

# spotlight

No. 356 – November 30, 2009

## PARENT-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS, 2009

*How ‘parent-friendly’ are school districts in North Carolina?*

This report develops a system to evaluate school districts on how “parent friendly” they are — in other words, to determine to what extent North Carolina’s school districts provide children a sound, basic education in a stable and safe school environment that is responsive to the needs of children and the concerns of parents.

**KEY FACTS:** • North Carolina’s school districts are not parent-friendly organizations. While a handful of school districts fare reasonably well in the final ranking, the highest score was a 3.4, or a B+.

• School districts in western North Carolina generally fared very well in the ranking, while the Triad, Triangle, Charlotte, and northeastern regions fared poorly. Seven of the top ten school districts are located in western North Carolina.

• In general, smaller school districts are more parent-friendly than larger school districts. Most of the top-performing school districts enrolled fewer than 10,000 students.

• Further research will be required to pinpoint the combination of factors that contribute to their success, but district size and high-quality administrative and/or teaching staffs appear to be outstanding reasons why districts fared well in this ranking.

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**W**hat do parents want from their child’s school district? In this ranking, I have separated the answer into four general areas — administrators, teachers, safety, and academic performance (see Table 1, beginning on page 3). These four areas correspond to the areas of parental satisfaction measured in *Parent and Family Involvement in Education, 2006-07 School Year; From the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2007*, a report published by the U.S. Department of Education in 2008.

The *Parent and Family Involvement in Education* report (hereafter PFIE) includes measures of parental satisfaction in six areas, including overall satisfaction with the school, teachers, academic standards, order/discipline, interaction with school staff, and homework. Due to data limitations, this *Parent Friendly* report will exclude two areas: overall satisfaction and homework (see

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the appendices for a more detailed explanation of the methodology and the state data sets used in this ranking). PFIE uses direct assessments of parental attitudes, but that kind of data is not available for North Carolina's 115 school districts. Thus, the *Parent Friendly* ranking uses indirect assessments to determine if each of the state's school systems offers educational conditions that the average parent would find satisfactory.

The *Parent Friendly* ranking also includes enrollment, demographic, and per-pupil expenditure data for each school district (see Table 2, beginning on page 6). There is neither a strong nor a consistent relationship between these factors and district performance in the *Parent Friendly* ranking.

### 1. Administrators

PFIE reported that only 51 percent of parents with children assigned to a public school said that they were "very satisfied" with the way school staff interacts with parents. The *Parent Friendly* ranking uses two data points to assess school interaction with parents. First, it includes the percentage of teachers that "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that school leadership communicates clear expectations to students and parents. Second, it examines the total number of consultants, clerical staff, and "other" professionals as a percentage of total staff. This data point provides a comparative measure of the size of the school district bureaucracy, which is an indication of the accessibility of school and district administrators. As a rule, large school and district bureaucracies typically make it difficult for concerned parents to obtain necessary information or discuss concerns with decision makers.

### 2. Teachers

According to PFIE, 61 percent of parents with children assigned to a public school reported that they were "very satisfied" with the teachers their student had during the year. The three data points in the *Parent Friendly* ranking include the following: 1) the number of teachers that taught in the school district in 2006-07 as a percentage of the total number of teachers for the 2007-08 school year; 2) the percentage of teachers that left their teaching positions; and 3) the number of vacant positions as a percentage of the total number of teachers. Those factors assess stability and continuity in the teacher workforce, key prerequisites for any school district seeking to employ an experienced, high-quality teaching staff. Given the ongoing debate about the validity of traditional measures of teacher quality, the *Parent Friendly* ranking of teachers does not include years of experience, certification status, and graduate training.

### 3. Safety

According to PFIE, only 58 percent of parents with children assigned to a public school reported that they were "very satisfied" with order and discipline at the school. Obviously, parents want their children to attend safe and orderly schools that minimize disruptions in the educational process. The *Parent Friendly* ranking uses one data point to measure order and discipline among schools in the district — the number of reported acts of school crime and violence per 1,000 students.

