

North Carolina Accountability Task Force

Meeting 1 Summary

February 19, 2026 | 9:00 AM - 3:30 PM ET | North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Raleigh, NC

Project Background

North Carolina's Achieving Educational Excellence strategic plan establishes the goal of making North Carolina's public schools the best in the nation by 2030. The strategic plan is organized around eight pillars, each representing a core commitment to students, educators, families and communities. These pillars describe what North Carolina wants students to achieve and what the system must do to make that possible.

Accountability is central to this vision. The plan outlines each pillar as follows:

1. Pillar 1 defines what students should be prepared for: strong academic foundations, career and technical education, college readiness, character development and durable skills needed for life beyond school.
2. Pillar 2 recognizes that student outcomes are tied directly to educator quality and working conditions, and holds the state responsible for supporting its workforce.
3. Pillar 3 calls for stronger family and community partnerships, family engagement policies and resources that remove non-academic barriers to student success.
4. Pillar 4 prioritizes support to improve student well-being, school climate, and the physical and emotional conditions that make learning possible.
5. Pillar 5 calls for modernized operations and data systems at state and district levels, creating the infrastructure that schools need to function effectively.
6. Pillar 6 charges the State Board with redesigning the accountability system, setting a target of publishing new School Performance Profiles by December 2026.
7. Pillar 7 calls for communicating the strengths of public education, ensuring communities understand and trust what schools are doing.
8. Pillar 8 calls on organization and community partners to actively invest in and advocate for public education.

The current accountability system has served important purposes. It provides annual school performance results, communicates outcomes in a format the public can understand, and generates longitudinal data that policymakers and educators rely on. At the same time, there is growing concern about whether the system accurately reflects what is happening in North Carolina schools, whether it supports continuous improvement, and whether it aligns with the full scope of the strategic plan's expectations for schools.

In response, the State Board of Education engaged the Center for Assessment to support a comprehensive redesign, and NCDPI convened a Task Force to guide the work. Task Force members include state legislators, State Board members, NCDPI leaders, district and school administrators, educators, students and community members. Their charge is to develop recommendations for a redesigned system that is more accurate, fair and useful for everyone it serves. A separate working group led by NCDPI will translate those recommendations into implementation plans for the Task Force's final approval. The Center for Assessment is facilitating the Task Force's work across three in-person meetings, the first of which was held on February 19, 2026.

Meeting 1 Objectives and Activities

Meeting 1 was designed to build a shared foundation for the redesign work. The primary meeting objectives included:

- Reflecting on what is and is not working in the current system;
- Exploring the idea of reciprocal accountability, where responsibility is shared across the school, district, and state levels;
- Articulating a collective vision for North Carolina graduates and schools; and
- Identifying the most important purposes and uses of a redesigned system.

Four structured activities were used to accomplish these objectives. Members worked in small groups for each activity and then shared their perspectives with the whole group.

What's Working and Not Working. Task Force members considered the current accountability system from the perspective of multiple constituent groups, including students, parents, teachers, school and district leaders and state leaders. They identified aspects of the system that are working well and aspects that are not.

Reciprocal Accountability. Members mapped the distinct responsibilities of schools, districts and the state within an accountability system built on shared responsibility. They identified what each level should be held accountable for and what each owes to the others.

Visioning and Priority-Setting. Members reflected on their vision for North Carolina graduates and schools, identified negative consequences to guard against and used a voting process to rank the most important purposes for the redesigned system.

Use Stories. Members adopted the perspective of a specific person or role (i.e., teacher, school administrator, district leader) and built use stories describing how that person would use information from a redesigned accountability system, what data they would need, how their actions would change, and what could go wrong.

Summary of Activity Discussions

The following sections summarize key themes from each activity. Findings reflect patterns across the full group and are presented in the aggregate. Where a specific example helps illustrate a broader theme, we note it as such.

Activity 1: What is Working and Not Working

Task Force members considered the current accountability system from multiple constituents' perspectives. Their responses identified a system that communicates results in ways the public can understand, but one that also raises significant concerns about accuracy, usefulness, and unintended consequences.

