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Quality Counts Marks 20 Years Report Explores New Directions in Accountability

Nation Earns C, Massachusetts Ranks First in “State of the States” Report Card

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

WASHINGTON—Jan. 7, 2016—For years, the movement to improve the nation’s schools has been fought largely on two fronts: academic standards as one battleground, and accountability as the other. Testing has also become highly contested and increasingly politicized territory. In some ways, the questions driving the public debate have been straightforward: What should students know and be able to do? How should that learning be measured? What should the consequences be for failing to meet performance or improvement goals? Despite the seeming simplicity of these questions, the answers have been anything but clear.

For many, the very term “accountability” has become synonymous with testing, particularly the type of mandatory standardized assessments at the center of federally driven school accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act. But now that the NCLB era has ended and the successor Every Student Succeeds Act has become law, America’s schools stand at a crossroads. The path chosen in the coming days may shape the course of education accountability for years to come.

The 2016 edition of *Education Week’s Quality Counts* report—*Called to Account: New Directions in School Accountability*—examines how new state and federal strategies are transforming the assessment of school performance and reshaping the consequences for poor results. The new Every Student Succeeds Act is widely believed to herald a shift in authority away from the federal government and back to the states and school districts. Pressure is also mounting for accountability systems to go beyond test scores and incorporate other academic and non-academic factors in meaningful ways. *Education Week’s* journalists investigate these and other pivotal issues, delivering in-depth insights and lessons learned from the work of states and local schools systems already on the cutting edge of these trends.

“This year’s *Quality Counts*, which marks the 20th edition of the report, could not be more timely,” said Christopher B. Swanson, Vice President of Editorial Projects in Education, the nonprofit organization that publishes *Education Week*. “After a decade and a half of strong federal influence over school accountability, the states are poised to take the helm again and chart their own course. This promises to be a period of great innovation and opportunity, but also one of considerable uncertainty and divergence, when states may take very different paths forward.”

THE STATE OF THE STATES

In addition to the special focus on accountability, *Quality Counts 2016* features the report’s hallmark report card on the state of education for the nation and states. This year, the Education Week Research Center issues overall summative grades, as well as updated scores in each of the three categories that comprise the report’s grading rubric: Chance-for-Success, K-12 Achievement, and School Finance.

The nation receives an overall grade of C on its 2016 report card, with a score of 74.4 out of a possible 100 points, virtually the same result as a year ago. Massachusetts earns top marks this year with a score 86.8 and the only B-plus awarded. Consistently a strong performer, the state improved on the B it earned

in 2015. Maryland, New Jersey, and Vermont—also fixtures at the top of the state rankings—earn grades of B this year. At the other end of the grading scale, Nevada ranks last, with a grade of D and a score of 65.2. Mississippi and New Mexico also receive Ds. Most states (33) earn grades somewhere between a C-minus and a C-plus.

Quality Counts' signature Chance-for-Success Index—which captures the role of education in a person's life from cradle to career—shows the nation earning a C-plus in 2016, holding steady in its efforts to promote positive learning experiences for youths and opportunities for adults to make good on a good education. For the ninth consecutive year, Massachusetts tops the nation, receiving the only A-minus. Five states—Connecticut, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Vermont—earn grades of B-plus. At the low end of the rankings, New Mexico receives a D-plus and Nevada a D.

The Education Week Research Center's K-12 Achievement Index is newly updated for the 2016 "State of the States" report card. This year, the nation earns a C-minus on the index, which assesses the performance of a state's public schools against 18 indicators capturing: current achievement levels, improvements over time, and poverty-based gaps. Massachusetts receives the only B awarded this year, continuing its streak as the nation's top-achieving state, a position it has held since the index was first introduced in 2008. New Jersey finishes second with the only B-minus; three states (Maryland, New Hampshire, and Vermont) earn grades of C-plus. Mississippi and New Mexico finish last in the nation, both receiving grades of D-minus.

Rounding out this year's report card are results for the Education Week Research Center's annual analysis of school finance, which examines educational expenditure patterns and the distribution of those funds within states. Data are from 2013, the most recent year available. The U.S. earns a C for school finance, with the national grade showing little movement over the past six years. With a score of 88.1 and a B-plus, New York earns top marks in school finance this year, edging out Wyoming (87.7 points and a B-plus), which had ranked first for seven consecutive years. Connecticut and Maryland also earn grades of B-plus, while Idaho receives the nation's only failing grade on school finance. In all, 16 states post a D-plus or lower.

QUALITY COUNTS AT 20

This year marks the 20th edition of *Education Week's* long-running *Quality Counts* report, which was introduced in 1997 to track state progress in implementing then-new standards-based-reform policies. To mark the occasion, the Education Week Research Center draws on two decades of *Quality Counts* news analysis and research to offer a unique perspective on the nation's progress—and the challenges its schools have faced—during this period.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE AT EDWEEK.ORG

- The full *Quality Counts 2016* report, including in-depth reporting on new directions in school accountability, a retrospective look at highlights and milestones from the past 20 years, and an original analysis of national and state achievement trends: www.edweek.org/go/qc16.
- State Highlights Reports for the 50 states and the District of Columbia featuring detailed, state-specific data and our comprehensive "State of the States" grades for educational performance: www.edweek.org/go/qc16shr.
- Interactive map and report card for delving into *Quality Counts'* signature grading rubric: www.edweek.org/go/qc16map.
- Interactive Grading Calculator that lets users try their hand at grading by assigning different weights for the importance of various outcomes: www.edweek.org/go/qc16calculate.

