



## **Quality Counts: Report Issues Grades for Education Performance, Policy**

As an election year begins, the nation also approaches the third anniversary of the federal stimulus program and the aggressive wave of education reforms it spawned. Such topics as American schooling's international standing, the lessons to be learned from high-performing countries around the globe, and the implications for economic competitiveness in an interconnected world all remain high on the policy agenda, from the White House and Congress down to local school boards and chambers of commerce.

Against this backdrop, the nation and many states face continuing challenges in delivering a high-quality education to all students, according to *Quality Counts*, the annual report card published by *Education Week*. The nation receives a C when graded across the six distinct areas of policy and performance tracked by the report, the most comprehensive ongoing assessment of the state of American education. For the fourth year in a row, Maryland earns honors as the top-ranked state, posting the nation's highest overall grade, a B-plus. Perennial strong finishers Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia follow close behind, each receiving a B. Nearly half the states, however, receive grades of C or lower.

"Dating back at least to the Sputnik era and the Space Race, we've been warned that America's schools do not measure up favorably on an international yardstick," said Christopher B. Swanson, vice president of Editorial Projects in Education, the nonprofit organization that publishes *Education Week*. "Despite some bright spots over the years, Americans remain rightly concerned that the nation's pace of improvement is simply too slow, at a time when our global peers and competitors may be rocketing ahead."

New findings from the report's annual Chance-for-Success Index 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. For the fifth year running, Massachusetts earns the only A and remains at the top of the national rankings, followed closely by New Hampshire and New Jersey, each posting grades of A-minus.

On the report's K-12 Achievement Index, which evaluates overall public school performance, the nation again posts lackluster results, with the average state receiving a C-minus. Massachusetts earns a B and emerges as the top-achieving state this year, with New Jersey and Maryland finishing second and third, respectively. A wide gulf separates the leaders



from the rest of the pack; three states—Louisiana, Mississippi, and West Virginia—and the District of Columbia receive grades of F on the index.

States post their highest scores for policies related to standards, assessments, and school accountability. The nation earns a B in this year's report, with 12 states—led by Indiana—receiving an A and nine with an A-minus. This strong showing reflects the legacies of standards-based reforms dating back to the 1990s, the decade-old No Child Left Behind Act, and, more recently, stimulus-era programs and the common-standards movement.

*Quality Counts 2012* also features new results for its Teaching Profession category, where the U.S. earns a C. Arkansas and South Carolina each earns a B-plus, the highest grade awarded this year. Scores for the nation and most states have dropped in the past two years, partly due to the economic impacts of the recession. However, the EPE Research Center's Pay-Parity Index shows that the national pay gap between teachers and other comparable workers has narrowed. Teachers now earn about 94 cents for every dollar earned in similar occupations nationwide.

### **A closer look at international education**

*Quality Counts 2012: The Global Challenge—Education in a Competitive World* takes a critical look at the nation's place among the world's public education systems, with an eye toward providing policymakers with perspective on effective reform strategies here and abroad that have gained traction and may be replicable. The report also features commentaries penned by educational leaders from around the globe—Byong-man Ahn of South Korea, England's Sir Michael Barber, Pasi Sahlberg sharing Finland's lessons, and Margaret Spellings from the United States.

Access the full contents of the 2012 edition of *Quality Counts*, downloadable state-specific highlights report and a variety of exclusive online features at [www.edweek.org/go/qc12](http://www.edweek.org/go/qc12)