccalaureate (IB), Cambridge International, Career and College Promise (CCP), credentialed Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC), to **ensure every student takes and passes a college level and career-connected course**.

“**When opportunity is shared, excellence expands. Every student deserves the chance to rise to rigorous expectations.**”

## **Legislative Connection**

### **Advanced Courses (NCGS 115C-174.26)**

- NC AP Partnership - only one in the country
- Test Fee Coverage
- Advanced Courses = AP, IB, and CIE courses



# North Carolina AP Partnership

## NC AP Partnership Team

**Brian Barnes**, Senior Director

**Michelle Lourcey**, Director

**Ryan Byrd**, Director

**Laura Turner**, Associate Director

# Synergy of Advanced Learning

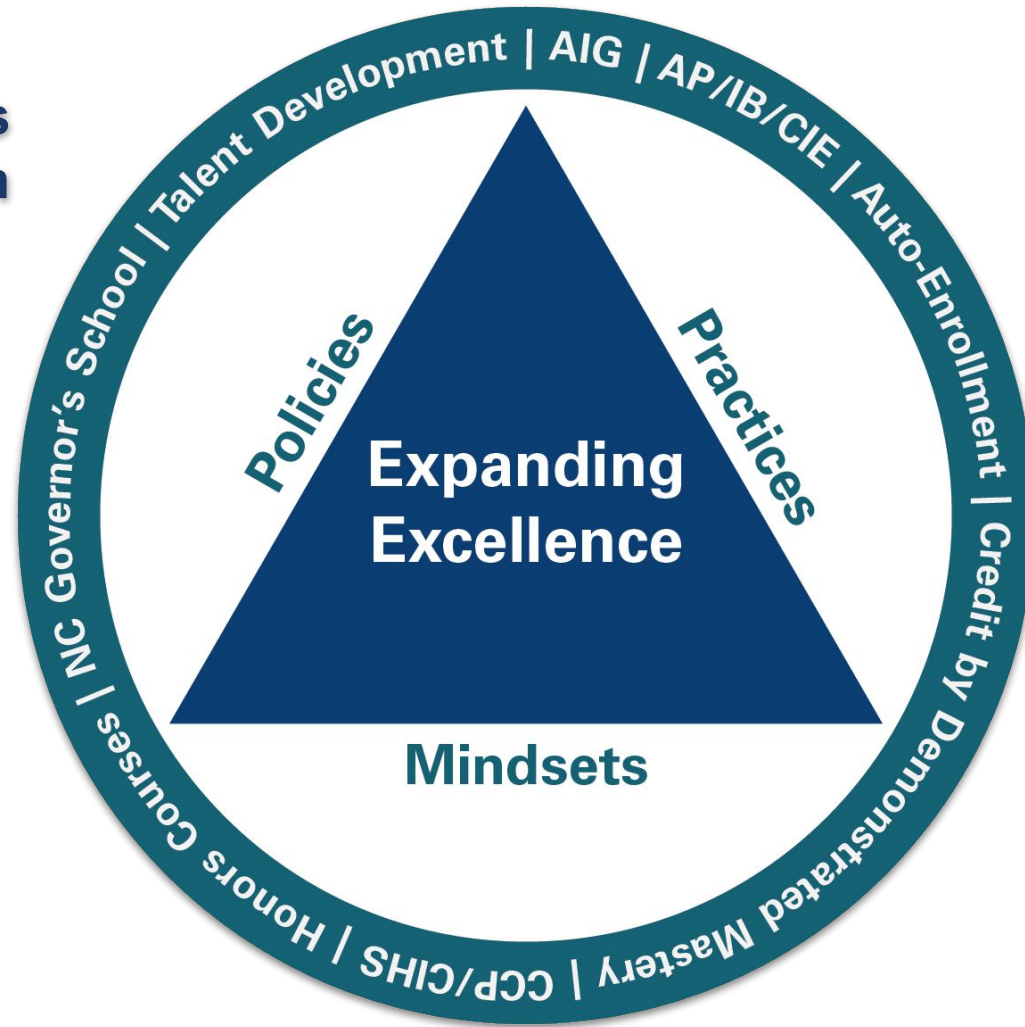


## Legislation: Broaden Access and Successful Participation

Test Fees Coverage  
Since 2015

State Board of Education  
AIG Program Standards

# Sustained Focus and Vision



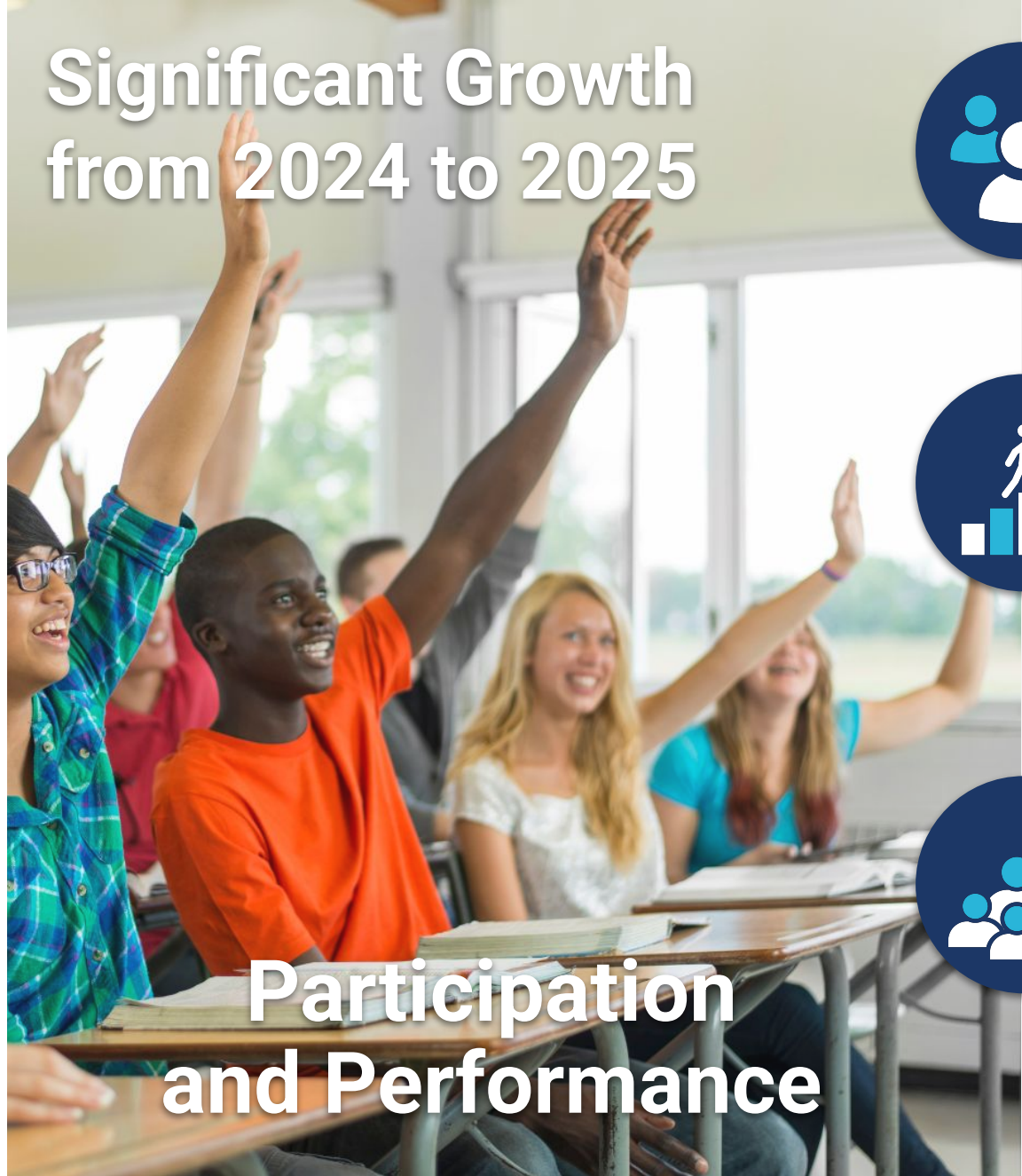
NC AP Partnership  
Professional Learning  
Instructional Supports

Equity and Excellence  
Access and Performance

# Celebrating North Carolina's Momentum

Record Gains in Access and Achievement

# Significant Growth from 2024 to 2025



## Participation and Performance



## Participation

- **90,504 students** participated in AP exams — a **7.3% increase** from 2024.
- Growth **outpaced the national average of 5.0%**, showing expanding access across NC public schools.
- **171,162 AP exams** were taken — a **9.8% increase** over the prior year.

