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State and National Grades Issued for Education Performance, Policy; U.S. Earns a C-plus, Maryland Ranks First for Fifth Straight Year

Report Also Explores School Climate, Discipline, and Safety

Grades and Highlights Reports Issued for All 50 States and D.C.

WASHINGTON—Jan. 10, 2013—As a shocked nation struggles to come to terms with the recent school shootings in Newtown, Conn., policymakers, school leaders, and the public alike have renewed their attention to the need to ensure a safe and secure environment in which students can grow and learn, and in which educators can teach. At the same time, policymakers and school leaders are focusing intently on the full range of factors that contribute to an academically successful school climate—strong peer and student-teacher relationships, effective and positive ways to address student misbehavior, supports for social and emotional development, and the involvement of parents and community groups. These issues are at the heart of the 2013 edition of *Education Week's Quality Counts* report: *Code of Conduct: Safety, Discipline, and School Climate*.

A collaboration between the *Education Week* newsroom and the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, *Quality Counts 2013* investigates the impact of a school's social and disciplinary environment on students' ability to learn and on the teachers and administrators tasked with guiding them. The report's journalism takes an in-depth look at a range of school-climate factors—including strong and positive peer interactions, a sense of safety and security, and school disciplinary policies and practices—that help to lay the groundwork for student achievement.

To complement the reporting, the EPE Research Center conducted an original survey of more than 1,300 educators, who shared their insights and opinions on school climate and discipline in their schools. Highlights of the study are featured in the report.

“For the past couple decades, education reform has concentrated on the obviously academic factors that define schooling—curriculum, assessments, accountability, and teachers,” said Christopher B. Swanson, Vice President of Editorial Projects in Education, the nonprofit organization that publishes *Education Week*. “While these issues are clearly important, there is growing agreement that a school's broader climate profoundly affects student achievement and serves as a precursor for effective instruction, deep engagement in learning, and academic success.”

THE STATE OF THE STATES

Against this backdrop, the annual *Quality Counts* report card—the most comprehensive ongoing assessment of the state of American education—also chronicles the challenges the nation and many states continue to face in delivering a high-quality education to all students. For 2013, the nation receives a C-plus when graded across the six distinct areas of policy and performance tracked by the report, marking a slight improvement since last year. For the fifth year in a row, Maryland earns honors as the top-ranked state, posting the nation's highest overall grade, the only B-plus awarded.

Massachusetts ranks second with a B and is followed closely by New York and then by Virginia. These perennial top-performers took the same slots in last year's rankings. Arkansas rounds out the top five with a grade of B-minus. Kentucky (ranked 10th) joins the top-10 states for the first time this year, while Florida (sixth) regains its top-10 standing after falling from the list in 2012. At the other end of the grading scale, South Dakota for the second year in a row takes the bottom spot, with a grade of D-plus. In all, 20 states receive grades of C or lower, a tally that includes the District of Columbia.

New findings from the report's annual Chance-for-Success Index—which captures the role of education in a person's life, from cradle to career—show the country struggling to provide opportunities to succeed and many states lagging far behind the national leaders. The U.S. as a whole receives a C-plus on the index. Massachusetts remains at the top of the national rankings for the sixth year running, earning the only A-minus and followed closely by Connecticut, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Vermont, each posting grades of B-plus. Mississippi, Nevada, and New Mexico receive the lowest scores, with grades of D-plus or lower. Scores on the Chance-for-Success Index fell one point from last year and remain below pre-recession levels, due in part to continued weakness in conditions that support early schooling success, including family income and parental employment.

Quality Counts 2013 features new results from the EPE Research Center's annual analysis of school finance, which examines educational expenditure patterns and the distribution of those funds within states. Rather than simply considering raw dollars spent, the Center's analysis of expenditures examines levels of state spending relative to relevant benchmarks, such as the national average or the total size of a state's budget. The report's finance indicators are based on data from 2010, the most recent year available.

The national grade for school finance held nearly constant at a C for 2013, with little change in either of the dimensions of educational finance tracked by *Quality Counts*—spending and equity. Wyoming, a longtime leader in this category, has gained almost four points since last year and earns the only grade of A awarded for school finance in 2013. West Virginia, which ranks second in the nation, experienced the greatest one-year gain in this category. Due to a large and widely reported increase in per-pupil funding levels, West Virginia's score climbed more than 11 points in the past year, raising its grade from a C-plus to an A-minus. This year's top five in school finance is rounded out by Connecticut, New York, and Vermont, with each earning grades of B-plus.

