

SREB

North Carolina

Moving Ahead

Southern
Regional
Education
Board

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2010 PROGRESS REPORT ON THE
CHALLENGE TO LEAD GOALS FOR EDUCATION



This state progress report on the SREB *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education is available as a printable document and as PowerPoint slides at www.sreb.org.

It is designed for state policy-makers and education leaders to use as a ready reference and to select individual pages and topics for custom presentations and handouts.

This report was developed by a team of SREB staff members led by Jeff Gagne, director, Education Policies. Key team members included Education Policies research associates Crystal Collins, Matthew Lenard, Lexi Netto and Marilyn Thomas; Joan M. Lord, vice president, Education Policies; and Gene Bottoms, senior vice president.

It was edited by Alan Richard, director, Communications; and Lisa Johnston, associate director, Communications.

It is part of the *Challenge to Lead* education goals series, directed by Jeff Gagne. For more information, e-mail jeff.gagne@sreb.org or call (404) 875-9211. *Goals for Education: Challenge to Lead* is available on the SREB Web site at www.sreb.org. A full listing of the goals, including reports on each goal, is printed on the inside back cover.

North Carolina

Moving Ahead

A State Progress Report
on the SREB *Challenge to Lead*
Goals for Education

CHALLENGE TO LEAD SERIES
2010

A Message from the President of SREB

SREB states have come a long way since adopting the *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education in 2002. The region has seen more growth in public school enrollment, in the racial and ethnic diversity of the population, and in the numbers of school children from low-income families.

At the same time, states have had to struggle with the toughest economic challenges in decades. Yet SREB states have been able to make progress on the *Challenge to Lead* goals they set for themselves. This fourth biennial report marks this progress as SREB states move ahead:

- Nearly every SREB state has expanded public **prekindergarten** sufficiently to serve the children in poverty — a major improvement since 2002.
- Fourth- and eighth-grade **reading and mathematics** achievement is up in the region.
- Troubling **achievement gaps** — between racial and ethnic groups and for students from low-income families — are beginning to narrow.
- Most SREB states added more **rigor in high school**, leading the nation in student participation in Advanced Placement courses and matching the nation in student success on AP exams.
- Most SREB states **improved their high school graduation rates** from 2002 to 2007.

*SREB states have come a long way since adopting the **Challenge to Lead** Goals for Education in 2002.*



This report details where your state stands in education and suggests future priorities. You and **North Carolina** can take pride in these highlights of your progress:

- **North Carolina's statewide prekindergarten program was one of only two in the nation to meet all 10 nationally recognized standards of quality for these programs.**
- **The state's fourth- and eighth-graders outperformed the nation and region in math on NAEP. Its black fourth-graders narrowed the achievement gap in reading on NAEP — and its black eighth-graders did in math.**
- **North Carolina's high school curriculum includes the recommended essential core of courses and requires students to complete either an academic or career concentration.**
- **In North Carolina, student participation in Advanced Placement courses — and performance on AP exams — exceeded national rates.**
- **North Carolina's college graduation rate at four-year institutions topped the U.S. rate.**
- **The state topped most in the region in young adults enrolled in adult learning programs.**

Still, many challenges remain for all states in the region. Low college graduation rates and overall degree-completion numbers need significant improvement — which means strengthening students' transitions at key points in school. If too many ninth-graders are not ready for high school, too few graduate — and even fewer go to and finish college. All policy-makers and education leaders in SREB states need to continue to make improving all points in the education pipeline a top priority.

David S. Spence

Dave Spence

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The <i>Challenge to Lead</i> Goals for Education	2
State Profile	
Actual and Projected Changes in Public Elementary and Secondary Enrollment	3
Children Under 18 Years Old Living in Poverty, 2008	4
Percent of Students Approved for Free or Reduced-Price Meals, 2009	5
Public Prekindergarten Enrollment Related to Children Living in Poverty, 2008	6
Fourth-Grade Assessment Results, 2003-2009	
NAEP Reading Results, Percent Scoring At or Above Basic	7
NAEP Math Results, Percent Scoring At or Above Basic	8
NAEP Reading Results, Percent Scoring At or Above Basic By Racial/Ethnic Group	9
NAEP Reading Results, Percent Scoring At or Above Basic By Income Group	10
NAEP Reading Results, Percent Scoring At or Above Basic for Students with Disabilities	11
Percent At or Above Standards in Reading, Compared with NAEP Basic and Proficient	12
Percent At or Above Standards in Math, Compared with NAEP Basic and Proficient	13
Eighth-Grade Assessment Results, 2003-2009	
NAEP Reading Results, Percent Scoring At or Above Basic	14
NAEP Math Results, Percent Scoring At or Above Basic	15
NAEP Math Results, Percent Scoring At or Above Basic By Racial/Ethnic Group	16
NAEP Math Results, Percent Scoring At or Above Basic By Income Group	17
NAEP Math Results, Percent Scoring At or Above Basic for Students with Disabilities	18
Percent At or Above Standards in Reading, Compared with NAEP Basic and Proficient	19
Percent At or Above Standards in Math, Compared with NAEP Basic and Proficient	20
Transition to High School	
Eighth-Grade Students Taking College-Prep Math, 2009	21
Ninth-Grade Enrollment Bulge, 2007	22
High School	
<i>High Schools That Work</i> Reading Assessment Results, 2004-2008	23
Academic and Career Concentrations Beyond the Essential Core, Class of 2014	24
High School Exams in SREB States, 2011	25
Percent of Graduating Seniors Taking At Least One AP Exam, 2009	26
Percent of Graduating Seniors Passing At Least One AP Exam, 2009	27

High School (*continued*)

Average ACT/SAT Scores	28
Average ACT/SAT Scores By Racial/Ethnic Group	29
Grade-Level Promoting Power, 2007	30
Seniors Graduating On Time, 2007	31
Four-Year Graduation Rate, 2007	32
Graduation Rates by Racial/Ethnic Group, 2007	33
Graduation Rates by Gender, 2003-2006	34
Racial/Ethnic Proportions of Public High School Graduates, 2010 and 2022	35
Number of “Dropout Factories” in SREB States, 2007	36

Teachers and School Leaders

Percent of Core Academic Classes Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers, 2008	37
Average Salaries of Beginning Teachers, 2008	38
SREB School Leadership Benchmark Study Results, 2010	39

Data Systems

10 Essential Elements a State Data System, 2009	40
10 State Actions to Ensure Effective Data Use, 2009	41

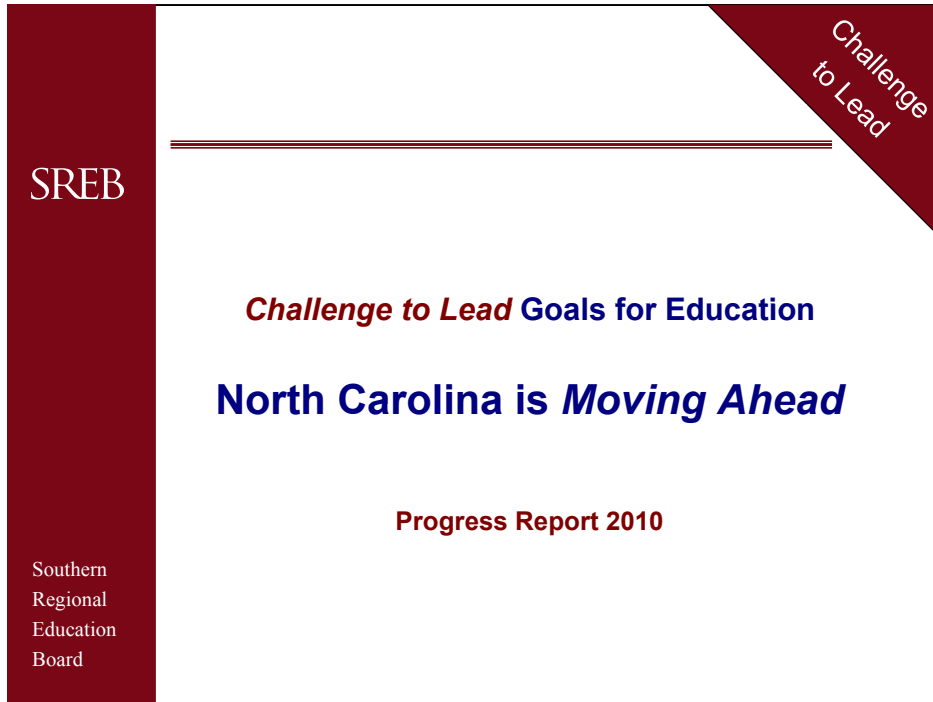
Adult Education

GED Awards by Age, 2008	42
Percent of 25- to 44-Year-Olds Enrolled in Adult Education, 2008	43

Postsecondary Education

College Affordability Gap, 2009	44
Estimated College Enrollment Rates of Recent High School Graduates, 1998 and 2008	45
Six-Year Graduation Rates at Public Four-Year Institutions, 2008	46
Adults With Bachelor’s Degrees or Higher, 2008	47
Average Salaries of Full-time Instructional Faculty, 2009	48

References	49
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SREB states are moving ahead.

Leaders from every SREB state committed to SREB's *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education in 2002, and the states have made measurable progress toward meeting them. Many SREB states now lead the nation in prekindergarten access, quality and funding, and they can claim some of the nation's greatest improvements in early and middle grades achievement in reading and mathematics.

You and other policy-makers can look forward to the day when the SREB region leads the nation in educational progress in even more areas. To get there, your state is working to meet all 12 *Challenge to Lead* goals and the indicators of progress associated with them. SREB provides progress reports every two years on how your state is doing. This is your state's fourth progress report.

Particularly in this time of economic difficulty, educational progress will be **the** key to long-term economic vitality. SREB states need an education system that constantly prepares for the future, strengthens the work force and promotes a higher quality of life for all.

Meeting these goals depends in part on your action and leadership. You and other policy-makers and education leaders can be proud of the important steps your state already has taken, but you need to continue your efforts to ensure that . . .

North Carolina is moving ahead.

North Carolina

Challenge to Lead: Key Goals

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Challenge to Lead

- **Ensure readiness for learning throughout school**
 - Prekindergarten to elementary
 - Middle grades to high school
- **Raise achievement and close gaps**
 - Racial/ethnic and gender groups
 - Students with disabilities
 - Students from low-income families
- **Prepare all students for college and careers**
- **Improve college completion**

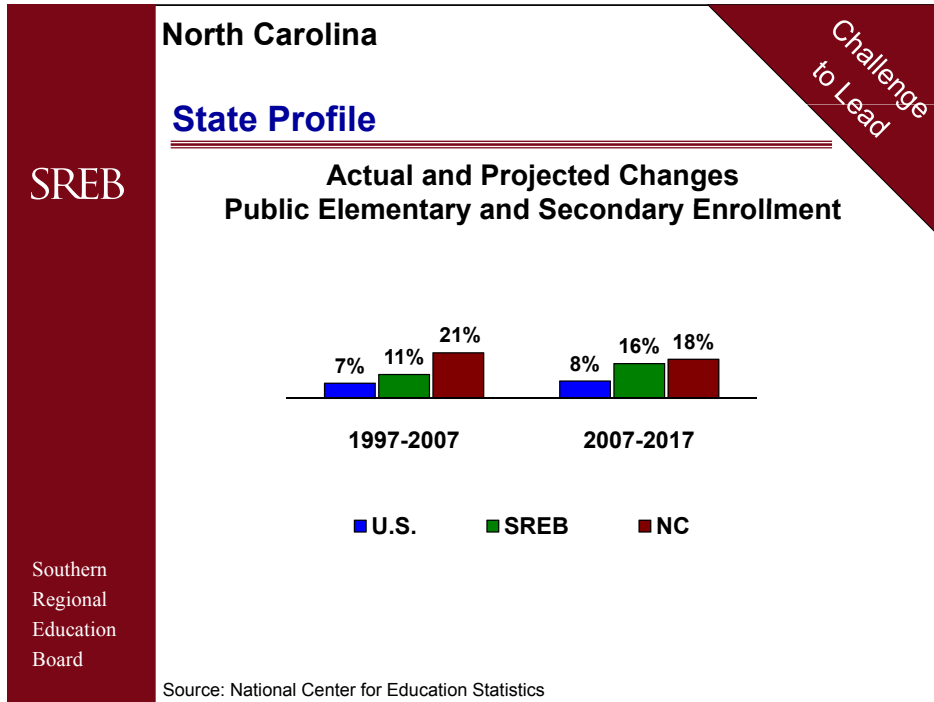
This report tells a story of progress in your state — invaluable information to help you make good education policy decisions. The story is built around four themes that guided SREB state leaders when they developed SREB’s *Challenge to Lead* goals in 2002:

- ♦ **helping students make smooth transitions** to ensure they are ready to move from one level of education to another;
- ♦ **raising achievement and closing gaps** for different racial, ethnic and gender groups; for students with disabilities; and for those from low-income families — beginning with improvement for *all* students and then promoting accelerated growth for students from groups that are behind in achievement;
- ♦ **preparing more students for college and career training**, including improving high school graduation rates and creating college-readiness standards, and
- ♦ **improving college completion**, including higher college graduation rates and more postsecondary certificates and degrees.

Each *Challenge to Lead* goal includes specific indicators of progress. The information presented in this report is linked to the goals and indicators, and the pages are labeled to reflect the associated goals. A few pages profile general state demographic information.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals also address the broader issues of school leadership, teacher quality, and school and college accountability. These are difficult issues that require various education agencies within states to work together. That is why the goals call on states to develop an education system — from prekindergarten through higher education — that is accountable.

For detailed information on each of the 12 goals, see the entire *Challenge to Lead* series of reports at www.sreb.org. These reports provide analysis and recommend the specific steps your state can take to improve many different education policies and practices.



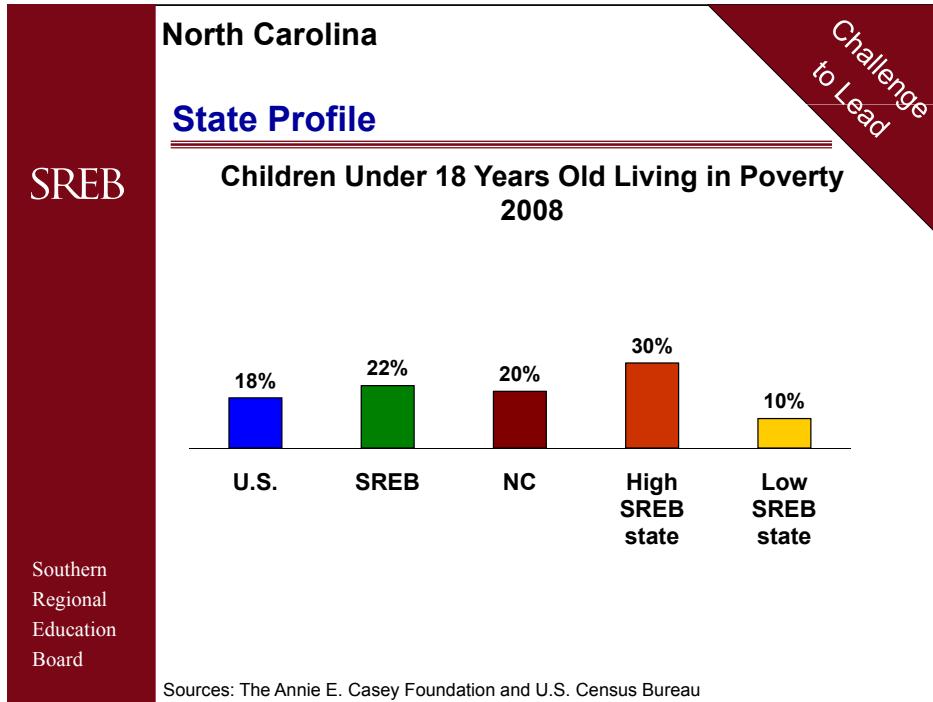
North Carolina's K-12 enrollment is expected to increase.

The overall population in SREB states grew by 17 percent from 1997 to 2007, so it is no surprise that public elementary and secondary school enrollment also grew. Enrollment increased by 11 percent in SREB states — slower than population growth but faster than the 7 percent increase in enrollment nationally.

Eleven SREB states had higher enrollment in 2007 than in 1997, and five SREB states had declines. The changes ranged from an increase of 21 percent to a decrease of 12 percent.

Looking ahead, public school enrollment nationally is projected to increase at a faster rate from 2007 to 2017 than it did from 1997 to 2007. The enrollment rate in SREB states will grow even faster. Only two SREB states are projected to decline in enrollment through 2017.

- **North Carolina's** public school enrollment increased from 1997 to 2007, the largest percentage increase in the region, and it is expected to increase from 2007 to 2017. About 1.5 million students were enrolled in public schools in North Carolina in 2007.

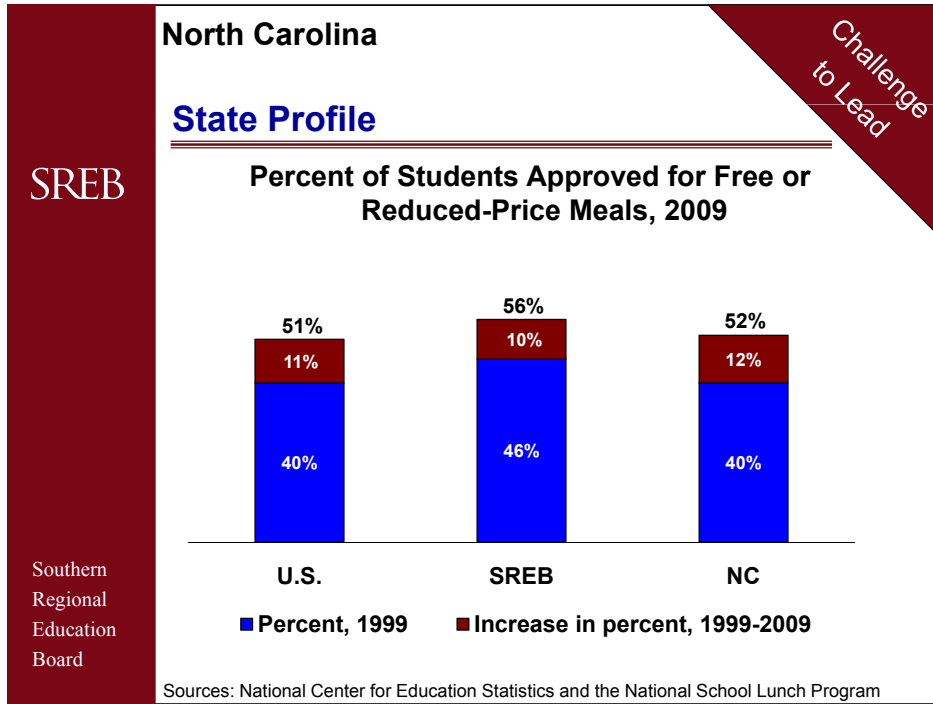


In North Carolina, one in five children lives in poverty.

In 2008, more than 13 million children under 18 years old in the United States lived in *poverty* — about 18 percent of U.S. children. About 45 percent of these children — some 6 million — lived in SREB states. The percentages of children living in poverty in SREB states ranged from 10 percent to 30 percent of all children. In most SREB states, the percentage of children living in poverty was 20 percent or higher. The percentages in the nation and the SREB median states decreased from 1998 to 2008; it also declined in most SREB states. (Percentages for the SREB median states are the average of the two middle SREB states.)

The U.S. Census Bureau measures poverty by income and household size. In 2008, the poverty level was about \$27,000 in annual income for a household of four.

- In 2008, **North Carolina's** poverty rate among children was 2 percentage points higher than the U.S. rate but 2 percentage points lower than the rate for the SREB median states.
- The percentage of children living in poverty in the state increased by 1 point since 1998.

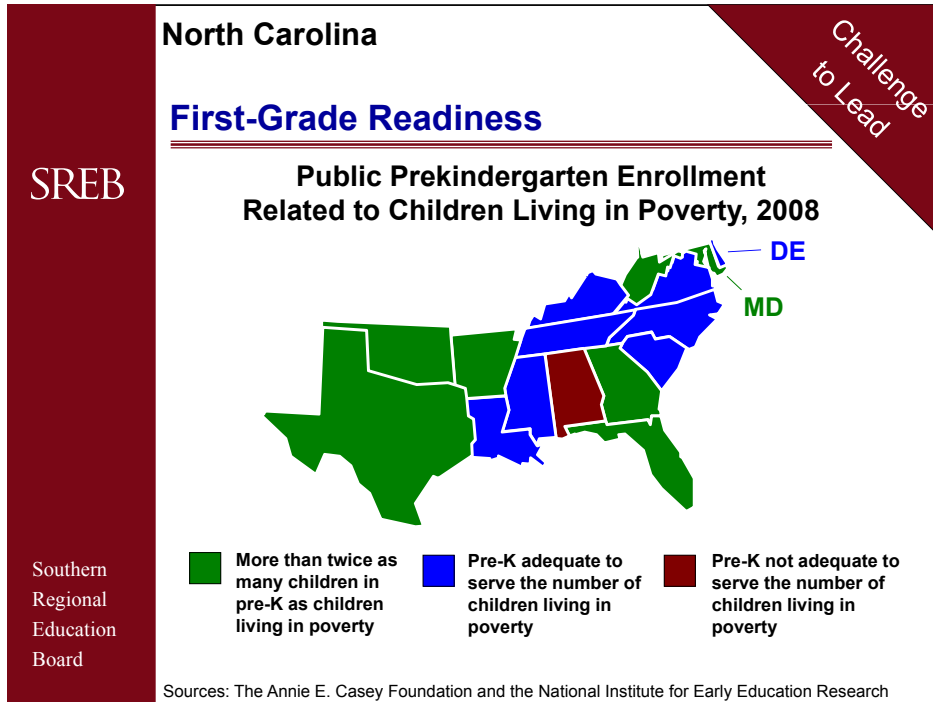


More than half of students in North Carolina live in low-income households.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for *all* students to achieve at high levels, including students from low-income families. The *No Child Left Behind Act* defines low income by eligibility for free or reduced-price meals in the National School Lunch Program — available to students from households of four with incomes up to 185 percent of the annual poverty level (up to \$40,793 in 2009). The percentage of students in *low-income* households in the nation rose from 40 percent in 1999 to 51 percent in 2009. In SREB states, it grew from 46 percent to 56 percent.