## Performance

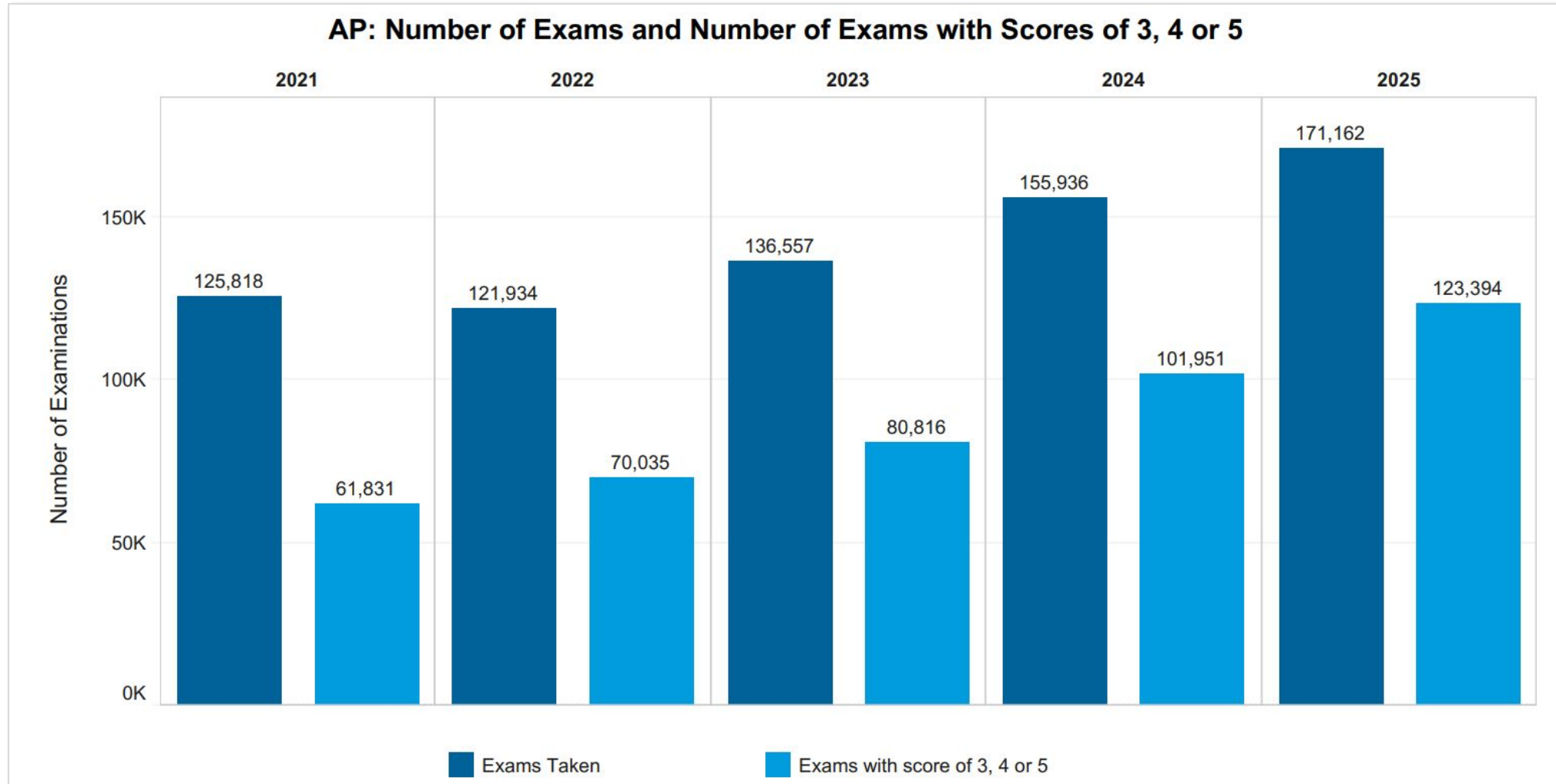
- **123,394 exams** earned scores of **3 or higher**, a **21.0% increase**, **exceeding** the U.S. success rate (72.1% vs. 70.1%).

## Equity and Access

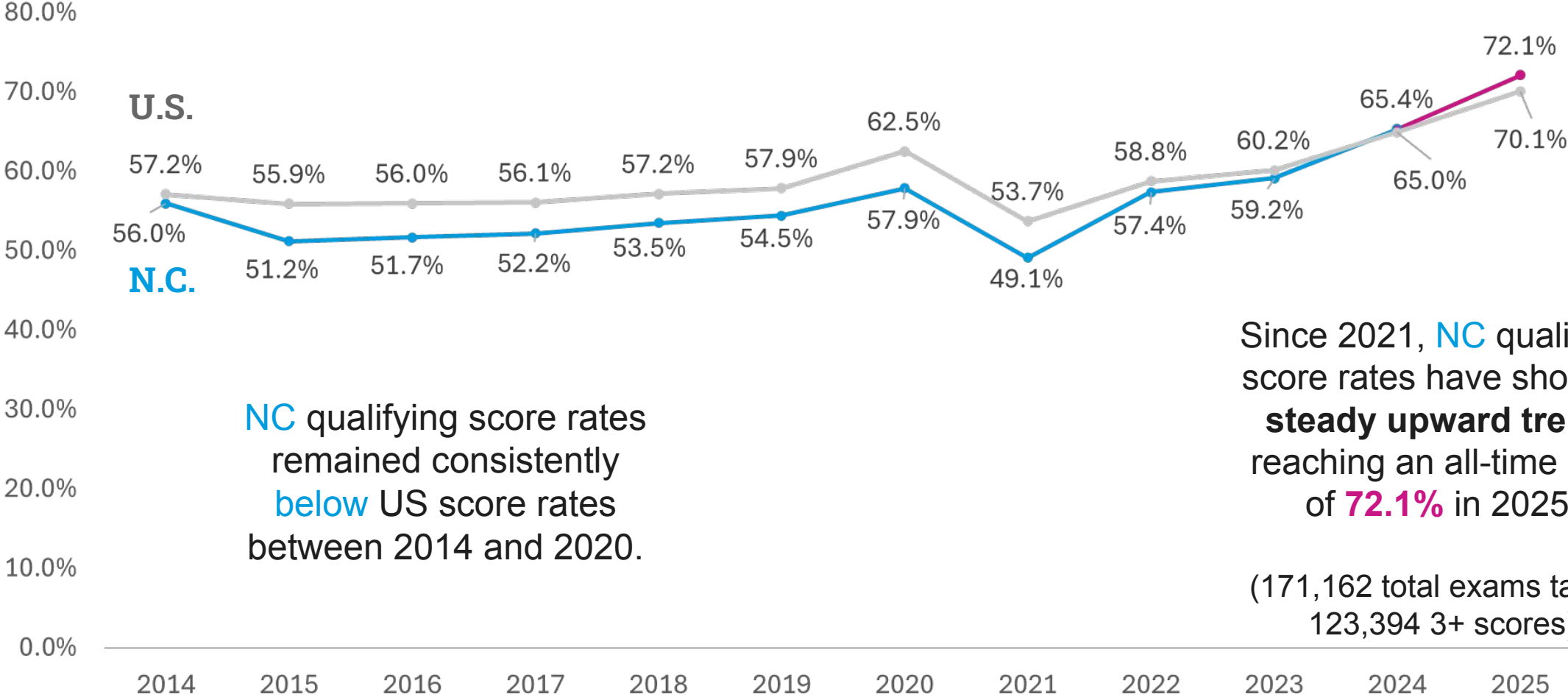
- **Every student group** showed gains in participation and success.
- **Growth was strongest** among **American Indian, Black, and Hispanic/Latino** students, reflecting the power of expanded opportunity.

