DENVER – States are struggling to create school accountability systems that are easy to find, meaningful to parents and filled with the data experts recommend, according to a review of school report cards in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The Education Commission of the States released the report *Rating States, Grading Schools: What Parents and Experts Say States Should Consider to Make Accountability Systems Meaningful* after a three-part analysis that included:

- Assigning experienced online researchers to find school accountability reports in each state.
- Asking parents to rate a school report card in each state on overall usefulness.
- Convening experts to select the essential indicators for any school accountability system.

The report is intended to help states policymakers create accessible, useful and effective school accountability systems. In January, ECS released a 50-state database that found more states are moving to A-F grades for schools. Today’s ECS report shows it take more than a letter grade to be transparent.

“There is no substitute to an informed and empowered body of parents,” said UpSpring Education Group’s Jean-Claude Brizard, a member of the ECS experts’ panel and the former CEO of Chicago Public Schools. “Therefore school accountability systems must equip parents with the information they need to ensure their children are being well-served – and to insist upon change if that is not the case. That’s why it is so important for states to get these systems right.”

ECS asked parents and researchers for their top choices among the accountability reports and then checked to see how many states were using the experts’ essential indicators. Among the findings:

- **Parents** identified six report cards as the best choices, with the **District of Columbia** and **Illinois** the clear winners, followed by **Delaware**, then **Arkansas**, **Ohio** and **Wisconsin**.
- **Researchers** agreed eight state report cards stood out from the rest, with the top three picks being **Arizona**, **Illinois** and **Ohio**. The others included **Delaware**, **Kentucky**, **Louisiana**, **Massachusetts** and **Maine**.

**Illinois** is the only state to make the top picks for both parents and researchers, who applauded its online report cards for being easy to find, easy to navigate and easy to understand.

- **Experts** identified five essential indicators for inclusion in state school accountability systems:
  - Student achievement
  - Student academic growth
  - Achievement gap closure
  - Graduation rates
  - Postsecondary and career readiness

ECS identified 11 states using and reporting all five indicators: **California**, **Colorado**, **Kentucky**, **Louisiana**, **New Mexico**, **North Carolina**, **Ohio**, **Oklahoma**, **Pennsylvania**, **Utah** and **Wisconsin**.

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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.