



## Testing the Testers 2002: An Annual Ranking of State Accountability Systems Executive Summary

During the Winter of 2001–2002, The Princeton Review conducted this first Annual Ranking of State Accountability Systems. Unlike other accountability studies ours' is not primarily concerned with the rigor of academic standards or of the tests that measure them. The emphasis is on the complete accountability system: is it consistent, secure, open to public scrutiny, and flexible enough to improve over time? Does it allow schools flexibility in how they meet standards?

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As the stakes rise, these systems affect what gets taught and how. As a result, they will strongly influence how schools develop over the next several years. Good systems will result in better schools, and bad systems will create worse ones.

We collected data on twenty–five relevant indicators from each state and the District of Columbia. Each indicator was assigned to one of four major criteria and states received a score of either zero, one, or two points depending upon how their program performed. The criteria were:

1. **Academic Alignment:** High–stakes tests are aligned to academic content knowledge and skills as specified by the states' curriculum standards.
2. **Test Quality:** The tests are capable of determining that those curriculum standards have been met.
3. **Sunshine:** The policies and procedures surrounding the tests are open, and open to ongoing improvement.
4. **Policy:** Accountability systems affect education in a way that is consistent with the goals of the state.

These criteria were weighted at 20%, 20%, 30%, and 30% respectively, and the raw scores scaled accordingly to give each state and the District of Columbia a ranking from one to fifty–one (the highest possible scaled score was 200). Each state was also assigned letter grades on the A–F scale for each separate criterion.

The best programs are:

Rank	State	Scaled Score	Alignment	Test Quality	Sunshine	Policy
1	NC	178.5	B+	A	B	A
2	TX	167.5	B–	A–	A–	A–
3	NY	164.5	B	A	B+	B

4	MA	163.5	B+	B+	B+	B+
5	AZ	158.0	B-	A-	C+	A
6	MS	154.5	B+	A-	C-	B
7	LA	151.5	C	A	B	B+
8	KS	148.5	B-	A	B	B-
8	KY	148.5	B-	A	B-	B
8	SC	148.5	B+	B+	B	B-
8	WA	148.5	B-	A	B	C+

The worst programs are:

Rank	State	Scaled Score	Alignment	Test Quality	Sunshine	Policy
42	TN	97.0	C-	B-	C+	D
43	NM	93.0	F	B	C-	C+
44	VT	92.0	F	B-	C-	C
45	DC	90.0	F	B-	D	B-
46	SD	86.5	F	C+	C-	C+
46	WY	86.5	F	C+	C-	C+
48	MT	62.5	F	C+	F	C-
49	WV	57.5	F	C+	F	C-
50	HI	26.5	F	F	F	F
51	IA	24.5	F	F	F	D

We found much room for improvement: the mid-ranked state, Utah, received a raw score of 130 out of a possible 200, while the ten bottom-ranked programs all had scores of 97 or lower. Even top-ranked North Carolina achieved grades of "A" on only two of four criteria. It is our hope that many of these programs will have improved when we survey them again next year, both as a result of heightened public scrutiny and through compliance with the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

Although the rankings are affected by the weighting we applied, most states tend to do things well or poorly with some consistency. Most reasonable weightings (including no weighting at all) do not drastically alter the composition of the top or bottom quintiles. Rankings for unscaled scores are presented in the body of this report. Readers are encouraged to download the data spreadsheet and formulate their own weightings and judgements.

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