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New ECS database highlights letter grades for schools, other trends in states' school accountability systems

DENVER – More than a dozen states will assign A-F letter grades to schools by 2015, among the trends highlighted in a [first-of-its-kind database](#) published today by the Education Commission of the States.

The online database shows which indicators states are considering in gauging school performance and how state leaders are publicly reporting on that performance to parents and others.

Letter grades for schools, which have been controversial in some states, appear to be an increasingly popular tool for policymakers. In 2002, only one state – Florida – assigned letter grades to schools.

Among some of the highlights of the analysis:

- 14 states assign, or plan to assign, letter grades for schools. Ohio, Texas and Virginia are scheduled to begin letter grading systems in 2014 and 2015.
- All 50 states and the District of Columbia consider student achievement as measured by test results in their performance indicators.
- 37 states and D.C. factor in student growth or improvement on tests in deciding school performance. That's up from 21 in 2002.
- 44 states and D.C. consider graduation rates in determining school performance while 12 states include dropout rates.
- 9 states weigh growth of the lowest-performing quartile of students in judging their schools.

Kathy Christie, ECS vice president and co-director of its Information Clearinghouse, said the database marks the first comprehensive look at how states are measuring and reporting school performance. Some data are comparable to previous years, when more limited analysis was completed.

“What we know from reviewing state policy is that the intent of these school accountability systems is to help parents make informed choices for their children,” Christie said. “So it’s important that what’s being measured and reported is an accurate depiction of a school’s progress.”

Support for this project was provided by the Walton Family Foundation. The views expressed are those of ECS, which receives the majority of its funding from the member states it serves.

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[The Education Commission of the States](#) was created by states, for states, in 1965. We track policy, translate research, provide unbiased advice and create opportunities for state policymakers to learn from one another.