### 4. Academic achievement

PFIE reported that 58 percent of parents with children assigned to a public school said that they were "very satisfied" with academic standards at the school. Parents want their children to attend schools that maintain high academic standards from kindergarten through twelfth grade. To assess elementary and middle school performance, the *Parent Friendly* ranking examines end-of-grade reading and math test scores for students in grades 3-8. Graduation rates and SAT scores are used to measure the academic performance of high school students. The ranking also utilizes a measure of district-wide performance: the percentage of student subgroups (e.g., race and ethnicity, disability, economic disadvantage, etc.) that met proficiency requirements on state tests. This measure is also known as Adequate Yearly Progress or AYP targets met under the federal No Child Left Behind law.

**Table 1. Domain Grades and Final Grade, 2007-08 School Year**

District	Administration	Teachers	Safety	Academic Performance	2009 GPA	2009 Grade	Rank	2008 GPA	2008 Grade	Change 08-09
Clay	A	B+	A	C+	3.40	B+	1	3.18	B	0.22
Cherokee	B+	B+	A	B-	3.33	B+	2	3.43	B+	-0.11
Elkin	C	A	B	A	3.25	B	3	2.90	B	0.35
Ashe	C	A	B-	A	3.18	B	T-4	2.93	B	0.25
Polk	A	A-	D	A	3.18	B	T-4	3.50	B+	-0.33
Surry	A	B	C	B+	3.08	B	6	2.75	B	0.33
Henderson	B	C	B	A	3.00	B	T-7	2.15	C	0.85
Dare	D	A	B	A	3.00	B	T-7	3.18	B	-0.18
Lincoln	A	B	C+	B-	3.00	B	T-7	3.18	B	-0.18
Camden	C-	A-	B	B+	2.93	B	10	2.75	B	0.18
Rutherford	A-	A-	C	C	2.85	B	11	2.68	B-	0.17
Macon	C+	B	A	C	2.83	B	12	2.50	C+	0.33
Davie	C	C	A	B	2.75	B	T-13	2.43	C+	0.32
Martin	A	C	B	C	2.75	B	T-13	2.75	B	0.00
McDowell	B-	B	B	C	2.68	B-	15	2.75	B	-0.08
Madison	B-	B-	C+	B-	2.60	B-	T-16	2.25	C	0.35
Iredell-Statesville	B-	C-	C	A	2.60	B-	T-16	2.33	C+	0.27
Cleveland	B	A	D+	C	2.58	C+	T-18	2.50	C+	0.08
Alleghany	C+	C	C+	A-	2.58	C+	T-18	2.83	B	-0.26
Mooreville	A-	D+	C	B	2.50	C+	T-20	2.43	C+	0.07
Union	B+	C-	C	B	2.50	C+	T-20	2.50	C+	0.00
Richmond	A	C	B	D	2.50	C+	T-20	2.83	B	-0.33
Mount Airy	B-	B	D	B+	2.50	C+	T-20	2.93	B	-0.43
Burke	C+	B+	C	C+	2.48	C+	24	2.50	C+	-0.03
Hickory	A-	D	C	B	2.43	C+	T-25	1.33	D+	1.10
Duplin	B-	C	B	C	2.43	C+	T-25	2.18	C	0.25
Wake	C	C	C	A-	2.43	C+	T-25	2.25	C	0.18
Buncombe	C	B	C	B-	2.43	C+	T-25	2.43	C+	-0.01
Beaufort	A	C	C	C-	2.43	C+	T-25	2.50	C+	-0.08
Stanly	B+	B	D	C+	2.40	C+	30	2.43	C+	-0.03
Newton/Conover	A	D	D	B+	2.33	C+	T-31	2.00	C	0.33
Haywood	C	B	D	B+	2.33	C+	T-31	2.25	C	0.08
Moore	C+	C	C	B	2.33	C+	T-31	2.25	C	0.08
Chapel Hill/Carrboro	F	D+	A	A	2.33	C+	T-31	2.43	C+	-0.11
Asheville	C	C	C+	B	2.33	C+	T-31	2.50	C+	-0.18
Graham	D+	A	C	C	2.33	C+	T-31	2.50	C+	-0.18
Stokes	B	C	C	C+	2.33	C+	T-31	2.50	C+	-0.18
Yadkin	C	B	B	D+	2.33	C+	T-31	2.65	B-	-0.33

