

School, District, and State Report Cards

Living Documents for Public Discourse



President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act requires schools, districts, and states to publish annual report cards for the public. These report cards are intended to drive decisionmaking and ensure accountability in school reform. The challenge for educators is to create workable tools—documents that are practical and meaningful in the real world of public education.

President Bush's recent reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, requires each of the nation's school districts to publish and distribute an annual Local Education Agency (LEA) Report Card that includes individual report cards for each of its schools. The law further requires that each state develop and disseminate an annual State Report Card that incorporates data from the district and school levels. Because the act was signed into law in January 2002, discussions on the effective use and dissemination of this information are urgently needed. The challenge for Northwest school administrators and other stakeholders, at all levels, is to transform these report cards from bureaucratic paperwork to living documents for public discourse on public schools and school improvement.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS?

The new reporting law will affect educators at all levels—state, district, and building. The goal is to create an interlocking picture of how America's schools stack up against the goals and standards that have been developed both nationally and locally over the past decade—and to use this picture to move schools toward excellence.

Requirements for states. Each state that receives federal assistance shall, no later than the beginning of the 2002–2003 school year, prepare and disseminate an annual state report card that:

- ✓ Is concise
- ✓ Is presented in an understandable and uniform format in language that parents can understand
- ✓ Contains information on student achievement at each proficiency level on the assessments required by the act for third- through eighth-graders; the information must be presented both in the aggregate (the entire student population) as well as disaggregated (broken out by race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, migrant status, English proficiency, and status as economically disadvantaged)
- ✓ Provides a comparison between the actual achievement levels of each

What's Inside:

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group of students and the state's annual measurable goals and objectives

- ✓ Shows the percentage of students who were not tested, broken out by the above categories

- ✓ Shows the most recent trends in student achievement in each subject area and at each grade level

- ✓ Aggregates information on any other indicators used by the state to determine adequate yearly progress of students in achieving state academic achievement standards

- ✓ Shows graduation rates for secondary school students

- ✓ Reports the performance of local education agencies in the state regarding adequate yearly progress including the number and names of each school identified for school improvement (see the next section)

- ✓ Shows the professional qualifications of teachers in the state, the percentage of such teachers teaching with emergency or provisional credentials, the percentage of classes in the state not taught by highly qualified teachers; these data should be presented both in the aggregate and disaggregated by high-poverty compared to low-poverty schools (schools in top quartile and bottom quartile of poverty in the state)

- ✓ Describes the state's accountability system, criteria for status of schools regarding school improvement, corrective action, and restructuring. It is important to note that states are also expected to develop measurable objectives (described elsewhere in No Child Left Behind) that might be included in the report cards.

In addition, states may include optional information such as school attendance rates; average class size in each grade; academic achievement and gains of limited English proficient students; incidence of school violence, drug and alcohol abuse, suspensions, and expulsions; the extent and type of parental involvement in the schools; and the percentage of students completing Advanced Placement courses.

Requirements for districts.

For their part, districts must publish an annual Local Educational Agency Report Card that includes:

- ✓ The data required for the State Report Card (described above) as applied to the local educational agency, including the number and percentage of schools identified for school improvement and how long those schools have been identified

- ✓ Information that compares the schools' and district's student achievement on the statewide assessments and other indicators of adequate yearly progress with the LEA and the state as a whole

The district may include other information not required by the state, as long as the data are sufficient to yield statistically reliable information, as determined by the state. The information contained in the LEA report card must be widely disseminated through public means. Districts and states may use their existing report card formats to meet these requirements, modified to meet the requirements outlined above.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?

There really isn't any secret about the purpose of the report cards. No Child Left Behind wants the collection and dissemination of these report cards to fuel public accountability through disclosure and dialogue on improving education. President Bush, in a foreword to materials released by the U. S. Department of Education, states: "This guide explains the goals and scope of No Child Left Behind. I hope it starts a conversation among our dedicated educators about how we can raise expectations for our children and reach those expectations in classrooms everywhere." In Education Secretary Rod Paige's strategic plan for the Education Department, he says: "The department will work with states to implement the report card requirements of No Child Left Behind to provide high-

quality, understandable information to parents about their child's school. We will publicize the existence of these report cards and encourage their use. We will also encourage the creation of easy-to-use, online databases of school information and options for parents." Clearly, the report cards are a centerpiece within No Child Left Behind's focus on accountability. The responsibility of taking the information once it is collected and using it as the engine that drives school improvement efforts rests on the shoulders of local administrators.

