

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL: Jan. 8, 2015, 12:01 a.m. EST

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***Quality Counts* Introduces New State Report Card; U.S. Earns C, and Massachusetts Ranks First in Nation**

Report Also Examines Early Learning, Releases Early Education Index

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

WASHINGTON—Jan. 8, 2015—In a politically polarized environment that has increasingly extended into education policy, an area once largely free of partisan skirmishing, support for early-childhood education has become a rare point of consensus along the ideological and political spectrum. From President Barack Obama’s push for a \$75 billion, 10-year federal preschool commitment to efforts by governors, mayors, and state legislatures for new and expanded programs, momentum continues to build. Yet, consensus around the importance of early education is just the starting point. Complications abound, and disagreements over funding strategies and policy approaches threaten to unravel tenuous alliances that have bridged the partisan divide.

The 2015 edition of *Education Week’s Quality Counts* report—*Preparing to Launch: Early Childhood’s Academic Countdown*—explores the complex landscape that defines early-childhood services and programs in this country. The report examines how new academic demands and accountability pressures are reshaping the learning environment for young children and the teachers and administrators serving them. *Education Week* journalists delve into the policy debates surrounding publicly funded programs, examine cutting-edge research on the early years, and highlight the academic and technological challenges that await the nation’s youngest learners.

To complement the report’s journalism, the Education Week Research Center also conducted an original analysis of participation in early-education programs, poverty-based gaps in enrollment, and trends over time. The center’s Early Education Index grades the states based on federal data across eight critical indicators. The nation as a whole earns a D-plus on the index, while half the states earn grades in the C-minus to C-plus range. The District of Columbia ranks first in the nation with a B-plus.

“No state really aces the exam on early-childhood education,” said Christopher B. Swanson, Vice President of Editorial Projects in Education, the nonprofit organization that publishes *Education Week*. “In fact, we find very inconsistent performance across early-childhood indicators, with the majority of states ranking in the top 10 for some areas but in the bottom 10 for others. This speaks to the complexity of early education’s patchwork of laws, institutions, and programs spanning the public and private sectors.”

THE STATE OF THE STATES

After a one-year hiatus, *Quality Counts*—the most comprehensive ongoing assessment of the state of American education—resumes its long-standing tradition of grading the states on their overall performance. For *Quality Counts 2015*, those grades return in a newer, leaner form that focuses on outcomes rather than on policy and processes. The report issues summative letter grades for the U.S., the 50 states, and District of Columbia, as well as results for the report card’s three graded categories: Chance for Success, the K-12 Achievement, and School Finance.

The nation receives an overall grade of C on its 2015 report card, with a score of 74.3 out of a possible 100 points. This marks a decline from a C-plus in 2013, when summative grades were last issued under the report's previous grading framework. Massachusetts finishes first this year with a grade of B and a score of 86.2. A perennial high-performer, the state has consistently finished among the nation's top five. Also earning grades of B this year are New Jersey, 2013 front-runner Maryland, and Vermont. Wyoming makes its first appearance in the top 10 since *Quality Counts* started issuing summative grades. At the other end of the grading scale, Mississippi earns a D and ranks last, with New Mexico and Nevada also posting grades of D.

New results for the Chance-for-Success Index—which captures the role of education in a person's life, from cradle to career—show the nation holding steady in its efforts to promote positive learning experiences for youths and opportunities for adults to make good on a good education. The nation's grade of C-plus remains virtually unchanged from last year. For the eighth consecutive year, Massachusetts tops the nation, receiving an A-minus. New Hampshire also earns an A-minus and is followed closely by Connecticut, Minnesota, New Jersey, and North Dakota, each receiving a B-plus on Chance for Success. The lowest grades were posted by Nevada (D), Mississippi (D-plus), and New Mexico (D-plus).

Quality Counts 2015 also updates the Education Week Research Center's annual analysis of school finance, which examines educational expenditure patterns and the distribution of those funds within states using data from 2012, the most recent available. This year, the U.S. earns a C for school finance, with the national grade showing little movement over the past several years. For the seventh year in a row, Wyoming ranks first and posts a B-plus. Six other states also earn grades of B-plus: Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and West Virginia. At the other end of the spectrum, Arizona, Nevada, and Texas receive D grades, Utah earns a D-minus, and Idaho finishes last with the only failing grade on school finance. In all, 15 states earn a D-plus or lower.

