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ABSTRACT

While the publication of school report cards and profiles is common in a number of states, their contents and formats vary as they represent the concerns and initiatives of policymakers. Over the past several years, detailed analyses have been conducted of the report cards of southern and southeastern states. This report compared report cards and profiles currently in use in eight states in the e- tern United States, from New England as far south as Maryland. Report cards and profiles submitted by the states were analyzed for: (1) measurements of student performance; (2) student outcomes reported and the reporting procedure; (3) student characteristics reported; (4) school and community factors presented; and (5) statistical procedures used in evaluating data. Findings, reported in each of these areas, indicate marked differences among contents and formats, with some commonalities. A number of states have established state standards for performance, usually based on achievement test results, and these are reported along with state and student characteristics. There is generally no attempt to determine relationships between student/school/community factors; rather, there is a tacit assumption that these variables affect academic outcomes. (Contains three tables.) (SLD)

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AN ANALYSIS OF STATE REPORT CARDS ON SCHOOLS PRODUCED IN EIGHT EASTERN STATES

by
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Paper presented to the Mid-South Educational Research Association
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AN ANALYSIS OF STATE REPORT CARDS ON SCHOOLS PRODUCED IN EIGHT EASTERN STATES

By Russell L. French and Gordon Bobbett[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

The publication of school report cards and school profiles is now common in a number of states. Their contents and formats vary from state to state, representing the concerns and initiatives of policymakers.

Over the past several years, the authors have conducted detailed analyses of the report cards produced in Tennessee and Arkansas, and, in 1993, they presented a detailed comparison of report cards/profiles disseminated in 11 Southeastern states. In the investigation reported here, the focus is a comparison of report cards/profiles currently in use in the Eastern United States.

II. METHODOLOGY

Requests for copies of report cards/school reports/school profiles and explanatory information were made to 10 Eastern and Northeastern states. Eight states provided materials that represented reports that could rightly be classified as "report cards" offering information that might be desired by parents and citizens as well as local educators. These states were Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. Vermont sent copies of its annual state report, but this report did not provide information comprehensible to the man on the street or useful in studying an individual school district.

As in the previous study of report cards in Southeastern states, each report card/profile and the information accompanying it were

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analyzed for similarities and differences in five categories: 1) instruments used to measure student performance, 2) student outcomes reported and the procedure for reporting them, 3) student characteristics reported, 4) school and community factors presented, and 5) statistical procedures used in evaluating data. Findings of the study are reported in each of these five categories.

III. FINDINGS

Instruments Used To Measure Student Performance

As anticipated, instruments and procedures used to measure student performance differ from state to state. Table 1 displays the findings:

Table 1. Instruments And Procedures Used To Measure Student Performance In Eight Eastern States

State	Instruments/Procedures	Comments
Connecticut	Connecticut Mastery Tests, Grades 4, 6, 8 Reading, Writing, Mathematics	Reported as % of students at/above state goal and % of students at/above remedial standards
	Physical Fitness Tests (1-mile walk/run, sit and reach exercise, situps, pull-ups)	Reported as % of students meeting national standards on each test
	Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), graduates	Reported as number of students taking the test and the average scores for each test (verbal, math) by gender, race/ethnicity (Asian American, Black, Hispanic, White) and income (under $20,000, $20,000-70,000, over $70,000. Also reported is percentage of test takers scoring 600 and above.

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	Credits earned in selected courses: Algebra I or equivalent, English Literature, Foreign Language (3 years or more), The Arts (2 years or more), high school courses for college credit.	Reported by gender and race/ethnicity (see previously listed categories).
	Credits earned by last graduating class: Algebra, Literature, Laboratory Sciences, Vocational (2 or more yrs.), Arts (2 or more yrs.), Foreign Language (3 or more yrs.)	Reported as totals for each category
Delaware	No student outcome data reported.	
Maryland	Maryland Functional Tests, Grades 9, 11 Mathematics, Writing, Reading, Citizenship	Reported as % students meeting State school standards: Excellent, Satisfactory, Passing.
	Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP), Grades 3, 5, 8, Reading, Mathematics, Social Science, Science	Again reported as % students meeting state school standards.
	California Test of Basic Skills/4, Grades 3, 5, 8, Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics	Reported by median percentile for school
	Program Completion	Reported as % students attaining University of Maryland system requirements, % students attaining Occupational Program Requirements and % students attaining both.