WHAT IS ALREADY IN PLACE?

Table 1 on the next page shows what is in place in the Northwest region in terms of report cards.

Most of these state requirements need only minor adaptation to meet the No Child Left Behind requirements. Much of the information required by the act has been collected and disseminated for years. All the state requirements have stipulations about public participation in the process of developing the report cards, as well as stipulations about dissemination. But questions still remain on what to do with the information once it has been collected and made public, what the public wants, how they want it, and how to use it. These questions will be addressed in the Recommendations section below.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

As noted above, the requirements in No Child Left Behind for development and dissemination of school report cards is not a new idea—the five states in the Northwest region have been collecting and publishing school report card information for years. As the drive to hold

schools accountable continues to gather steam, there is a concurrent movement to ensure that schools can use the information gathered in a meaningful way to improve student performance. The ideal appears to be that a public informed on the status of their school or schools will be energized to begin a thoughtful dialogue with significant actors to craft a well-formulated school improvement plan that uses the information in the school report card to inform the interventions (Henry, 1996; Jamentz, 1998).

Unfortunately, the reality is quite the opposite. Research performed by the Public Agenda Foundation for *Education Week* found that fewer than one-

third of parents and a little more than half of teachers polled have ever seen a school report card (Edwards, 1999). This result was similar to a conclusion by Herrington (1993). Collecting and producing the information contained in the school report cards is quite a different animal than using and interpreting the information. An effective school report card assumes, first of all, that the system that gathers and produces the data contained in the report card is comprehensive, valid, and reliable (Ananda and Rabinowitz, 2001; Linn, 2000). Also, the indicators utilized and reported in the report cards (poverty rates, student demographic data) are

sometimes at odds with what indicators the public wants reported (school safety statistics, teacher qualifications) in the report cards (Edwards, 1999). Also, using data in the report cards to develop a school performance rating (for example, “strong,” “exemplary,” “weak”) has little public support or credibility (Edwards, 1999; Kerna-Schloss, 1999).

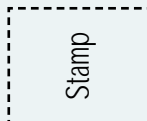
Table 1

State	Law/Statute/Code	Comments
ALASKA	Alaska Statutes, Title 14, Section 14.03.120, <i>Education Planning</i>	Includes requirements for school, community, and parent comments on school performance, student transfers in and out of district, summary and evaluation of environmental education curriculum.
IDAHO	Idaho Statutes, Title 33, Education, Chapter 45, <i>School Accountability Report Cards</i>	Includes requirements for student support services information, qualification and utilization of substitute teachers, currency of textbooks and instructional materials.
MONTANA	Administrative Rules of Montana, Chapter 56, Assessment, Sub-Chapter 1, Rule 10.56.101 <i>Student Assessment</i>	Provides for the creation of an assessment system and submission of “a report” by schools and district to the state board of education. Requires parent/community participation
OREGON	Oregon Revised Statutes 39.105 and 329.115/Oregon Administrative Rules 581-022-1060 <i>School and District Performance Report Criteria</i>	Requires that schools receive a “grade,” such as Exceptional, Strong, Satisfactory, or Low. The original law has been amended once.
WASHINGTON	Revised Code of Washington 28A.655.100 <i>Performance Goals Reporting Requirements</i> and 28A.655.110 <i>Annual School Performance Report Model Report Form</i>	Requires that schools report annually in a news release to local media progress toward meeting district and school goals.

Teacher Information (*state, district, school)

Professional Qualifications	Employed under emergency or provisional credentials
Bachelor's Degree ___%	___%
Master's Degree ___%	___%
Doctoral Degree ___%	___%
Other ___%	___%

Percentage of classes not taught by
"highly qualified" teachers ___%



Optional Information

(Note: Although NCLB says this information is optional,
parents say the starred (*) items are desirable.)