What is working. Generally, members identified the A-F school grading structure as one that is broadly understood by parents and the general public. The A-F system is valued for its simplicity, though several members shared concerns about its accuracy. Members also noted the availability of longitudinal data and the state's dual enrollment and CTE pathway offerings as genuine strengths. Finally, members recognized early literacy programming as an area that appears to be supporting students' early academic and social-emotional development.

What is not working. Members raised several substantial and common concerns. Members of each group questioned the accuracy and fairness of the current growth model and the fairness of the 80%/20% weighting of achievement versus growth. One task force member described this weighting as failing to capture what is actually happening in schools. The EVAAS growth model was cited as difficult to understand and explain to educators and families. Members also expressed concern that the A-F grading structure creates stigma that affects students' sense of themselves, and that high-stakes testing pressure, particularly for younger students, narrows the curriculum to tested subjects at the expense of science, social studies, arts and other valued areas. Several members noted that the post-mortem nature of annual state assessments limits their instructional value.¹ Moreover, members reported that it is not always clear who the current system's information is designed to serve or how those users are expected to act on it.

Activity 2: Reciprocal Accountability

Task Force members worked in small groups to map distinct responsibilities across the three levels of the education system: schools, districts and the state. There was strong consistency across groups in how these responsibilities were described.

Schools were identified as responsible for quality instruction, student outcomes, safety and belonging, family engagement and carrying out district and state direction. Districts were seen as

¹ It should be noted that the EOG and EOC end-of-year tests were designed to provide a summative determination of students' academic performance and not for instructional purposes. This is a common misnomer that may deserve additional attention via training and communication about the purposes and uses of various assessments.

responsible for curriculum selection, staff recruitment and retention, creating and supporting the local improvement strategy and serving as the bridge between schools and the state. The state's responsibilities focused on setting standards, ensuring adequate and equitable funding, designing the accountability system and advocating for educators' needs.

One group drew an important distinction between the role of the State Legislature and the role of the State Board of Education, noting that these two bodies carry different but related responsibilities and that their alignment or misalignment affects what is possible at the district and school levels. For example, if the Legislature sets funding levels that fall short of what the State Board's accountability system requires schools to demonstrate, districts are left responsible for outcomes they lack the resources to achieve. This distinction has implications for how reciprocal accountability is designed and communicated.

Across groups, members described a system that places a disproportionate share of accountability burden on schools relative to what the state and districts are held accountable for in return. A redesigned system should make each level's responsibilities explicit and should hold the state accountable for providing the resources, data/information and guidance schools need to succeed.

Activity 3: Visioning and Priority-Setting

Vision for North Carolina graduates. Members described graduates who are life-ready, workforce-ready, and community-ready, not simply diploma-ready. Key attributes included strong literacy skills applied across subject areas, communication and collaboration skills, problem-solving and critical thinking, civic engagement and emotional resilience. Members also emphasized that students should be exposed early to a range of future opportunities, including career pathways, postsecondary options, and civic roles, rather than encountering only a narrow academic track.

Vision for North Carolina schools. Members described schools organized around diverse, high-quality pathways and real-world learning experiences. Pathways mentioned included college preparatory, CTE, health sciences, education, IT/cyber, and trades, among others. Members also described schools where teachers have access to high-quality instructional materials and where active, collaborative learning is the norm.

Unintended consequences to guard against. Members named several outcomes they are most concerned about inadvertently producing. These included: career pathways becoming rigid tracks that limit options, especially for underserved students; students accumulating credentials without developing transferable literacy, math and reasoning skills; widening opportunity gaps between districts, especially along geographic and income lines; and designing ratings that do not accurately reflect the quality of teaching and learning. One task force member emphasized that assessment and/or accountability results should be treated as a starting block and not a finish line, meaning that it should generate actionable next steps rather than terminal judgments.

Priority purposes for the redesigned system. Following individual reflection, groups used a voting process to rank priorities. The top priorities based on rankings were to:

1. Produce reliable, annual measures of student performance in reading, math, science, history and civics.
2. Monitor equity of access and opportunity across districts, including rural and high poverty communities, and trigger differentiated state support when geographic or funding disparities limit student success.
3. Focus on major academic competencies and character development (e.g., durable skills).
4. Generate and provide reports that are holistic and meaningful for all stakeholders.