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District	Administration	Teachers	Safety	Academic Performance	2009 GPA	2009 Grade	Rank	2008 GPA	2008 Grade	Change 08-09
Franklin	A	C	D	C	2.25	C	T-39	1.50	D+	0.75
Nash-Rocky Mount	B-	B	C	D+	2.25	C	T-39	1.90	C	0.35
Bladen	C	C	A	D	2.25	C	T-39	2.00	C	0.25
Currituck	C-	C	C	B+	2.25	C	T-39	2.03	C	0.22
Gaston	C	C	B	C	2.25	C	T-39	2.15	C	0.10
Davidson	C	B	C	C	2.25	C	T-39	2.25	C	0.00
Avery	D	A-	C+	C	2.25	C	T-39	2.33	C+	-0.08
Watauga	B	B	D	C	2.25	C	T-39	2.50	C+	-0.25
Catawba	C+	C	C-	B	2.25	C	T-39	2.75	B	-0.50
Asheboro	C-	C	B	C	2.18	C	T-48	1.75	C	0.43
Chatham	C-	C	C	B	2.18	C	T-48	2.00	C	0.18
Caldwell	C	B	C-	C	2.18	C	T-48	2.18	C	-0.01
Columbus	B-	B	C	D	2.18	C	T-48	2.18	C	-0.01
Wayne	B	C	B-	D	2.18	C	T-48	2.33	C+	-0.16
Carteret	C	B	D	B-	2.18	C	T-48	2.85	B	-0.68
Yancey	B-	B	D	C	2.18	C	T-48	3.18	B	-1.01
Person	C-	C	B-	C	2.10	C	T-55	1.93	C	0.17
Whiteville	C	B	B-	D-	2.10	C	T-55	2.18	C	-0.08
Pasquotank	C	D+	A	D	2.08	C	T-57	0.83	D	1.25
Roanoke Rapids	D+	C	B	C	2.08	C	T-57	1.60	C-	0.48
Clinton	D	D+	A	C	2.08	C	T-57	1.93	C	0.15
Randolph	C+	C	C	C	2.08	C	T-57	2.08	C	0.00
Cabarrus	C	C	C	C+	2.08	C	T-57	2.18	C	-0.11
Orange	D	C	C	B	2.00	C	T-62	1.50	D+	0.50
Rowan-Salisbury	C	C	C	C	2.00	C	T-62	1.75	C	0.25
Onslow	D+	C-	B-	C+	2.00	C	T-62	1.83	C	0.17
Craven	C	C	C	C	2.00	C	T-62	2.00	C	0.00
Pender	D	C	B	C	2.00	C	T-62	2.08	C	-0.08
Mitchell	B-	B+	F	C	2.00	C	T-62	2.18	C	-0.18
Rockingham	C	B	D	C	2.00	C	T-62	2.18	C	-0.18
Alexander	C	A	F	C	2.00	C	T-62	2.43	C+	-0.43
Transylvania	C	C	F	A	2.00	C	T-62	2.43	C+	-0.43
Brunswick	D	C	B-	C	1.93	C	T-71	1.50	D+	0.43
Hyde	F	C	A	C-	1.93	C	T-71	1.58	D+	0.35
Johnston	B-	F	C	B	1.93	C	T-71	1.68	C-	0.25
Caswell	C	C	C-	C	1.93	C	T-71	2.08	C	-0.16
Harnett	B-	D-	C+	C	1.93	C	T-71	2.08	C	-0.16
Sampson	B-	C	C	D	1.93	C	T-71	2.43	C+	-0.51
Kannapolis	C+	D+	C	C	1.90	C	77	1.83	C	0.07
Wilkes	C	C+	D	C	1.83	C	78	2.18	C	-0.36