# North Carolina's Five-Year Trend (2021-2025)

Number of AP Exams and Number of Exams with Score of 3, 4, or 5



# NC Qualifying Scores Continue to Outpace the Nation in 2025



NC qualifying score rates remained consistently below US score rates between 2014 and 2020.

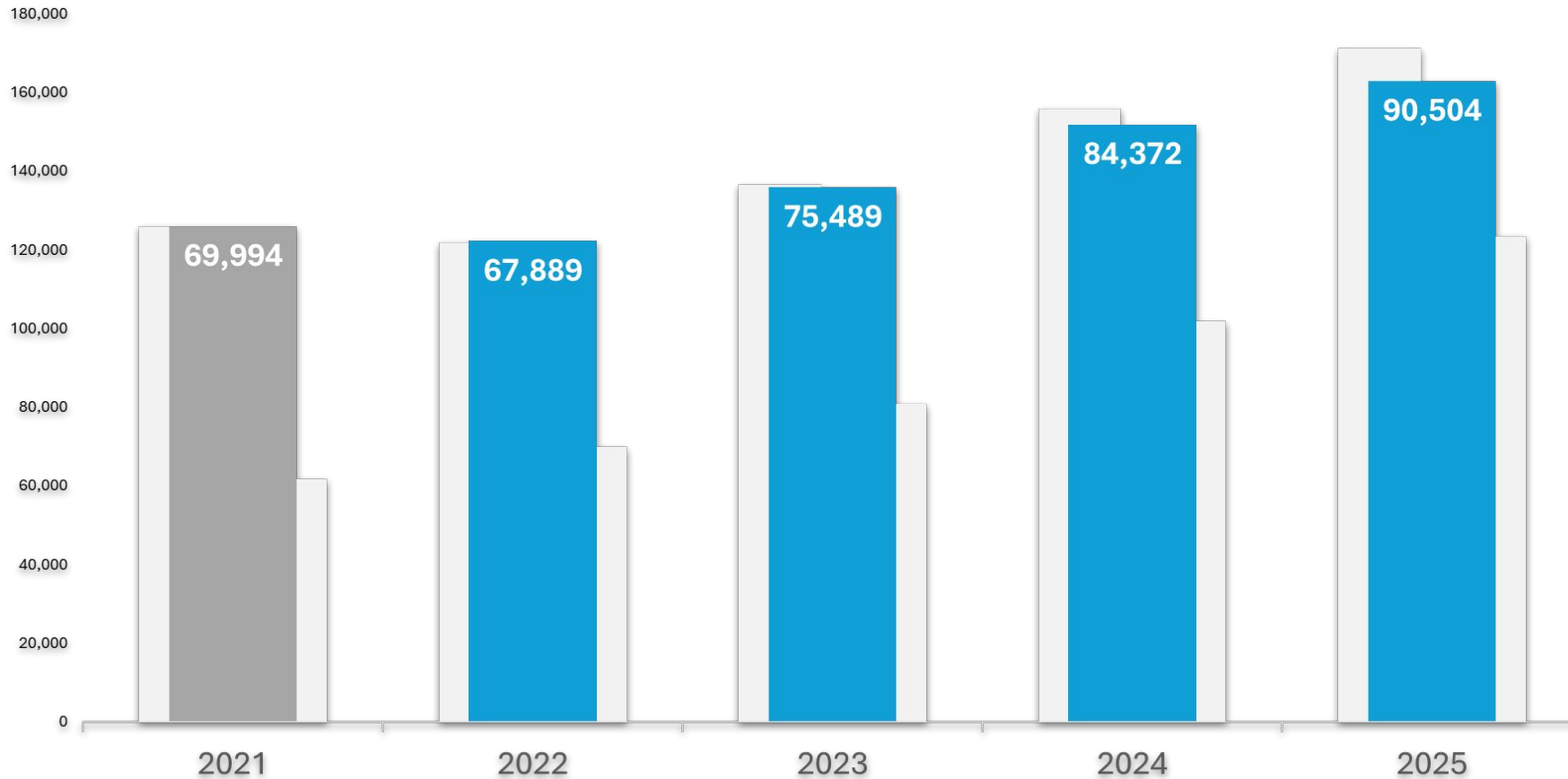
Since 2021, NC qualifying score rates have shown a **steady upward trend**, reaching an all-time high of **72.1%** in 2025.

(171,162 total exams taken, 123,394 3+ scores)