Additional priorities included increasing the weight given to academic growth, providing meaningful data to constituents across the K-12 continuum, and identifying areas needing additional support along with where funding and resources will come from.

Activity 4: Use Stories

Three small groups developed use stories from the perspective of a teacher, a school administrator and a district leader. Common themes emerged across all three: the need for timely, actionable data; trust in the measures being used; and clarity about what the system is designed to accomplish. Each group also identified meaningful risks if those conditions are not met.

Teacher perspective. Teachers would use information generated by the accountability system to guide instruction and inform decisions about student support. To do so effectively, they need a clear and transparent picture of what is measured and how. Members described a redesigned system as one that would motivate teachers to take greater ownership of student outcomes, but only if expectations are matched by commensurate support. The group cautioned that without adequate resources and professional development, expanding the scope of accountability would place an unfair burden on teachers.

School administrator perspective. School administrators would use accountability information to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction, identify students not receiving high-quality learning opportunities, recognize educators demonstrating strong growth or performance, and make placement and professional development decisions. They emphasized the need for trend data and granular, student-level information. Members in this group noted that without careful design, a redesigned system could inadvertently prompt schools to narrow their focus, de-emphasizing arts, civics and other valued programs that fall outside the measured domains. They also identified the risk of parents and communities reacting negatively to concerns about overtesting.

District perspective. District leaders described the accountability system as a tool for measuring strategic plan success, providing schools an improvement roadmap, identifying resource and professional development needs, and maintaining transparency with communities. The data they

need includes at least three years of trend data, subgroup and demographic breakdowns, baseline and outcome information across multiple indicators, and adaptive assessments appropriately leveled to the skills of the student. This group emphasized that timing matters. More specifically, data must be available before the school year begins to inform staffing, curriculum and intervention decisions. The risks they identified centered on data being used punitively or miscommunicated in ways that damage trust and morale rather than supporting improvement.

Emerging Themes and Design Considerations

In addition to the structured activity outputs, several important themes and design questions emerged during discussions. These are presented as emerging considerations rather than Task Force conclusions. They reflect ideas that surfaced during the session and warrant further exploration as the redesign work moves forward.

Parallel accountability systems. One idea raised during discussion was the possibility of designing two parallel accountability systems rather than a single system. One system would address federal ESSA requirements for differentiating among schools, reporting a summative school performance determination, and identifying CSI, ATSI and TSI schools. A second system would focus on contextualizing school performance and recognizing growth and progress in ways that summative ratings cannot capture. This idea is consistent with a well-established distinction in the field between accountability systems that ask whether the system is working as intended and those that ask how it can be improved. If pursued, this approach raises important design questions. For example, how will the two systems interact? How will performance be reported within each system? How should results be communicated to different audiences? And is a two-system approach operationally and politically feasible? These questions merit deliberate consideration by the Task Force in future meetings.

Improving how growth is calculated and reported. Multiple discussions across the day surfaced concern about how growth is calculated and reported in North Carolina, as well as the current 80/20 weighting of achievement versus growth. Members returned repeatedly to the view that growth is a more accurate signal of what schools are doing for students, particularly schools serving historically underserved populations. At the same time, members raised concerns about the current growth model (EVAAS), which is difficult to explain to educators and families and is structured so that a significant portion of schools will not meet the growth standard in any given year. The current 80/20 weighting compounds this problem by limiting the credit schools receive for strong growth, even when that growth is substantial. Together, these two issues represent a foundational design question the Task Force will need to address directly.

Measuring what matters versus what is measurable. Throughout the session, members expressed a consistent desire to hold schools accountable for outcomes that go beyond standardized test scores. These include durable skills, student agency, postsecondary readiness across multiple pathways, and equitable access to opportunity. Members in turn acknowledged the risk of

weakening accountability by including measures that lack rigor or that are easy to game. The tension between measuring what matters and measuring what can be measured accurately—with precision and rigor—will be a central design challenge.