This year's report also updates progress in the area of transitions and alignment, which tracks state-policy efforts to better coordinate the connections between K-12 schooling and early-childhood education, postsecondary schooling, and the workforce. The nation as a whole earns a B-minus in this category for *Quality Counts 2013*, up from a C-plus two years ago, when the analysis was last updated. Eight states earn grades of A for transitions and alignment, with Georgia posting the first perfect score in this category for enacting all 14 policies tracked by the report. Overall, 25 states have improved their grades since 2011, with significant policymaking activity seen across all three domains tracked in this section—early childhood, college readiness, and economy and workforce.

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES AVAILABLE AT EDWEEK.ORG

- The full *Quality Counts 2013* report and interactive state report cards: www.edweek.org/go/qc13.
- State Highlights Reports for the 50 states and the District of Columbia featuring detailed, state-specific data and our comprehensive grading of the states across six categories of educational performance and policy: www.edweek.org/go/qc13shr.
- Interactive features, including a timeline of watershed moments in the history of school violence and security, and a searchable database of suspension and expulsion information for thousands of districts and schools, drawn from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights.

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The EPE Research Center is the research division of the Bethesda, Md.-based nonprofit Editorial Projects in Education. It conducts policy surveys, collects data, and performs analyses that appear in the annual Quality Counts, Technology Counts, and Diplomas Count reports. The center also conducts independent research studies and maintains the Education Counts and EdWeek Maps online data resources. The EPE Research Center is on the Web at www.edweek.org/rc.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

SAFETY, DISCIPLINE, AND SCHOOL CLIMATE

New Findings from *Quality Counts 2013: Code of Conduct*

NOTE: Embargoed for release until 12:01 a.m. EST on Thursday, Jan. 10, 2013

About *Quality Counts 2013*

Code of Conduct—Safety, Discipline, and School Climate will be released on Jan. 10, 2013. This 17th annual edition of the report examines the impact of a school’s social and disciplinary environment on students’ ability to learn and on the teachers and administrators tasked with guiding them. *Education Week* journalists take an in-depth look at a range of school-climate factors—including strong peer relationships, a sense of safety and security, and school disciplinary policies and practices—that help to lay the groundwork for academic success.

Quality Counts 2013 also features highlights from an original study by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, which includes a survey of more than 1,300 school-level administrators and educators who are registered users of edweek.org. Respondents shared their firsthand insights and opinions on a range of issues related to school climate and discipline in their schools.

To help guide your reporting, we have highlighted some of the key findings below. For the purposes of the national totals reported here, the District of Columbia is counted as a state.

Key Findings

School climate emerges as a leading factor for promoting educational success, cited by a large majority of school-level administrators and teachers.

- Overall, 74 percent of respondents report that school climate is “very important” to student achievement.
- A majority of respondents also cite school safety (64 percent) and school discipline policies (53 percent) as “very important” factors for student achievement.
- Teaching quality was identified as the leading factor (among those presented) for promoting achievement, cited by 92 percent of respondents as “very important.” Only 38 percent of respondents consider family background to be “very important” for student achievement.
- School administrators and teachers generally express similar views on the importance of school climate, discipline, and safety for educational success.

Opinions are split regarding the effectiveness of common methods for addressing student misbehavior. The EPE Research Center asked respondents to rate a set of five—largely punitive—disciplinary-referral strategies or approaches.

- Both administrators and teachers tend to report greater levels of support for less severe (i.e., less punitive) disciplinary options.

- In-school suspensions are considered effective by three-quarters of respondents, while more severe out-of-school suspensions received support from fewer than half of respondents (76 percent versus 46 percent of respondents respectively).
- Fewer than half of respondents believe that “zero tolerance” policies and expulsions are effective (48 percent and 41 percent of respondents respectively).
- Teachers are somewhat more likely to view punitive disciplinary approaches as effective ways to address student misbehavior, compared with school administrators.

Schools are pursuing a range of strategies for improving student behavior.

- About 80 percent of respondents report that their schools have adopted some type of concerted approach to managing student behavior.
- The majority of educators surveyed (53 percent) report using a schoolwide behavioral-management program (such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, or PBIS).
- Thirty-five percent of respondents report using social and emotional learning initiatives; 21 percent are using restorative practices.
- More than half of respondents report that their schools have used multiple strategies.