# Examining the Data Story

Statewide, Regional, and Subgroup Insights

# 2025 NC AP Participation Test Takers

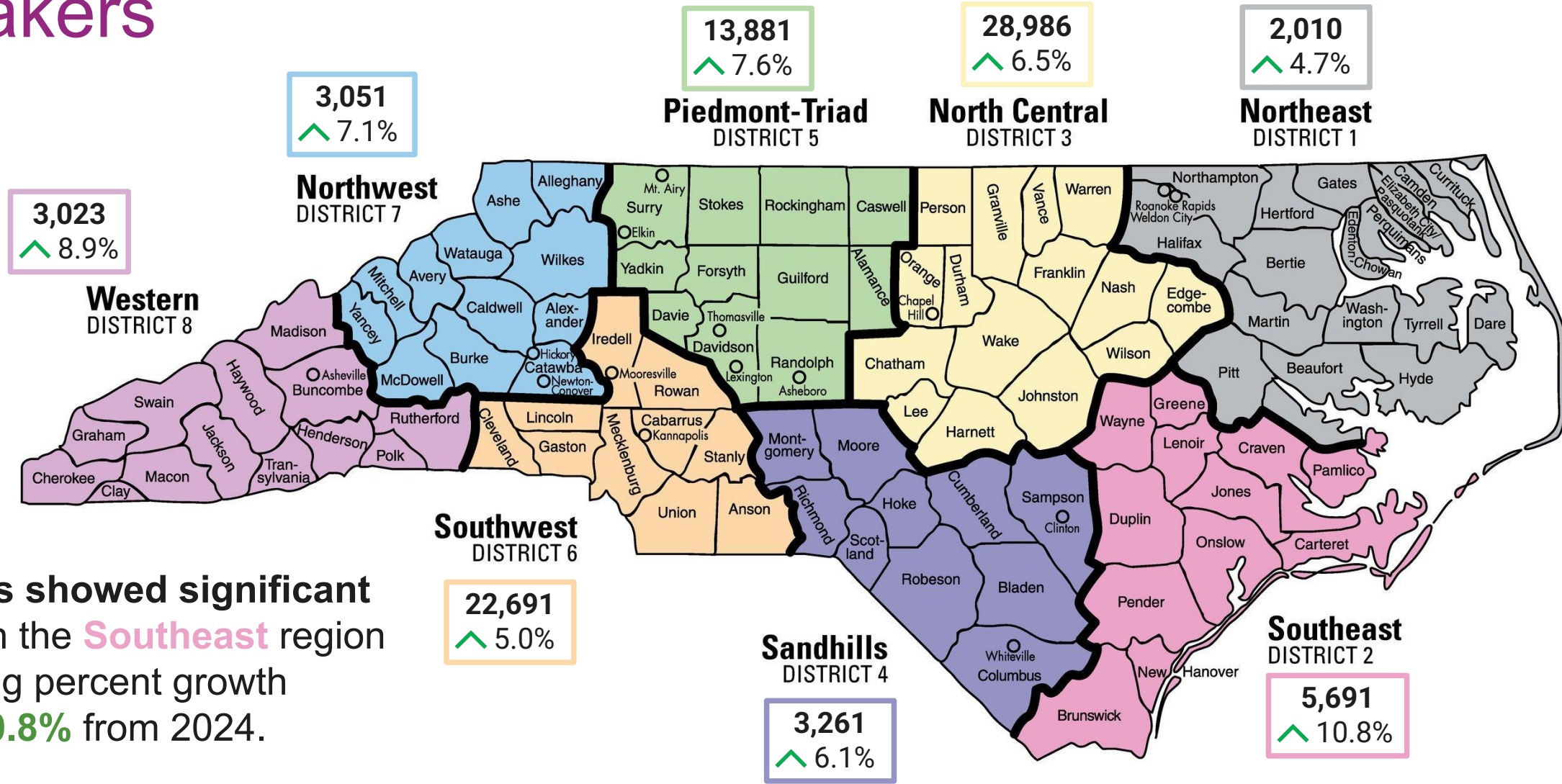


**7.3%**  
Growth  
from  
2024

North Carolina **student participation** has **steadily increased over the past 4 years** to an all-time high of **90,504 students** in 2025.

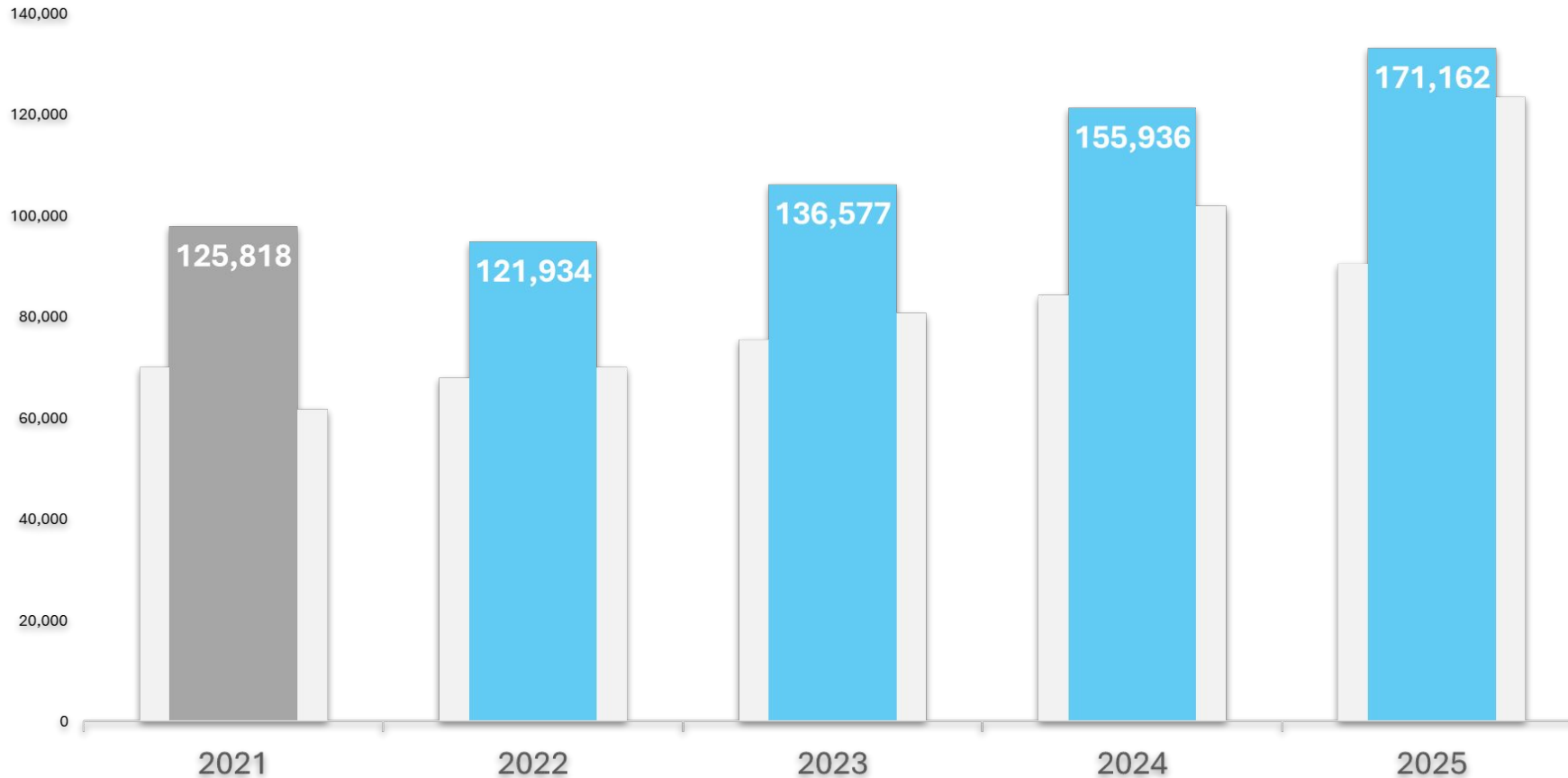
# AP Participation Across Regions

## Test Takers



All regions showed significant growth with the **Southeast** region leading percent growth at **10.8%** from 2024.