Monitoring equitable access and opportunity as an explicit accountability component. Members consistently emphasized that equity should be a central feature of the redesigned system, not simply background context. Their concern extended beyond outcome differences between student groups to the underlying conditions that produce those differences: whether students have access to high-quality pathways, strong instructional materials, experienced teachers, and adequate resources. Members noted that these conditions vary significantly by geography and income and that the accountability system should surface those disparities and prompt responses when they exist. How the redesigned system incorporates measures of opportunity alongside measures of outcomes will require careful attention.

Suggested Next Steps to Inform Future Meetings

Based on the findings from Meeting 1, we suggest the following next steps to prepare for the next in-person Task Force meeting on April 16, 2026.

Draft a theory of action for Task Force review. The Center will develop a draft theory of action for the redesigned system. The theory of action will be based primarily on results from the visioning activity and priority purposes, and use stories generated in Meeting 1. The draft will be shared with Task Force members in advance of Meeting 2 for their review and feedback.

Clarify the Task Force's mandate and intended use of recommendations. Post-meeting feedback indicated that at least one member sought greater clarity about the Task Force's charge. One member put the question directly:

The committee needs to have an honest conversation about what exactly we are creating: something that we intend to bring to the General Assembly for legislation? Something that NCDPI will use as a complement to the currently legislated process? This informs what we are doing and how we do it.

The Center will briefly address this question during the opening of Meeting 2 and invite members to raise any remaining concerns before the group moves into design decisions. Additionally, to help Task Force members track progress across sessions, each meeting will open with a brief orientation to the project timeline, clarifying where the group is in the process and what decisions lie ahead.

Deliberate on how growth should be measured. The Task Force identified significant concerns about how growth is currently measured and reported in North Carolina. These concerns should be addressed before the group turns to questions of weighting. The Center will guide the Task Force to consider what design priorities and features should be prioritized when evaluating growth models. This will enable the Working Group to examine student growth models more closely, including the

strengths and limitations of the current EVAAS model and alternatives such as student growth percentiles and growth tables.

Discuss Indicator types, priorities, and aggregation. Meeting 2 will include a structured discussion in which Task Force members identify categories of indicators the redesigned system should consider. Drawing on the theory of action developed after Meeting 1 and the priority purposes identified in Activity 3, members will examine what the accountability system should measure, what behaviors it should incentivize, and what data are sufficiently reliable and comparable for statewide use.

Equity of access and opportunity will be a central focus of this discussion. Members consistently emphasized that equitable access to opportunities should be built into the redesigned system. Their concern extended beyond outcome differences between student groups to the underlying conditions that produce those differences; for example, whether students have access to high-quality pathways, strong instructional materials, experienced teachers, and adequate resources. The accountability system should both surface those disparities and prompt responses when they exist.

The discussion will also address how individual indicators should be combined into an overall school performance determination. This includes decisions about the relative weighting of indicators, how subgroup performance should influence overall determinations, and the appropriate balance between technical precision and public understandability.

Issues for Deliberation Beyond Meeting 2

A few themes from Meeting 1 surfaced ideas significant enough to warrant dedicated deliberation but are not yet ready for resolution. The Center for Assessment will develop structured materials to support these conversations in future meetings.

Examine achievement and growth weights. Determinations about achievement and growth indicators should be weighted in the accountability model is a foundational design question that will require careful, data-informed deliberation. The appropriate framing for that analysis depends in part on decisions the Task Force has not yet made, including whether North Carolina retains its current growth model or transitions to an alternative approach. Once the direction on growth measurement is clearer, the Center and NCDPI should consider working together to develop analyses that allow the Task Force to see the practical effects of different weighting scenarios using North Carolina data.

Consider parallel accountability systems. One idea raised during Meeting 1 was the possibility of designing two parallel accountability systems rather than a single system. One system would address federal ESSA requirements for differentiating among schools, reporting a summative school performance determination, and identifying CSI, ATSI, and TSI schools. A second system would focus on contextualizing school performance and recognizing growth and progress in ways that

summative ratings cannot capture. If pursued, this approach would raise important design questions: how the two systems interact, how performance is characterized and reported within each system, how results are communicated to different audiences, and whether a two-system approach is operationally and politically feasible. The Center for Assessment will develop a structured framing of this concept for future Task Force deliberation, including examples from other states, design considerations, and tradeoffs.