The growth in students from low-income households is important for policy-makers. The *No Child Left Behind Act* requires that states report the progress of these students in meeting state standards. As a result, students from low-income households figure prominently in schools' efforts to make progress under the federal law.

- In 1999, 40 percent of students in **North Carolina** lived in low-income households. By 2009, the percentage had climbed to 52 percent.



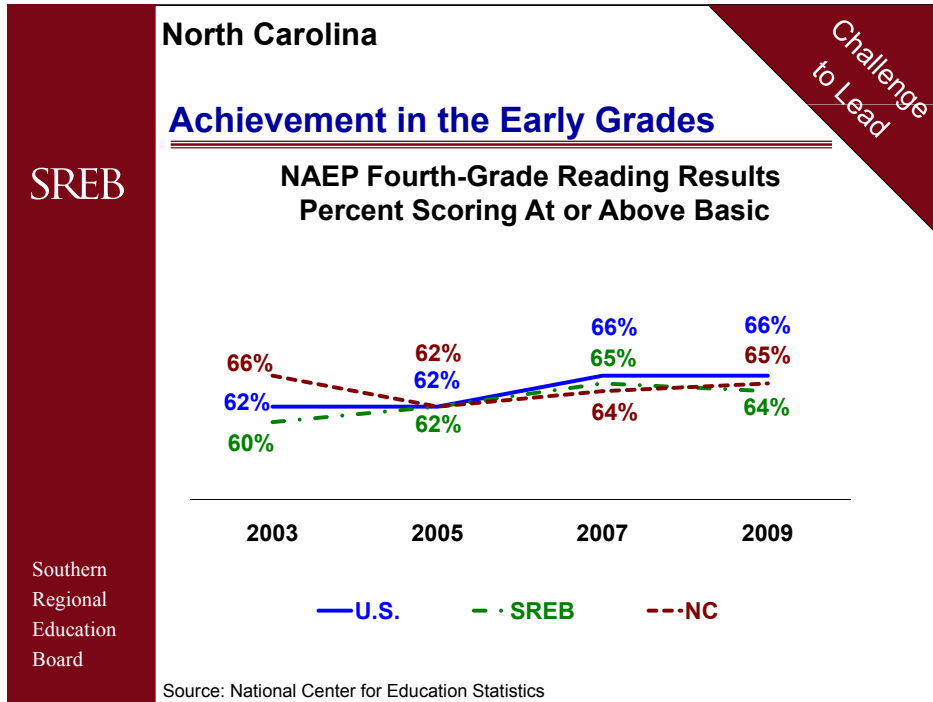
Access to public prekindergarten in North Carolina was adequate to serve the neediest children.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to serve children at risk of not being ready for school. Each state's commitment to school readiness can be measured by whether it provides access to prekindergarten programs for its neediest children and whether its programs meet national standards of quality. Research shows that only high-quality programs make a difference in school readiness for these children.

One measure of providing access for the neediest children is having space in publicly funded prekindergarten programs — both state-funded prekindergarten (including programs for children with disabilities) and federally funded Head Start — at least equal to the number of 4-year-olds living in poverty in the state. **SREB states are leaders in providing this level of access to prekindergarten.** Seven SREB states had fall 2008 enrollment of at least twice the number of children living in poverty. Eight other SREB states had prekindergarten enrollment equal to or greater than the number of children living in poverty.

The National Institute for Early Education Research has identified 10 standards of quality that are now widely accepted for prekindergarten programs. **SREB states are national leaders in implementing these standards.** Among the criteria are curriculum, class-size limits, child-to-staff ratios and staff qualifications. Only two states in the nation have met all 10 standards: Alabama and North Carolina. Five SREB states are among nine states nationwide that have met nine of the 10 standards.

- In 2008, enrollment in **North Carolina's** publicly funded prekindergarten programs was an estimated 156 percent of 4-year-olds living in poverty, up from 149 percent in 2007.
- The National Institute for Early Education Research reported that **North Carolina** met all 10 standards of quality for prekindergarten in 2008 — **one of only two states to do so in the nation.**



North Carolina fourth-graders trailed the U.S. in reading at the NAEP Basic level.

Known as the Nation’s Report Card, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a series of exams that measure student achievement in specific subjects and grades. NAEP results show how students in your state compare nationally and state-to-state.

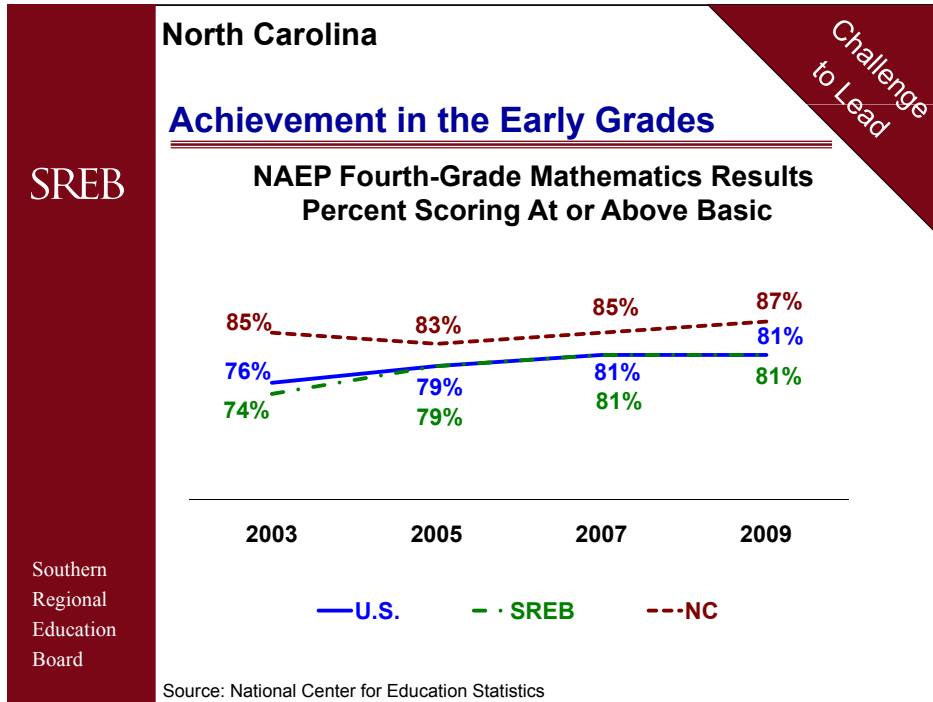
The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for all fourth-graders to score at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading, defined as “partial mastery of knowledge and skills.” The goals also call for the percentages of fourth-graders scoring at or above the higher NAEP Proficient level, defined as “demonstrated competence,” to exceed national percentages.

Nearly two of three fourth-graders in the SREB median states and in the nation scored at or above the **NAEP Basic level** in reading in 2009 — about the same as in 2007 for both groups. Fourth-graders in the nation and region have made gains in reading since 2003, but their progress appears to have stalled. Too many fourth-graders have yet to master the skills they will need to be successful in the middle grades.

In the SREB median states, the percentage of fourth-graders who scored at or above the **NAEP Proficient level** in reading trailed the nation in 2009 (29 percent compared with 32 percent). These SREB states continued to mirror national results, increasing from 2003 to 2007 and then leveling off in 2009.

Moving more students in the early grades to the NAEP Proficient level in reading is important as your state works to prepare more students for the transitions to the middle grades and high school.

- **In North Carolina**, 65 percent of fourth-graders scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading in 2009, down since 2003.
- In 2009, 32 percent of fourth-graders in the state scored at or above the NAEP Proficient level — a 1 percentage-point decrease from 2003.



North Carolina fourth-graders topped the U.S. and region in math on NAEP.

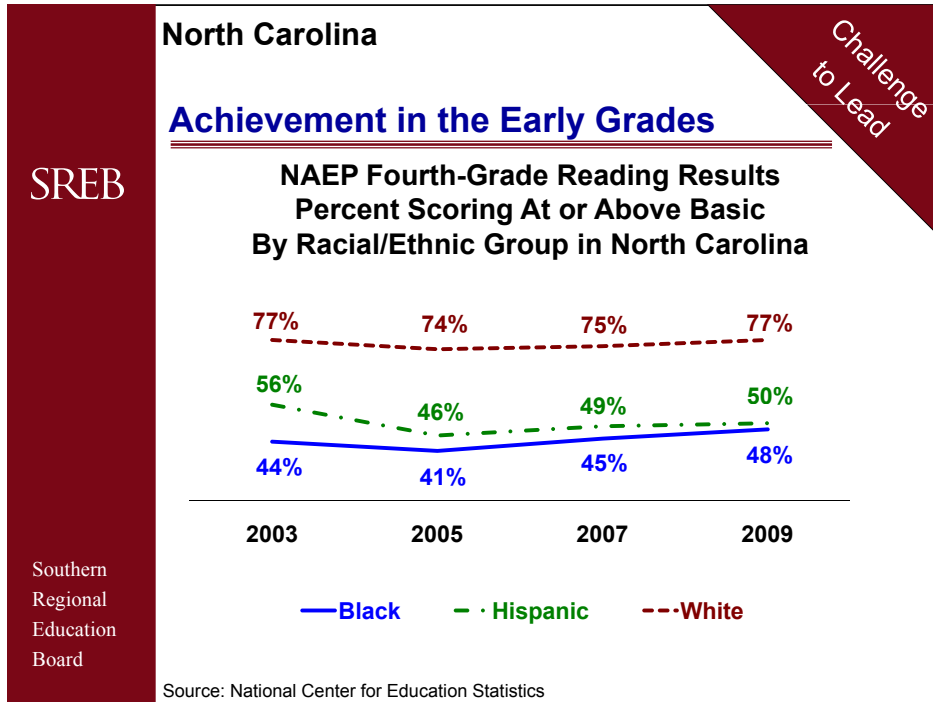
The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for all fourth-graders to score at or above the NAEP Basic level in mathematics, defined as “partial mastery of knowledge and skills.” The goals also call for the percentages of fourth-graders scoring at or above the higher NAEP Proficient level, defined as “demonstrated competence,” to exceed the national percentages.

Four out of five fourth-graders in the SREB median states and in the nation scored at or above the **NAEP Basic level** in math in 2009 — the same as in 2007 for both groups. Fourth-graders in the nation and region have made gains in math since 2003, but their progress appears to have stalled. Too many fourth-graders have yet to master the skills they will need to be successful in the middle grades.

In the SREB median states, the percentages of fourth-graders who scored at or above the **NAEP Proficient level** in math trailed the nation in 2009 (35 percent compared with 38 percent). These SREB states continued to mirror national results, increasing from 2003 to 2007 and then leveling off in 2009.

Moving more students in the early grades to the NAEP Proficient level in math is important as your state works to prepare more students for algebra in the middle grades and for advanced math in high school.

- **In North Carolina**, 87 percent of fourth-graders scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in math in 2009, up since 2003.
- In 2009, 43 percent of fourth-graders in the state scored at or above the NAEP Proficient level — a 2 percentage-point increase from 2003.



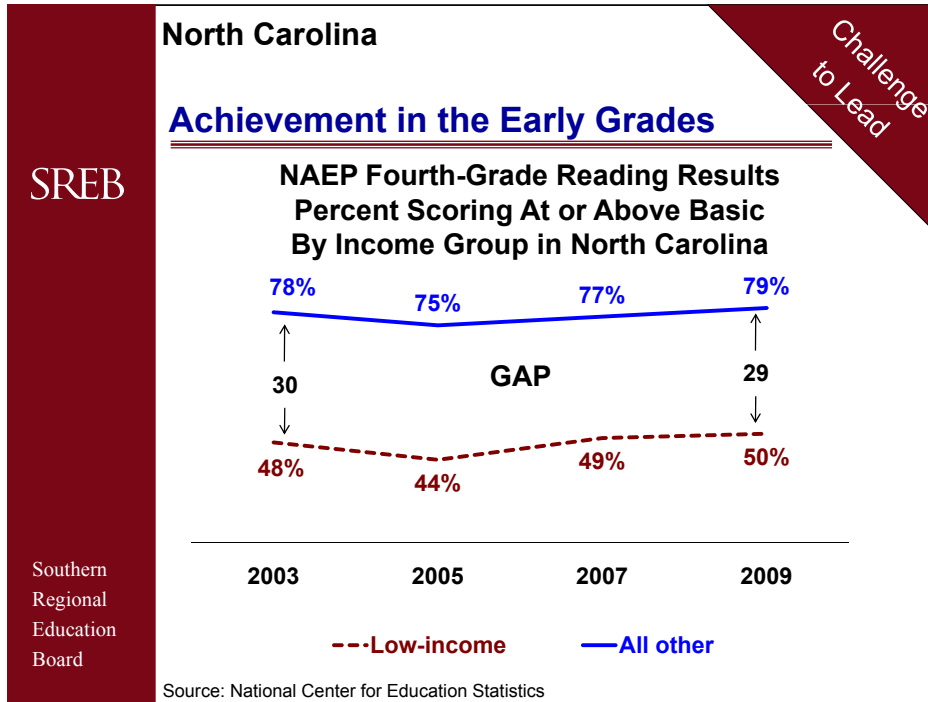
Black fourth-graders in North Carolina narrowed the achievement gap in reading on NAEP.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to close achievement gaps for *all* groups of students, including students from various racial and ethnic groups. But large gaps remain.

In 2009, a higher percentage of white fourth-graders (75 percent) in the SREB median states scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading than black (46 percent) and Hispanic (53 percent) fourth-graders. NAEP reports similar results at the Proficient level for these students: 39 percent for white students compared with 14 percent for black students and 18 percent for Hispanic students.

But NAEP results show that black fourth-graders made some progress in closing the achievement gap in reading from 2003 to 2009. In the SREB median states, the percentages of black fourth-graders scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level rose by 5 points, while the results for white fourth-graders rose by 4 points. The percentage of Hispanic fourth-graders in the SREB median states increased by 2 points. The achievement gap between black and white fourth-graders narrowed slightly; the gap between Hispanic and white fourth-graders grew in the six-year period.

- **In North Carolina**, 48 percent of black fourth-graders scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading in 2009, up since 2003. In 2009, 77 percent of white fourth-graders in the state scored at this level, the same as in 2003. Black students narrowed the achievement gap to 29 points in 2009.
- In 2009, 50 percent of Hispanic fourth-graders in the state scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading, down since 2003. The achievement gap for Hispanic students widened to 27 points in 2009.



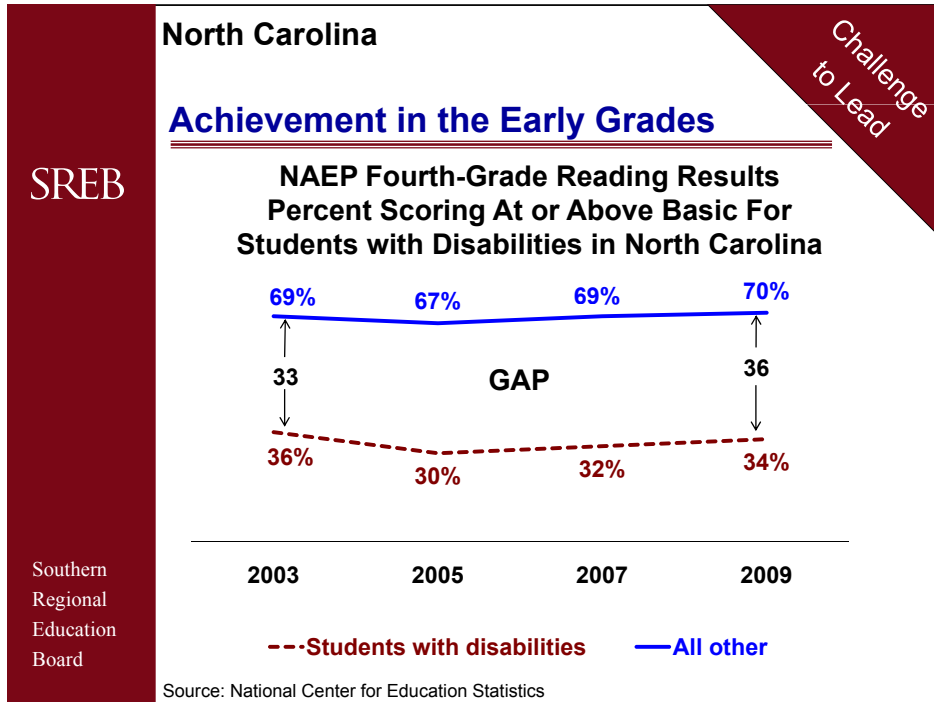
Fourth-graders from low-income families in North Carolina narrowed the gap in reading on NAEP.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to close achievement gaps for *all* groups of students, including children from low-income families. Schools, districts and states are held accountable for how well these children — generally defined as those eligible for free or reduced-price meals — achieve under the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

Fifty-one percent of the nation’s and 52 percent of the region’s fourth-graders from low-income families scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading in 2009, both up since 2003. Fourth-graders from low-income families in the SREB median states topped their peers in the nation every year since 2003. However, these fourth-graders continued to trail their peers from all other families at both the national and regional levels. The gap between students from low-income families and all others scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level was 28 percentage points nationally and 27 percentage points in the SREB median states in 2009.

While these gaps are large, many SREB states have made progress in closing them. Eleven SREB states reduced the gap between fourth-graders from low-income families and all other students who scored at or above the NAEP Basic level from 2003 to 2009. These gains are crucial for SREB states because students from low-income families represented *more than half* of the region’s public school enrollment in 2009 and a larger proportion of the school population than in the nation: 56 percent compared with 51 percent. If these students do not make significant education gains that outpace their more affluent peers, the region likely cannot continue to improve student achievement.

- **In North Carolina**, 50 percent of fourth-graders from low-income families scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading in 2009, up since 2003. In 2009, 79 percent of all other fourth-graders scored at this level, also up since 2003. Students from low-income families narrowed the achievement gap by 1 percentage point from 2003 to 2009.



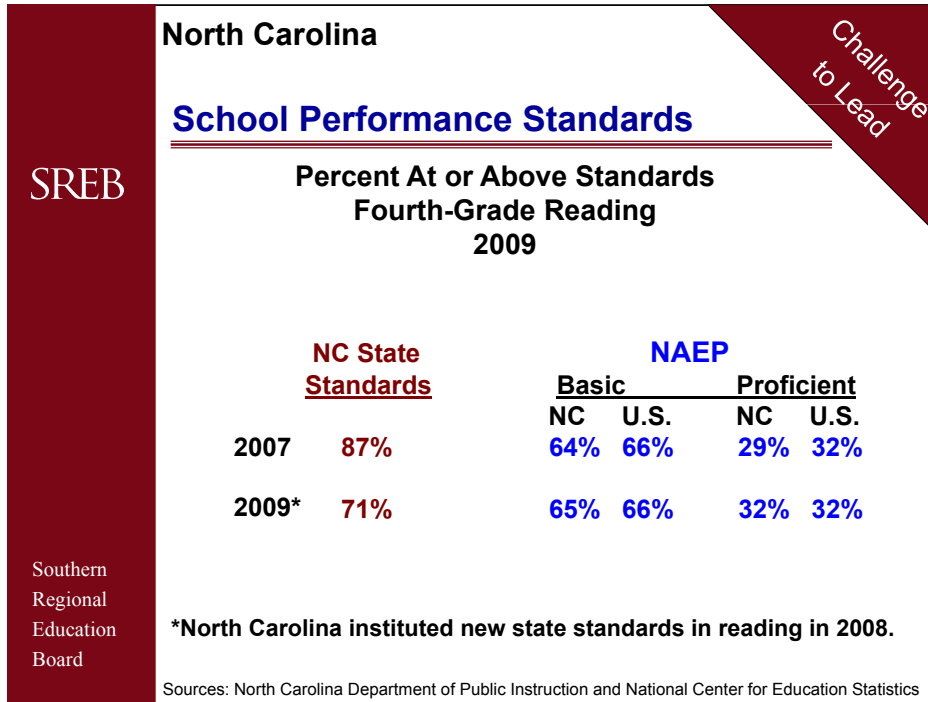
The gap for fourth-grade students with disabilities in North Carolina widened in reading on NAEP.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to close achievement gaps for *all* students, including students with disabilities. Schools, districts and states are held accountable for how well these children — identified as having mental, physical or emotional disabilities — achieve under the *No Child Left Behind Act*. In 2008, 5 million students with disabilities were enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools; nearly half (2.3 million) were enrolled in SREB states.