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District	Administration	Teachers	Safety	Academic Performance	2009 GPA	2009 Grade	Rank	2008 GPA	2008 Grade	Change 08-09
Granville	D	C	B	D	1.75	C	T-79	1.25	D	0.50
Lee	D	C	C	C	1.75	C	T-79	1.25	D	0.50
Greene	C	C	C	D	1.75	C	T-79	1.40	D+	0.35
Lenoir	C	D	C	C	1.75	C	T-79	1.43	D+	0.32
Alamance-Burlington	D	C	C	C	1.75	C	T-79	1.50	D+	0.25
New Hanover	D	C	C	C	1.75	C	T-79	1.58	D+	0.17
Scotland	D+	D-	B	C	1.75	C	T-79	1.58	D+	0.17
Jackson	C+	C-	D	C	1.75	C	T-79	1.85	C	-0.10
Montgomery	D	D+	B-	C	1.75	C	T-79	1.85	C	-0.10
Cumberland	C	D	C	C	1.75	C	T-79	2.00	C	-0.25
Pitt	B-	C-	D	D+	1.68	C-	T-89	1.68	C-	0.00
Guilford	D	D	C	B-	1.68	C-	T-89	1.75	C	-0.08
Lexington	C	D	B-	D	1.68	C-	T-89	1.90	C	-0.23
Washington	C-	D	A	F	1.68	C-	T-89	2.25	C	-0.58
Pamlico	D+	D	F	A	1.58	D+	93	1.43	D+	0.15
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	C	F	C	C	1.50	D+	T-94	1.50	D+	0.00
Swain	D	C	F	B	1.50	D+	T-94	1.83	C	-0.33
Gates	D	C	D	C	1.50	D+	T-94	2.00	C	-0.50
Tyrrell	D	C-	C	D	1.43	D+	97	1.25	D	0.18
Edenton/Chowan	C	D+	D+	D	1.40	D+	98	1.50	D+	-0.10
Wilson	C+	C	D	F	1.33	D+	99	1.48	D+	-0.16
Jones	B-	D	F	D	1.18	D	T-100	1.93	C	-0.76
Hertford	C	D	C-	F	1.18	D	T-100	2.33	C+	-1.16
Halifax	C	D	D	F	1.00	D	T-102	0.93	D	0.07
Perquimans	F	D	C	D	1.00	D	T-102	1.00	D	0.00
Robeson	D	C	D	F	1.00	D	T-102	1.25	D	-0.25
Durham	C	D-	F	D	0.93	D	T-105	0.50	F	0.43
Forsyth	F	C-	D	D	0.93	D	T-105	1.58	D+	-0.66
Edgecombe	F	F	C+	D-	0.75	D	T-107	0.25	F	0.50
Warren	F	F	C	D	0.75	D	T-107	0.43	F	0.32
Thomasville	F	F	B	F	0.75	D	T-107	0.50	F	0.25
Anson	D	D	D	F	0.75	D	T-107	0.85	D	-0.10
Northampton	C	F	F	D-	0.68	D-	111	1.00	D	-0.33
Hoke	F	F	D+	D	0.58	F	112	0.83	D	-0.26
Vance	D	F	F	F	0.25	F	T-113	0.00	F	0.25
Bertie	F	F	D	F	0.25	F	T-113	1.00	D	-0.75
Weldon	F	F	F	F	0.00	F	115	1.50	D+	-1.50