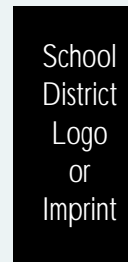
- ✓ Attendance rates
- ✓ Average class size by grade level*
- ✓ LEP gains
- ✓ Incidence of violence at school*
- ✓ Drug/alcohol incidents/arrests*
- ✓ Suspensions
- ✓ Expulsions
- ✓ Extent and type of parental involvement
- ✓ Percentage of students completing AP courses
- ✓ Description of state/district accountability system, criteria
for status of schools regarding school improvement, correc-
tive action, restructuring*
- ✓ Links to standards, curriculum scope and sequence, bench-
marks*

If there's room . . .

- ✓ Meeting dates for forums on school report cards
- ✓ Testing dates
- ✓ Tips for parents: volunteer opportunities
- ✓ Questions for parents to ask
- ✓ "Brag Box" (what's unique about . . .)
- ✓ Agency priorities
- ✓ School calendar information/significant dates
- ✓ Where to go if interested in teaching/substitute teaching
- ✓ Grants awarded
- ✓ Community "rolodex" (food/clothing bank, public health
numbers, etc.)

School District Name
Address
City/State/Zip

School Report Card *Year*



State
LEA
School

State Agency Name
Address
Web Site Address
Contact Name
Contact Phone
Contact Fax
Contact E-Mail Address
Toll Free # for technical
assistance for interpretation



Student achievement data, grades 3-8

Grade	Percent at grade level or above		
3	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
4	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
5	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
6	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
7	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
8	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%

Student achievement data by group

Group	Percent at grade level or above		
Race			
White	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
Black	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
Hispanic	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
Asian	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
Amlnd	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
Ethnicity			
SE Asian	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
Japanese	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
Chinese	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
E. European	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
W. European	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
Arab	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
Gender			
Male	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
Female	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
Disability			
Status: All	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
LD*	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
Migrant			
Status: All	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
English Proficiency			
All LEP**	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%
Status as Economically Disad			
All	Math ___%	Rdg/LangArts ___%	Science ___%

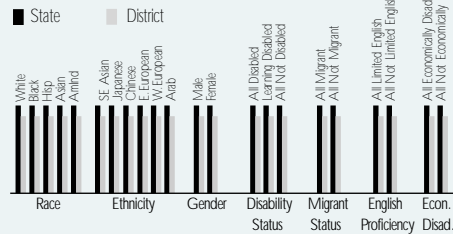
* Learning Disabled
 ** Limited English Proficiency

Disclaimer: Student results are not reported where privacy may be compromised and/or the results are not statistically valid or significant.

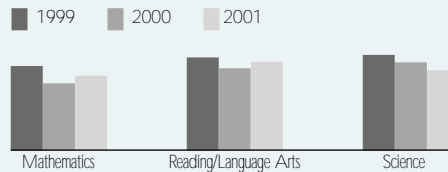
Percentage of students not tested by group

Race	White ___%	Black ___%	Hisp ___%	Asian ___%	Amlnd ___%	
Ethnicity	SE Asian ___%	Japanese ___%	Chinese ___%	E. European ___%	W. European ___%	Arab ___%
Gender	Male ___%	Female ___%				
Disability Status	All ___%	Learning Disabled ___%				
Migrant Status	All Migrant Students ___%					
English Proficiency	All Limited English Proficient ___%					
Status as Economically Disadvantaged	All ___%					

Comparison of actual student achievement levels and state's annual measurable objectives:



Recent trends in student achievement in each subject

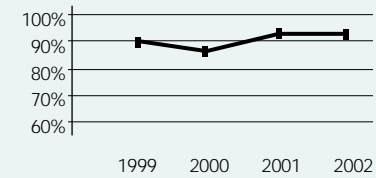


Other indicators used by the state to determine Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of students in achieving state academic standards

School Report Card only: Comparisons of school with state and district achievements/AYP

Graduation Rates

*For states, districts, and high schools only



Poverty Level

*For states and districts only

Combined: ___% at or below poverty level
 Broken out by high poverty compared to low poverty schools (top quartile and bottom quartile of poverty in the state):

Bullet points for interpretation of data

- ✓ What does this stuff mean?
- ✓ How can parents know what is "good"?
- ✓ How can parents help improve what needs improvement?
- ✓ Etc.