In 2009, 34 percent of the nation’s and region’s fourth-grade students with disabilities scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading, both up since 2003. However, fourth-grade students with disabilities continued to trail all other fourth-graders in both the nation and the region. The gap between these students and all others scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading in 2009 was 35 percentage points nationally and 34 points regionally.

While achievement gaps for other groups of fourth-graders — including racial and ethnic groups and students from low-income families — have narrowed in recent years in most SREB states, gaps for fourth-grade students with disabilities have grown in many SREB states since 2003. If these students do not make significant gains, many schools, districts and states likely will not meet the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

- **In North Carolina**, 34 percent of fourth-grade students with disabilities scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading in 2009, down since 2003. In 2009, 70 percent of all other fourth-graders scored at this level, up since 2003. The achievement gap for students with disabilities widened by 3 percentage points from 2003 to 2009.



North Carolina’s state standards for fourth-grade reading appear low.

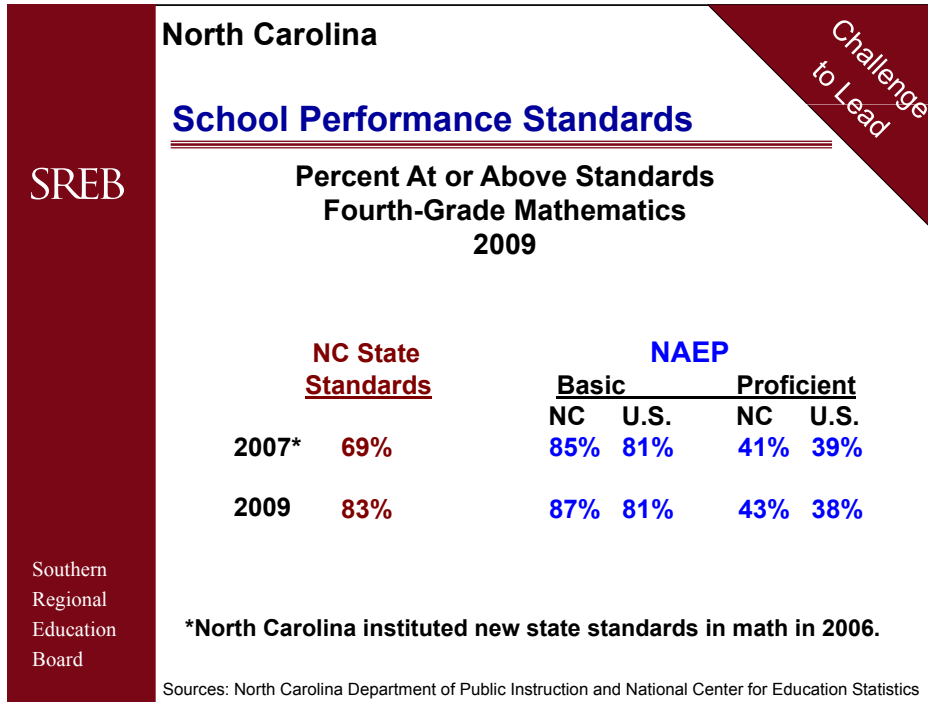
The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to get their standards “right” in reading, as they should in every subject. All states have developed academic standards that serve as guidelines for teachers. They establish the knowledge and skills that students should master in specific subjects at each grade level. Then states test students to measure whether they meet the standards.

If a higher percentage of students meet your state’s standards than score at or above the NAEP Basic level — representing only “partial mastery” of a subject — your state standards likely are **too low**. SREB has considered results on state standards that fall within 5 percentage points of the NAEP Basic level to be **similar** to this national benchmark. You should work with education officials to ensure that your reading results are higher than the NAEP Basic level and closer to the NAEP Proficient level — giving you confidence that your standards are set **about right**.

If your state’s reading standards are too low, they do not challenge students sufficiently. They leave too many students unprepared for the next grade level and for high school and beyond. If state standards are too high, students score lower than they should and more schools are identified as “needing improvement” under the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Limited resources are then spent on these schools instead of the ones that need them most.

Currently, 15 SREB states are participating in a nationwide initiative to develop a common core of standards in reading and math for all elementary and secondary grades. This **Common Core State Standards Initiative** — coordinated by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers — will aid states as they implement more rigorous, college-ready standards. Several SREB states are delaying the development of their standards to coordinate with this initiative.

- **In North Carolina**, 71 percent of fourth-graders met state standards in reading in 2009 — higher than the 65 percent scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level and the 32 percent at or above NAEP Proficient. **This means North Carolina’s state standards for fourth-grade reading appear low when compared with the NAEP Basic and Proficient levels.**



North Carolina’s state standards for fourth-grade math appear similar to the NAEP Basic level.

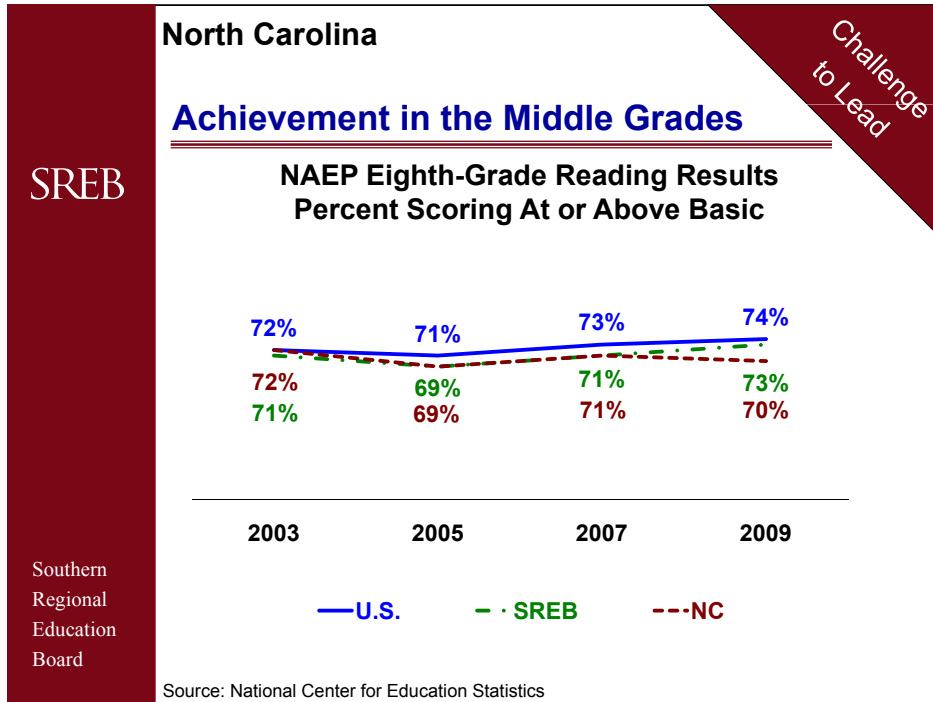
Getting your state standards “right” is important in mathematics and in every subject. State academic standards establish the knowledge and skills that students should master at each grade level.

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- **In North Carolina**, 83 percent of fourth-graders met state standards in math in 2009 — close to the 87 percent scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level but higher than the 43 percent scoring at or above NAEP Proficient level. **This means North Carolina’s state standards for fourth-grade math appear somewhat low because they are similar to the NAEP Basic level but lower than the NAEP Proficient level.**



North Carolina eighth-graders trailed the U.S. and region in reading on NAEP.

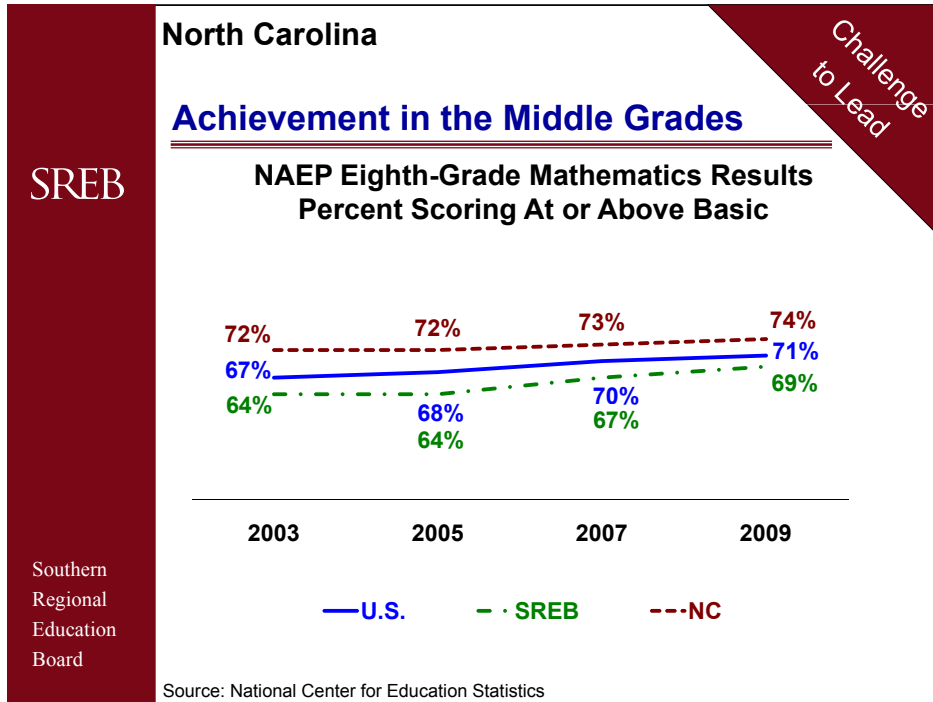
The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for all eighth-graders to score at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading, defined as “partial mastery of knowledge and skills.” The goals also call for the percentages of eighth-graders scoring at or above the higher NAEP Proficient level, defined as “demonstrated competence,” to exceed national percentages.

Even though nearly three-fourths of eighth-graders in the SREB median states and in the nation scored at or above the **NAEP Basic level** in reading in 2009, too many have not mastered basic reading skills. This is significant because these students are unlikely to receive direct reading instruction in high school.

In the SREB median states, the percentage of eighth-graders who scored at or above the **NAEP Proficient level** in reading trailed the nation in 2009 (27 percent compared with 30 percent). These states did not narrow this gap from 2003 to 2009 and continued to mirror national results over that period.

In 2009, the SREB report *A Critical Mission: Making Adolescent Reading an Immediate Priority in SREB States* identified improving reading as the most immediate critical priority for public middle grades and high schools. Moving more students in the middle grades to the NAEP Proficient level in reading is important as your state works to prepare more students for college- and career-ready courses in high school.

- **In North Carolina**, 70 percent of eighth-graders scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading in 2009, down since 2003.
- In 2009, 29 percent of eighth-graders in the state scored at or above the NAEP Proficient level — the same as in 2003.



North Carolina eighth-graders topped the U.S. and region in math on NAEP.

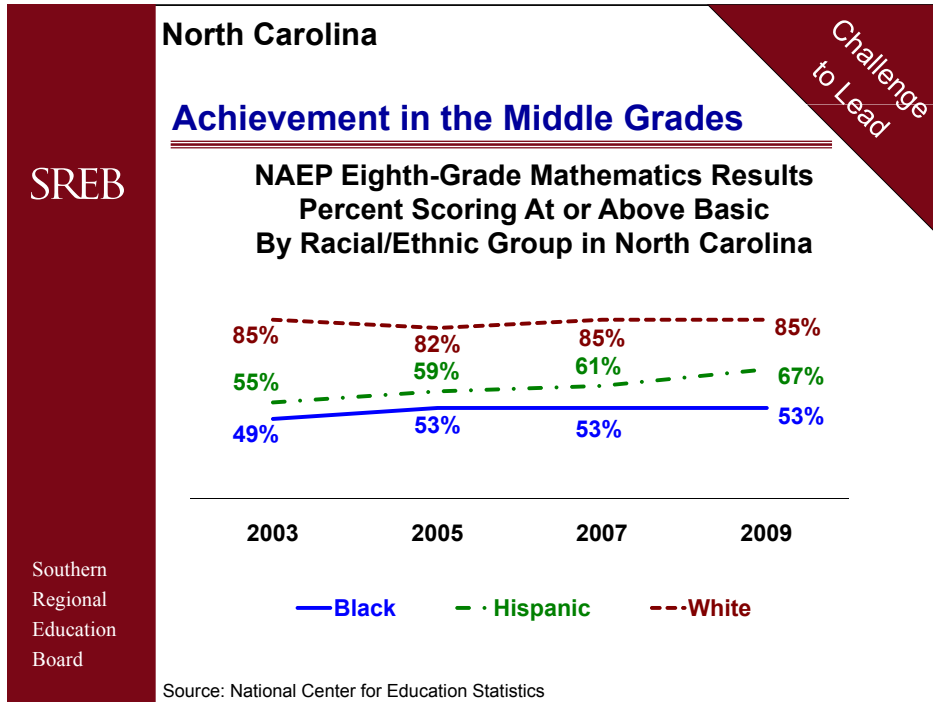
The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for all eighth-graders to score at or above the NAEP Basic level in mathematics, defined as “partial mastery of knowledge and skills.” The goals also call for the percentages of eighth-graders scoring at or above the higher NAEP Proficient level, defined as “demonstrated competence,” to exceed the national percentages.

More than two-thirds of eighth-graders in the SREB median states and the nation scored at or above the **NAEP Basic level** in math in 2009 — up slightly from 2007 for both groups. Progress has been slow, with only a 4 percentage-point gain in the nation and a 5 percentage-point gain in the region since 2003. Too many eighth-graders have yet to master the math skills they will need to be successful in high school.

In the SREB median states, the percentage of eighth-graders who scored at or above the **NAEP Proficient level** in math trailed the nation in 2009 (27 percent compared with 33 percent). Two SREB states — Maryland and Texas — outpaced the nation’s gains from 2003 to 2009 with double-digit percentage-point increases.

Moving more students in the middle grades to the NAEP Proficient level in math is important as your state works to prepare more students for advanced math in high school. Students who start high school unprepared for algebra are less likely to be prepared for college or careers when they graduate.

- **In North Carolina**, 74 percent of eighth-graders scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in math in 2009, up since 2003.
- In 2009, 36 percent of eighth-graders in the state scored at or above the NAEP Proficient level in math — a 4 percentage-point increase from 2003.



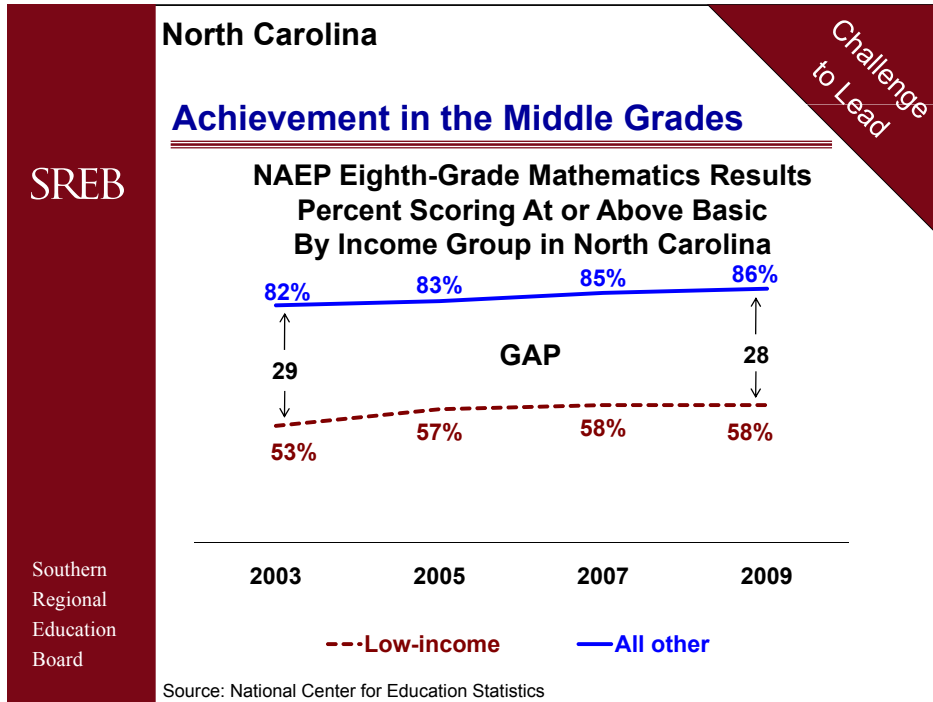
Black and Hispanic eighth-graders in North Carolina narrowed the gaps in math on NAEP.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to close achievement gaps for *all* groups of students, including students from various racial and ethnic groups. But large gaps remain.

In 2009, a higher percentage of white eighth-graders (79 percent) in the SREB median states scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in mathematics than black (52 percent) and Hispanic (63 percent) eighth-graders. NAEP reports similar results at the Proficient level for these students: 37 percent for white students compared with 11 percent for black students and 22 percent for Hispanic students.

But NAEP results show that black and Hispanic eighth-graders made progress in closing these gaps in math from 2003 to 2009. In the SREB median states, the percentages of black and Hispanic eighth-graders scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level both rose by 14 points, while the results for white eighth-graders rose by 3 points. The achievement gaps between black and white and between Hispanic and white eighth-graders narrowed in the six-year period.

- **In North Carolina**, 53 percent of black eighth-graders scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in math in 2009, up since 2003. In 2009, 85 percent of white eighth-graders in the state scored at this level, the same as in 2003. Black students narrowed the achievement gap to 32 points in 2009.
- In 2009, 67 percent of Hispanic eighth-graders in the state scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in math, up 12 percentage points from 2003. Hispanic students narrowed the achievement gap to 18 points in 2009.



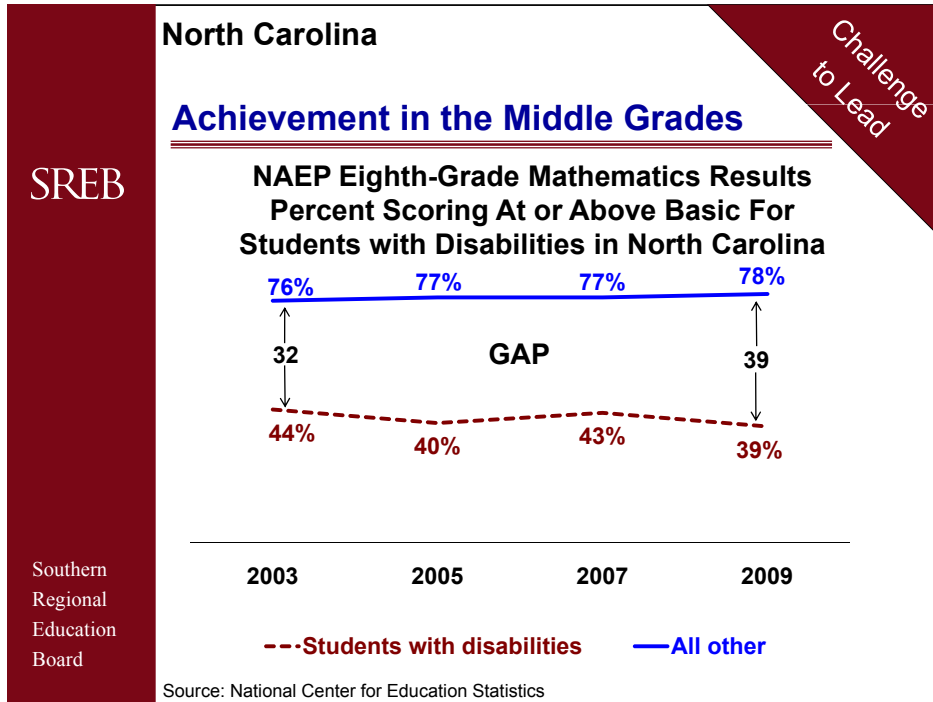
Eighth-graders from low-income families in North Carolina narrowed the gap in math on NAEP.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to close achievement gaps for *all* groups of students, including children from low-income families. Schools, districts and states are held accountable for how well these children — generally defined as those eligible for free or reduced-price meals — achieve under the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

Fifty-seven percent of the nation’s and 56 percent of the region’s eighth-graders from low-income families scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in mathematics in 2009, both up since 2003. However, eighth-graders from low-income families continued to trail their peers from all other families in both the nation and region. The gap between students and all others scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level was 26 percentage points nationally and 23 percentage points in SREB states in 2009.

While these gaps are large, most SREB states have made progress in closing them. Thirteen SREB states reduced the gap between eighth-graders from low-income families and all other students who scored at or above the NAEP Basic level from 2003 to 2009. These gains are crucial for SREB states because students from low-income families represented *more than half* of the region’s public school enrollment in 2009 and a larger proportion of the overall school population than in the nation: 56 percent compared with 51 percent. If these students do not make significant education gains that outpace their more affluent peers, the region likely cannot continue to improve student achievement.

- **In North Carolina**, 58 percent of eighth-graders from low-income families scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in math in 2009, up since 2003. In 2009, 86 percent of all other eighth-graders scored at this level, also up since 2003. Students from low-income families narrowed the achievement gap by 1 percentage point from 2003 to 2009.