**Table 2. School District Profiles, 2007-08**

District	Parent-Friendly Rank	Average Daily Membership	Reduced Lunch Applications	Free Lunch Applications	Percentage of Needy Students	Percentage of Poverty/Population	Per Pupil Expenditure	PPE Rank
Clay	1	1,356	158	484	47.3%	17.1%	\$9,826	27
Cherokee	2	3,613	531	1,554	57.7%	20.1%	\$9,419	36
Elkin	3	1,231	76	333	33.2%	15.8%	\$9,358	39
Ashe	T-4	3,236	512	1,226	53.7%	18.2%	\$9,495	34
Polk	T-4	2,457	302	873	47.8%	13.6%	\$10,449	17
Surry	6	8,658	987	3,878	56.2%	16.8%	\$8,292	80
Dare	T-7	4,749	360	876	26.0%	10.4%	\$11,011	10
Henderson	T-7	12,887	1,191	4,484	44.0%	14.7%	\$8,034	97
Lincoln	T-7	12,118	1,088	4,028	42.2%	13.6%	\$7,622	111
Camden	10	1,899	193	338	28.0%	9.6%	\$8,742	66
Rutherford	11	9,533	896	4,606	57.7%	19.5%	\$8,456	71
Macon	12	4,319	616	1,939	59.2%	17.7%	\$8,624	69
Davie	T-13	6,655	426	2,031	36.9%	10.9%	\$7,751	107
Martin	T-13	3,644	372	2,071	67.0%	23.4%	\$11,009	11
McDowell	15	6,499	873	2,804	56.6%	16.4%	\$8,307	78
Iredell-Statesville	T-16	21,236	1,702	6,186	37.1%	12.1%	\$7,830	106
Madison	T-16	2,590	295	993	49.7%	18.5%	\$9,058	51
Alleghany	T-18	1,575	248	668	58.2%	20.5%	\$10,671	12
Cleveland	T-18	16,580	1,320	7,086	50.7%	17.6%	\$8,666	67
Mooresville	T-20	5,387	442	1,240	31.2%	10.2%	\$7,902	101
Mount Airy	T-20	1,633	135	773	55.6%	22.2%	\$10,069	24
Richmond	T-20	7,882	764	4,550	67.4%	23.2%	\$8,812	61
Union	T-20	36,598	2,528	8,550	30.3%	10.9%	\$7,739	108
Burke	24	14,032	1,562	5,970	53.7%	16.3%	\$8,254	83
Beaufort	T-25	7,077	664	3,611	60.4%	22.9%	\$9,055	53
Buncombe	T-25	25,367	2,445	8,212	42.0%	14.6%	\$8,432	73
Duplin	T-25	8,865	1,003	5,069	68.5%	21.4%	\$8,446	72
Hickory	T-25	4,532	422	2,210	58.1%	19.7%	\$8,087	95
Wake	T-25	133,215	8,771	35,622	33.3%	9.9%	\$8,119	93
Stanly	30	9,409	975	3,390	46.4%	15.3%	\$8,224	85
Asheville	T-31	3,683	207	1,524	47.0%	27.2%	\$12,209	3
Chapel Hill/Carrboro	T-31	11,395	357	2,170	22.2%	11.3%	\$10,579	13
Graham	T-31	1,172	197	493	58.9%	22.4%	\$11,135	8
Haywood	T-31	7,818	701	2,603	42.3%	17.5%	\$8,781	62
Moore	T-31	12,294	951	4,008	40.3%	15.0%	\$8,150	88
Newton/Conover	T-31	2,823	316	1,281	56.6%	24.9%	\$9,041	54
Stokes	T-31	7,191	623	2,105	37.9%	13.0%	\$8,376	76