# 2025 NC AP Participation Exams Taken

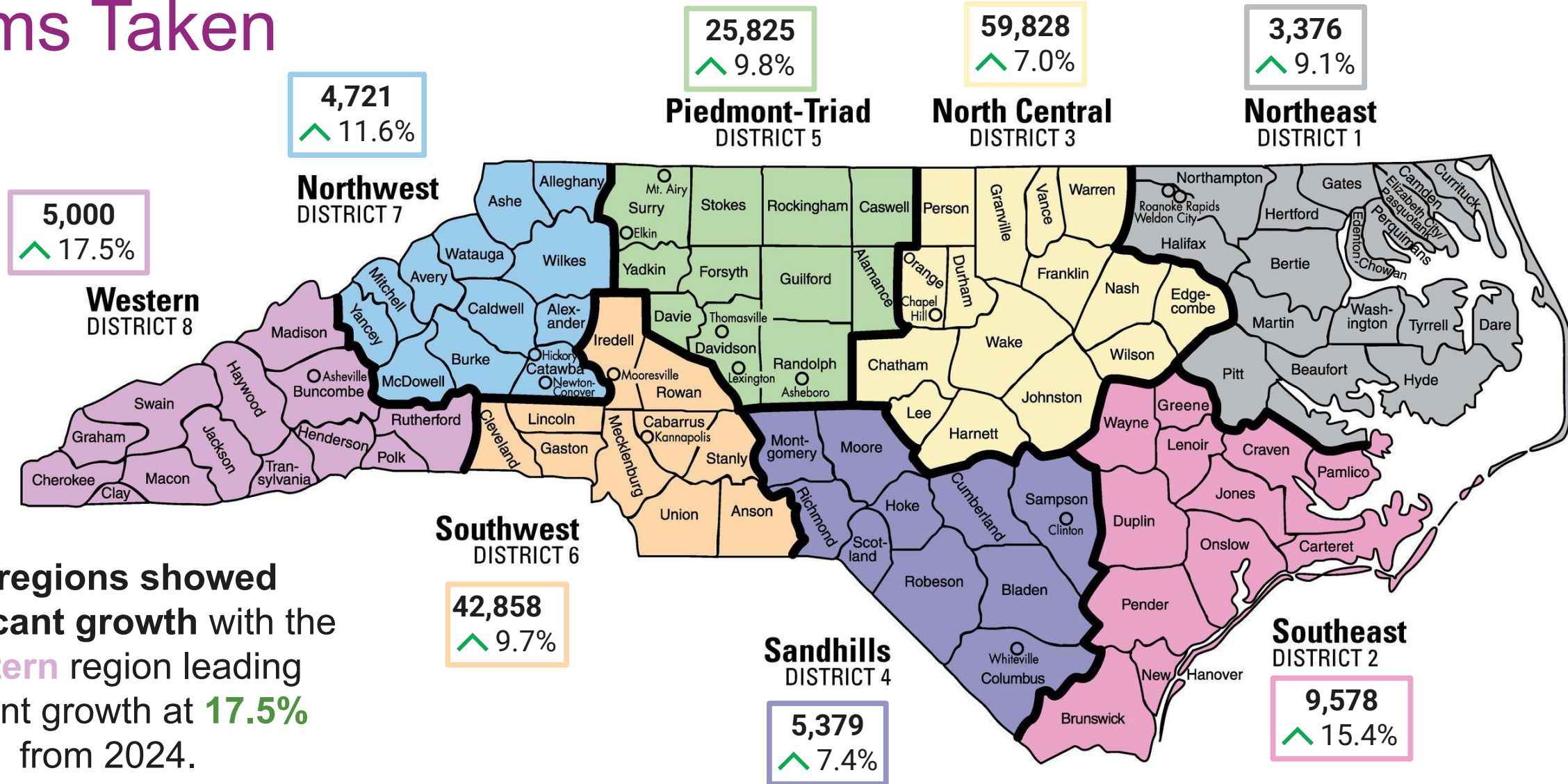


↑ 9.8%  
Growth  
from  
2024

Since 2022, the number of **AP exams taken** in North Carolina has **increased by almost 50,000** to an all-time high of **171,162 exams** in 2025.

# AP Participation Across Regions

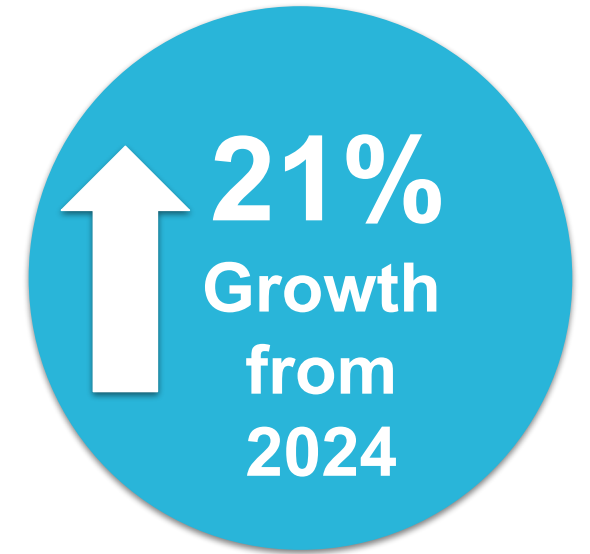
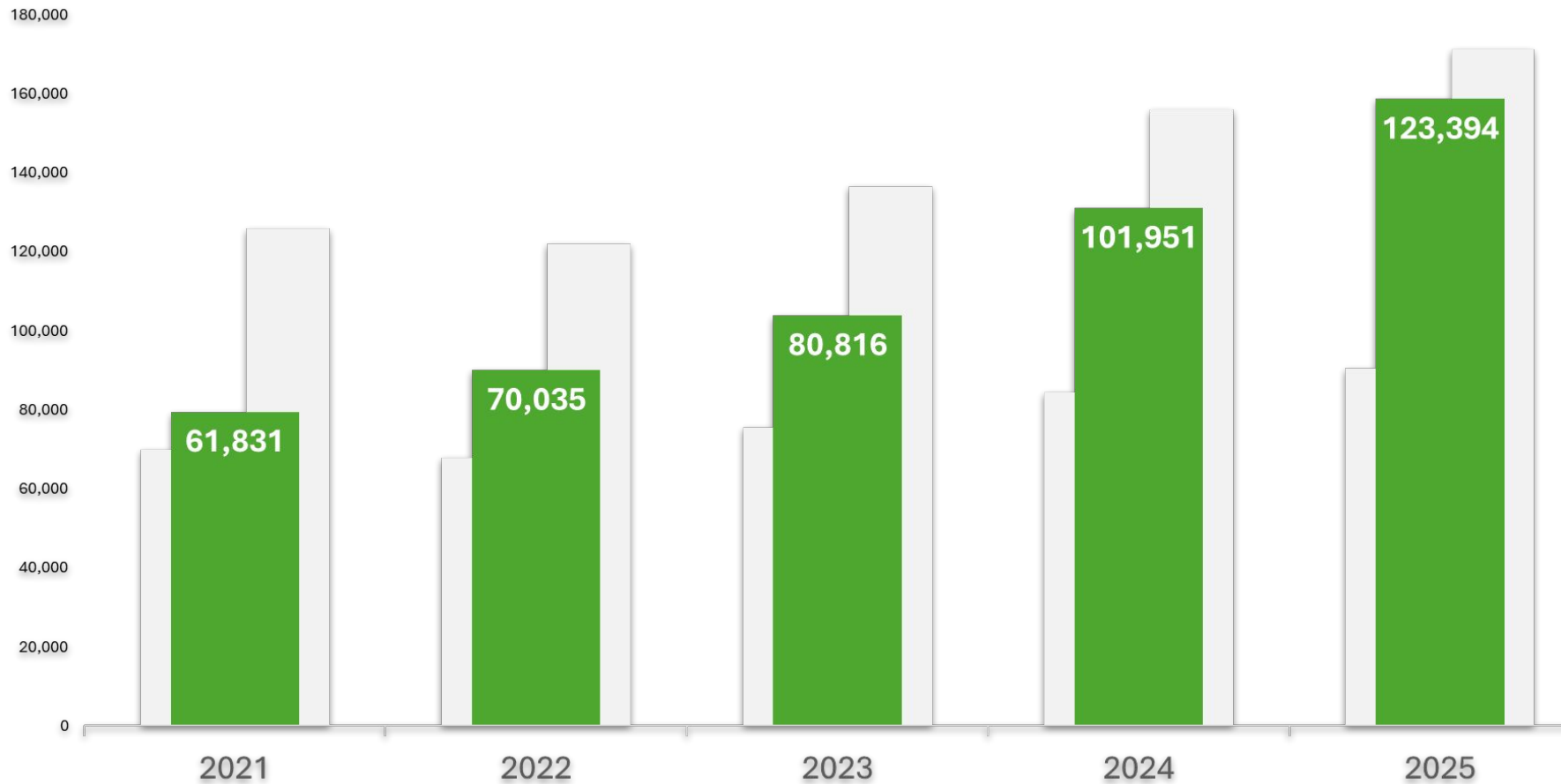
## Exams Taken



All regions showed significant growth with the **Western** region leading percent growth at **17.5%** from 2024.