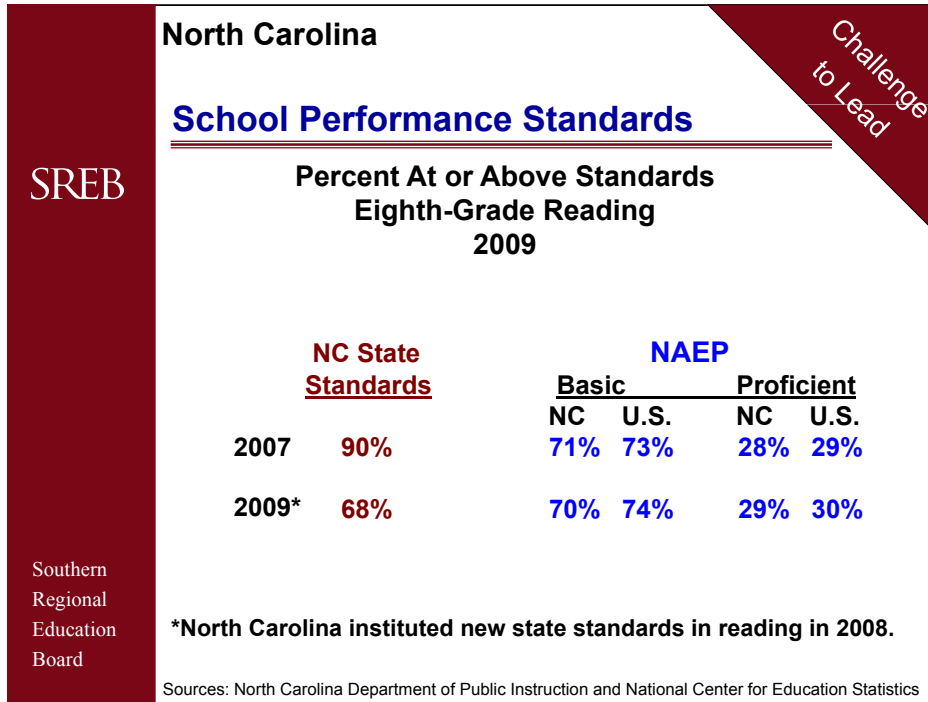
The gap for eighth-grade students with disabilities in North Carolina widened in math on NAEP.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to close achievement gaps for *all* students, including students with disabilities. Schools, districts and states are held accountable for how well these children — identified as having mental, physical or emotional disabilities — achieve under the *No Child Left Behind Act*. In 2008, 5 million students with disabilities were enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools; nearly half (2.3 million) were enrolled in SREB states.

In 2009, 36 percent of the nation's and 31 percent of the region's eighth-grade students with disabilities scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in mathematics, both up since 2003. However, eighth-grade students with disabilities continued to trail all other eighth-graders in both the nation and the region. The gap between these students and all others scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in math in 2009 was 40 percentage points nationally and 42 points regionally.

While achievement gaps for other groups of eighth-graders — including racial and ethnic groups and students from low-income families — have narrowed in recent years in most SREB states, gaps for eighth-grade students with disabilities have grown in many SREB states since 2003. If these students do not make significant gains, many schools, districts and states likely will not meet the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

- **In North Carolina**, 39 percent of eighth-grade students with disabilities scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in math in 2009, down since 2003. In 2009, 78 percent of all other eighth-graders scored at this level, up since 2003. The achievement gap for students with disabilities widened by 7 percentage points from 2003 to 2009.



North Carolina’s state standards for eighth-grade reading appear similar to the NAEP Basic level.

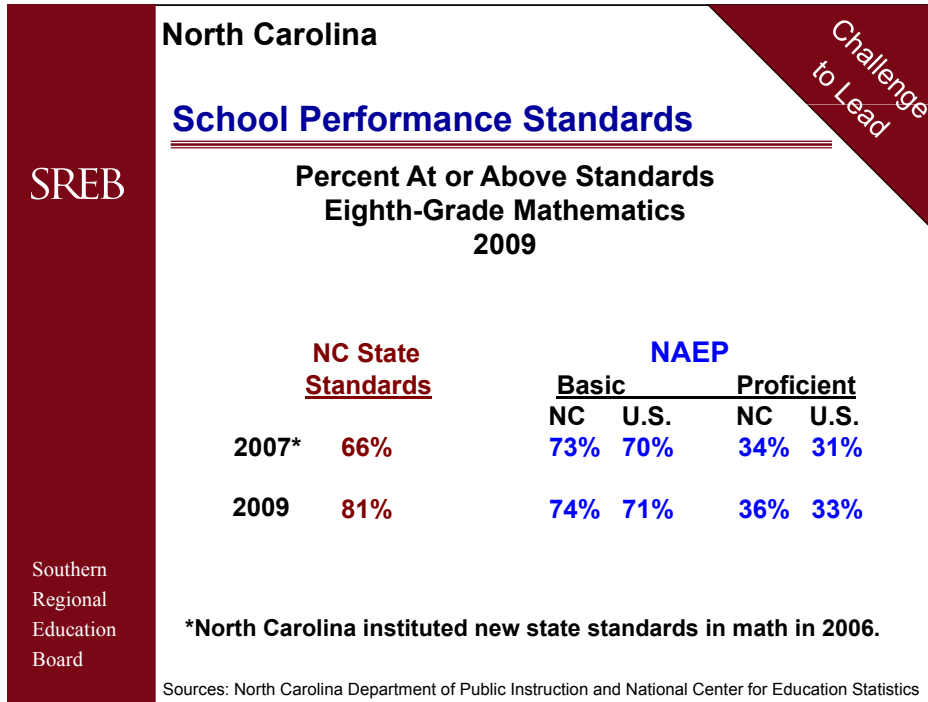
The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to get their standards “right” in reading, as they should in every subject. All states have developed academic standards that serve as guidelines for teachers. They establish the knowledge and skills that students should master in specific subjects at each grade level. Then states test students to measure whether they meet the standards.

If a higher percentage of students meet your state’s standards than score at or above the NAEP Basic level — representing only “partial mastery” of a subject — your state standards likely are **too low**. SREB has considered results on state standards that fall within 5 percentage points of the NAEP Basic level to be **similar** to this national benchmark. You should work with education officials to ensure that your reading results are higher than the NAEP Basic level and closer to the NAEP Proficient level — giving you confidence that your standards are set **about right**.

If your state’s reading standards are too low, they do not challenge students sufficiently. They leave too many students unprepared for the next grade level and for high school and beyond. If state standards are too high, students score lower than they should and more schools are identified as “needing improvement” under the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Limited resources are then spent on these schools instead of the ones that need them most.

Currently, 15 SREB states are participating in a nationwide initiative to develop a common core of standards in reading and math for all elementary and secondary grades. This **Common Core State Standards Initiative** — coordinated by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers — will aid states as they implement more rigorous, college-ready standards. Several SREB states are delaying the development of their standards to coordinate with this initiative.

- **In North Carolina**, 68 percent of eighth-graders met state standards in reading in 2009 — close to the 70 percent scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level and higher than the 29 percent scoring at or above NAEP Proficient level. **This means North Carolina’s state standards for eighth-grade reading appear somewhat low because they are similar to the NAEP Basic level but lower than the NAEP Proficient level.**



North Carolina’s state standards for eighth-grade math appear low.

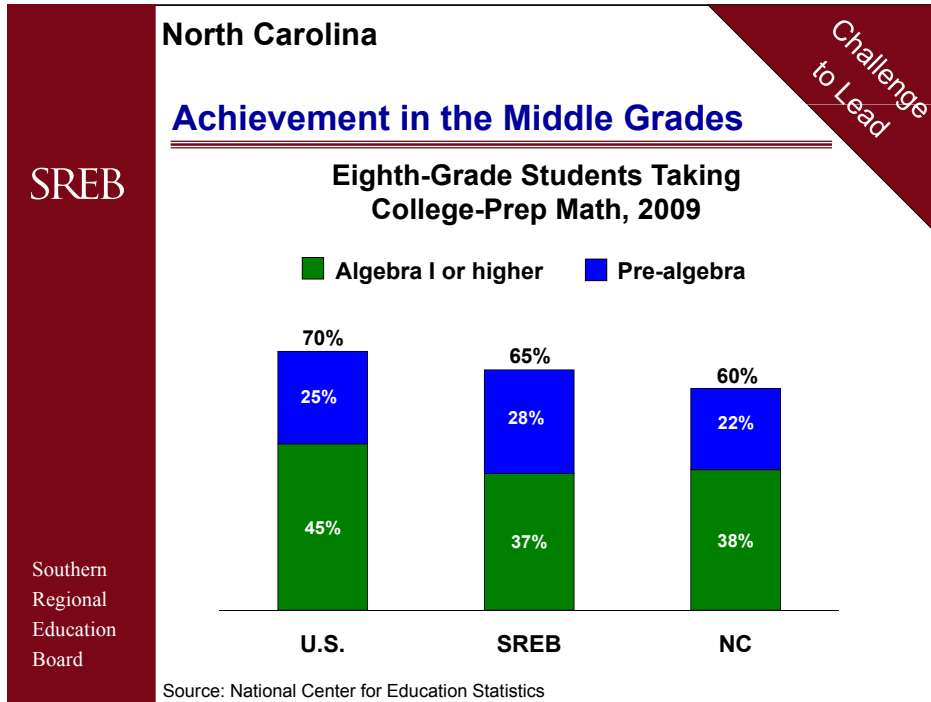
Getting your state standards “right” is important in mathematics and in every subject. State academic standards establish the knowledge and skills that students should master at each grade level.

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- **In North Carolina**, 81 percent of eighth-graders met state standards in math in 2009 — higher than the 74 percent scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level and the 36 percent scoring at or above NAEP Proficient. **This means North Carolina’s state standards for eighth-grade math appear low when compared with the NAEP Basic and Proficient levels.**



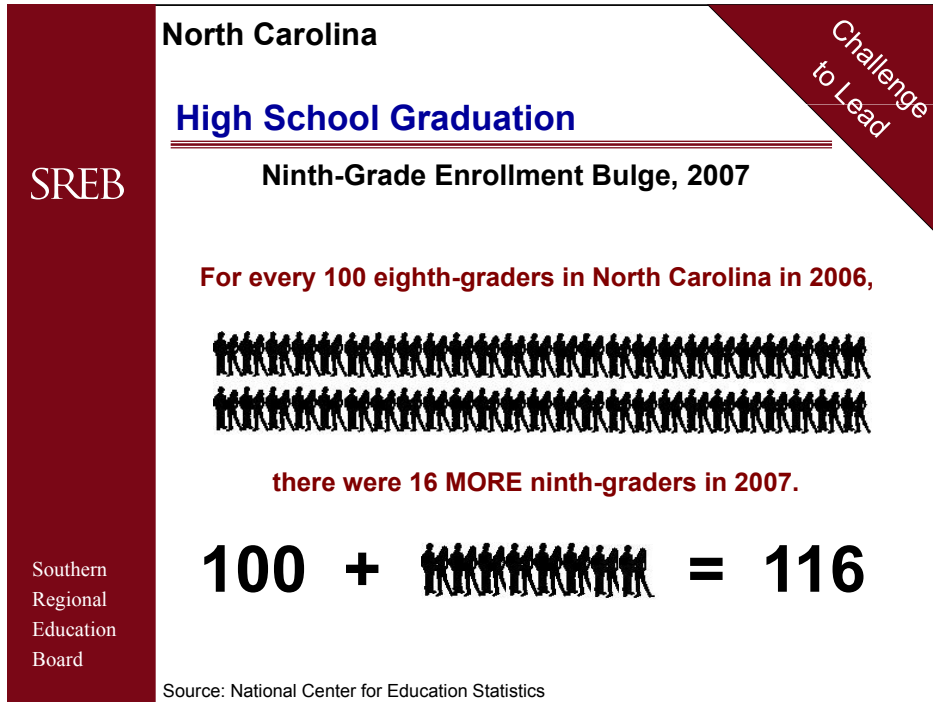
North Carolina eighth-graders trailed the U.S. in the total percentage taking college-prep math.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for more eighth-graders in SREB states to pass Algebra I — and for *all* students to pass Algebra I by the end of ninth grade — so they are prepared for rigorous high school mathematics and science courses.

Currently, too many eighth-graders in the SREB region are not well-prepared for algebra. While 65 percent of eighth-graders in the SREB median states reported taking pre-algebra, Algebra I or a higher math course in 2009, an equivalent percentage of eighth-graders scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in math, defined as “partial mastery of knowledge and skills.” In 2009, 37 percent of eighth-graders in the SREB median states were enrolled in Algebra I (or higher), but only 27 percent of eighth-graders in the SREB median states scored at or above the NAEP Proficient level in math, defined as “demonstrated competence.” Students who enroll in pre-algebra or higher without adequate preparation in the early and middle grades likely lack the knowledge and skills to succeed.

Student preparation is critical for success in these courses. SREB’s 2009 report *Keeping Middle Grades Students on the Path to Success in High School* advised that states should not enroll higher percentages of students in algebra than score at the NAEP Basic level in math. Instead, states need to ensure that more students are **ready** to take pre-algebra or higher in the eighth grade and have the foundation for rigorous high school math courses that lead to college and career success. This means taking a detailed look at the entire math curriculum from the early grades through the middle grades and providing more support to students who need it — including those attempting algebra in the eighth grade.

- **North Carolina’s** eighth-grade enrollment in pre-algebra or higher was 60 percent in 2009, down 5 percentage points from 2005, and 74 percent of eighth-graders scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in math, defined as “partial mastery of knowledge and skills.”
- In 2009, 38 percent of eighth-graders in the state took Algebra I or higher, the same as in 2005, and 36 percent of eighth-graders scored at or above NAEP Proficient level. **This means that about the same percentage of students were enrolled in Algebra I or higher as showed “demonstrated competence” in math in 2009.**



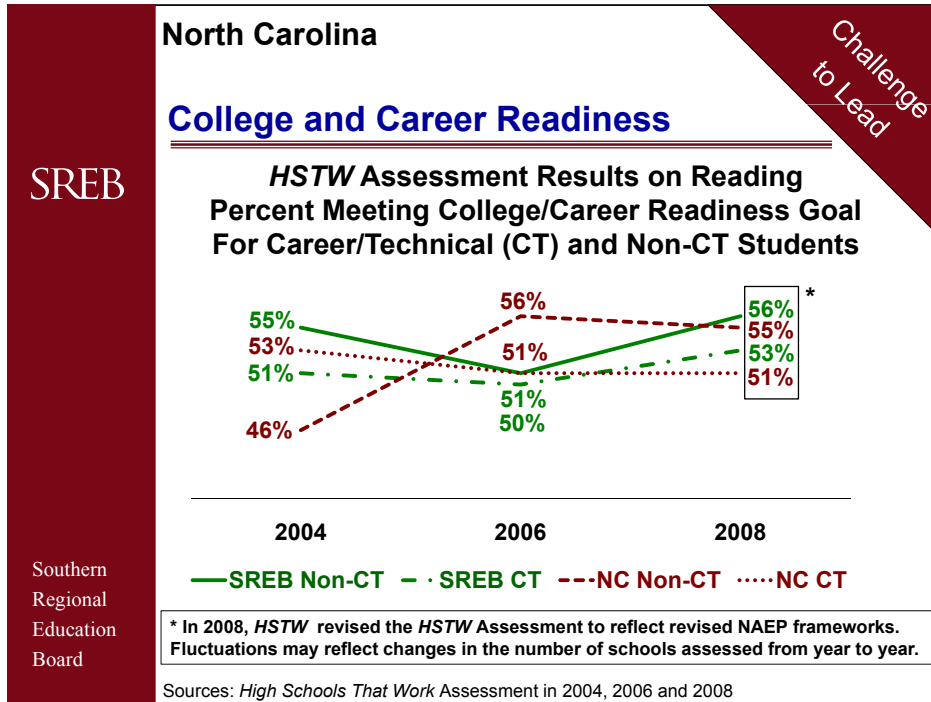
Too many eighth-graders in North Carolina were not ready for high school.

An aligned education system enables students to make smooth transitions from prekindergarten through college. One of the most critical transitions for many students is **from the middle grades to high school**. Students who leave the middle grades without a strong academic foundation and good study skills are typically overwhelmed by the pace and rigor of ninth-grade courses. Results on a key eighth-grade reading assessment give an indication of the size of this group: Slightly more than one-quarter of eighth-graders score below the NAEP Basic reading level.

Students who are behind when they reach high school are more likely to fail. More students are retained in ninth grade than in any other grade, creating a ninth-grade enrollment “bulge.” In 2007, every SREB state had such an enrollment bulge. Overall, the 2007 ninth-grade enrollment in SREB states was 14 percent larger than the eighth-grade enrollment in 2006. The ninth-grade bulges in SREB states ranged from 5 percent to 20 percent.

SREB’s blueprint for improving high school achievement and graduation rates, *The Next Generation of School Accountability*, urges policy-makers and education leaders to focus on strengthening the ninth-grade transition. Students who are retained in the early or middle grades run the risk of being retained — or worse, dropping out — in high school. Programs that help middle-graders focus on academic and career plans and that connect them with adult mentors can make a difference.

- **In North Carolina** in 2007, there were 16 more ninth-graders for every 100 eighth-graders in 2006.



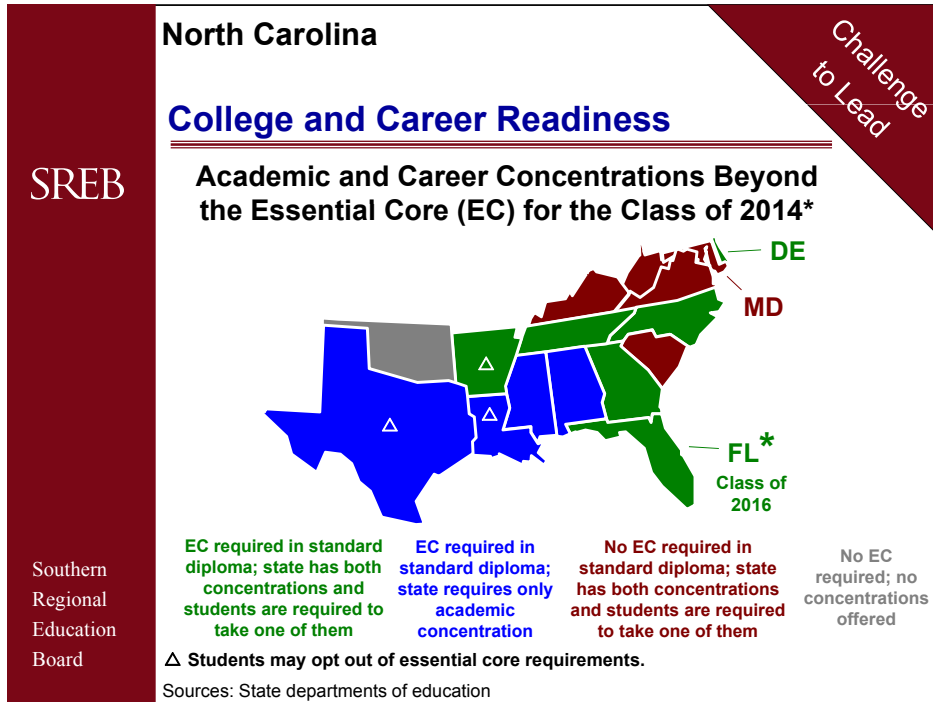
The percentage of North Carolina CT students who met the *HSTW* reading goal decreased.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to ensure that all students are ready to learn after high school — in college, technical programs or on the job. In SREB states, 650 public schools in the *High Schools That Work (HSTW)* network administered the 2008 *HSTW* Assessment to more than 22,000 seniors who had completed at least four career/technical (CT) courses. Parallel to NAEP, the *HSTW* Assessment measures achievement in 12th-grade reading, mathematics and science. The *HSTW* Assessment was revised for the 2008 administration to reflect the new NAEP frameworks. The *HSTW* reading goal is benchmarked higher than NAEP Basic and close to NAEP Proficient. In 2008, 53 percent of the CT students taking the *HSTW* Assessment in SREB states met the *HSTW* reading goal, compared with 56 percent of the non-CT students. Too many students still fall short of the reading goal.

HSTW research suggests that higher-performing students had a more rigorous and supportive set of literacy experiences in high school than those who scored lower — including, for example, more full-length book assignments, more reading in courses other than English class, and more emphasis on writing in all classes.

SREB noted in a 2009 report, *The Next Generation of School Accountability: A Blueprint for Raising High School Achievement and Graduation Rates in SREB States*, that reading instruction is rare in the middle grades and high school. Another 2009 report, *A Critical Mission: Making Adolescent Reading an Immediate Priority in SREB States*, calls for better teacher training in literacy instruction and more support for struggling students so they can catch up.

- **In North Carolina**, 8 percent of the state’s public high schools and 13 percent of its seniors participated in the 2008 *HSTW* Assessment.
- In 2008, 51 percent of CT students in the state met the college-readiness reading goal, compared with 53 percent in 2004.



North Carolina requires the SREB essential core plus an academic or career concentration.