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The Education Week 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 online data resources. The Research Center is on the Web at www.edweek.org/rc.

GRADING SUMMARY 2016

	OVERALL STATE GRADE			Quality Counts 2016 Chance for Success			Quality Counts 2016 K-12 Achievement			Quality Counts 2016 School Finance		
	grade	score	rank	grade	score	rank	grade	score	rank	grade	score	rank
	Alabama	D+	68.1	47	C-	70.4	47	D	64.6	45	D+	69.4
Alaska	C	75.1	20	C+	76.7	31	D	65.6	42	B	83.2	10
Arizona	D+	68.5	45	C	72.8	43	C-	70.7	26	D-	61.8	48
Arkansas	C-	69.8	40	C-	70.8	45	D	66.0	41	C-	72.5	26
California	C-	69.8	41	C	73.6	39	D+	69.3	30	D	66.4	41
Colorado	C	74.5	24	B	83.2	13	C-	71.8	18	D+	68.6	37
Connecticut	B-	82.5	5	B+	87.4	4	C	73.3	12	B+	86.7	3
Delaware	C+	76.8	16	C+	79.3	25	D+	67.9	35	B	83.1	11
Dist. of Columbia	C	72.9	28	B	82.8	14	D	63.1	47	N/A	N/A	N/A
Florida	C-	72.4	30	C	75.1	37	C	73.9	11	D+	68.3	38
Georgia	C-	71.9	33	C	74.6	38	C-	71.2	22	C-	70.0	33
Hawaii	C	74.0	25	C+	78.9	26	D+	69.0	32	N/A	N/A	N/A
Idaho	D+	67.9	48	C	75.5	34	D+	69.2	31	F	59.0	49
Illinois	C+	76.6	17	B-	80.5	20	C-	71.2	20	C+	78.2	16
Indiana	C	74.9	21	C+	77.5	29	C	75.3	8	C-	72.0	28
Iowa	C	76.2	19	B	84.6	10	C-	70.3	29	C	73.7	23
Kansas	C	73.8	26	B-	80.7	19	D	66.0	40	C	74.7	20
Kentucky	C	73.3	27	C	75.4	35	C-	72.3	16	C-	72.1	27
Louisiana	D+	68.7	44	C-	70.3	48	D	62.8	49	C	72.9	25
Maine	C+	78.5	14	B-	79.5	24	C-	72.4	15	B	83.5	9
Maryland	B	82.7	4	B	84.7	9	C+	76.8	5	B+	86.6	4
Massachusetts	B+	86.8	1	A-	92.3	1	B	85.2	1	B	83.0	12
Michigan	C-	71.7	35	C	76.1	33	D	65.6	43	C	73.4	24
Minnesota	B-	79.6	10	B+	87.4	5	C	75.9	6	C	75.5	19
Mississippi	D	65.6	50	C-	69.8	49	D-	60.0	51	D+	67.1	40
Missouri	C-	72.2	31	C+	78.7	28	D+	67.6	36	C-	70.5	32
Montana	C	72.8	29	C+	77.2	30	C-	70.5	28	C-	70.7	31
Nebraska	C+	76.5	18	B	84.1	11	C-	71.6	19	C	73.8	22
Nevada	D	65.2	51	D	66.5	51	D	66.2	38	D	62.8	46
New Hampshire	B-	82.3	6	B+	89.1	2	C+	79.4	3	C+	78.4	15
New Jersey	B	85.1	2	B+	88.1	3	B-	81.0	2	B	86.2	5
New Mexico	D	65.8	49	D+	66.9	50	D-	61.8	50	D+	68.7	36
New York	B-	79.8	9	B-	80.8	18	C-	70.6	27	B+	88.1	1
North Carolina	C-	70.6	37	C+	76.5	32	D+	69.0	33	D	66.2	42
North Dakota	C+	77.1	15	B	85.3	7	D+	68.1	34	C+	77.9	17
Ohio	C	74.7	23	C+	78.9	27	C-	70.7	25	C	74.6	21
Oklahoma	D+	68.2	46	C	72.6	44	D	66.1	39	D	66.0	44
Oregon	C-	70.2	39	C	75.2	36	D	66.4	37	D+	69.1	35
Pennsylvania	B-	80.5	7	B-	82.1	15	C	74.6	10	B	84.9	8
Rhode Island	C+	78.9	13	B-	79.8	22	C-	71.0	23	B	85.8	6
South Carolina	C-	69.6	43	C	73.4	41	D	64.4	46	C-	70.9	30
South Dakota	C-	70.3	38	B-	79.7	23	D	65.2	44	D	66.1	43
Tennessee	C-	70.9	36	C	73.5	40	C-	72.0	17	D+	67.3	39
Texas	C-	69.7	42	C	73.3	42	C-	70.9	24	D	64.8	45
Utah	C-	72.2	32	B-	81.6	17	C	73.2	14	D-	61.9	47
Vermont	B	83.8	3	B+	86.8	6	C+	78.8	4	B	85.7	7
Virginia	C+	79.2	12	B	85.0	8	C	75.8	7	C+	76.8	18
Washington	C	74.9	22	B-	80.4	21	C	73.2	13	C-	71.1	29
West Virginia	C-	71.8	34	C-	70.7	46	D	62.8	48	B-	81.9	13
Wisconsin	C+	79.4	11	B	83.3	12	C	74.6	9	B-	80.3	14
Wyoming	B-	80.2	8	B-	81.8	16	C-	71.2	21	B+	87.7	2
U.S.	C	74.4		C+	77.8		C-	71.0		C	74.4	

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: Education Week Research Center, 2016.