School Improvement Designation

State: Number (how many) and names of schools identified for school improvement
District: Number (how many) and names of schools identified for school improvement
School: Note if this school is a "school improvement" school

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A SEAMLESS SYSTEM

The state education agency should conduct a review of the existing reporting requirements and how they align with the new federal requirements. As noted above, most of the states already meet or exceed the requirements. Each state should develop a standard format and template for local education agency reporting and provide technical assistance to the LEA so the LEA can, in turn, provide a standard format and template for school-level reporting. A seamless system of reporting the same information from school to district to state education agency should be put into place. The costs of this endeavor can be accomplished by reallocating resources or accessing funds available for this purpose in the accountability provisions of No Child Left Behind. We have created a sample template for this report, blending the best features from other state report cards with the requirements from No Child Left Behind. (See pages 4–5.) We hope this template is a useful tool for education agencies as they adapt and revise existing tools to meet the new requirements.

Once the state reporting mechanism is adjusted, state and local education agencies need to formulate plans for using the information to engage stakeholders in efforts to improve schools. Best practices for school report cards include:

- ✓ **Develop a distribution plan.** Getting the report cards out may include direct mailing, distribution in key community points (banks, stores, public offices), town meetings, and the Inter-

net. Provide a toll-free number at the state level for parents and community members to interpret the data once they receive it. This is also important for people who do not have access to the Internet.

- ✓ **Make the report cards accessible.** They should be available “front and center” at state and local education agency Web pages. Finding the school report cards in the Web pages of the Northwest region’s state education agencies (and elsewhere across the country) sometimes requires detective work. A link that says simply “School Report Cards” would give people more efficient access.

- ✓ **Provide guidance in interpreting data.** The report card should include suggestions for how to use the data. It is not enough to report that “17 percent of fourth-graders did not meet satisfactory scores on the state reading assessment.” Such information should be supplemented with explanatory information, for example, “Research has shown that volunteer reading tutors increase reading achievement in schools with tutoring programs.” The point is, when data are provided without a context or without suggestions for addressing the issues the data reveal, the purpose of reporting the data is defeated.

- ✓ **Provide questions.** Parents will appreciate suggestions for key questions they can ask school officials relative to the data presented, for example: “What efforts are under way to address areas that need improvement?” or “What factors influenced the rise in achievement levels of third graders?” The questions should not limit the engagement of the public, but rather should be a starting point. (Preparing questions ahead of public meetings also will give school officials time to prepare answers!)

- ✓ **Avoid defensiveness.** If the data are unflattering to your school, district, or state, don’t try to defend yourself. Conversely, don’t gloat if the information is flattering. The message should always be riveted on continuous improvement. Model to the community the proactive and honest way the data can be used to either inform school improvement efforts or demonstrate interventions and programs that work. Acknowledge areas of concern and be thoughtful in the engagement of the public in addressing them. Avoid the blame game. If you cannot answer a question, say so and then follow up when you do have the answer.

- ✓ **Make the report easy to read.** Do not clutter it up with too much information. A simple document posted on the Web is accessible to all audiences, with links that can provide more detailed information for those who want it. If possible, link information from one section of the online report card with information from another section. Charts and graphs, for example, can provide comparison data when clicked. Remember: a graph or chart whose data may be clear to an education professional may not be clear to the average person. Provide short narratives to place the data in context.

- ✓ **Hold regular community forums.** When the report cards are released and throughout the year, invite the public in for a discussion. Use experienced moderators or facilitators to keep these events focused on constructive dialogue and continuous improvement. Do not use the regular school board meetings for public engagement. Thoughtful, purposeful engagement takes time usually not available in a packed board meeting.

- ✓ **Make sure you share the report cards with legislators in**

your community, at all levels.