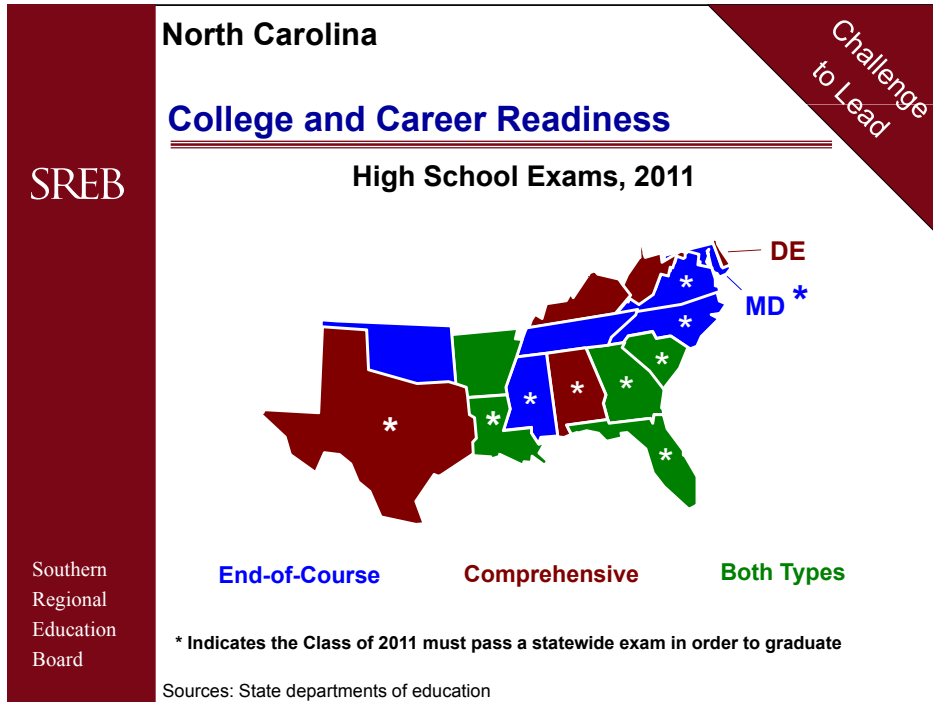
The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for states to have rigorous high school graduation requirements to get students ready for college and careers. SREB recommends an **essential core** that includes four years of English, three years each of science and social studies, and four years of math: Algebra I and II, geometry, and one additional course such as trigonometry, statistics, or a course designed to prepare students for college math.

All SREB states already require students to complete the essential core in English, science and social studies as a part of their standard diplomas. Nine SREB states also currently — or will for the Class of 2014 — require the essential core in math: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee and Texas. (Florida will for the Class of 2016.) Three of these states let students opt out of the essential core requirements.

The goals also call for states to require all students to choose an **academic or career concentration** beyond the essential core. (An academic concentration generally includes at least three courses from foreign language, fine arts, public speaking, and additional units in science and social studies. A career concentration generally includes at least three courses in a career/technical field.)

In Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee, students in the Class of 2014 must take the essential core as part of the standard diploma *and* choose either an academic or career concentration. (In Florida, students in the Class of 2016 must.) Some other states offer but do not require concentrations in addition to the essential core.

- **North Carolina's** standard diploma for the Class of 2013 requires all students to earn four credits each in English and math and three credits each in science and social studies. Math requirements include Algebra I, geometry and Algebra II or their equivalents within an integrated math sequence.
- The state requires students to complete either an academic or career concentration, which includes two credits in a specified area and four additional credits in the same academic or career area.



North Carolina administers high school end-of-course exams.

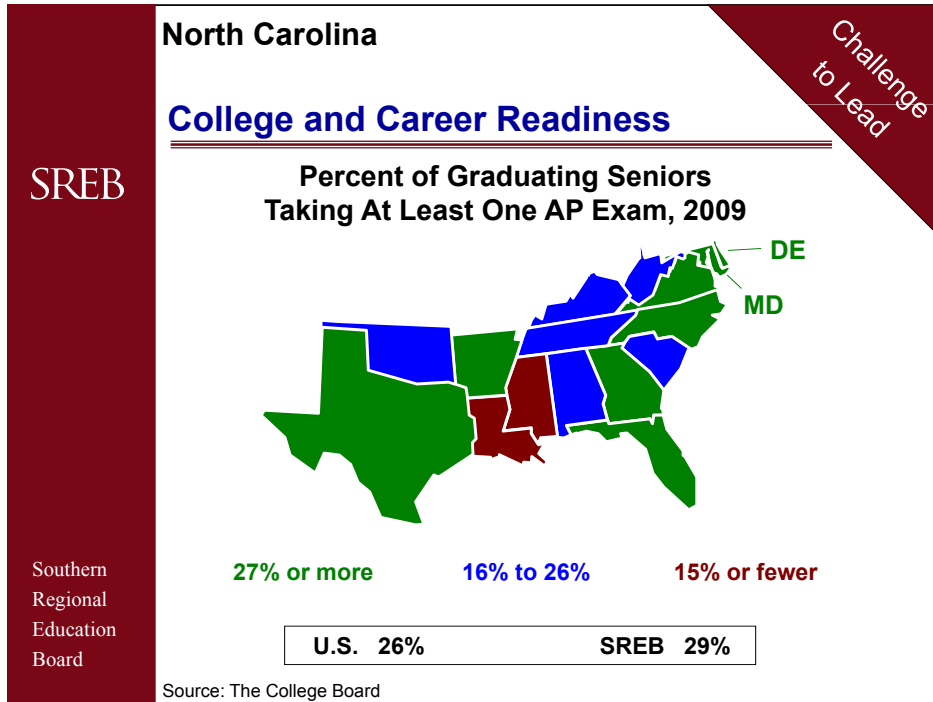
For years, SREB states have used state exams to measure student progress toward high school graduation and to ensure the value of the high school diploma. Today, they also use exam results to meet school accountability requirements under federal law.

Some SREB states use comprehensive exams, some use end-of-course exams — and some use both. Usually given in 10th or 11th grade, **comprehensive exams** assess whether students have met academic standards based on content learned over a number of years. **End-of-course** exams assess whether students have met academic standards at the end of specific high school courses, such as Algebra I and English I.

Most SREB states hold students — and schools — accountable for their performance on these exams. Ten SREB states require students in the Class of 2011 to pass all or part of an exam before they can graduate from high school, making these exams *high-stakes*. Some other SREB states use the results of end-of-course exams as part of final course grades. In a few SREB states, exam results are reported on student transcripts but have no other consequence for students.

In the last five years, several SREB states implemented end-of-course exams with the intent of replacing their comprehensive exams. Advocates argue that end-of-course exams are a better measure of student performance because they assess knowledge and skills from a single course and can be tied more closely to academic standards. Exams in subjects such as Algebra II and English III also may have greater potential to measure students' college readiness than comprehensive exams.

- **North Carolina's** End-of-Course Tests assess students in Algebra I, Algebra II, biology, chemistry, civics and economics, English I, geometry, physical science, physics and U.S. history. Student performance counts for at least 25 percent of final course grades, and students are required to pass five exams in order to graduate.

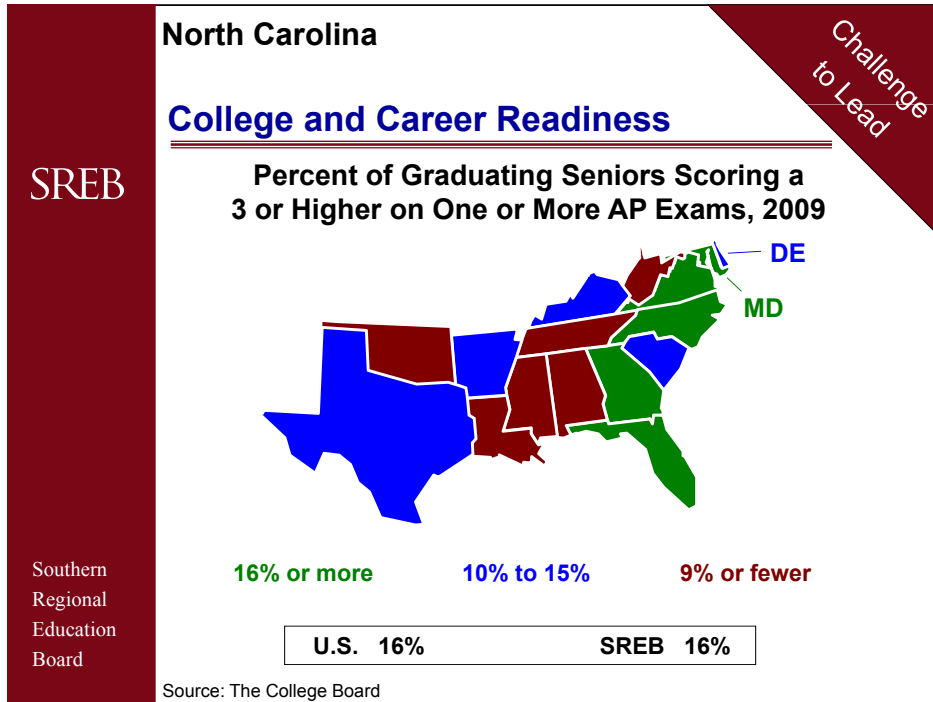


Student participation in Advanced Placement in North Carolina exceeded the national rate.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals recognize that encouraging high school students to participate in the Advanced Placement (AP) program is a good way to help them prepare for college and careers. The goals call for graduating seniors to take and pass AP courses at rates higher than national rates. Eight SREB states have met this goal for participation.

SREB states led the nation in 2009 in the percentage of graduating seniors who took at least one AP exam in high school — 29 percent compared with 26 percent. This is significant because research shows that students who take AP courses are more successful in the freshman year of college — even if they do not earn college credit by scoring a 3 or higher on the accompanying AP exams in high school.

- In 2009, 29 percent of **North Carolina's** graduating seniors took at least one AP exam in high school, an increase of 9 percentage points from 2000.

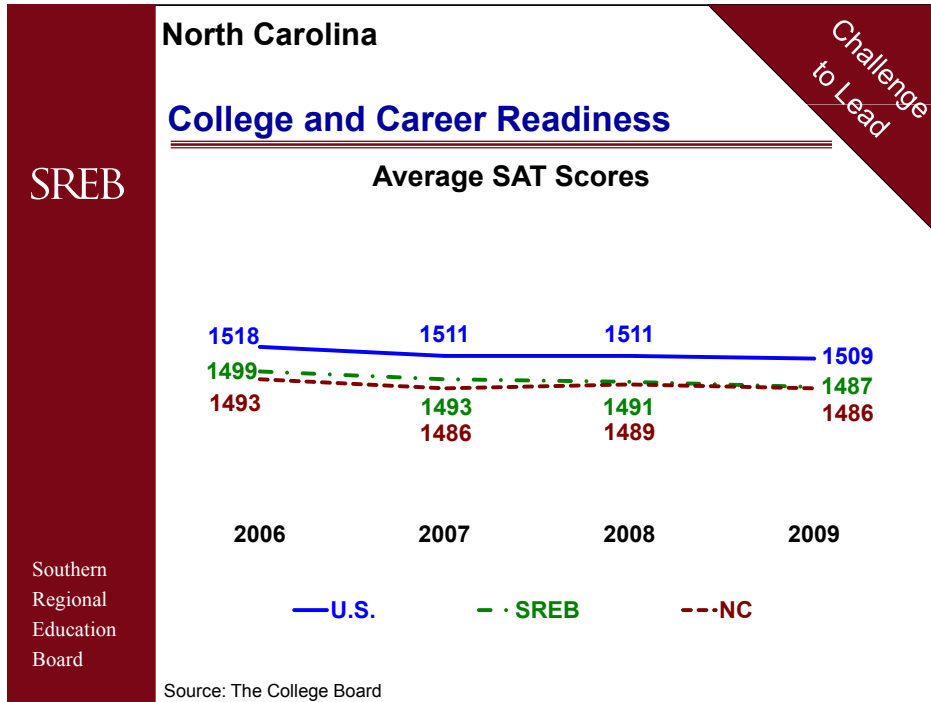


North Carolina student performance on AP exams exceeded national and regional rates.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for graduating seniors in SREB states to take and pass Advanced Placement (AP) courses at rates higher than national rates. Students who are successful on AP exams may earn college credit and are generally more successful in the freshman year of college.

SREB states matched the nation in the percentage of all graduating seniors who passed at least one AP exam in 2009 — 16 percent — a 7 percentage-point increase from 2000. A score of 3 or higher on these exams is considered “passing” because most colleges award credit to students who achieve this score. Although SREB states have not yet met the goal to exceed the national percentage, **this is the third consecutive year that SREB states have matched the national rate.**

- In 2009, 17 percent of **North Carolina’s** graduating seniors passed at least one AP exam, an increase of 6 percentage points from 2000.



The average SAT score declined in North Carolina and trailed the national average.

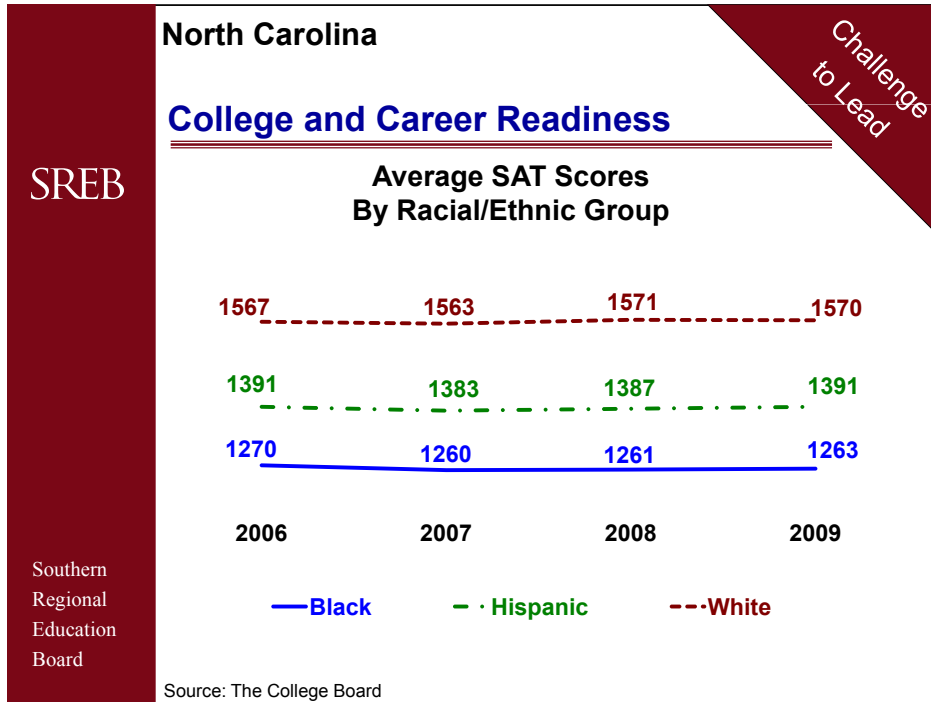
The *Challenge to Lead* goals identify students' performance on college admission tests as an indicator of readiness for college and careers. The SAT is the dominant admission test in half of the SREB states.

In 2006, the College Board added a writing section to the verbal and math sections that comprise the SAT and changed the scale of the test. Each section of the test continues to be valued at 800 points, so the composite test now has a potential score of 2400 points. In 2009, the U.S. average composite SAT score of 1509 (verbal, math and writing) fell 9 points from 2006. The average composite score in the SAT-dominant SREB states fell 4 points over the period.

The numbers of students taking the SAT in both the nation and the region grew from 1999 to 2009. The number of students nationwide rose from about 1.2 million in 1999 to about 1.5 million in 2009, up 25 percent. The number in the region rose from nearly 400,000 in 1999 to about 523,000 in 2009, up 31 percent.

Average statewide test scores are related to the percentage of the state's seniors who take the test while in high school. When the percentage is small, the students typically are the state's most motivated and academically prepared, and the average statewide score is typically high. As more students take the test — and the group taking the test more nearly represents a cross-section of students in the state — the average statewide score usually drops. In the eight SAT-dominant SREB states, the percentage of seniors who had taken the SAT ranged from 51 percent to 71 percent in 2009.

- **North Carolina's** average SAT score declined by 7 points from 2006 to 2009. North Carolina's average SAT score was lower than the regional and national composite averages in 2009.
- In 2009, 63 percent of seniors in the state had taken the SAT, down 1 percentage point over the decade.

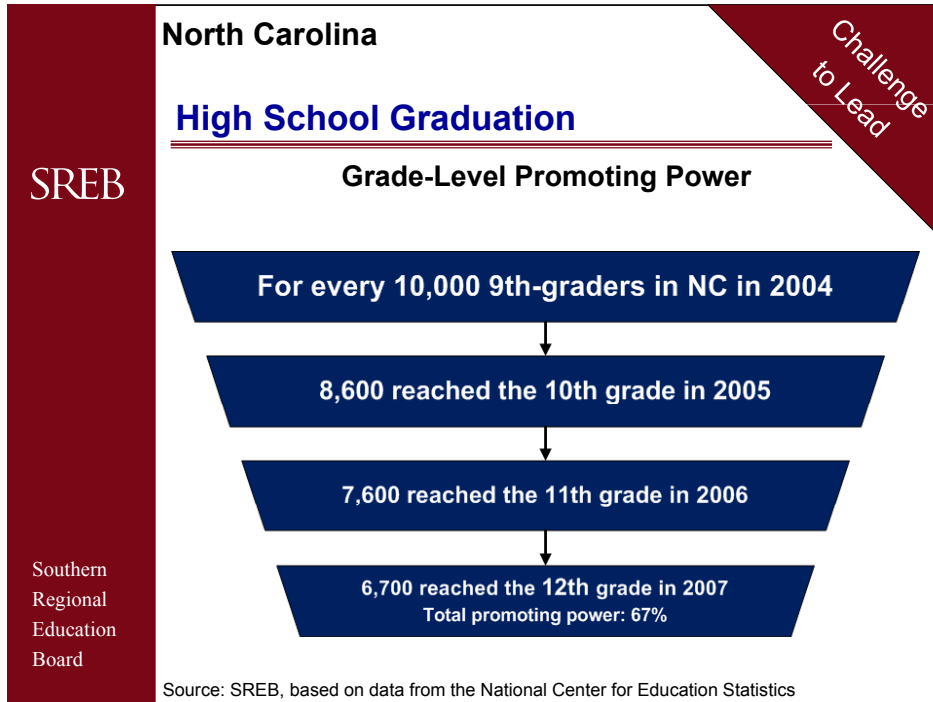


Achievement gaps among student groups on the SAT did not narrow in North Carolina.

Closing achievement gaps among racial and ethnic groups is central to SREB's *Challenge to Lead* goals. In the United States, the average composite (verbal, math and writing) SAT score increased more for white seniors than for black seniors from 2006 to 2009. Gaps narrowed between black and white students and between Hispanic and white students nationwide. The total percent of black seniors in the nation who had taken the SAT while in high school increased from 10 percent in 2006 to 12 percent in 2009; the percent of Hispanic seniors who had taken the SAT while in high school increased from 4 percent in 2006 to 7 percent in 2009, while the percent of white seniors who had taken the SAT declined by 2 percentage points over the period.

Only one SAT-dominant SREB state made progress in the last three years in closing achievement gaps. Maryland reduced the gaps in scores between Hispanic and white seniors from 2006 to 2009.

- **In North Carolina**, the average composite SAT scores improved for white seniors, remained the same for Hispanic seniors and declined for black seniors from 2006 to 2009. The score gaps widened between black and white seniors and between Hispanic and white seniors.
- The percent of black seniors in the state who had taken the SAT while in high school increased from 21 percent in 2006 to 23 percent in 2009. The percent of Hispanic seniors who had taken the SAT while in high school remained the same over the period.



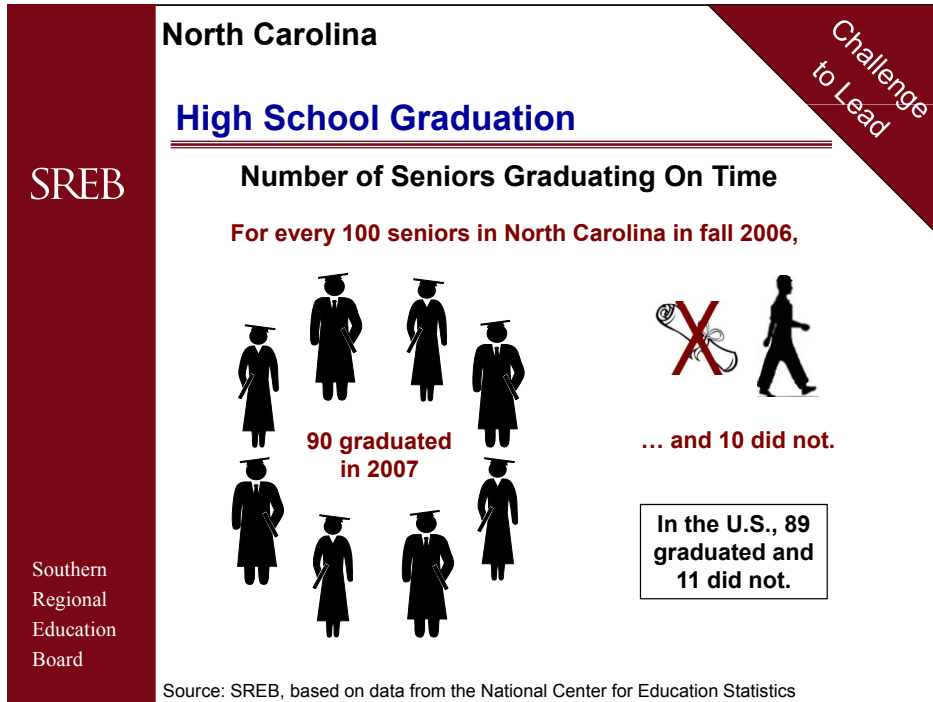
High school promoting power in North Carolina trailed the national and regional rates.

After students make the transition from the middle grades to high school, it's important that they make steady progress toward graduating from high school on time. One benchmark of progress is the number of ninth-graders reaching the senior year in three years. Too many don't.