The Education Week Research Center's K-12 Achievement Index rounds out the "State of the States" report card. Last updated in 2014, the index assesses the performance of a state's public schools against a broad set of 18 indicators capturing: current achievement levels, improvements over time, and poverty-based disparities or gaps. The nation earned a grade of C-minus and marked a slight improvement since *Quality Counts 2012*. Massachusetts earned a B, holding on to the nation's top spot, a position it has held since the index was first introduced in 2008. Maryland and New Jersey—two other perennial top-scorers—finished second and third with grades of B and B-minus, respectively. At the other end of the rankings, the District of Columbia and Mississippi received grades of F, and 32 states earned grades in the D to C-minus range.

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES AVAILABLE AT EDWEEK.ORG

- The full *Quality Counts 2015* report and interactive state report cards: www.edweek.org/go/qc15.
- State Highlights Reports for the 50 states and the District of Columbia featuring detailed, state-specific data, our comprehensive "State of the States" grades for educational performance, and the special Early Education Index: www.edweek.org/go/qc15shr.
- Interactive map and report card for delving into *Quality Counts'* signature grading rubric: www.edweek.org/go/qc15.

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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 and EdWeek Maps online data resources. The Research Center is on the Web at www.edweek.org/rc.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

EARLY CHILDHOOD'S ACADEMIC COUNTDOWN**New Findings from *Quality Counts 2015: Preparing to Launch***

NOTE: Embargoed for release until 12:01 a.m. EST on Thursday, Jan. 8, 2015

About *Quality Counts 2015*

Preparing to Launch: Early Childhood's Academic Countdown will be released on Jan. 8, 2015. This 19th annual edition of *Quality Counts* focuses on early-childhood education, examining how new academic demands and accountability pressures are altering the learning environment for young children and the educators serving them. *Education Week's* journalists investigate the policy debates, research studies, and academic and technological challenges shaping the landscape for early schooling.

To complement the report's journalism, the Education Week Research Center conducted an original analysis of participation in early-education programs, poverty-based gaps in enrollment, and trends over time. The center's Early Education Index features state grades based on federal data across eight key metrics.

To help guide your reporting, we have highlighted some of the most significant findings about the early-childhood landscape below.

Key Findings

***Quality Counts 2015* features the Early Education Index**, a new indicator developed by the Education Week Research Center. The center's original analysis draws on several federal databases to assess levels of participation in early-education programs and services, as well as aspects of equity and trends in enrollment. The nation and states are issued scores and letter grades that capture performance across the index's eight individual measures.

- The nation as a whole earns a D-plus for the Early Education Index, with 40 states receiving a grade of C-minus or lower.
- The District of Columbia ranks at the top of the nation with a B-plus and a score of 89.5 out of a possible 100 points. Two other states—Hawaii and Mississippi—earn grades of B, while Louisiana posts a B-minus.
- State performance is extremely inconsistent across the index's eight indicators. The majority of states (29) rank in the top 10 in the nation for some indicators but in the bottom 10 for others.

Nearly two-thirds of children between 3 and 6 years of age are attending school.

- The majority of these children participate in either preschool (35 percent) or kindergarten (18 percent) programs.
- Rates of enrollment in formal schooling increase as children grow older, with participation in preschool skyrocketing between the ages of 3 and 4.

- Nationally only 35 percent of 3-year-olds participate in preschool and just three states enroll the majority of their children this age. By the age of 4, the national preschool enrollment rate reaches 61 percent, while 45 states enroll the majority of their 4-year-olds.

Children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families are less likely to be enrolled in preschool.

- Forty-eight percent of all 3- and 4-year-olds are enrolled in some form of schooling.
- However, only 40 percent of children from low-income families attend preschool, compared with 56 percent of their more affluent peers.
- Parental education is also strongly tied to participation in early-education programs. Sixty-two percent of 3- and 4-year-olds who have a parent with a postsecondary degree attend preschool, compared with only 41 percent of children without college-educated parents.
- Children whose parents work full time and speak English fluently are also more likely to be enrolled in preschool.

Rates of preschool participation vary considerably across states, as do poverty-based gaps in enrollment.

- Preschool enrollment for 3- and 4-year-olds exceeds 50 percent in 10 states and the District of Columbia. For most states, preschool participation rates fall between 40 percent and 50 percent.
- The District of Columbia leads the nation, with a 76 percent preschool enrollment rate.
- States with the highest levels of preschool enrollment are typically located along the East Coast, although rates also top 50 percent in Hawaii, Illinois, Louisiana, and Mississippi.
- In nearly all states, children from higher-income households are more likely to attend preschool. Nationally, a 16-percentage-point enrollment gap separates poor and non-poor children.
- Preschool enrollment rates for low-income children exceed those for their higher-income peers in only two states: Montana and Wyoming.