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District	Parent-Friendly Rank	Average Daily Membership	Reduced Lunch Applications	Free Lunch Applications	Percentage of Needy Students	Percentage of Poverty/Population	Per Pupil Expenditure	PPE Rank
Yadkin	T-31	6,060	600	2,115	44.8%	13.5%	\$8,263	81
Avery	T-39	2,232	329	884	54.3%	17.8%	\$10,484	16
Bladen	T-39	5,309	549	3,161	69.9%	24.6%	\$9,208	46
Catawba	T-39	17,475	1,549	5,189	38.6%	9.7%	\$7,896	103
Currituck	T-39	4,024	287	798	27.0%	12.0%	\$9,094	50
Davidson	T-39	20,470	1,527	5,427	34.0%	9.2%	\$7,022	115
Franklin	T-39	8,437	822	3,227	48.0%	16.0%	\$8,139	90
Gaston	T-39	32,215	2,563	13,203	48.9%	16.6%	\$7,522	113
Nash–Rocky Mount	T-39	17,548	1,714	8,864	60.3%	20.5%	\$8,397	75
Watauga	T-39	4,470	334	1,031	30.5%	12.8%	\$9,305	41
Asheboro	T-48	4,453	400	2,291	60.4%	24.2%	\$8,928	57
Caldwell	T-48	12,974	1,248	5,277	50.3%	15.9%	\$7,939	99
Carteret	T-48	8,145	737	2,158	35.5%	15.6%	\$9,272	43
Chatham	T-48	7,671	657	2,819	45.3%	13.4%	\$9,769	30
Columbus	T-48	6,748	699	3,977	69.3%	24.5%	\$8,833	60
Wayne	T-48	19,118	2,132	9,185	59.2%	19.0%	\$8,299	79
Yancey	T-48	2,460	323	930	50.9%	21.0%	\$9,417	37
Person	T-55	5,482	479	2,257	49.9%	16.0%	\$8,423	74
Whiteville	T-55	2,541	195	1,452	64.8%	30.1%	\$8,777	63
Cabarrus	T-57	26,917	1,997	6,981	33.4%	10.7%	\$7,612	112
Clinton	T-57	3,067	293	1,631	62.7%	24.9%	\$8,871	58
Pasquotank	T-57	6,040	661	2,703	55.7%	20.0%	\$9,297	42
Randolph	T-57	18,762	1,674	6,566	43.9%	12.3%	\$7,453	114
Roanoke Rapids	T-57	2,910	249	1,026	43.8%	20.4%	\$9,210	45
Alexander	T-62	5,602	544	1,757	41.1%	13.9%	\$7,646	110
Craven	T-62	14,510	1,811	5,596	51.0%	18.1%	\$8,059	96
Mitchell	T-62	2,164	300	876	54.3%	18.7%	\$9,334	40
Onslow	T-62	23,227	2,619	6,939	41.2%	19.9%	\$7,854	105
Orange	T-62	6,903	387	1,815	31.9%	9.3%	\$9,797	28
Pender	T-62	7,901	930	3,330	53.9%	17.3%	\$7,880	104
Rockingham	T-62	14,119	1,353	5,968	51.9%	15.9%	\$8,337	77
Rowan-Salisbury	T-62	20,632	1,854	8,431	49.8%	14.8%	\$8,241	84
Transylvania	T-62	3,739	406	1,391	48.1%	17.4%	\$8,860	59
Brunswick	T-71	11,548	1,357	5,039	55.4%	18.9%	\$8,974	56
Caswell	T-71	3,161	342	1,507	58.5%	18.6%	\$9,381	38
Harnett	T-71	18,291	1,910	7,426	51.0%	17.9%	\$7,904	100
Hyde	T-71	632	69	352	66.6%	23.1%	\$16,310	1
Johnston	T-71	30,100	2,184	9,607	39.2%	14.8%	\$7,902	102
Sampson	T-71	8,214	929	4,581	67.1%	19.7%	\$8,200	86

