



A change in how N.C. schools are graded will lead to many getting a lower grade next year. **Chris Seward** - N&O file photo

VIEWPOINT

Why your kid's school might go from a 'C' to an 'F'

BY CHERYL P. MILAM - SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER EDITORIAL BOARD

Who is Michael Wolff?

DECEMBER 18, 2017 01:13 PM

UPDATED DECEMBER 18, 2017 01:15 PM

The change that the North Carolina General Assembly has made in how N.C. public and charter schools are ranked in 2018 is a disaster waiting to happen – and it's entirely avoidable.

Schools are currently ranked on a 15-point scale and assigned a grade based on their School Performance Score (85-100=A, 70-84=B, 55-69=C, 40-54=D, and below 40=F). However, the change will require grades to be assigned on a 10-point scale (90-100=A, 80-89=B, 70-79=C, 60-69=D, and below 60=F). This change will result in over half of the schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, and in the rest of the state, being labeled as “failing

schools” (those with assigned grades of D or F). So, a school like J.M. Alexander Middle School with a grade of C for 2017 (SPS of 58) will suddenly become an “F” school in 2018, and nothing will have changed in the school except this arbitrary new scale that is applied to it.

Not only is the labeling of more than 50 percent of our schools as “failing” problematic, but so is the fallacious formula for determining the School Performance Scores (SPS) themselves. The 80 percent proficiency/20 percent growth formula rewards schools with large numbers of affluent students and penalizes schools with large numbers of students who live in poverty. The current formula tells us much about the wealth of neighborhoods and very little about what happens to students in those schools in terms of the effectiveness of instruction those students receive (growth).

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North Carolina simply cannot afford another black eye. The grades assigned to our schools affect property values, business decisions about relocating or starting a business here and our standard of living in terms of social climate.

If you want to know what grade your child's

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school would receive on the 10-point scale, simply go to the website: www.ncpublicschools.org and click on the link “NC School Report Cards” in the left column. Find your county and school, then look for the School Performance Score. Compare the school’s grade for 2017 to what it would receive in 2018 on the 10-point scale.

Nothing will have changed in your child’s school – just this arbitrary scale. For a legislature that purports to be leading the way for business development and improving our standard of living, this misguided effort to “improve” schools will only result in shooting ourselves in the foot.

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Cheryl Milam **Photo by Michael Martin**

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