Massachusetts	Massachusetts Educational Assessment Program (MAEP), Grades 4, 8, 12, Reading, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Writing	Reported as % students attaining proficiency levels I- (low) through IV. Proficiency levels are behaviorally anchored. The average scaled scores by grade level are also reported, together with a comparison score band for schools with similar socioeconomic characteristics.
	(High Schools) Number of Advanced Placement tests taken in English Literature/Composition, U.S. History, Calculus, Biology, other.	Reported as number taken in each subject and total number
New Hampshire	No student outcome data reported	
New Jersey	Unnamed standardized achievement test (could be one of several), Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics	Reported as % students meeting state standard
	8th Grade Early Warning Test (Basic Skills), Reading, Mathematics, Writing	Reported as % students at Level I - satisfactory, Level II - marginal, Level III-unsatisfactory.
	(High Schools) 9th Grade Proficiency Tests, Reading, Writing, Mathematics	Reported as % students passing by race/ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander
	(High Schools) Number of seniors taking the SAT.	Reported as average verbal and average math scores for classes of the past two years. State average scores are provided for comparison.
	Advanced Placement Tests: Mathematics (Calculus), Spanish, U.S. History, Biology, etc.	Reported as number of students taking tests and number scoring 3 or better
	(High Schools) Graduation rate	Reported as % of students who were enrolled in the 9th grade

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Pennsylvania	(Elementary And Middle Schools) Pennsylvania Reading and Mathematics Tests	Reported as % students in quartile groups (Top, High-Middle, Low-Middle, Bottom)
	(Elementary And Middle Schools) Sixth Grade Writing Assessment	Reported as % students in each of five levels: Excellent (scores of 12, 11, 10), Good (scores of 9, 8), Fair (scores of 7, 6), Weak (scores of 5, 4), Poor (scores of 3, 2)
	(Elementary Schools) Metropolitan Achievement Tests: Reading, Mathematics, all grade levels	Reported as % students in quartile groups (see comments for Pa. Reading and Math Tests).
	(Middle School) California Achievement Tests, all grade levels	Reported as % students in quartile groups (see above).
	(Elementary And Middle Schools) Amount of Writing	Reported as % students required to write paragraphs (very often, often, sometimes, rarely, never). Student self-reports.
	(High Schools) Pennsylvania Reading And Math Tests, Grade 11	Reported as % students in quartile groups
	(High Schools) Pennsylvania Writing Assessment, Grade 9	Reported as % students in quartile groups
	(High Schools) Metropolitan Achievement Tests, Grades 10, 11	Reported as % students in quartile groups
	(High Schools) AP Course Participation	Reported as % students in all AP courses, 9th, 10th, 11th grades.
	(High Schools) Completion of Volunteer Community Service	Reported as % students completing 60 hours

Rhode Island	Metropolitan Achievement Tests: Reading, Math, Writing	Reported as average percentile ranking of the district and comparison with national norms. Also reported as % of students in district meeting basic proficiency standard (40th percentile or higher) in grades 4, 8, 10
	Writing Assessment, Grades 3, 6	Reported as % students achieving "Good" or above rating (state standard)
	Health Knowledge Assessment, Grades 3, 6, 8, 10	Reported as average percentile score
	Compensatory Education Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) Grades 2 and above	Reported as a gain score denoting the difference before and after instruction. Rhode Island performance standard is 1 NCE.
	SAT Scores	Reported as average scores (verbal, math, total) for all students and college-bound students.

Analysis of this table indicates that two states (Delaware, New Hampshire) do not report any student outcome data. Five of the other six states (Massachusetts excluded) in the sample use both state-developed tests and at least one recognized national achievement test (California Achievement Battery, Metropolitan Achievement Tests, etc.) to measure aspects of student, school and/or school district performance. Test results are presented differently across the states, and in five states (Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania) indicators other than test scores are included as measures of performance.

Unique areas of assessment are found in Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Rhode Island. Pennsylvania provides information on the percentage of high school students completing 60 hours or more of volunteer service

in the community and the amount of writing students report that they are required to do. Connecticut reports percentage of students meeting national physical fitness standards on four performance assessments, and Rhode Island reports student health knowledge and gain scores for Compensatory Education students.

Student Outcomes Reported

Table 1 also provides the information necessary for comparison of the ways in which student outcomes are reported in the six states reporting them. As previously mentioned, the rubrics for reporting vary across the states. Connecticut reports its Mastery Test results as percentages of students at or above a state goal and at or above remedial standards. Physical fitness test results are reported as percentage of students meeting national standards. SAT results are reported by average scores (verbal, math) for racial/ethnic groups and family income levels.

Maryland reports most test results as percentages of students meeting pre-determined state school standards. This state also reports achievement test results by median school percentiles and percentages of graduates attaining state requirements for post-secondary education.