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University have studied the rate of ninth-graders' progression to the 12th grade — or *promoting power*. In 2007, 78 percent of U.S. ninth-graders reached the 12th grade in three years. The rate in the SREB region was 71 percent. White ninth-graders in SREB states trailed their national peers in reaching the 12th grade by 12 percentage points in 2007. Hispanic ninth-graders in the region trailed their national peers by 7 points, and black ninth-graders trailed their national peers by 4 points.

Because students held back in high school have a much greater chance of dropping out, states should do all they can to ensure that students stay in school — by providing an engaging curriculum, by developing high school exams that do not become barriers to graduation, and by creating multiple paths to graduation. Education leaders in SREB states can also use their state's *grade-level promoting power* to pinpoint where students are having trouble keeping pace.

- **In North Carolina**, 67 percent of ninth-graders in 2004 reached the senior year in 2007, 11 percentage points lower than in the nation and 4 points lower than in the region.



The percentage of seniors in North Carolina who graduated in their senior year topped the nation.

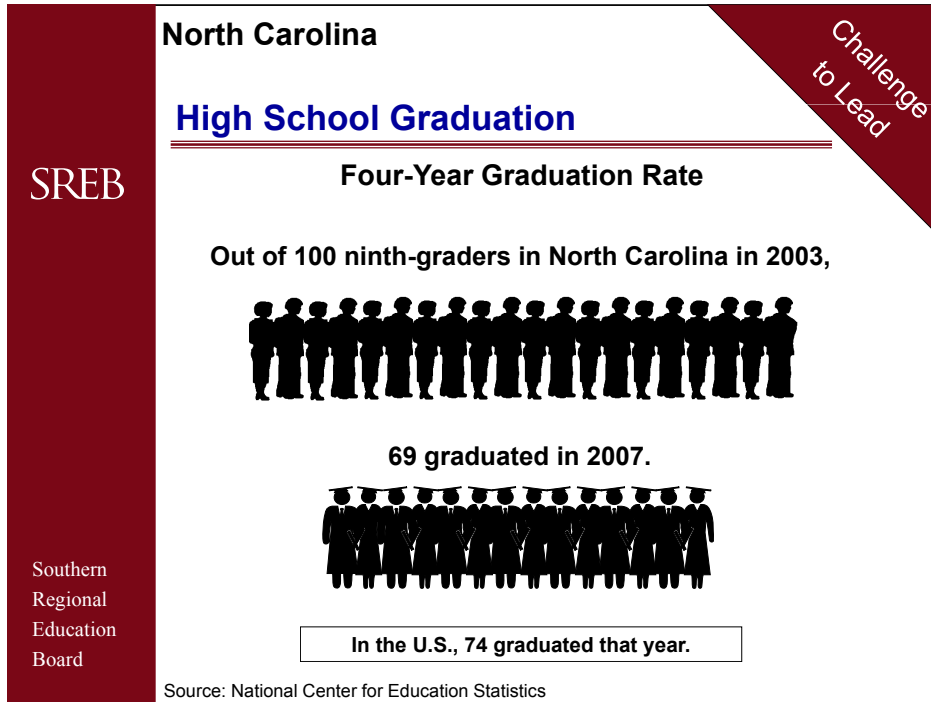
The senior year of high school is critical for students because they must complete their final requirements for a diploma and chart a path toward college and careers. Yet far too many students disengage from school during this final year.

Nationally, 89 percent of students who began the school year as seniors in fall 2006 graduated in spring 2007. Seniors in SREB states fared slightly better: 90 percent graduated in the spring. Even more encouraging, black, Hispanic and white students in the region graduated at the end of the senior year at higher rates than their peers nationwide.

What happened to the 10 percent of SREB seniors who didn't graduate in the spring? Some students failed to graduate on time because they reached the senior year without having passed required courses or exams. Others lost interest in school and dropped out, including some who had work or family obligations.

Teachers, school leaders and guidance counselors should help all students develop an academic plan early in high school so that students know what is expected of them. Students should not reach the senior year without completing necessary requirements along the way. When seniors are forced to play catch-up, their chances of graduating are reduced. To help make the last year of high school more flexible for more students, some states allow seniors to complete portfolio projects, take alternative assessments, or participate in credit-recovery programs. Such options should be rigorous and engaging — and enable students to transition successfully to college or career training.

- **In North Carolina**, 90 percent of seniors in fall 2006 graduated from high school in spring 2007, a larger percentage than in the nation and the same as in the region.



North Carolina's high school graduation rate trailed the national and regional rates.

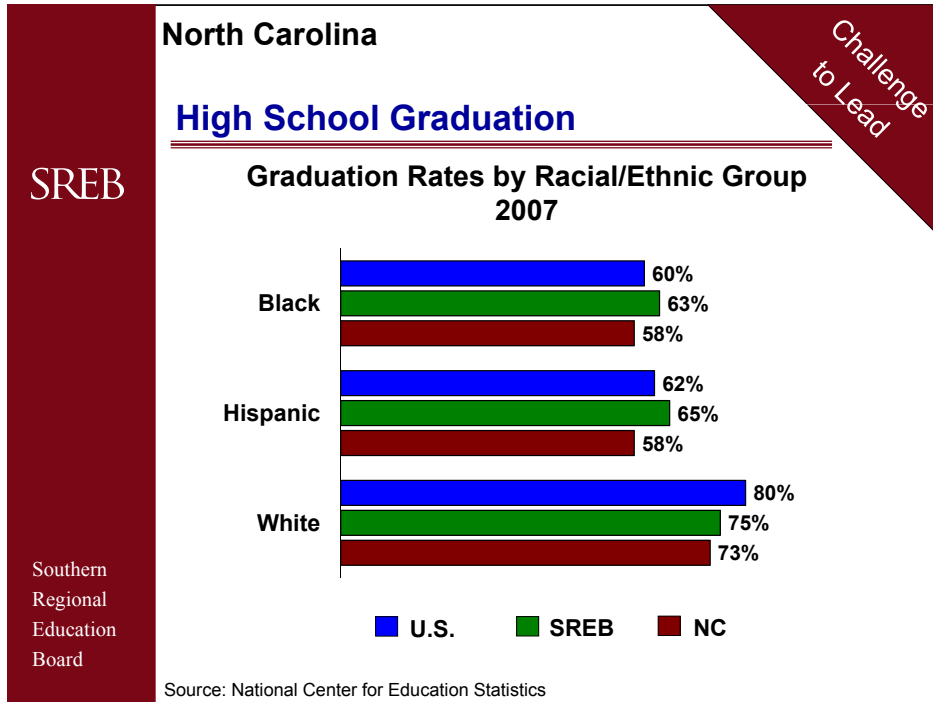
The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for states to exceed the national percentage of students graduating from high school each year. Graduation rates in the nation and the region declined and remained low throughout the 1990s before consistently rising over the past decade. While the SREB region has made progress, its graduation rate continues to trail the national rate.

To calculate the graduation rate, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) compares the number of ninth-graders who entered high school in the fall with the number of graduates reported four years later. Its cohort-style rate is an estimate based on enrollment and is known as the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR). The estimated AFGR in 2007 was 74 percent in the nation and 70 percent in SREB states.

Because the estimated AFGR is calculated the same way for all states, SREB states can use it to compare their progress to neighboring states, the region and the nation. While most states also calculate other graduation rates to meet state and federal school-accountability requirements, those state-specific rates are not comparable across the nation because each state determines how it calculates rates.

The U.S. Department of Education has issued an updated graduation rate calculation, considered more precise than the AFGR, which all states must adopt by 2011. The rate it yields will offer more accurate comparability across states.

- The Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate in **North Carolina** was 69 percent in 2007, which was lower than the national and regional rates.
- Based on NCES' 2010 *First Look* report, the state's AFGR in 2008 was 73 percent.



In North Carolina, black, Hispanic and white seniors graduated at lower rates than their U.S. peers.

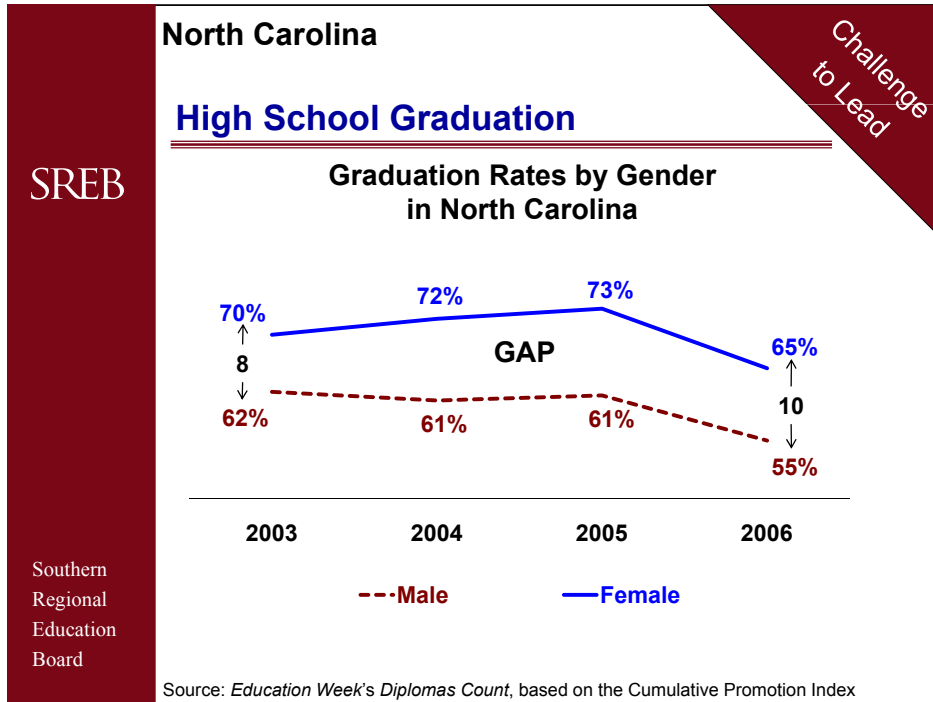
The *Challenge to Lead* goals emphasize the need to improve high school graduation rates for *all groups* of students. Achievement gaps among racial and ethnic groups are too wide at all levels of education, and graduation rates are no exception. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) calculates the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate by racial/ethnic groups and for total graduating classes.

In the SREB region (except for Kentucky, which did not report data on racial and ethnic groups to NCES), gaps persisted in graduation rates between black and white students (12 percentage points) and between Hispanic and white students (10 percentage points) in 2007.

In the region, 63 percent of black students, 65 percent of Hispanic students and 75 percent of white students graduated from high school on time in 2007. Black students and Hispanic students in SREB states graduated at rates higher than their peers nationwide in 2007, while white students graduated at rates lower than their peers.

Updated federal accountability rules require states to report racial and ethnic group graduation rates, and several states are starting to place greater emphasis on graduation rates in their own accountability systems. In order for states to move faster toward closing these persistently large graduation-rate gaps, they should set higher targets to ensure that students from all groups graduate at increasingly higher rates year after year.

- **In North Carolina**, the gaps in graduation rates between black and white students and between Hispanic and white students were 15 percentage points in 2007.



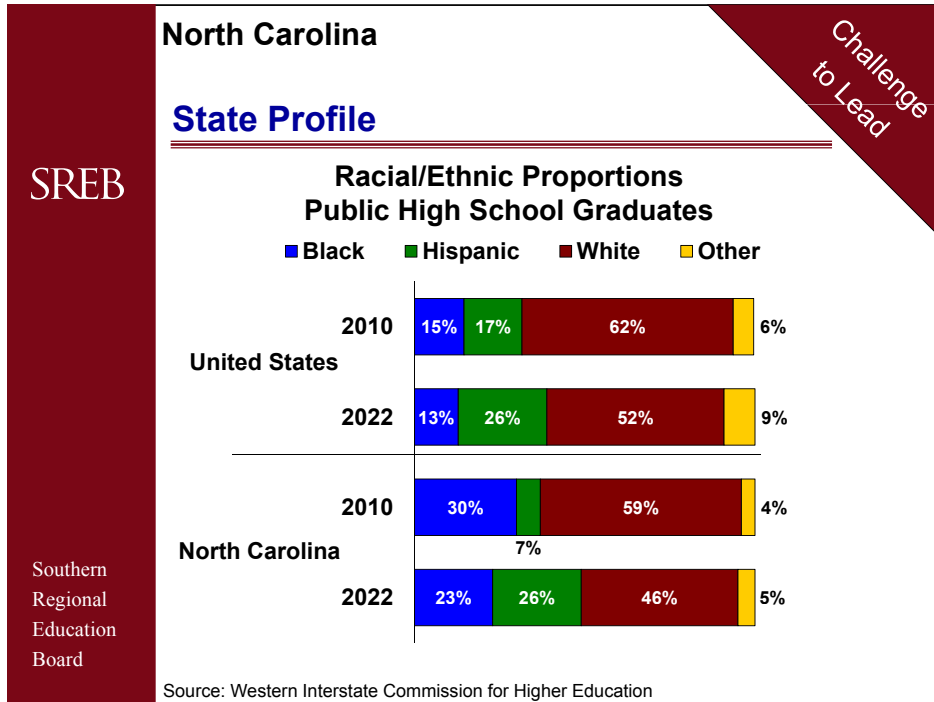
North Carolina's graduation rate gap between males and females was larger than the nation's gap.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for states to close gaps among all groups of students, including gaps by gender. Based on calculations from *Education Week's* annual *Diplomas Count* report, male students graduated from high school in 2006 at much lower rates than female students in every state in the nation for which data were available. **Females graduated at a rate 7 percentage points higher than males in the nation and 9 points higher in the SREB median states. The range in SREB states was from 4 points higher to 14 points higher.** From 2003 to 2006, this gap grew or remained the same in eight SREB states and narrowed by 1 percentage point in six states. Two SREB states did not report sufficient data to determine how the gap changed.

Researchers have identified absenteeism, retention (or lack of promotion to the next grade), poor academic performance and disciplinary problems in school as risk factors for students who drop out or fail to graduate on time. No one factor explains why males have lower graduation rates than females, but federal data show that males are suspended and expelled from school at much higher rates than females. They also account for a larger share of school-crime incidents. Males also are twice as likely to receive special education services in the early and middle grades. Research shows that students who receive these services graduate at much lower rates than the entire school population.

New federal accountability rules do not require states to report male and female graduation rates separately. But this does not mean states should ignore these rates. States should be concerned if trends show that either males or females do not perform well. The current gap for males should trouble state leaders. They should examine trends in male student achievement, attendance, discipline and crime to identify strategies to help males keep pace and stay engaged in school.

- **In North Carolina**, the graduation rate gap between male and female students was 10 percentage points in 2006, larger than in the nation and region. From 2003 to 2006, the gaps in the state and region grew, while the national gap narrowed.



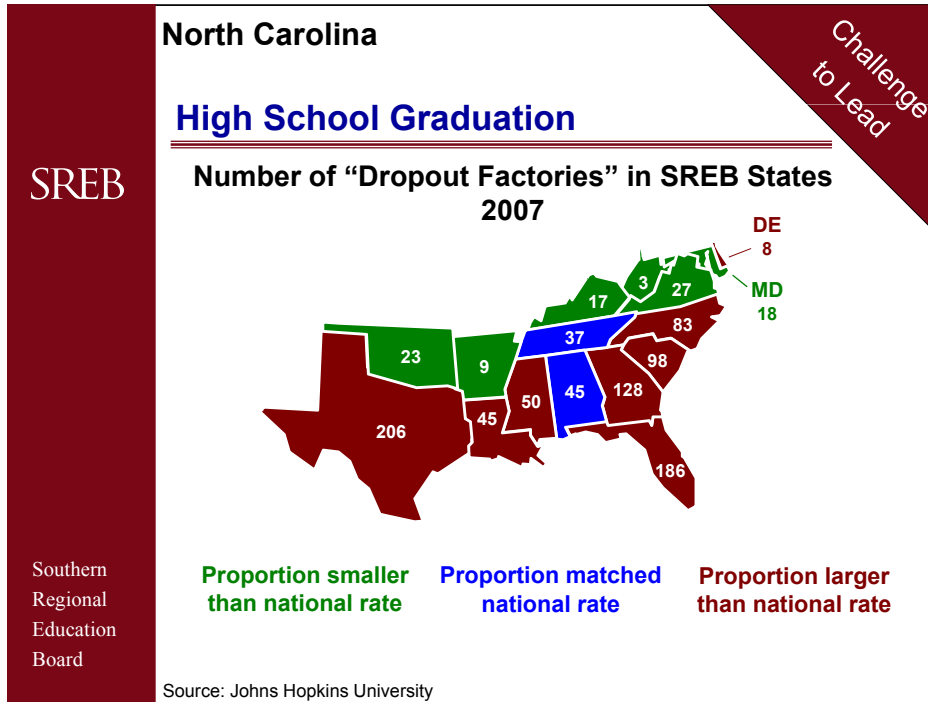
The high school Class of 2022 in North Carolina will be more diverse than the Class of 2010.

Public school enrollment is expected to grow and become much more diverse in the years ahead. This change will be obvious in public high school graduating classes. In 2010, about 62 percent of graduating seniors in the United States were white. According to projections, for the Class of 2022 — which began kindergarten in the 2009-2010 school year — that proportion is expected to decline to 52 percent. The proportion of graduating seniors who are black will decline slightly over the period, from 15 percent to 13 percent.

The proportion of Hispanic graduating seniors in the United States is expected to grow from 17 percent to 26 percent. The increase will be even greater in SREB states — rising from 17 percent in 2010 to 31 percent in 2022.

These changes mean that even more attention will be required of SREB states to meet the *Challenge to Lead* goals. The fastest-growing group — Hispanic students — traditionally has been disadvantaged educationally and economically. SREB states will need to better educate the growing number of students with limited English proficiency and from low-income households.

- The changes in the composition of the Class of 2022 in **North Carolina** will parallel those in the nation. The proportions of black and white students are expected to decline, and the proportion of Hispanic students will grow.



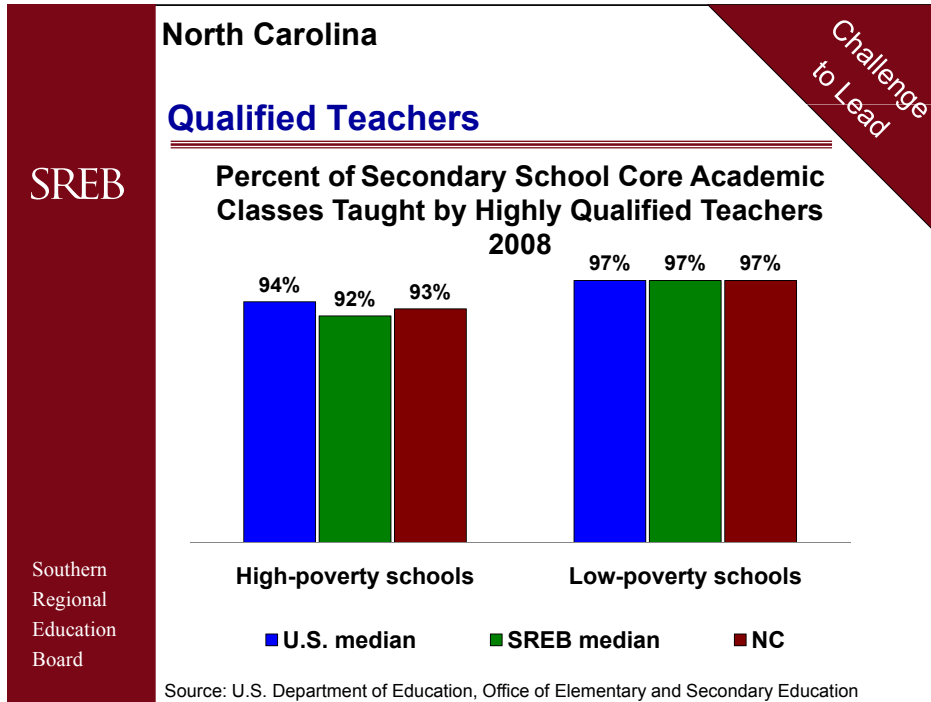
North Carolina’s percent of “dropout factory” high schools was high compared with the nation.

In an effort to improve high school graduation rates, policy-makers and education leaders in SREB states and in the nation have focused attention on reducing the number of dropouts. Research has helped clarify the nature of the problem. One important finding is that urban high schools are the epicenters of the crisis.

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University monitor dropout trends across states, districts and schools. They classify a high school as a “dropout factory” if, on average, 60 percent or less of ninth-graders reach the senior year in three years. In 2007, more than 2,000 of the nation’s public high schools — **12 percent** — were classified as “dropout factories.”

Nearly half of these schools were in SREB states, which represented **18 percent of all public high schools in the region**. In eight SREB states, the proportion of high schools classified as “dropout factories” matched or was smaller than the national proportion of 12 percent. The other eight states had proportions that exceeded the nation, including four states with a quarter or more of high schools dubbed “dropout factories.”

- **In North Carolina**, 83 high schools were classified as “dropout factories” in 2007. This represented 22 percent of public high schools in the state, a proportion larger than in the nation and the region.