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District	Parent-Friendly Rank	Average Daily Membership	Reduced Lunch Applications	Free Lunch Applications	Percentage of Needy Students	Percentage of Poverty/Population	Per Pupil Expenditure	PPE Rank
Kannapolis	77	4,970	542	2,874	68.7%	23.0%	\$8,654	68
Wilkes	78	10,020	1,181	4,522	56.9%	16.0%	\$8,140	89
Alamance-Burlington	T-79	22,260	1,375	8,532	44.5%	13.6%	\$7,658	109
Cumberland	T-79	52,242	5,975	23,585	56.6%	19.6%	\$8,138	91
Granville	T-79	8,831	920	3,196	46.6%	15.6%	\$7,963	98
Greene	T-79	3,280	327	2,127	74.8%	22.5%	\$9,771	29
Jackson	T-79	3,658	460	1,325	48.8%	18.6%	\$9,160	47
Lee	T-79	9,396	947	4,251	55.3%	16.6%	\$8,181	87
Lenoir	T-79	9,547	878	4,695	58.4%	21.2%	\$8,754	65
Montgomery	T-79	4,426	581	2,546	70.7%	19.7%	\$9,252	44
New Hanover	T-79	23,757	1,645	8,139	41.2%	16.6%	\$9,459	35
Scotland	T-79	6,654	528	4,089	69.4%	24.7%	\$10,342	22
Guilford	T-89	70,707	5,893	29,935	50.7%	17.4%	\$9,012	55
Lexington	T-89	3,046	265	2,302	84.3%	34.8%	\$9,603	33
Pitt	T-89	22,592	1,533	10,597	53.7%	20.2%	\$8,254	82
Washington	T-89	2,031	195	1,412	79.1%	26.7%	\$11,422	6
Pamlico	93	1,465	165	697	58.8%	19.5%	\$11,085	9
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	T-94	130,410	10,590	51,912	47.9%	15.0%	\$8,596	70
Gates	T-94	1,974	223	649	44.2%	15.4%	\$10,254	23
Swain	T-94	1,839	258	773	56.1%	21.8%	\$10,422	18
Tyrrell	97	558	69	327	71.0%	27.8%	\$16,273	2
Edenton/Chowan	98	2,399	230	1,125	56.5%	22.2%	\$10,347	21
Wilson	99	12,424	1,130	5,829	56.0%	20.4%	\$8,111	94
Hertford	T-100	3,231	328	2,182	77.7%	24.7%	\$10,578	14
Jones	T-100	1,226	203	733	76.3%	19.9%	\$11,972	5
Halifax	T-102	4,472	452	3,268	83.2%	29.8%	\$9,910	26
Perquimans	T-102	1,752	265	975	70.8%	22.6%	\$10,351	20
Robeson	T-102	23,557	2,193	15,689	75.9%	28.5%	\$9,057	52
Durham	T-105	31,732	2,211	14,247	51.9%	18.4%	\$9,700	31
Forsyth	T-105	50,780	3,537	20,719	47.8%	16.0%	\$9,097	49
Anson	T-107	3,995	424	2,516	73.6%	22.5%	\$9,925	25
Edgecombe	T-107	7,363	904	4,825	77.8%	21.5%	\$8,123	92
Thomasville	T-107	2,580	297	1,891	84.8%	26.9%	\$9,670	32
Warren	T-107	2,685	335	1,727	76.8%	26.4%	\$10,396	19
Northampton	111	2,701	350	1,973	86.0%	26.1%	\$11,164	7
Hoke	112	7,360	950	3,721	63.5%	20.3%	\$8,768	64
Bertie	T-113	2,999	432	2,019	81.7%	25.5%	\$10,504	15
Vance	T-113	7,548	852	5,658	86.2%	24.9%	\$9,151	48
Weldon	115	1,011	98	726	81.5%	33.1%	\$12,053	4



## Conclusion

With no threat of losing its clientele to competitors, many schools and school districts behave like the monopolies they are — focused on strengthening the organization’s position and goals, rather than meeting the needs of their clientele.

Even so, a handful of school districts in North Carolina distinguish themselves as providing superior learning environments. The 17 districts that earned a “B” excelled in at least three of the four domains. Further research will be required to pinpoint the combination of factors that contribute to their success, but the school districts that fared well in this ranking were generally small districts with stable, high-performing teaching staffs.

