

## Center for the Study of Jobs & Education in Wisconsin and the And the United States

### Education Week's Grading of the States Quality Counts 2002

Receives a Grade of F

By Dennis W. Redovich

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An evaluation of the of the sixth annual Education Week report on public education in the 50 states, *Quality Counts 2002*, by the Center for the Study of Jobs & Education in Wisconsin and the U.S. gave a grade of F or unsatisfactory to the report. Quality Counts 2001 released in January 2001 also was rated an F by the Center. (See Education Week's Grading of the States Receives a Grade of F [www.jobseducationwis.org](http://www.jobseducationwis.org)) The Education Week report Quality Counts is useless for comparing the quality of education by state. The primary use of these reports is to unfairly criticize American public education by the media and American public school bashers of all persuasions.

Data for two categories of data collected to rate states, Student Achievement and Standards and Accountability were analyzed. Data for other categories that were used to rate states, Improving Teacher Quality and Resources, was determined to be not useable for qualitative or quantitative measurements of education quality by state. The comparisons and analysis of the data in these categories was meaningless and not worthy of discussion. Education Week did not rate states on the category School Climate in the 2002 report but unbelievably did in 2001.

The only possible comparative measure of student achievement by state are standardized tests such as the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade National Assessment of Educational Progress NAEP Exams in math, reading, science and writing. Four states, Alaska, South Dakota, New Jersey and Pennsylvania have no NAEP test results. Four states, Delaware, Florida, New Hampshire and Wisconsin and the District of Columbia had results for only four or fewer NAEP test results because they had test samples for some of the tests that ere not large enough to satisfy NAEP requirements.

The Quality Counts 2002 report ranks the states on Student Achievement by the percent of students who scored at or above the "proficient" level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress Exams in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Math only. (There is no rationale for not using NAEP reading scores as well as math) In 2001 the percentage of state schools offering advanced placement was also used as an indicator of academic achievement. (See analysis of 2001 Quality counts report [www.jobseducationwis.org](http://www.jobseducationwis.org))

Table 1 that follows shows the rank order of the "proficient" level of the top 10 states on the NAEP 4<sup>th</sup> Grade reading test and the state ranks on the other NAEP tests used to determine the quality of Student Achievement. For comparison the grade and rank of the 10 states on Education Week's Standards and Accountability is given. Two high achievement states, Montana, and Iowa received an F for Standards and Accountability in 2002 and 2001, Minnesota earned a D- (F in 2001) and Wisconsin got a D in both years.

Table 1 Top 10 Student Achievement States by State Rank on Proficiency Tests

State-Rank Order NAEP*	Reading	Reading	Writing	Math	Math	Sci.	Sci.
Standards/Accountability**	4 <sup>th</sup> Gr.	8 <sup>th</sup> Gr.	8 <sup>th</sup> Gr.	4 <sup>th</sup> Gr.	8 <sup>th</sup> Gr.	4th Gr.	8 <sup>th</sup> Gr.
Grade/Rank by State**							
Connecticut B-/20	1(46)*	1*	1*	3*	3*	7*	11*
New Hampshire C/29	2(38)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Massachusetts A-/3	3(37)	5	3	2	5	1	2
Montana F/49	3(37)	3	10	12	2	5	1
Maine C/28	5(36)	1	2	12	5	3	8
Minnesota D-/46	5(36)	4	10	1	1	7	2
Iowa F/50	7(35)	NA	NA	8	NA	5	NA
Wisconsin D/37	8(34)	8	5	NA	NA	NA	NA
Kansas C+/17	8(34)	6	NA	8	NA	5	NA
Colorado B+/8	8(34)	14	6	NA	NA	NA	NA

\*State Ranking for NAEP Test \* Percent Proficient and Above

Source: Quality Counts 2002

The top 10 states in 2001 were exactly the same as 2002. In 2001 Minnesota had an F for Standards and Accountability and ranked in the top 10.

The Center also reviewed the student achievement ranks of eight states and D.C. that received a grade of D, D- or F and the three states that received an A for the Standards and Accountability category.

Table 2	Standards and	Improving	NAEP Test
	Accountability	Teacher Quality	Scores
Dist. Of Columbia	D	D	Lowest Scores
Idaho	D	D	Average
Wisconsin	D	D+	Top 10 Scores
Hawaii	D-	C-	Very low scores
Minnesota	D-	C	Top 10 Scores
Wyoming	D-	F	Above Average
Iowa	F	D+	Top 10 Scores
Montana	F	D	Top 10 Scores
Nebraska	F	C-	Above Average
Kentucky	A	C+	Below Average
Maryland	A	C	Average
New York	A	C	Average

The data in Tables 1 and 2 indicate that the methodology used to determine the state rankings and grades is absurdly flawed. There is no valid statistical relationship between a state's student achievement ranking and its standards and accountability ranking. In fact, the standards and accountability ranking of a state is in many cases inversely proportional, not directly proportional, to the student achievement ranking of a state, according to Education Week report writers. For example, Minnesota, which is second

only to Connecticut in student achievement ranks on NAEP tests in the United States in both 2001 and 2001, received an F grade on Standards and Accountability in 2001.

The unbelievable Education Week rationale for rating states low on Standards and Accountability in 2001 and 2002 is based on two specious premises. (1) “Because the quality of state assessments is so pivotal for standards-based reform to work, this year we changed our methodology to focus more on details of state assessment systems. Specifically, states get full credit only if they use tests aligned with their standards in all three grade spans—elementary, middle, and high school—and offer the tests in all four core subjects: English, math, science and social studies.” (2) “In addition, it’s important that tests go beyond multiple-choice questions to gauge students’ knowledge and skills. Therefore, *Quality Counts 2001* gives more credit to states that also include short-answer questions, extended-response items (such as writing an essay), and portfolios as part of their testing systems. The more detailed analysis caused many state grades on “standards and accountability” to decline this year.”

But the most incredible paradox of this so-called grading of the states report is that it extols government over local control of schools. “A solid core of local control states—including Idaho, Iowa, Nebraska and North and South Dakota—are inching toward state standards but have rejected a strong state driven accountability system. Such states do not typically do not do well on the *Quality Counts* indicators, which assume a strong state role in standards, assessments and accountability.” (Quality Counts 2001) The local control states are traditionally high student achievement states and also were rated low by the Education Week experts in 2001. “Government schools” is a demeaning term that is often used to bash American education by conservative school bashers.

The inspiration for the evaluation of the Education Week state-by-state study were the January 2001 headlines in the Star Tribune in Minnesota, “*Minnesota scores an F in school standards study*”, and the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, “*School report gives state poor grades*”, two states that are leaders in student achievement. In January 2002 the abysmal headline in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel was, “*State schools earn mediocre grades*”. This article outrageously claimed Wisconsin schools were mediocre but well funded based on the absurd Quality Counts 2002 report.

Why does the American media continue to reiterate misinformation in education commentaries and bogus reports bashing American education without question? The question that I continually ask in regards to the reporting of education issues, “Is the media educationally disadvantaged or just lazy and naïve? The same question might be reasonably asked of too many so-called education experts from prestigious universities and so-called think tanks. The problem is that too many so-called experts are feeding well at the trough kept full by foundations and other organizations that are not the friends of American education!

The Education Week *Quality Counts* report may be the poorest quality education report I have ever reviewed in 46 years in the education business. An F grade is well deserved. Education Week is welcome to challenge the grade they received in this commentary.

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