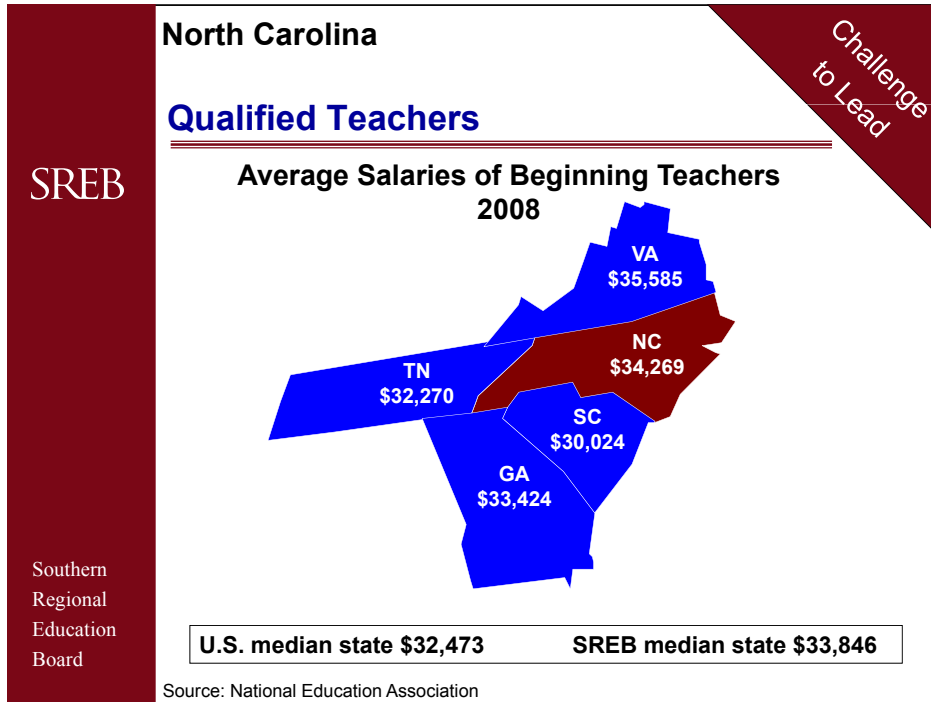


North Carolina trailed the nation in secondary teachers who were highly qualified.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals and the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* both call for every student to be taught by “highly qualified” teachers. *NCLB* defined highly qualified teachers as those having a college major or minor in the subjects taught or knowledge verified by a test. Since 2002, most SREB states have made substantial progress toward all teachers being highly qualified, even though retirements, attrition, recruitment, subject-area shortages and the economy have made it a challenge. In 2008, 14 SREB states — up from eight states in 2003 — had at least 90 percent of elementary and secondary teachers in core subjects (English, math, science and social studies) who were highly qualified.

Even so, in 2008 all SREB states — and most states in the nation — had a gap between the percentages of highly qualified teachers in their high-poverty and low-poverty secondary schools, which include both middle grades and high schools. In 2008, three SREB states had a gap of 5 percentage points or greater, two states had a gap greater than 10 points and two other states had a gap greater than 20 points. Consequently, the distribution of highly qualified teachers in high-poverty and low-poverty schools remains a concern in the region and nation.

- In **North Carolina’s** high-poverty secondary schools, 93 percent of teachers in core subjects were highly qualified, compared with 94 percent in the nation and 92 percent in SREB states. In low-poverty secondary schools, 97 percent of teachers in core subjects were highly qualified, compared with 97 percent in both the nation and SREB states. Ninety-seven percent of secondary teachers in core subjects were highly qualified in 2008.
- In 2008, 98 percent of the state’s elementary and secondary teachers in core subjects were highly qualified, up from 85 percent five years earlier.



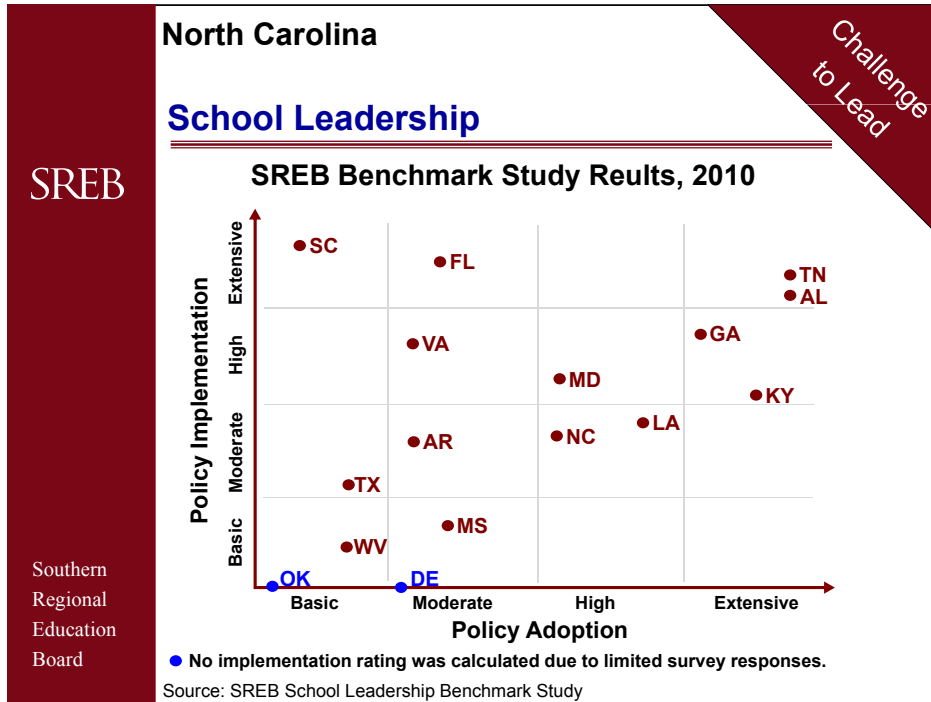
North Carolina paid beginning teachers more than most of its neighboring states.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to ensure that salaries, benefits and incentives for teachers are competitive in the marketplace. States need teachers who are recognized for their expertise, who enhance student learning and who are willing to assume new roles to improve curriculum and instruction — beyond traditional roles. Average pay for beginning teachers is one way to compare your state's ability to compete with surrounding states, the region and the nation in attracting candidates for teaching jobs.

Teacher turnover is highest among beginning teachers, and your state may need to provide incentives during these early years to keep them. States also may need to provide incentives for teachers who fill specific needs, such as teaching in particular subjects or geographic areas where there are shortages.

In 2007, for the first time, **beginning teachers in the SREB median states earned slightly higher salaries than the median in the nation.** This marks an important milestone for the region.

- The average salary for a beginning teacher in **North Carolina** in 2008 was higher than the averages in all of its neighboring states except Virginia — and higher than the median in the nation and the region.



North Carolina has adopted strong leadership policies.

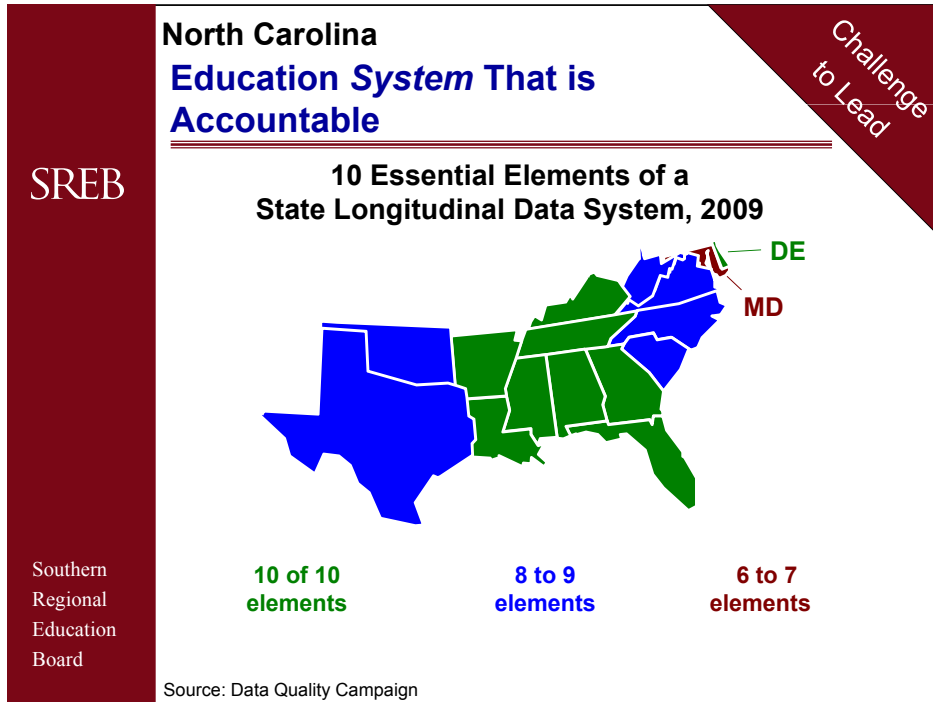
When school principals know how to *lead instruction*, they can improve both teacher effectiveness and student learning. The *Challenge to Lead* goals identify six state policy indicators that can help ensure school principals have the knowledge and skills to be strong instructional leaders:

1. leadership standards that clearly articulate a vision of instructional leaders;
2. collaborative recruitment and selection of future school leaders by universities and districts;
3. redesign of leadership programs to emphasize curriculum, instruction and student learning;
4. rich, field-based experiences that prepare candidates to lead school improvement;
5. tiered, performance-based leadership licensure, and
6. alternative pathways to leadership.

In 2010, SREB conducted a study to examine state adoption and implementation of school leadership policies based on the six indicators. The study involved a review of SREB state policies (e.g., state law, rules and guidance), using three criteria per indicator. The criteria were based on guidance from two expert panels and a review of the current research. Each state received a rating based on two measures: an adoption rating determined by the number of criteria met, and an implementation rating based on survey responses from district superintendents and administrators of school leadership preparation programs.

SREB found that most SREB states have adopted policies consistent with the indicators. Ten SREB states have developed strong leadership standards to guide leader preparation, licensure and evaluation. Eleven states have developed comprehensive policies to redesign leadership preparation programs on collaboration and instructional leadership. Few states, however, have clear policies guiding the collaborative selection and recruitment of future school leaders by districts and universities.

- Based on SREB analysis, **North Carolina's** standards articulating a vision and role for school leaders are strong. Future reform efforts are likely to be strengthened by tiered licensure policies that support advancement along a career continuum of leadership practice, from beginning to professional to master leader. Survey responses placed the state in the top 10 SREB states on policy implementation.



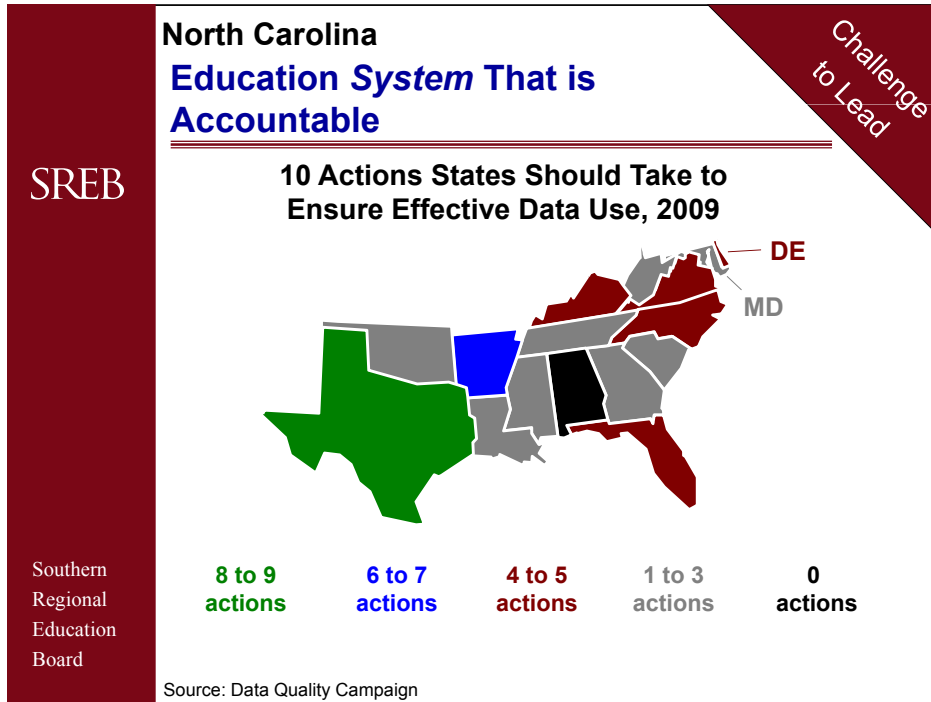
North Carolina has implemented most of the essential elements of a state data system.

Having high-quality data is vital to meeting the *Challenge to Lead* goals, which call on states to track student progress from prekindergarten through higher education. States need the ability to link student data with other information, such as course-taking patterns, higher education success, and faculty qualifications. Some states have the ability to do this but not all.

Established in 2005 and sponsored by many national organizations, the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) promotes the development of longitudinal data systems — those data systems that can link information from multiple years and sources. DQC's founding goal was to help states implement systems with 10 essential elements by 2009. DQC credits states with completion of an element only after the state reports it has implemented that element. In 2009, nine states in the SREB region reported implementation of all 10 of the following essential elements:

1. a unique statewide student identifier that is linked to student data;
2. student-level fall enrollment, demographic and program (e.g., free lunch) participation data;
3. individual students' test records from year to year to measure growth;
4. data on untested students to ensure accountability for all groups of students;
5. a unique statewide teacher identifier, with the ability to match teachers to students;
6. student-level transcripts, including courses completed and grades earned;
7. student-level college admission and Advanced Placement test scores;
8. student-level high school completion and dropout data, collected annually;
9. links between the pre-K-12 and higher education systems, to track students through college, and
10. data audit system to allow for the assessment of data quality, validity and reliability.

- In 2009, **North Carolina** reported that it had implemented eight of the 10 essential elements, all but numbers 1 and 7.



North Carolina was one of nine states nationwide reporting progress on four or more state actions.

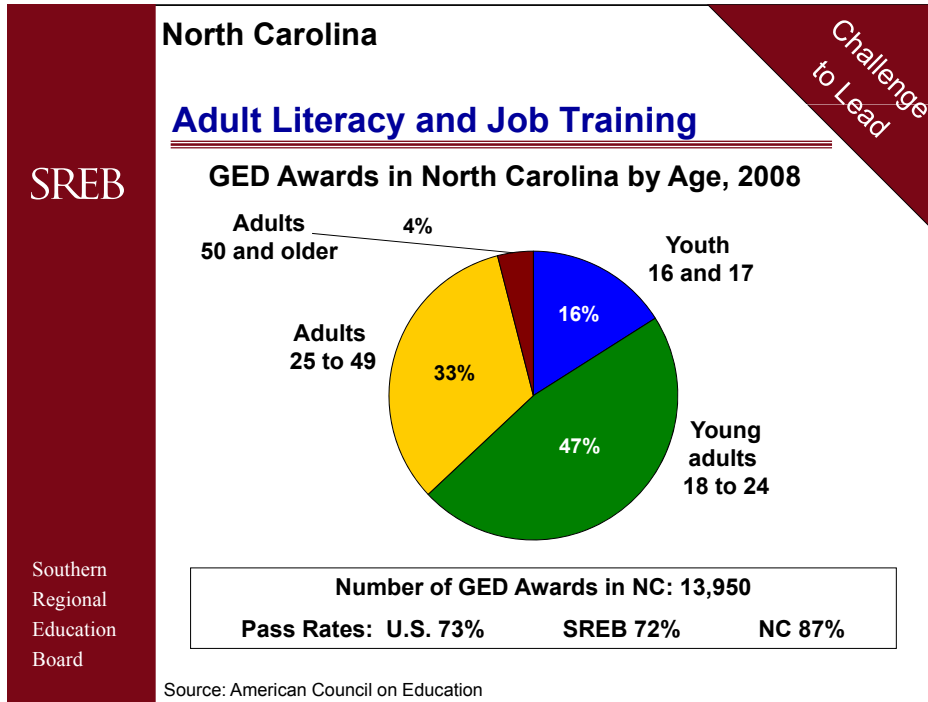
Once states have built comprehensive education data systems, they should ensure that the information they collect is used to help create effective policies and practices for state and local agencies and classrooms. Instead of collecting information to fulfill reporting requirements, states should use data to make informed decisions that can lead to increased student achievement and greater efficiencies.

The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) has identified 10 actions states should take to make more effective use of their data systems. These actions are intended to link state K-12 data systems with higher education and work-force data systems that are critical for effective decision-making. While no state in the nation reported completing all 10 actions in 2009, 46 states reported progress on at least one of the following:

1. link data systems;
2. create stable, sustained support;
3. develop governance structures;
4. build state data repositories (e.g., data warehouses);
5. implement systems to provide timely access to information;
6. create progress reports using individual student data;
7. create reports using longitudinal statistics;
8. develop a research agenda covering prekindergarten through advanced degrees to work force;
9. promote educator professional development and credentialing, and
10. promote strategies to raise awareness of available data.

The DQC did not have enough data to issue state analysis for action 5 in 2009 but will in 2010.

- In 2009, **North Carolina** reported it had taken four of the 10 actions.



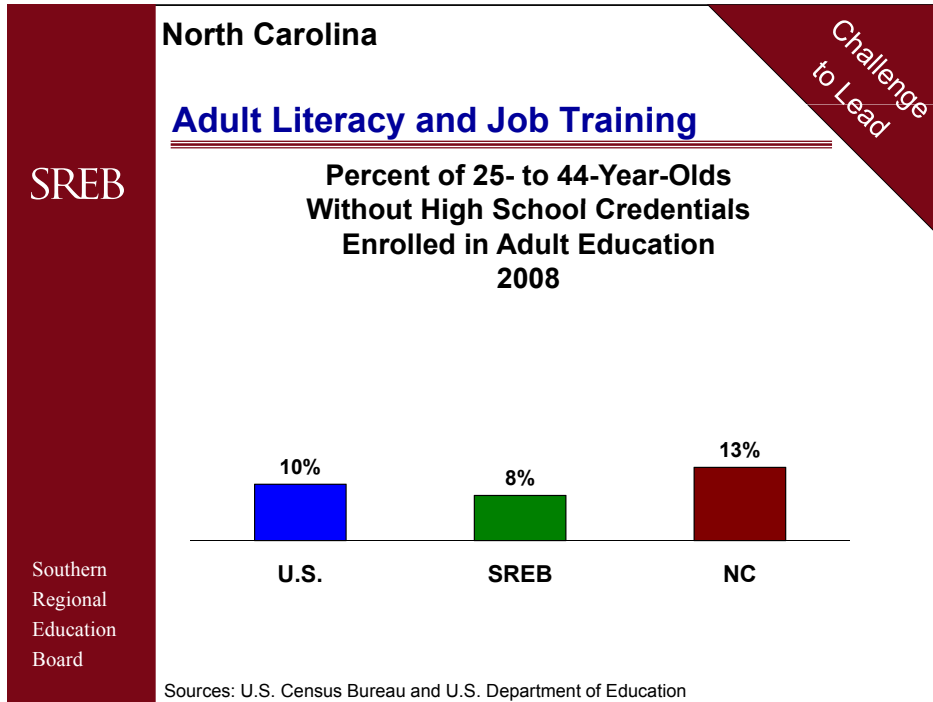
In North Carolina, too few adults earned GED credentials.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for more adults without a high school diploma to pass GED tests. All adults in SREB states need high school credentials to earn higher wages — even those already in the work force.

Yet in SREB states, the majority of GED recipients in 2008 were 16 to 24 years old. This suggests that adult education and GED programs are used primarily by recent high school dropouts. Adults ages 25 to 49 without high school credentials represent many more individuals but a much smaller percentage of those who earn a GED credential.

In the nation, 17 percent of GED credentials awarded in 2008 went to 16- and 17-year-olds. Another 52 percent went to young adults 18 to 24 years old, 29 percent went to 25- to 49-year-olds, and 2 percent went to adults 50 and over. In SREB states, 20 percent of GED recipients were 16 or 17 years old, 50 percent were young adults ages 18 to 24, 28 percent were 25 to 49, and 2 percent were 50 and over.

- **In North Carolina**, nearly two-thirds of GED credentials in 2008 were awarded to 16- to 24-year-olds. Only 33 percent were awarded to adults ages 25 to 49.
- The GED pass rate in the state topped the national and regional rates in 2008.



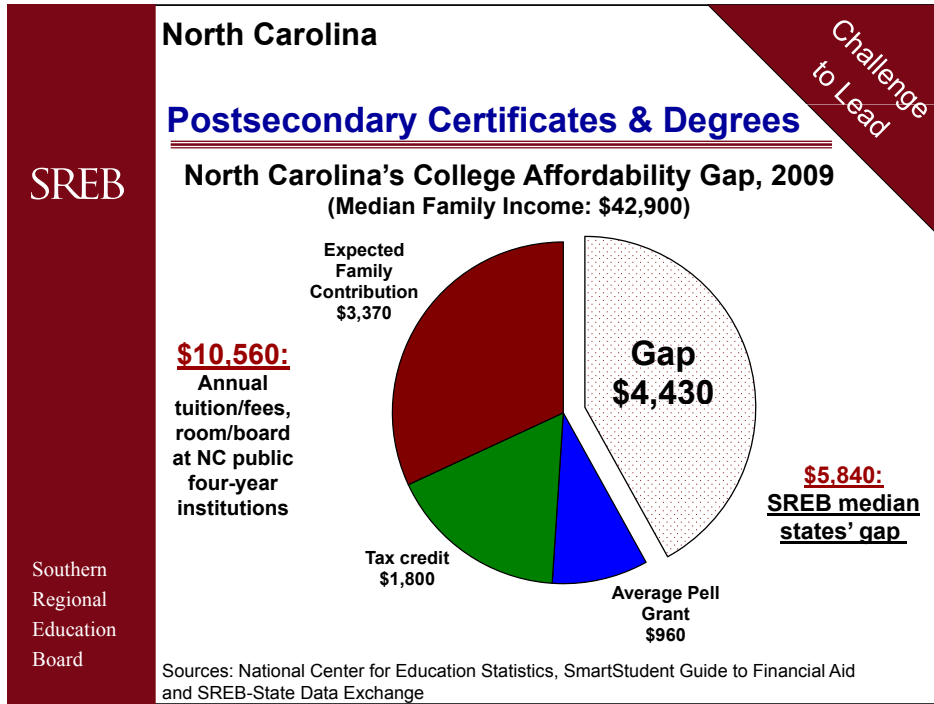
North Carolina topped most SREB states in enrolling young adults in adult education programs.