# 2025 NC AP Performance

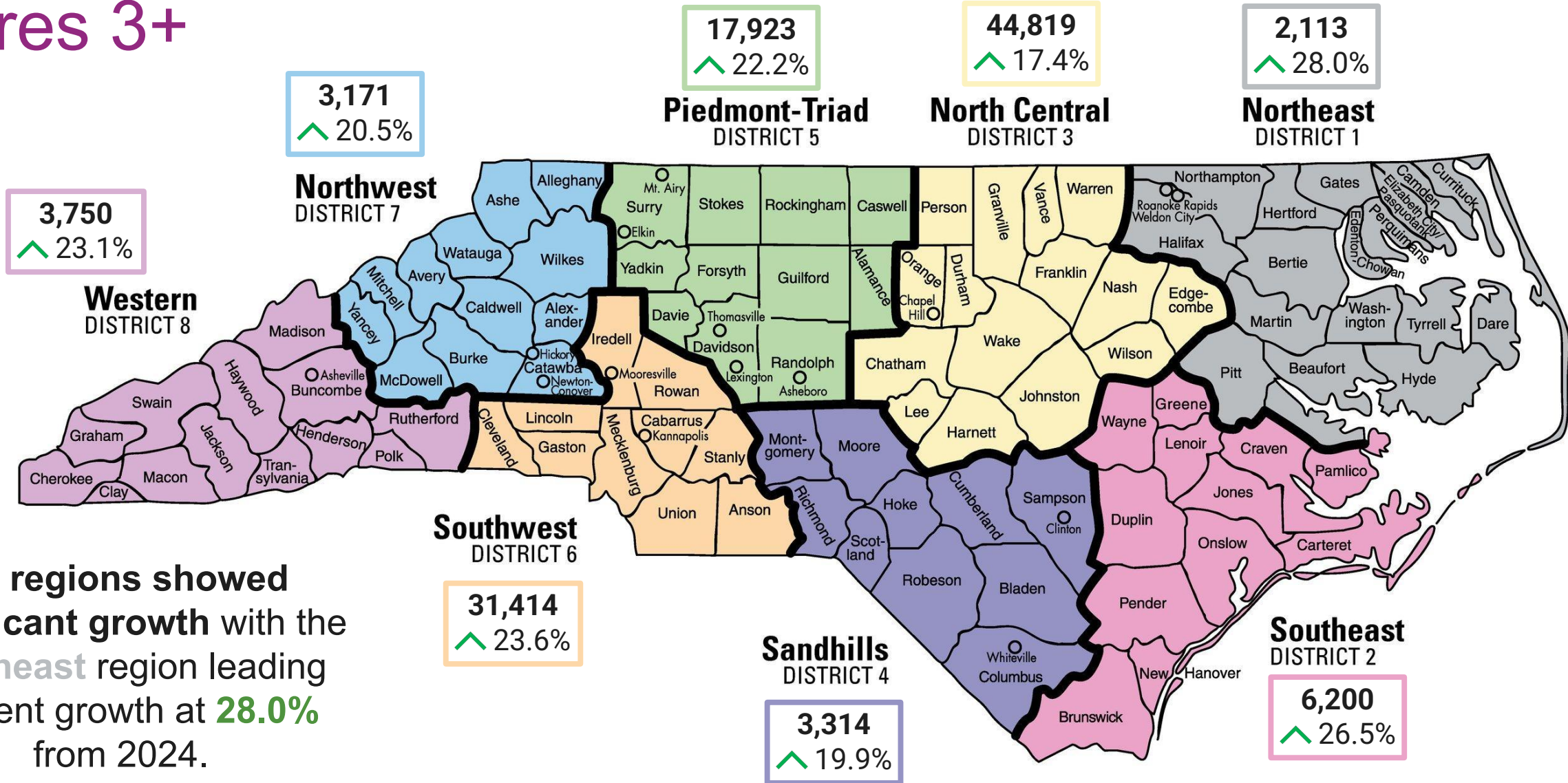
## Exam Scores 3+



Since 2021, the number of **3+ exam scores** in North Carolina has **roughly doubled** to an all-time high of **123,394** **qualifying scores** in 2025.

# AP Performance Across Regions

Scores 3+



All regions showed significant growth with the Northeast region leading percent growth at **28.0%** from 2024.

# NC Public School AP Exam Data

## 2024–2025 Key Highlights

### Black Students



**+7.5%**  
participation

Just Behind the Nation's 8.9% Growth



**+33.5%**  
qualifying scores

Outpacing the National Rate of 30.5%

### Hispanic or Latino Students



**+9.9%**  
participation

Outpacing the Nation's 8.1% Growth



**+26.0%**  
qualifying scores

Exceeding the National Rate of 20.6%

### American Indian Students



**+15.8%**  
participation

Outpacing the Nation's -8.0% Growth



**+49.7%**  
qualifying scores

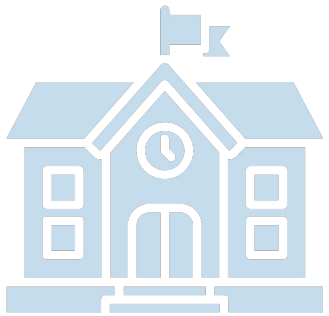
Exceeding the National Rate of 4.5%

# Expanding Access and Building Capacity

Strengthening Advanced Coursework Statewide

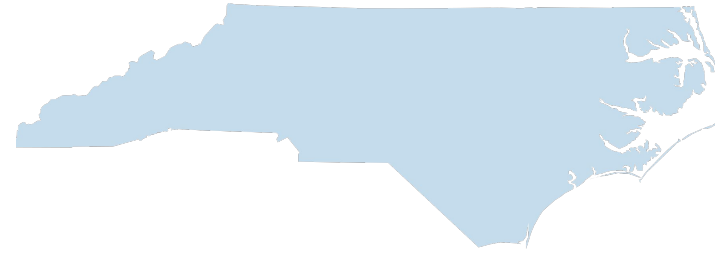
# Building Capacity NC AP Partnership

Four-person team assigned to provide support across NC  
\$2,000,000 Annual Contract



## Targeted District Support

- Focused on **Low-performing districts**
- **Technical assistance** and **intentional professional development** through District and Middle-Level Colloquia



## State-Wide Support

- **Professional development**, including **AP Summer Institute** training, **AP Mentoring** programs, **Regional AP Symposia**
- **College and Career Readiness Conference**
- **Regionally-focused** sessions

