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### **WS/FCS releases district grades for schools**

Schools in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County showed a wide range of achievement in the first release of the WS/FCS Performance Grades, underscoring the district's need to focus on its goals of literacy in early grades, increasing the graduation rate and decreasing achievement gaps.

The grades are separate from North Carolina's School Performance Grades, which are scheduled to be released on Feb. 5.

"We created our own performance grades because we think they more accurately capture the work our schools are doing," Superintendent Beverly Emory said. "Using one grade to measure a school's progress is limiting, and we wanted it to better reflect student growth from one year to the next and the challenges of poverty.

"At the same time, our grades show that we have much work to do. We want all of our schools to be As under any grading scale, and we will continue to work to that."

Of the district's 81 schools, 22 received an A. Two schools received a B+; 13 received a B; 11 received a C+; 8 received a C; 6 received a D+; 6 received a D; and 5 received an F+. Eight schools with special programs, such as The Children's Center, Lowrance Middle, Carter High and Main Street Academy, were not given a grade.

Based on a recent state law, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction is assigning each school a letter grade from "A" to "F." In elementary and middle schools, 80 percent of the grade is based on student proficiency of Level III or greater on state tests in grades 3 through 8, and 20 percent is based on student growth. In high schools, graduation rates, ACT performance and other indicators were used in addition to state tests to calculate the school grade.

Emory believes the grades needed to give additional weight to the growth a student makes from one year to the next and take poverty into account.

"We want every student to be proficient," Emory said. "However, we also think schools should be given more credit when their students are making gains every year in the face of obstacles such as poverty."

To calculate a school's WS/FCS Performance Grade, its state grade was increased one letter grade if the school met or exceeded its growth goals to acknowledge the importance of students going beyond what was expected of them in a year. To reflect the challenges of poverty, the grade was given a '+' if more than 85 percent of a school's students receive free or reduced-price lunch.

The Board of Education unanimously approved the district's model at its Jan. 27 meeting.

"These scores aren't new to us," Emory said. "We've had the scores they were based on since last summer. They were publically released last year. We study student performance constantly, and that's what has shaped the three goals we adopted in August."

The district's goals were developed over the course of 2013-14. They were based on trends in student performance and input from principals, teachers, parents and community members. They are:

- By 2020, 90 percent of third-grade students will read on or above grade level.
- By 2018, our graduation rate will be 90 percent.
- By 2018, we will close the achievement gap between subgroups by 10 percentage points while increasing the performance of all subgroups.

The Board of Education adopted the goals in August 2014 and reaffirmed them on Jan. 27

"We work hard to help every child reach his or her potential," said Kenneth Simington, the district's chief academic officer. "We will continue to strive to find new and better ways to do that."

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