Massachusetts also reports outcomes as the percentage of students attaining each of five behaviorally-anchored proficiency levels. In addition, the state reports the school's average scaled scores by grade level and provides a comparison band of scaled scores for schools with similar socioeconomic characteristics.

New Jersey's reporting approach is similar to that of Connecticut, Maryland, and Massachusetts; i.e., percentages of students meeting each of three levels of state standards. Like Connecticut, New Jersey also reports percentages of students passing state proficiency tests by racial/ethnic group. SAT scores are reported by average verbal and math scores for the past two years, and state averages are provided for

comparison. New Jersey also reports the number of students taking each of several Advanced Placement examinations and the number of students who scored 3 or above (levels usually associated with award of college credit).

Pennsylvania reports most test results as percentages of students scoring in each of four quartile groups. However, writing assessment results for a school are reported as percentages of students scoring in each of five levels (excellent to poor).

Rhode Island reports average percentile rankings for the school district and comparisons with national norms for achievement test results. This state also reports the percentage of students in the district meeting state-imposed proficiency standards. As noted previously, Rhode Island is the only state in the group studied to report results in compensatory education, where gain scores denoting the difference before and after instruction are provided. There is a state standard for gain in this area. SAT scores are reported as verbal and mathematics average scores for all students and college-bound students.

It is interesting to note that while methods of reporting student outcomes vary across these states, five of them (Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island) have developed state performance standards and report percentages of students meeting the standard or the various levels of standards. Two states (Connecticut, New Jersey) report some or most test results by racial/ethnic groups and gender. One state (Connecticut) reports results by family income level. Most of these states provide state or national averages and percentages for comparative purposes, but only Massachusetts provides a means of comparing school outcomes with like schools.

Levels of Outcomes Reported

The eight states differ in the levels of information reported as

indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Levels of Data Presented In State Report Cards

State	Performance Data	School/District Characteristics
Connecticut	District Level School Level	District Level School Level
Delaware*	District Level	District Level
Maryland	District Level	District Level
Massachusetts	District Level School Level	District Level School Level
New Hampshire*	District Level	District Level
New Jersey	School Level (No District Level Provided if available)	School Level
Pennsylvania	District Level School Level	District Level School Level
Rhode Island	District Level	District Level

Of the eight states studied, three (Connecticut, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania) develop both district and school level report cards/profiles. New Jersey may create profiles at both levels, but only school level report cards were sent. As indicated in Table 1, two states (Delaware, New Hampshire) provide no student outcome data, only data pertaining to school/community characteristics. New Jersey's report card is somewhat unique in that it is targeted to parents, and explanations of the reason(s) for including each item are provided on the report card itself. Although several of the states provide explanatory and interpretative materials, Pennsylvania's interpretation manual is the most comprehensive. That state also provides local educators a "Manual of Strategies For Release to Press and Public."

School And Community Characteristics

Inclusions of school and community characteristics were examined in relationship to the categories used in the previous study of Southeastern

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states: student characteristics, school/community characteristics, and district/community financial characteristics. Table 3 displays the results.

Table 3: Student, School And Community Characteristics Identified In Report Cards

State	Student Characteristics	School/District Characteristics	Community/District Financial Characteristics
Connecticut	•Percent free-reduced lunch •Percent non-English home language •Percent juniors and seniors working more than 16 hrs. per week •Percent kindergartners who attended preschool, nursery school, Headstart •Percent students who have used alcohol, tobacco, other drugs (self-report) •Activities of June graduates (higher education - 4 yr., 2 yr., other; work force, military, employed, unemployed •Percent student participation in school activities (general academic clubs, fitness/intramurals, career-oriented clubs, service clubs, music, athletics)	•Enrollment and change from previous year •Special programs; e.g., bilingual, ESL, gifted, migrant, extended day kindergarten, Pre-K, special ed. •Average class size •Number students per counselor, social worker, school psychologist, library media specialist, FTE administrator, FTE staff •Percent professional staff with Masters degree and above •Percent professional staff trained as mentors, assessors, cooperating teachers •Professional staff average years of experience	•Teacher starting salary •Teacher salary at Masters maximum •Expenditures (total and per pupil) for - instruction - equipment - pupil support services - administration - plant operation and maintenance - transportation - instruction and administrative support services - food services - students tutored outside school - land, building debt services

Connecticut (continued)		•Percent minority professional staff •Percent parents as resources (volunteers, student prepardness, homework assistance, parents' group, cpen house) •Percent student attendance •Percent dropouts (Fall to Fall) •Hours of instructional time (hrs. per yr., days per yr., length of day) •Learning resources available at school (library media ctr., computer lab, school cable access, telecommunication access to outside information sources, library aides, library media specialists) •Hours instruction per year in each subject area including arts, computer ed, technology education) •Results of parent survey (satisfaction, communication with school, etc.)		