Poverty levels have a strong influence on educators’ views of school climate conditions. The EPE Research Center compared results for groups of respondents based on the percent of low-income students served by their schools.

- Educators from low-poverty schools (25 percent or fewer low-income students) reported consistently more positive school environments than respondents serving student populations with moderate or high levels of poverty.
- Eighty-three percent of educators in low-poverty schools report that students and staff feel safe, compared with 46 percent in high-poverty schools (those with more than 75 percent low-income students).
- Educators in low-poverty schools are roughly twice as likely to feel that their school’s climate is conducive to teaching and learning or that it fosters social and emotional well-being.
- Educators in low-poverty schools are four times as likely to report that students are well-behaved, compared with high-poverty schools (58 percent and 14 percent respectively).

Differing perspectives emerged between school administrators and teachers, with regard to some key discipline and climate issues. The EPE Research Center performed a special series of analyses to compare the views of principals and other school administrators with those of teachers (including instructional specialists).

- Teachers are twice as likely as administrators to report that their schools devote insufficient attention to students’ social and emotional development, compared with the emphasis on academic skills and content knowledge.
- Forty percent of teachers indicate that there is too little attention to social and emotional development, compared with only 18 percent of principals and other school administrators.
- Administrators provide consistently more positive assessments of school-climate conditions, across a range of indicators.
- Seventy-seven percent of administrators “strongly agree” that their school’s climate is conducive to learning, compared with less than half of teachers (48 percent). Administrators are twice as likely to “strongly agree” that students are well-behaved (60 percent of administrators versus 28 percent of teachers).
- Teachers report feeling less supported (than do principals and other administrators) by parents and the school administration when managing student behavior.

Additional Resources

The 2013 release of *Quality Counts* also includes:

- The **Chance-for-Success Index**, which grades the nation and states on 13 indicators capturing the critical role that education plays as a person moves from childhood, through the K-12 system, and into college and the workforce.
- The **State of the States Report Card**, an annual update of national and state grades in key areas of performance and policy: the Chance-for-Success Index; the K-12 Achievement Index; the Teaching Profession; Standards, Assessments, and Accountability; Transitions and Alignment; and School Finance.
- **State Highlights Reports**, individualized online reports featuring state-specific findings from *Quality Counts*, including our comprehensive state report cards.
- **Interactive Timeline**, which charts watershed moments in the history of school violence and safety in the U.S.
- **School-Discipline Database**, which allows users to search for federal school-discipline data in thousands of schools and districts nationwide.

All of these resources are available on the *Education Week* Web site: www.edweek.org/go/qc13.