Education leaders in SREB states recognize the importance of the high school diploma or GED credential to economic well-being and quality of life, and they encourage working-age adults who need to earn these credentials to enroll in adult education programs. Yet few adults do.

According to the SREB report *A Smart Move in Tough Times: How SREB States Can Strengthen Adult Learning and the Work Force*, many adults find it difficult to complete high school credentials because of family obligations and financial responsibilities. They find adult education programs inconvenient and course schedules inflexible. They also report problems in affording classes. Although most adult education programs are tuition-free, adults find little support for such expenses as child care or transportation. Many also report that their employers offer them little encouragement to continue their education.

Nearly 4.5 million young adults ages 25 to 44 did not have a high school credential in SREB states in 2008. In SREB median states, only 8 percent of these adults were enrolled in adult education courses. Unless policy-makers pay more attention to the education needs of these adults, your state will not reach the *Challenge to Lead* goal that more adults have high school diplomas or GED credentials.

- **In North Carolina**, 45,771 adults — or 13 percent of 25- to 44-year-olds without a high school credential — were enrolled in adult education programs in 2008, the same percentage as in 2005.



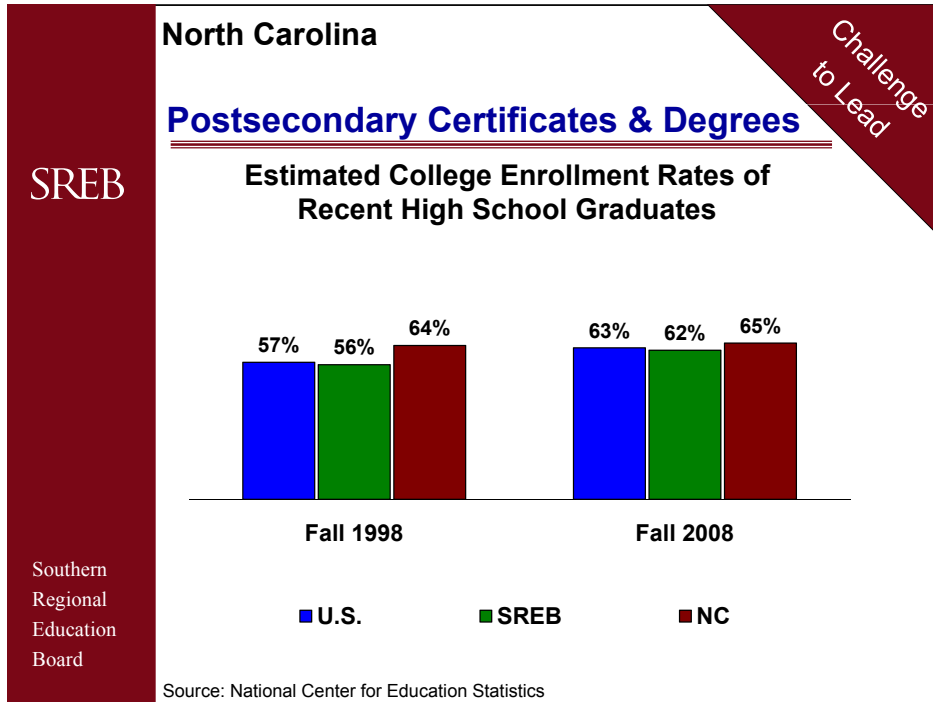
North Carolina's college affordability gap for median-income families was smaller than the region.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to provide sufficient financial aid to raise postsecondary education enrollment rates above national rates. State leaders often ask whether college is priced beyond the reach of many students. The answer depends in part on the kinds of financial aid and scholarships states offer. Federal aid provides grants, tax credits and loans. But loans only help students and their families stretch out the payments. Even with grants and tax credits, shortfalls — or gaps — often remain. State aid needs to help families fill these gaps.

The median one-year costs (tuition, fees, room and board) to attend a public four-year college or university in SREB states ranged from \$9,850 to \$17,080 in 2009. Families are expected to help pay the cost, and they receive notice of how much their contribution is expected to be — based on tax records — as a part of the federal financial aid process. Need-based grants often do not cover a family's expected contribution. Federal Pell Grants are available to students from low-income families; the maximum award in 2008-2009 was \$4,731 for the neediest students, and it dropped to zero for students from households that earned \$47,500 or more annually. All students whose families pay taxes also are eligible for the federal HOPE tax credit, up to \$1,800.

Yet family contributions, grants and tax credits taken together did *not* cover the median costs at a public four-year college for students from median-income families in any SREB state in 2009. **The affordability gap for median-income families in SREB median states was \$5,840 in 2009.** All SREB states provide some combination of need-based and merit aid to bridge the gap. But this state aid often does not fill the gap, forcing students and parents to find the money in other ways, including loans. The average student loan debt for the graduating Class of 2008 was \$23,200. This level of debt often forces college students to forgo starting families or buying a home after leaving college.

- **In North Carolina**, students from median-income families needed about \$4,430 in state or institutional aid to afford college without loans in 2009.



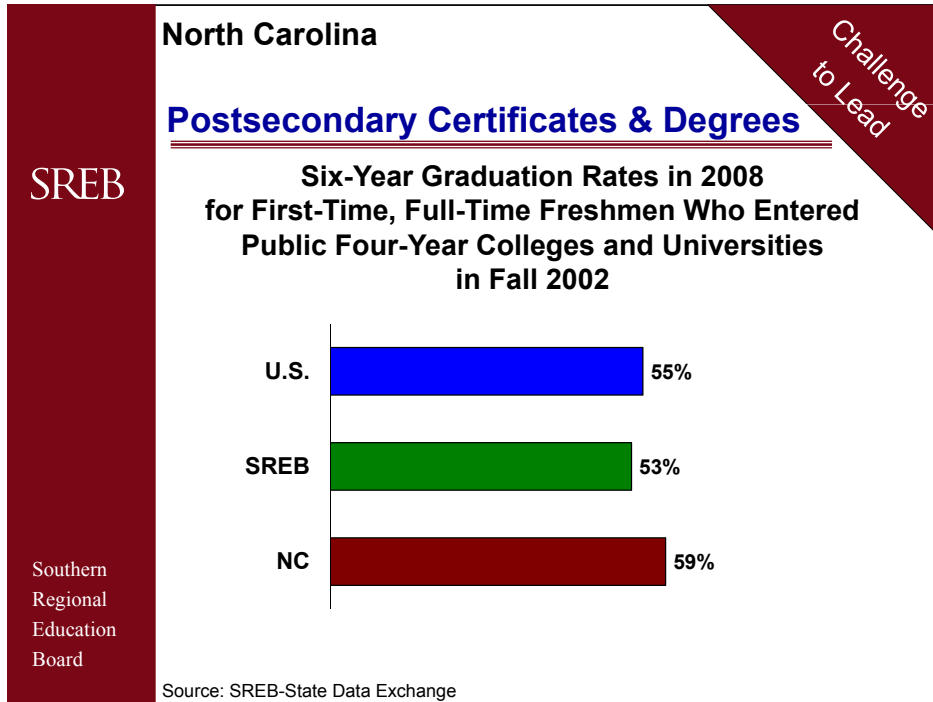
North Carolina's recent high school graduates enrolled in college at a higher rate than their peers.

Helping a higher percentage of your state's recent high school graduates enroll in college is key to reaching one of the *Challenge to Lead* goals — for your state's percentage of adults who earn postsecondary degrees or technical certificates to exceed the national rate. Research shows that students who enter college shortly after high school are more likely to earn a degree on time.

Every SREB state increased the college enrollment rate for recent high school graduates from 1998 to 2008. However, the region still trailed the nation in the percentage of recent high school graduates who enrolled in college in 2008 by 1 percentage point, the same as in 1998. SREB states will need to increase enrollment at a faster rate than the nation to meet the *Challenge to Lead* goal of exceeding the national enrollment rate.

But SREB state leaders also need to examine the relationships between high school graduation rates and college enrollment, persistence and completion rates if they want the numbers of college graduates to improve significantly. Policy-makers need to ensure that the path to college graduation remains open to all and that many more students finish high school and college with a degree or certificate.

- **North Carolina's** college enrollment rate of recent high school graduates was higher in 2008 than the rates in the nation and region.
- The state's college enrollment rate of recent high school graduates increased by 1 point since 1998.



North Carolina's graduation rate at four-year institutions topped U.S. and regional rates.

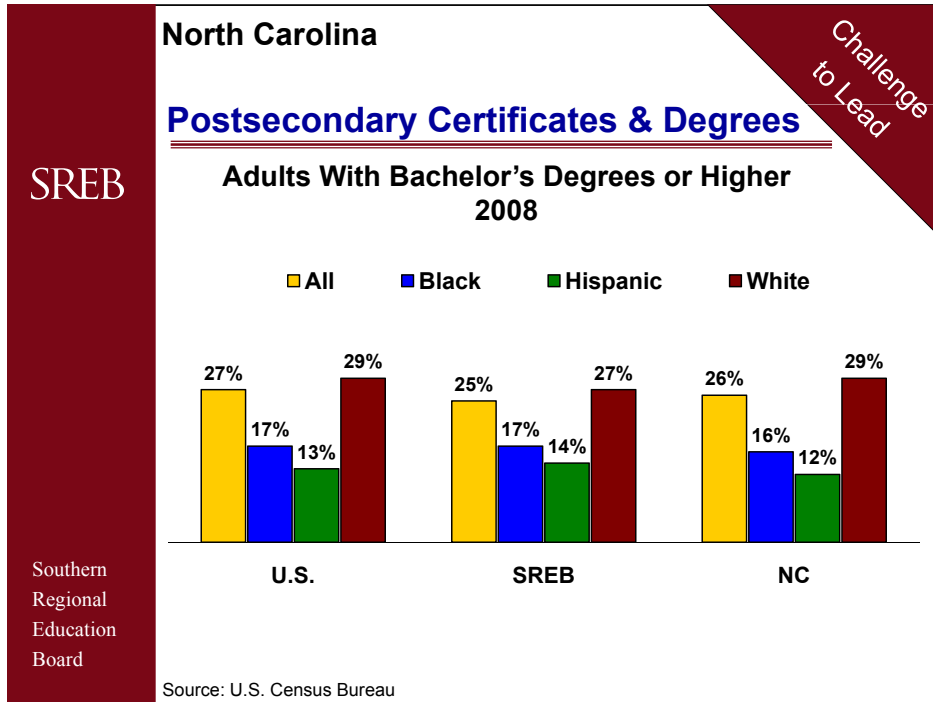
The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to improve graduation rates in colleges and universities. States should also work to increase the number of degrees and certificates awarded each year. States need a more educated work force in the future to fuel economic development and to build a higher quality of life for all residents.

A key indicator of college and university performance is the six-year graduation rate for students enrolled in four-year colleges and universities, and the three-year rate for students in two-year colleges. Calculating a true rate is difficult without a statewide data system that follows students if they transfer. Colleges and universities can only calculate rates for students who enter as freshmen and remain at the same institution.

In SREB states, 53 percent of first-time, full-time freshmen who entered public four-year colleges and universities in 2002 graduated from these institutions within six years. Individual SREB state rates ranged from 37 percent in Arkansas to 67 percent in Delaware and Virginia. **At two-year colleges in SREB states, 17 percent of first-time, full-time freshmen who entered in 2005 graduated within three years.** Individual state rates varied, with Florida's the highest at 31 percent.

A U.S. Department of Education study puts the four-year college rates in perspective: Researchers followed a sample group of students from the high school Class of 1992 who entered four-year colleges. Within eight and a half years, 66 percent had graduated from a four-year college — but not necessarily the first one they entered. Monitoring student transfer is essential to fully capture college completion in SREB states.

- **North Carolina's** public four-year colleges and universities reported that 59 percent of students who entered as first-time, full-time freshmen in 2002 graduated within six years from the institution they first attended. North Carolina's public two-year colleges reported that 20 percent of first-time, full-time students who entered in 2005 graduated within three years.



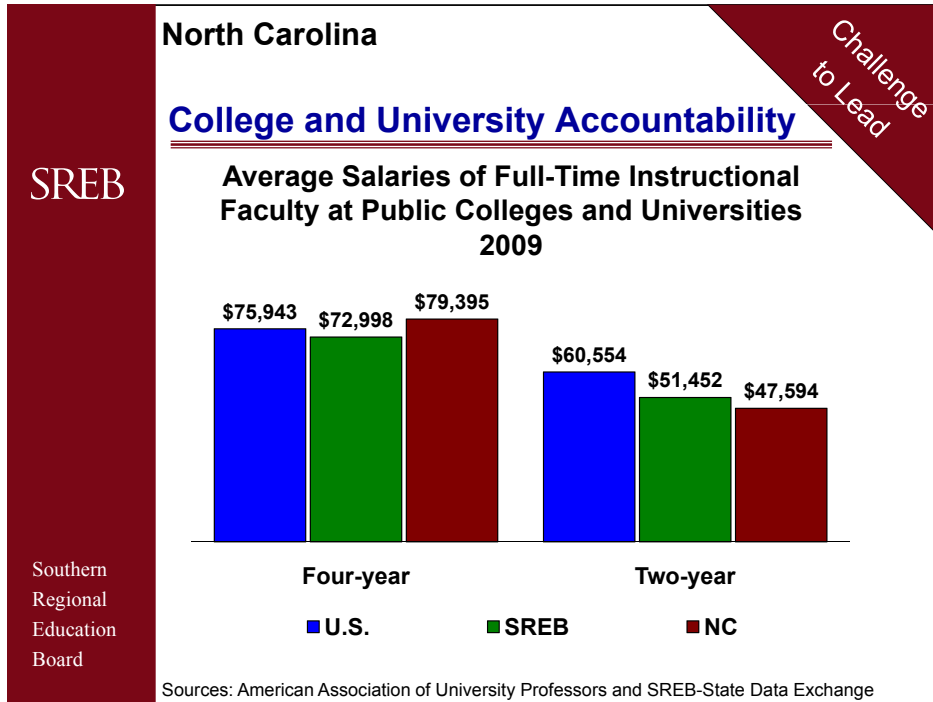
The percent of adults in North Carolina with bachelor's degrees trailed the nation.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to increase the percentages of adults with bachelor's degrees to above the national average. The number of adults with these degrees in each state depends largely on the number of students who graduate from colleges and universities *in the state*. But it also depends on the movement of college graduates *among states*. In the late 1990s, many SREB states attracted college graduates to "knowledge industries," and many of them stayed. Other areas lost college graduates when job opportunities were not available locally.

State efforts to increase the number of adults with bachelor's degrees generally focus on increasing college enrollment and improving the retention of college students. These efforts also include narrowing gaps in the percentages of all groups of students earning degrees, providing sufficient student financial aid and ensuring better access to postsecondary education. States should also work to enroll more working-age adults without college degrees in higher education and to assist them as they seek a bachelor's degree.

In the United States, 27 percent of adults ages 25 and older in 2008 had earned at least a bachelor's degree, only 2 percentage points higher than in SREB states. But the percentages of adults with a bachelor's degree varied widely among SREB states, from 35 percent to 17 percent.

- **In North Carolina**, 26 percent of adults had earned bachelor's degrees or higher by 2008, a lower percentage than in the nation but higher than in the region. North Carolina increased the percentage of adults with a bachelor's degree by 3 points since 2002.
- In 2008, the percentages of black and Hispanic adults with bachelor's degrees in the state trailed the national and regional percentages for their peers. The percentage of white adults with bachelor's degrees equaled the national percentage and exceeded the region.



The average faculty salary at four-year colleges in North Carolina topped the national average.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals call for SREB states to ensure that salaries and benefits for college and university faculty members are competitive in the marketplace. To attract top faculty members, colleges and universities must remain nationally competitive, particularly in such disciplines as mathematics, science, engineering and business.

However, SREB states continue to trail the nation in faculty salaries. In 2009, the SREB average salary for faculty members at public four-year colleges was \$72,998 — 96 percent of the national average. At public two-year colleges, it was \$51,452 — 85 percent of the national average. Salaries in SREB states increased in the decade since 2000 but at about the same rate as salaries in the nation.

Some policy-makers point out that if the local cost of living is lower than regional or national averages, it might be appropriate for local compensation packages to be lower. Yet with the exception of obvious differences (such as real estate prices), living costs are generally the same throughout the continental United States. As a result, a college or university should offer competitive compensation packages — especially in high-demand subjects.

- **In North Carolina**, the average faculty salary at public four-year colleges and universities in 2009 was \$3,452 higher than the national average and \$6,397 higher than the regional average.
- The average faculty salary at public two-year colleges in the state was \$12,960 lower than the national average and \$3,858 lower than the regional average in 2009.

References

Page 3 — Actual and Projected Changes in Public Elementary and Secondary Enrollment

National Center for Education Statistics

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Page 4 — Children Under 18 Years Old Living in Poverty

The Annie E. Casey Foundation and U.S. Census Bureau

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Page 5 — Percent of Students Approved for Free or Reduced-Price Meals

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Page 6 — Public Prekindergarten Enrollment Related to Children in Poverty

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Pages 7–11 — Fourth-Grade NAEP Results

National Center for Education Statistics: National Assessment of Educational Progress, Early Grades Reading and Mathematics Assessments

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Pages 12–13 — Fourth-Grade State Standards and NAEP Results

State departments of education and National Center for Education Statistics: National Assessment of Educational Progress, Early Grades Reading and Mathematics Assessments

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Pages 14–18 — Eighth-Grade NAEP Results

National Center for Education Statistics: National Assessment of Educational Progress, Middle Grades Reading and Mathematics Assessments

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Pages 19–20 — Eighth-Grade State Standards and NAEP Results

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Page 21 — Eighth-Grade Students Taking College-Prep Math

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Page 22 — Ninth-Grade Enrollment Bulge

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Page 23 — HSTW Assessment Results on Reading

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Page 24 — Academic and Career Concentrations Beyond the Essential Core

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Page 25 — High School Exams

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Pages 26–27 — Graduating Seniors Taking and Passing AP Exams

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Pages 28–29 — Average ACT/SAT Scores

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Page 30 — Grade-Level Promoting Power

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Page 31 — High School Seniors Graduating on Time

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Pages 32–33 — High School Graduation Rates

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Page 34 — High School Graduation Rates by Gender

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Page 35 — Racial and Ethnic Proportions of Public High School Graduates

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Page 36 — Number of “Dropout Factories” in SREB States

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Page 37 — Percent of Core Academic Courses Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers

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Page 38 — Averages Salaries of Beginning Teachers

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Page 39 — SREB Benchmark Study Results

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Pages 40–41 — State Data Systems and Effective Use

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Page 42 — GED Awards by Age

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Page 43 — Percent of 25- to 44-Year-Olds Enrolled in Adult Education

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Page 45 — Estimated College Enrollment Rates of Recent High School Graduates

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Page 46 — Six-Year Graduation Rates at Public Four-Year Colleges and Universities

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Page 47 — Adults With Bachelor's Degrees or Higher

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Page 48 — Average Salaries of Full-Time Instructional Faculty at Public Colleges and Universities

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Challenge to Lead Goals for Education

The reports listed below for each goal, and other reports on the goals, are found at www.sreb.org.

1. All children are ready for the first grade.
Ready to Start: Ensuring High-Quality Prekindergarten in SREB States
2. Achievement in the early grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
Set for Success: Improving Reading and Mathematics Achievement in the Early Grades
3. Achievement in the middle grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
Keeping Middle Grades Students on the Path to Success in High School: Increasing Engagement and Achievement in SREB States
4. All young adults have a high school diploma — or, if not, pass the GED tests.
Gaining Ground on High School Graduation Rates in SREB States: Milestones and Guideposts
5. All recent high school graduates have solid academic preparation and are ready for post-secondary education and a career.
Getting Students Ready for College and Careers
6. Adults who are not high school graduates participate in literacy and job-skills training and further education.
A Smart Move in Tough Times: How SREB States Can Strengthen Adult Learning and the Work Force
7. The percentage of adults who earn postsecondary degrees or technical certificates exceeds national averages.
Creating College Opportunity for All: Prepared Students and Affordable Colleges
8. Every school has higher student performance and meets state academic standards for all students each year.
Focusing on Student Performance Through Accountability
9. Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal.
Schools Need Good Leaders Now: State Progress in Creating a Learning-Centered School Leadership System
10. Every student is taught by qualified teachers.
Resolve and Resources to Get a Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom
11. The quality of colleges and universities is regularly assessed and funding is targeted to quality, efficiency and state needs.
Holding Colleges and Universities Accountable for Meeting State Needs
12. The state places a high priority on an education system of schools, colleges and universities that is accountable.
From Goals to Results: Improving Education System Accountability

These goals are built on the groundbreaking education goals SREB states adopted in 2002 and challenge the 16 SREB states to lead the nation in educational progress.