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Connecticut (continued)		•Professional development of teachers and Professional staff (average school days and other days per teacher) •Average number days of absence for teachers and other professional staff •Staffing (race/ethnicity, gender, FTE count for all professional staff and non-certified staff •Average class size •Drug education program (middle and secondary schools) •Elective program offerings (high schools) •Graduation requirements	
Delaware	•Percent regular and special education students •Percent enrollment by racial/ethnic groups (Indian, Black, Asian, Hispanic, White Minority) •Number of graduates	•Total enrollment •Area in square miles •Average daily attendance (number and percent) •Non-public schools (number in district and number and percent of students enrolled) •Number of teachers •Percent teachers by gender and race (white, black, other)	•Revenue per pupil (local, state, federal) •Expenditures per pupil •Average teacher salary •Scheduled teacher salary (beginning, middle, top) •Full valuation per pupil

Delaware (continued)		•Percent teachers with Masters degree and above •Average teacher age and years of experience •Student/teacher ratio •Student/professional staff ratios (administrators, support, other)	
Maryland	•Number and percent students receiving special services (LEP, Chapter I, Free-reduced lunch, special education) •Graduates' plans (post-secondary education, employment related to high school program, employment unrelated, military, employment and school, other)	•Percent student attendance (1-6, 7-12) •Number and percent dropouts (3 years) •Promotion rate •Enrollment (Pre-K, K, 1-6, 7-12, Special Ed. other) •Number and percent of entrants and withdrawals •Number instructional staff per 1000 students •Number professional support staff per 1000 students •Number instructional assistants per 1000 students •Average length of school day and year •Number and percent 1st graders with kindergarten experience •School improvement notes for each district	•Wealth per pupil •Per pupil expenditure

Massachusetts	•Percent students suspended out-of-school •Percent students suspended in school •Percent students by race/ethnicity •Percent students Limited English Proficient and first language non-English •Percent students in special education and percent integrated •Percent students in occupational education •Percent students low income (AFDC and Federal guidelines) •Graduate plans (post-secondary education, work or military, other) •Status of vocational-technical graduates (percent full time education, related employment, unrelated employment, military, unemployed, not in labor force)	•Percent student attendance at each level (elementary, middle, secondary) •Percent students retained •Percent dropouts (past 4 years) •Percent racial/ethnic groups in district (Asian, black, Native American, White, Hispanic, other) •Percent households with children •Educational attainment levels - percent less than 9 - percent some high school - percent diploma - percent some college - percent Bachelors degree and higher •Percent of children attending public and non-public schools •Number of schools with grade ranges and enrollments •Percents of available school staff (teachers, other instructional, administrators, support, service)	•Median family income •Integrated cost per pupil •School district revenues (total, percent state, federal, local, municipal, other) •Expenditures per pupil and change over two years •Average teacher salary

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New Hampshire		•Number and percent of dropouts (7-12, 7-8, 9-12) •District Average Daily Membership (elementary, middle/junior high, high school, other) •Number of students in public schools and academies •Student/teacher ratio •Number of graduates •Graduates' plans (post-secondary education)	•Average teacher salary •Valuations (property tax assessments, and school tax notes) •Equalized valuation per pupil •Per pupil expenditure (elementary, middle/junior, high school, total) •Amount of catasphrophic aid •Amount of foundation aid
New Jersey	•Percent students by race (White, Black, Hispanic, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander) (2 yrs.) •Percent students new to school •Percent students free-reduced lunch •Percent students in special programs (basic skills remediation, bilingual/ESL, special education, gifted/talented) •Percent students in athletics, arts, non-athletic activities	•Hours per day of instruction •Number of students per teacher, administrator, staff member •Percent staff attendance •Percent instructional staff with advanced degrees •Enrollment past two years and percent change (by grade level)	•Revenues (percent state, local, other) •Expenditures (percent instruction, student services, administration, facilities) •Percent budget for teacher salaries, for administrator salaries •Cost per pupil