Additional Resources

The 2015 release of *Quality Counts* also includes:

- The ***State of the States Report Card***, an annual overview of national and state grades in key areas of education performance: the Chance-for-Success Index; the K-12 Achievement Index; and School Finance.
- **State Highlights Reports**, individualized online reports featuring state-specific findings from *Quality Counts*, including the Early Education Index and our comprehensive State of the States rankings. Reports are available for the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
- **Interactive Grading Calculator**, an online tool that allows users to recalculate national and state grades from *Quality Counts 2015* by assigning different weights for the importance of various outcomes.

These resources are available on the *Education Week* website: www.edweek.org/go/qc15.

GRADING SUMMARY

	OVERALL STATE GRADE		Quality Counts 2015		Quality Counts 2015		Quality Counts 2014	
	grade	rank	Chance for Success		School Finance		K-12 Achievement	
			grade	rank	grade	rank	grade	rank
Alabama	D+	45	C-	44	C-	34	D-	46
Alaska	C	26	C	31	B-	13	D	44
Arizona	D+	47	C-	45	D	46	D+	38
Arkansas	C-	36	C-	46	C	28	D+	37
California	D+	42	C	42	D+	40	D+	33
Colorado	C	21	B	12	D+	38	C	11
Connecticut	B-	6	B+	4	B+	4	C-	14
Delaware	C+	15	C+	27	B	9	D+	30
District of Columbia	C-	38	B-	18	NA	NA	F	50
Florida	C	28	C	34	D+	37	C	7
Georgia	C-	31	C	37	C-	31	C-	17
Hawaii	C	23	B-	23	NA	NA	C-	18
Idaho	D+	46	C	38	F	49	C-	23
Illinois	C	17	B-	20	C+	14	C-	26
Indiana	C	25	C+	30	C	27	C	12
Iowa	C	24	B	10	C	25	D+	34
Kansas	C	20	B	13	C	21	D+	31
Kentucky	C	29	C	35	C	26	C-	19
Louisiana	D+	44	C-	48	C	19	D-	49
Maine	C+	14	B-	21	C+	15	C	13
Maryland	B	3	B	7	B+	6	B	2
Massachusetts	B	1	A-	1	B	10	B	1
Michigan	C-	32	C	33	C	23	D	42
Minnesota	B-	10	B+	6	C	20	C+	6
Mississippi	D	51	D+	49	D+	41	F	51
Missouri	C-	33	C+	28	C-	33	D	39
Montana	C	30	C+	29	C-	30	C-	25
Nebraska	C	22	B	11	C	22	D+	35
Nevada	D	50	D	51	D	47	D+	36
New Hampshire	B-	5	A-	2	C+	16	C+	4
New Jersey	B	2	B+	3	B+	5	B-	3
New Mexico	D	49	D+	50	D+	35	D-	48
New York	B-	9	B-	17	B+	3	C-	20
North Carolina	C-	34	C	32	D+	44	C-	24
North Dakota	C+	16	B+	5	C	24	D+	32
Ohio	C	18	B-	25	C+	18	C-	16
Oklahoma	D+	48	C-	43	D+	43	D	41
Oregon	C-	41	C	36	D+	36	D	40
Pennsylvania	B-	8	B	15	B-	11	C	8
Rhode Island	C+	13	B-	24	B+	7	D+	27
South Carolina	D+	43	C	40	C-	32	D	45
South Dakota	C-	40	C+	26	D+	42	D	43
Tennessee	C-	37	C	41	D+	39	D+	29
Texas	C-	39	C	39	D	45	C-	21
Utah	C-	35	B-	19	D-	48	D+	28
Vermont	B	4	B	8	B	8	C+	5
Virginia	C+	12	B	9	C+	17	C	10
Washington	C	19	B-	22	C-	29	C	9
West Virginia	C	27	C-	47	B+	2	D-	47
Wisconsin	C+	11	B	14	B-	12	C-	15
Wyoming	B-	7	B	16	B+	1	C-	22
U.S.	C		C+		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: Education Week Research Center, 2015. This table integrates findings reported in the 2014 and 2015 editions of *Quality Counts*.