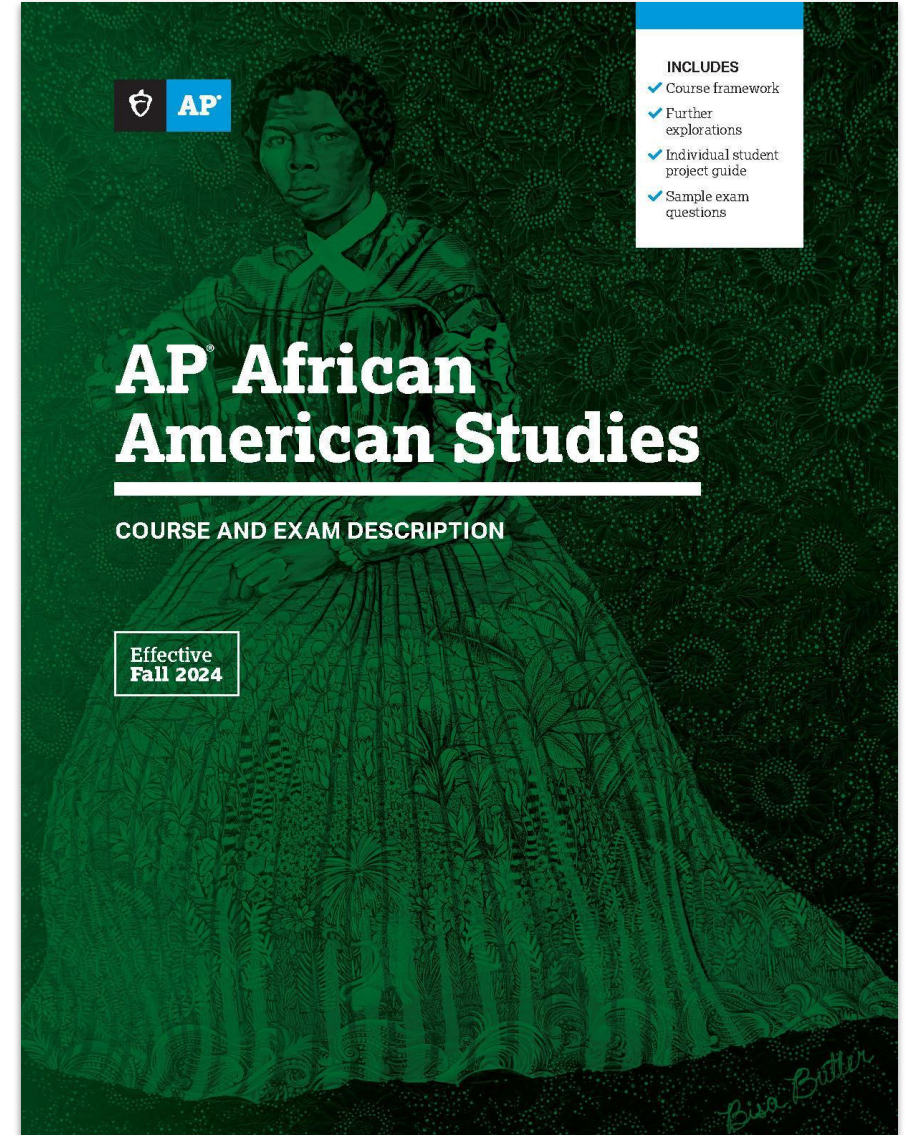
# Fastest-Growing AP Course

2025  
1,651

2024  
536

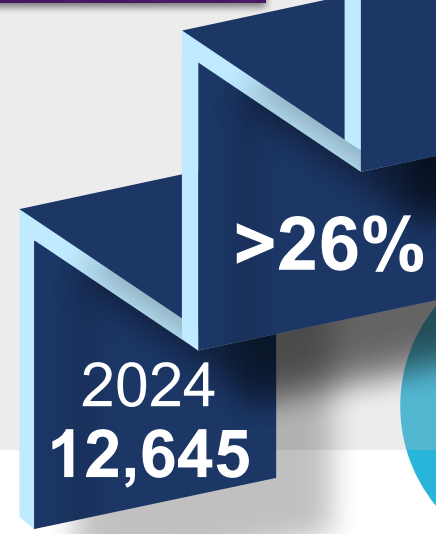
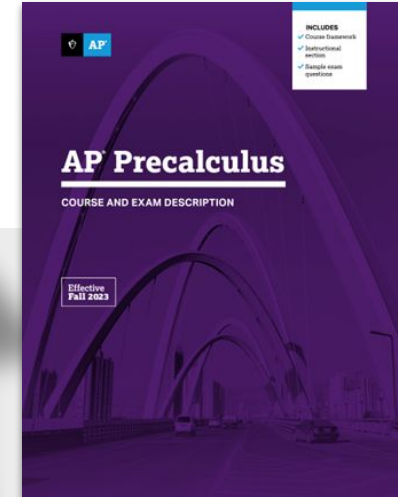
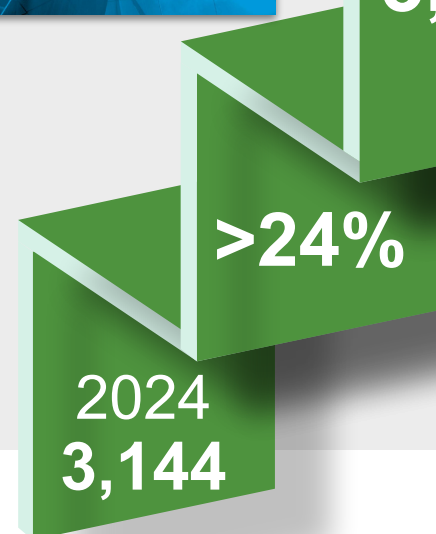
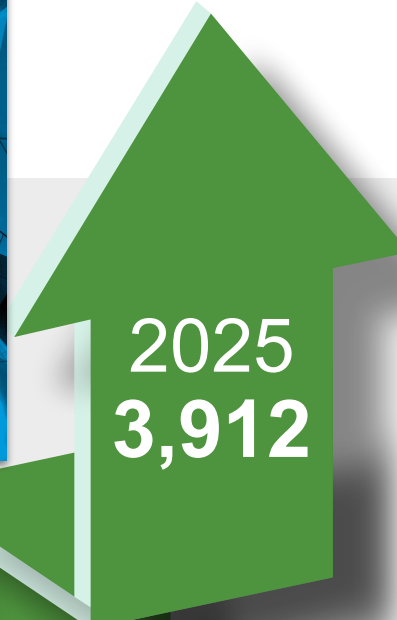
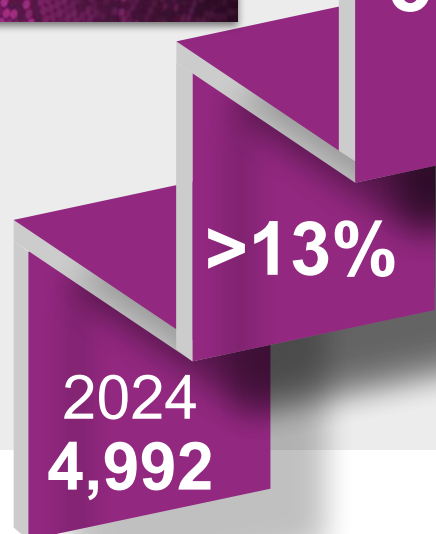
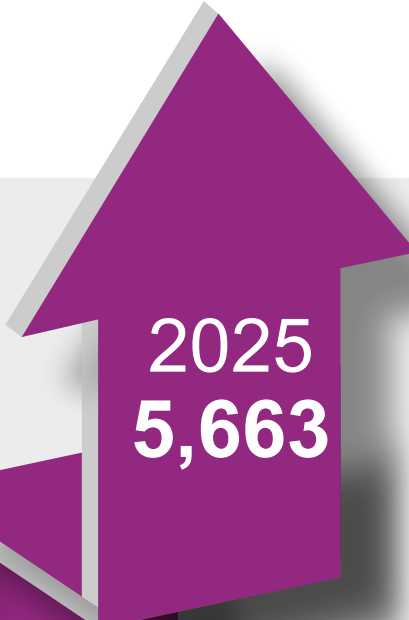
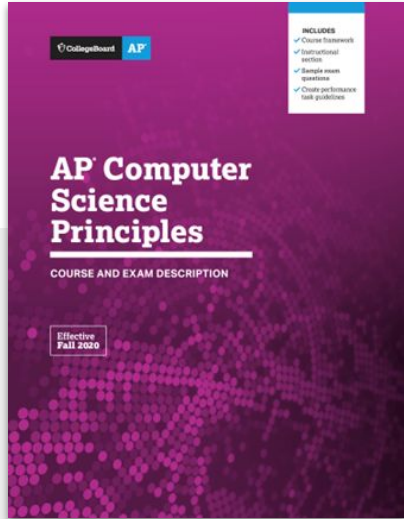
**>200%**  
Growth in 1 Year

Expanding access to  
culturally relevant college-level  
coursework for North Carolina.