Acknowledge where their support assisted the improvement efforts. Invite them to the community forums. They will appreciate being kept in the loop and contribute to constructive relationships down the road.

✓ **Use “credible messengers”** (Edwards, 1999). When presenting the report card information to the public, don’t leave school personnel out there alone—develop a pool of expertise from the community to be panel members to explain the data. And listen! School board members, state level administrators, clergy, businesspeople, and community leaders are possible resources. Credibility will increase when the public is given the information by people inside the community but outside the education agency.

✓ **Seize the moment.** During the public engagement process, provide information, examples, and opportunities for the community to assist in school improvement efforts. Opportunities might include service on committees, volunteer tutoring, telephone trees to get information out, and communicating the highlights of the meeting to those who could not attend. Providing people with authentic opportunities to make a difference when they are engaged in an issue gets better results than taking names and phone numbers and then failing to contact them for days, weeks, or months. Revisit issues and discussion points regularly.

✓ **Cultivate relationships with the media.** Prepare a press kit when the report card is released that includes dates of upcoming community forums. Use media advisories, tip sheets, story ideas, and press releases. Help the media understand data by providing them with briefings, backgrounders, and even seminars. Try to arrange a presentation to editorial boards. Again,

be proactive. Provide these things before the media ask for them.

✓ **Don’t leave teachers out.** One of your most important pipelines to the public is the teaching force. We often forget that many in the community regard the teacher herself as the education establishment. Train and develop teacher leaders to explain the data and information, and to provide ways and means for the public to participate in improvement efforts.

ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

School reform efforts have often lost steam for various reasons—public apathy, misinformation, and lack of funding, just to name a few. As our aversion to negative labels for kids and schools has grown, so have the expectations for schools. The way to address public apathy is to engage the public. The way to avoid misinformation is to provide accurate information through public forums. Education leaders in the Northwest should continue their reputation as trendsetters by embracing state, district, and school report cards as an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to a quality public education for all.

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If you have any questions about the contents of this topical summary, contact Dr. Steve Nelson, Director of Planning and Program Development at 503-275-9547 or nelsons@nwrel.org.

Resources

The following Web addresses provide links to existing Northwest state school profiles and/or report cards. Each of these sites sports features that can contribute to better profiles and report cards for everyone.

- ✓ **Alaska:**
<http://www.eed.state.ak.us/stats/>
- ✓ **Idaho:** <http://www.sde.state.id.us/finance/profiles99-00>
- ✓ **Montana:**
<http://www.opi.state.mt.us/EdProfile/>
- ✓ **Oregon:** <http://reportcard.ode.state.or.us/inst.htm>
- ✓ **Washington:**
<http://www.k12.wa.us/edprofile/>

Here are some links to additional research and information on report cards:

No Child Left Behind

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/esea/>

Education Week Special Report

<http://www.educationweek.org/sreports/qc99/>

This has a section on school report cards that is particularly useful. It includes a sample school report card.

NWREL

<http://www.nwrel.org/nwedu/2001fall/resources.html>

This is a link to *Northwest Education* magazine's issue on educational standards.

WestEd

<http://www.wested.org/cs/wew/view/rs/536>

This link is for an online publication, *Building a Workable Accountability System*.

The Center for Community Change

<http://www.communitychange.org/education/reportcards.asp>

This provides a link for *Individual School Report Cards: Empowering Parents and Communities to Hold Schools Accountable*

Public Agenda Online

<http://www.publicagenda.org/specials/pubengage/pubengage.htm>

Here you'll find a link for *Just Waiting to Be Asked? A Fresh Look at Attitudes on Public Engagement*

National School Public Relations Association

http://www.nspra.org/main_publine.htm#0001

Here's a link for "School Profiles as Public Relations Tool," an article in *Principal Communicator*

National Center for Education Statistics

<http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2001030>

This provides a link for *Monitoring School Quality: An Indicators Report* NCEs 2001-030. It's not about school report cards per se, but offers an analysis of the way we determine school effectiveness.

Ohio Department of Education

http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcard/toolkit_2002/2002LRCToolkit.pdf

This link for *Performance Accountability: Improving Ohio's Schools* offers a great deal of solid information.

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