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### Appendix 1: Methodology

For the methodology, I adapted Paul Peterson and Frederick Hess’s method for assessing state proficiency standards as given in their “Few States Set World-Class Standards,” *Education Next* 8:3 (Summer 2008), pp. 70-73.

The grades reported here are based on a number of measures provided by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey. I standardized each variable and computed the mean and standard deviation for each school district. I then determined how many standard deviations each district was above or below the average on each variable. I averaged the standard deviations for all variables in the domain and assigned grades distributed so that 10 percent of the school districts would earn As, 20 percent Bs, 40 percent Cs, 20 percent Ds, and 10 percent Fs. School districts that had standard deviations within 0.10 of the lowest or highest next letter grade received a minus or plus sign.

The grade point average (GPA) was calculated by using a standard point scale for each of the letter grades: A (4.0), A- (3.7), B+ (3.3), B (3.0), B- (2.7), C+ (2.3), C (2.0), C- (1.7), D+ (1.3), D (1.0), D- (.70), F (0.0). To use a hypothetical example, Locke County received grades of B (3.0), D (1.0), C (2.0), and C- (1.7). The average (7.7 points divided by four grades) is 1.93. The scale for the final grade is as follows: A (4.0–3.6), B (3.5–2.6), C (2.5–1.6), D (1.5–0.6), and F (0.5–0.0). In the example above, Locke County’s average falls within the C range.

### Appendix 2: An Explanation of Domains and Variables

For the purpose of this study, I selected four domains and twelve variables that are of particular interest to parents. I also selected variables based on the availability of data and comparability of data points between school districts of different sizes, types, and attributes. Some variables were not included because they heavily favored large counties, e.g., course offerings, alternative schools, and supplementary programs.

The administration domain included results from a 2008 Teacher Working Conditions survey question on administrative communication with students and parents. The more teachers that agreed or strongly agreed that the administration does a good job communicating with students and parents, the better the school system did on this measure. Also included in this domain was the number of extraneous personnel, including consultants and clerical staff, as a percentage of the total number of faculty and staff in the district. That measure is important because larger school bureaucracies make it more difficult for parents to solve problems and assist in their child’s learning process.

The teacher domain included measures related to the stability of the teacher workforce. School systems that

maintain few teaching vacancies, prevent turnover, and, specifically, ensure that teachers return to the school system score higher than those with volatile teaching staffs. While this measure does not assess the quality of teachers in the school system (the performance measure does that), it does provide one measure of the relative stability of the educational environment provided by the schools within the state's school systems.

Clearly, parents demand a school system that strives to maintain a safe and secure learning environment. The safety domain includes the number of violent and criminal acts reported to the school district per 1000 students during the 2007-08 school year.

Finally, parents want their school system to provide their children an adequate education. The performance domain includes SAT scores, student performance on state reading and math tests, and the percentage of students who enter ninth grade and graduate four years later. AYP targets met, which represent the performance of student subgroups (ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, etc.) on state tests, were also included.

Data sources include the following:

**North Carolina Department of Public Instruction:** *Statistical Profile 2008; 2007–2008 Selected Financial Data; Highlights of the North Carolina Public School Budget, 2008; Annual Report on Dropout Events and Rates, 2007–2008; Teacher Vacancy Report, Fall 2008; Annual Report on the Reasons Teachers Leave the Profession, 2007–2008; and The North Carolina 2008 SAT Report.*

**North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Internet Resources:** *Graduation Rates (2003-04 Entering 9th Graders Graduating in 2007-08 or Earlier); ABCs AYP Results, 2007-2008; ABCs Testing Results; and Full-Time Personnel (by LEAs, years, race, gender and Assignment Categories).*

**North Carolina Office of the Governor, Internet Resources:** *Teacher Working Conditions Initiative, 2008, and NC School Report Cards.*

*United States Department of Education:* K. Herrold and K. O'Donnell, *Parent and Family Involvement in Education, 2006–07 School Year, From the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2007* (NCES 2008-050), National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 2008.