# How NC Continues Changing the AP Invitation

Growth from 2024



83%  
Student  
Success  
Rate

# Lessons in Expanding Excellence Together

**Small Group Work**

Collaborative Reflection and Action Planning



# Small Group Work

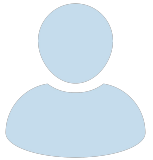
## Collaborative Reflection and Action Planning

### Purpose



To **explore regional data and district success stories** to identify trends, promising practices, and collective actions that can **expand excellence across North Carolina**.

### Protocol



- Divide into **four groups**, each assigned **two regions**.
- Engage in a **30-minute facilitated discussion** divided into **3 segments**:
  1. **Regional Data Dive: 10 Minutes**
  2. **AP Promising District Share: 10+ Minutes**
  3. **Reflection and Action Planning: 10 Minutes**

### Consider

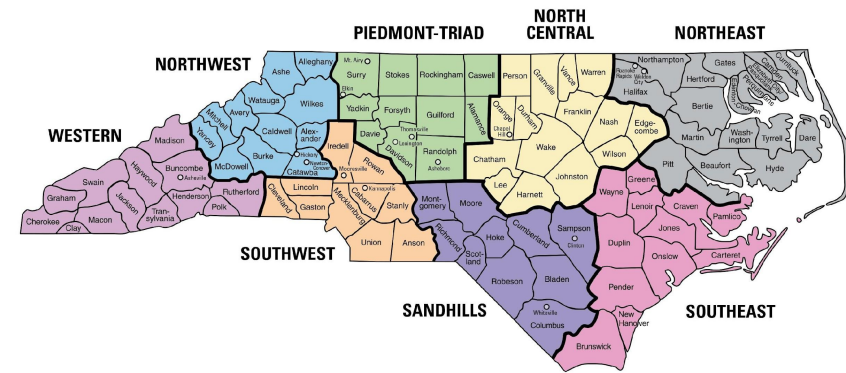


- What **key insights and strategies** can **inform** North Carolina's **continued efforts to expand excellence** statewide?
- What **critical factors for success** have been **sustained over time**?
- Be prepared to **share key reflections and takeaways** with the full group.





# Group Assignments



| Group | Facilitator      | AP Promising District Sharing | Board Regions               |
|-------|------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1     | Beth Cross       | Pitt County Schools           | Northeast<br>Northcentral   |
| 2     | Rodney Allen     | Pamlico County Schools        | Southeast<br>Sandhills      |
| 3     | Michelle Lourcey | Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools | Southwest<br>West           |
| 4     | Dr. Kristi Day   | Alamance-Burlington Schools   | Piedmont-Triad<br>Northwest |



# Regional Data Dive



- **Review** the regional data summaries
- **Discuss** your observations:
  - N** What do you **notice**?
  - E** What **excites** you?
  - W** What do you **wonder**?
  - S** What **surprised** you?



**How Can  
We Continue  
to Expand  
Excellence?**



# Promising District Share

What **critical factors for success** have enabled improvement to last?



## Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Dr. Melissa Balknight and Team



## Pitt County Schools

Dr. Steve Lassiter and Team



## Pamlico County Schools

Dr. Jeremy Johnson and Team



## Alamance-Burlington School System

Dr. Aaron Fleming and Team



Let's learn from districts that have made **significant gains** in **access** and **performance**.





# Reflection and Action Planning



## Directions:

- Reflect as a group on insights from both the **Regional Data Dive** and **District Sharing**.
- Discuss opportunities to **strengthen collaboration** and **impact** across our state.
- Whole Group Share



## How can excellence be expanded...

- From the **Local Board** perspective?
- From the **District** perspective?
- From the **School** perspective?
- From the **Classroom** perspective?



# Whole Group Share

## How can Excellence be Expanded?

- From the **Local Board** perspective?
- From the **District** perspective?
- From the **School** perspective?
- From the **Classroom** perspective?





# Continuing the Journey of Expansion and Access

Next Steps and Opportunities Ahead

# Critical Factors for Success

Sustained Over Time

## Intentional Leadership



Focused Vision, Alignment, Support, and Monitoring

## Professional Learning and Growth



Coaching, Strategy, Assessment and Data Use

## High-Quality Instructional Materials



Intentional Instructional Alignment, Standards Focused, and Use of AP Classroom

## High Leverage Student Opportunities



Course Access, Academic Scaffolding, Recruitment and Advising

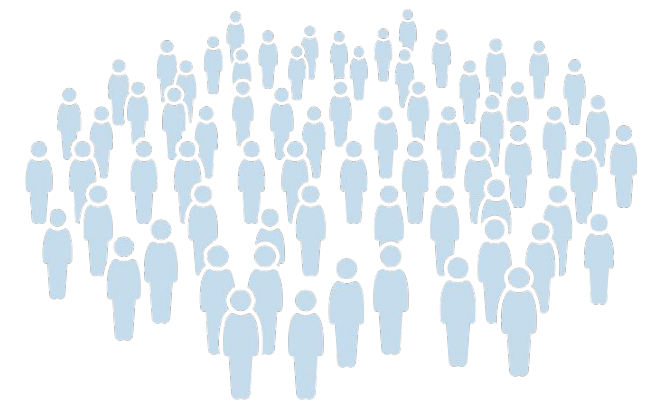
## Mindset of Excellence for All



High Expectations, Growth, and Continuous Improvement

| Academic Year                   | Number of Students | Impact and Change   |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| 2014-2015                       | 74,758             | 4.0% increase   |
| 2015-2016                       | 77,392             | 3.5% increase   |
| 2016-2017                       | 77,920             | 1.0% increase   |
| 2017-2018                       | 82,311             | 5.6% increase   |
| 2018-2019                       | 81,520             | 0.9% decrease   |
| 2019-2020                       | 77,579             | 4.8% decrease   |
| 2020-2021                       | 78,174             | 0.7% increase   |
| 2021-2022                       | 72,577             | 7.1% decrease   |
| 2022-2023                       | 80,271             | 10.6% increase  |
| 2023-2024                       | 93,050             | 15.9% increase over prior year  |
| 2024-2025                       | 97,317             | 4.6% increase over prior year   |
| 2025-2026<br>Current enrollment | 99,397             | 2% increase over prior year<br>33% increase since 2014-15<br>(24,639 more students) |

# AP Student Enrollment



# Next Steps



## NCDPI Partnerships

Continue collaboration with the NC AP Team, IBO, and CIE consultants to strengthen statewide alignment and impact.



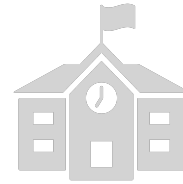
## Expanding Excellence

Maintain focus on expanding access, equity, and successful participation across districts and schools.



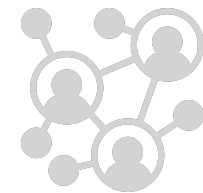
## Data-Driven Insights

Use ongoing data analyses to identify gaps and inform targeted support strategies.



## District and School Support

Provide more intentional coaching and resources to additional districts and schools.



## Networks & Promising Practices

Sustain AP and IB District Leader Networks, Cambridge check-ins, and continue sharing promising practices across NC.

# Expanding Excellence

# Questions?

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Beth Cross, [beth.cross@dpi.nc.gov](mailto:beth.cross@dpi.nc.gov)