

Remote Charter Academies in North Carolina

What we are learning about quality in remote academies

Charter Schools Review Board · September 8, 2026

Roots to Wings



■ How This Work Began

The grant

NCAPCS received a federal Charter Schools Program grant from the U.S. Department of Education, which funds the NC GROW Charter Schools Grant. NCAPCS conceived this project. Safal Partners is the research and technical assistance partner.

The need

2023 legislation authorized charter schools to add a remote academy by amendment and to seek approval for standalone remote charters. Authorizations have grown quickly since, faster than the tools available to evaluate them.

Today

- 19 remote charter academies operate in 26-27.
- 15 are part of an existing charter.
- 4 are standalone virtual schools.
- 9 are opening this year, nearly double the number operating a year ago.

The statute authorizes these schools. It does not say how to evaluate them.

GS 115C-218.120 and related statutes do not specify how quality should be defined, evidenced, or reviewed. That is the gap this project was created to close.

■ Scope of This Work

The goal

Determine:

- What quality looks like in remote charter academies
- How schools can demonstrate quality
- How the state can use that information to make key decisions

Grounded in both national research and the North Carolina-specific context.

Completed to date

- Literature review of best practices for remote charters.
- Interviews and surveys with CSRB members, OCS staff, & operators.
- Implementation Guide (boils statute requirements down to simple language for operators)
- A draft Quality Indicators Rubric
- A draft Monitoring Framework.

What comes next

- Pilot rubric and framework with NC remote charter academies
- Share findings with operators, OCS, and CSRB.
- Refine framework based on results, in collaboration with OCS.
- Longer-term: Determine how OCS can use this information for monitoring and renewal decisions.

■ Why We Are Here Today

1

Nothing today is for a vote.

This is a progress update on work still in development.

2

We are not here to say whether remote instruction is good or bad.

That is a policy question. Our role is to help make the process work, based on what the research and the data show.

3

There is a gap between what works and what anyone can see.

The research points to specific practices. Almost none of them are visible in the data the state collects today.

4

We need your input on where this goes next.

You know this sector and these decisions better than anyone. We would rather ask now than present something finished later.

■ What We Heard From You

Across conversations and surveys with Board members, the Office of Charter Schools, and operators, two ideas kept surfacing together.

A floor for every school

The bottom line is whether students are learning and growing. A full-time academy and a part-time credit recovery program have very different missions, but both have to be able to show that. This is not negotiable and should not vary school to school.

Fidelity to what was promised

Is the school doing what it told the state it would do, for the students it said it would serve? This came up in nearly every conversation. Two schools can both be succeeding and still look different on the same measure, because they set out to do different things.

North Carolina has no shared criteria for either one today.

The hard part, and the place we most need your help, is building one framework that holds the floor for every school while staying fair to what each school actually set out to do.

■ What the Research Points To

Three signals show up consistently across the K-12 remote and blended learning evidence base.

Adult presence

How often a student has real contact with a known adult at the school predicts outcomes more strongly than platform choice, curriculum vendor, or the split between live and independent work.

Engagement signals

Login patterns, assignment submission rates, and drops in participation show up weeks before grades do. They are the earliest reliable warning that a student is disengaged.

Preparation at intake

Knowing who needs help on day one. What a school learns about a student at enrollment, prior record and readiness habits, predicts how they will do well before grades show it. New students are the highest-risk group. The school's job is to identify them at the start and put supports in place.

Drawn from a review of 52 sources on K-12 remote and blended learning, completed for this project.

■ Where North Carolina Stands

What the data shows

Performance data, 2025-26

- 60% of rated academies (3 of 5) are low-performing, vs. 21% of other charter schools
- About 75% of remote academy students attend a low performing school, vs. 12% for other charter schools
- 20% (1 of 5) met growth, vs. 70% of other charter schools
- Half of remote academies are too small to be rated at all
- But every rated academy improved this year, and two moved out of low-performing status.

Is the difference in performance due to different student populations?

Comparison of remote academy vs. brick & mortar charters:

- Economically disadvantaged: 65%, vs. 41% for B&M.
 - DPI found that poverty explains about 25% of the variation. Most of the difference is something else.
- Students with disabilities: 11 to 13% vs. 11.7% for B&M.
- English learners: about 2% vs. 5.7% for B&M.

What is also true

Why families choose these schools

- Medical needs and geographic isolation
- Athletic and arts schedules
- Settings where a traditional school has not worked

What no one can see statewide

- How often students meet a teacher
- How engagement is tracked
- How families are prepared at intake
- Whether students stay or move on mid-year
- Why two academies improved sharply this year and others did not
- **Should this wait until renewal, three years from now?**

■ The Problem That Still Needs Solving

The constant: are students growing and learning?

- Every remote academy needs to show this, regardless of model or mission.
- A letter grade is one indicator of that, but there are other metrics that also provide important insights.

What does vary, and has to be accounted for

- Size. One academy enrolls more than 3,000 students. Another enrolls fewer than 30.
- Staffing. Some hire their own teachers. Others deliver instruction through a platform.
- Context. Formative assessment practices, staffing procedures, and student turnover differ widely.
- Mission. A credit recovery program and a full-time elementary academy are not doing the same job.

Where we need your feedback

What should the common minimum standards for remote charters be, and where should expectations adapt to the school?

■ What a Pilot Could Answer

Testing the tools

- 1 Which quality indicators can actually be measured in practice?
- 2 What kinds of data collection and review can schools and OCS realistically sustain?
- 3 Do the research-based best practices predict performance and growth in North Carolina, not just in the national research?
- 4 Where does the rubric need to adapt to a school's model or mission?

Learning from the schools

- 1 **What accounts for positive progress?** What are the academies that improved this year actually doing?
- 2 **How does school size affect quality and outcomes?** Does quality look different in a small academy than in a large one?
- 3 **Platform vs. Internal Staff.** Does it matter whether a school hires its own teachers or delivers instruction through a platform?
- 4 **Attrition.** What drives student turnover, and how does it relate to the ability to collect key data and achieve a school's goals?

Participation would be voluntary. We are exploring incentives to help recruit schools.

■ Three Questions for You

1

Which indicators should be the same for every remote academy, and which should adapt to a school's model and mission?

2

What data or information would you want to be able to see about a remote academy that you cannot see today?

3

If we piloted this with a handful of schools over the next year, what would you need to see in the results before this could be widely used?

Thoughts after today are just as welcome as thoughts in the room.

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