GRADING SUMMARY

	Overall State Grade			Quality Counts 2013		Quality Counts 2012		Quality Counts 2012		Quality Counts 2013		Quality Counts 2012		Quality Counts 2013	
	Overall State Grade			Chance for Success		K-12 Achievement		Standards, Assessments, & Accountability		Transitions & Alignment		Teaching Profession		School Finance	
	grade	score	rank	grade	rank	grade	rank	grade	rank	grade	rank	grade	rank	grade	rank
Alabama	C+	76.6	30	C-	43	D	44	A-	13	B	14	C	19	C-	32
Alaska	C-	71.0	47	C	35	D	43	C	43	C-	42	D-	51	B-	13
Arizona	C-	72.2	43	C-	47	D+	31	B+	25	C+	26	D-	47	D+	43
Arkansas	B-	81.7	5	C-	42	D	34	A	6	A	2	B+	2	C	26
California	C	75.5	36	C-	44	D	35	A	10	B-	20	C-	25	C-	38
Colorado	C	76.1	32	B	10	C	10	B-	32	B-	20	D	42	C-	37
Connecticut	C+	78.9	16	B+	5	C-	16	C+	39	C+	26	C	29	B+	5
Delaware	C+	78.0	19	B-	18	D+	29	B+	26	C+	26	C	22	B-	14
District of Columbia	C-	71.5	45	C+	21	F	51	B	30	C+	26	D-	48	NA	NA
Florida	B-	81.1	6	C	34	C-	12	A	5	A	4	B	4	D+	39
Georgia	B-	81.0	7	C	37	C-	22	A-	18	A	1	B-	10	C-	31
Hawaii	C+	76.7	29	C+	29	D+	28	B+	22	C-	42	C+	17	NA	NA
Idaho	C-	70.9	49	C	33	C-	18	B+	27	C-	42	D-	50	D-	49
Illinois	C+	76.7	28	C+	24	C-	21	A-	19	C	36	D+	34	C+	18
Indiana	C+	77.8	20	C	31	D+	33	A	1	B+	9	D	46	C	24
Iowa	C	75.9	34	B-	12	D	40	C	47	B-	20	C+	13	C	27
Kansas	C	75.2	37	B-	14	D+	26	B-	34	C	36	D+	37	C+	20
Kentucky	B-	80.1	10	C	38	C-	13	A-	20	A	4	B-	5	C-	34
Louisiana	C+	79.0	15	C-	48	F	48	A	2	A	4	B-	11	C	21
Maine	C	75.9	33	C+	25	C	11	C-	50	B-	20	D+	35	B	10
Maryland	B+	87.5	1	B+	6	B	3	B+	24	A	2	B	3	B	8
Massachusetts	B	84.1	2	A-	1	B	1	B+	23	C	36	C+	14	B	9
Michigan	C+	77.3	24	C	30	D	41	A-	17	B-	20	C	19	C	22
Minnesota	C	74.2	39	B	7	C	9	C-	49	C-	42	D+	36	C	23
Mississippi	C-	71.0	48	D+	49	F	50	A	10	C	36	D	41	D	45
Missouri	C	72.8	41	C+	28	D	37	C+	38	C	36	D+	33	C-	36
Montana	C-	72.2	44	C+	22	C	6	C	41	D-	51	D+	32	C	28
Nebraska	C-	71.2	46	B-	13	D	39	D+	51	D	49	C-	31	C+	15
Nevada	C-	69.7	50	D	51	D	36	C	45	C	36	C-	28	D	46
New Hampshire	C+	77.1	25	B+	3	C+	5	C	42	C+	26	D	44	C+	19
New Jersey	B-	80.8	8	B+	4	B	2	C	44	B-	20	D+	38	B	7
New Mexico	C	75.9	35	D	50	D-	47	A-	15	B+	9	C	23	C-	30
New York	B	83.1	3	B-	16	C-	24	A-	15	B	14	B-	7	B+	3
North Carolina	C+	77.7	21	C	32	C-	20	A	10	B	14	C+	16	D	48
North Dakota	C+	76.8	27	B	8	C-	23	B	28	C+	26	D+	40	C	25
Ohio	B-	79.6	12	C+	27	C-	15	A	4	C+	26	C	18	C+	17
Oklahoma	C+	76.5	31	C	39	D	38	A	8	B+	9	C-	24	D+	44
Oregon	C	72.7	42	C	41	D	46	B-	35	B	14	D	45	C-	33
Pennsylvania	C+	78.2	18	B-	11	C	7	C+	40	C+	26	C	21	B-	12
Rhode Island	C+	78.7	17	B-	19	C-	19	B	29	C+	26	C-	27	B	6
South Carolina	C+	76.9	26	C	40	D	45	A	6	C-	42	B+	1	C-	35
South Dakota	D+	69.3	51	B-	17	D+	30	C	48	D	49	D-	49	D+	40
Tennessee	C+	77.6	22	C-	45	D	42	A-	21	A	4	B-	9	D+	42
Texas	C+	79.4	14	C	36	C-	17	A-	13	A	4	C+	15	D+	41
Utah	C	74.6	38	C+	20	D+	32	B-	33	B+	9	D	43	D	47
Vermont	B-	79.9	11	B+	2	C+	4	B	30	C-	42	C-	30	B+	4
Virginia	B	82.9	4	B	9	C	8	A	8	B	14	B-	6	C+	16
Washington	C	73.8	40	C+	26	C-	25	C+	37	C-	42	C-	26	C	29
West Virginia	B-	80.8	9	C-	46	F	49	A	3	B+	9	B-	8	A-	2
Wisconsin	C+	79.4	13	B-	15	C-	14	C	46	B	14	C+	12	B	11
Wyoming	C+	77.5	23	C+	23	D+	27	C+	36	C+	26	D+	39	A	1
U.S.	C+	76.9		C+		C-		B		B-		C		C	

Note: States are ranked based on unrounded scores. The District of Columbia and Hawaii are single-district jurisdictions. As a result, it is not possible to calculate measures of financial equity, which capture the distribution of funding across districts within a state. The District of Columbia and Hawaii do not receive grades for school finance.

SOURCE: EPE Research Center, 2013. This table integrates findings reported in the 2012 and 2013 editions of *Quality Counts*.