New Jersey (continued)	•Student behavior (Number of incidents of substance abuse, vandalism, violence, and estimated cost of vandalism)		
Pennsylvania	•Hours per day students watch TV (6 or more, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 or less) •Percent students with pre-school experience •Percent students reporting parental encouragement to do best •Percent special education •Student expectations (percent) for advanced degree, college degree, post high school education, high school diploma	•Average class size •Number students per teacher, counselor, Health staff member, librarian •Percent teacher absence for professional development and non-related matters •Number titles per student in library •Percent stability in students from previous year •Percent student attendance •Percent graduates to post-secondary education •Percent graduates to military and work •Percent retention in grades 9, 10, 11 •Regional accreditation status •Percent graduates in academic/college prep, general education, vocational/ technical, exceptional/other	•Percent budget for instructional expenditures for regular ed., special ed., vocational ed., adult ed., community/junior college, other •Percent budget for support services (broken into categories) •Percent budget for other activities; e.g., food services, facilities acquisition, student activities

Rhode Island	•Number and percent students in special programs (voc./tech, spec. ed., LEP, Computer ed., Minority, Adult ed. •Percent students free and reduced lunch	•Number and percent students in public and non-public schools •State and regional accreditation status •Average class size (K-6, 7-12) •Number of secondary core courses (math, sciences, English, social studies) •Graduation requirements	•Median family income •Per capita income •Property value per pupil •Equalized municipal tax rate •Local educational revenues as percent of total budget •Revenues (local, state, federal, other) •Expenditures (total and per pupil) for - all programs - general instruction - instructional and administrative support - non-instructional services - facilities management - transportation - special programs (voc/tech, Special ed., LEP, Computer ed., gifted and talented - instructional materials per pupil (3 yrs)

Examination of Table 3 shows that no two states report exactly the same student, school and community factors. However, but New Hampshire report some factors in each of the three categories used as organizers. Connecticut's inclusions are the most comprehensive. Several states report factors not previously found in these investigations; e.g., number of instances of substance abuse, violence and vandalism in a school, student reports of hours spent watching television, student expectations and plans for the post-high school years. These reports may reflect the public's concern for school safety and security and educator concerns for

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student and home factors that influence schooling and student achievement. Whatever they reflect, some of these "new" inclusions offer opportunity to study their statistical impact on student outcomes.

Statistical Procedures Used In Evaluating Data

The statistical presentation of data in the eight sets of report cards/profiles has been discussed previously. None of these report cards report statistical analyses of the impact of individual student, school/community characteristics, or financial factors on student outcomes. Therefore, there is no way for readers to determine which factors that can be modified should be modified.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The sample of report cards (8) analyzed in this study is small, and generalizations must be restricted to that sample. However, there are several noteworthy generalizations that can be made:

1. While the report cards/profiles differ markedly in contents and formats, there are some commonalities.

   For example, a number of these states have established state standards for student performance. Most of them report some form of socioeconomic data regarding students. Most report school or district revenues and expenditures in some form. Many report student, family and educator data by gender and race/ethnicity.

2. As in previous studies, procedures used in analyzing and presenting student outcome data appear to reflect both state policy and the particular bents of report card developers.

3. As in previous studies, the most commonly reported student, school and community characteristics are percentage of students receiving free/reducted lunch, percentage of student attendance, per pupil expenditures, and pupil/teacher ratios.

4. As in states previously studied, there is no attempt to determine relationships between student/school/community characteristics and student performance. There appears to be a tacit assumption that the characteristics reported influence outcomes.

5. There is an attempt in these states to expand the student/school/community variables reported to include more "personal" information about students, their families and [illegible] conditions that may relate to student performance.

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6. Half of the states reporting provide school level as well as district level profiles.

7. While several of the states provide for comparison with like schools/districts, there is no information provided that would offer educators, parents, and others insights into the factors that have led to higher performance levels in their own or other schools.

8. Several states are attempting to use factors other than test scores as indicators of student and school performance.

V. IMPLICATIONS

Several implications emerge from the findings and conclusions of this study.

Measurement of Student Performance. Most of the states in this study are using one or more state developed tests in their assessment package. This finding is not inconsistent with findings in our previous studies. However, it underscores again the related issues and questions; "Do these tests more accurately reflect the curriculum of schools across the state? Have the time and resources expended been well spent? Do these tests provide more valid and creditable information than is available in assessments produced for national use? As assessment reforms are undertaken, should states continue development on a state-by-state or consortium basis?

Report Card Development. As demonstrated again in this study, state report cards on schools tend to portray school districts and schools through a variety of student performance indicators and an array of student, school and community characteristics, but relationships between student outcomes and other reported factors are never examined. There is a tacit assumption that the factors presented are important variables in schooling and that they somehow impact student performance.

The Big Picture. This study adds to the information available about school report cards, but it is now time to look at the big picture: the procedures used across many states to develop and present report card

data, the inclusions in them, and the relationships that can be found between student/school/community factors and student outcomes across states. That investigation is necessary to give guidance to both report card developers and consumers.