

Appendix 3: Review of Selected Report Cards

We examined other “report card” projects as we developed *America's Youngest Outcasts: State Report Card on Child Homelessness*. This survey provided a perspective on how similar projects have presented grades or ranking of the states, helping us to determine the best approach for providing this information in the Report Card. This Appendix summarizes the various approaches to “report card” projects and provides examples of selected publications.

Some report card-style publications rank the states 1 through 50. An index or score is assigned to states using a pre-determined formula. The states are then listed in numerical order based on this score. One example of this style is the Brady Campaign to End Gun Violence.¹ Each state is provided a scorecard in addition to its ranking, with yes/no answers to such questions as “are there limitations on assault weapons?” and “must locking devices be sold with guns?” The Brady Campaign also makes its numerical scorecard available, showing specifically how it arrived at a state’s score. Another similar report card was designed by the Institute for Innovation in Social Policy’s *The Social Health of the States 2008 Report*.² A “social health score” is calculated based on a variety of factors, and the states are then ranked based on that score. Each grouping of ten states is also given a label based on its rank. For instance, states ranked 1 to 10 receive a label of “excellent performance,” 11 to 20 “above average performance,” etc. Finally, each state receives a grade on individual indicators, again based on the state’s rank. For example, Minnesota receives an “A” for ranking in the top 10 on the child poverty indicator, but a “C” on teenage suicide for ranking from 21 and 30.

Another approach to report card-style projects assigns states an overall letter grade rather than a 1 through 50 ranking. Although a numerical score or index may be used to assign the letter grade, the letter grade is the focus of the report. An example of this approach is the Pew Center on the States *Grading the States* report.³ A letter grade is assigned to each state based on overall government performance. Further letter grades are assigned within the subtopics of “Money” (financial resources), “People” (how well the state manages its employees), “Infrastructure,” and “Information” (use of technology). Finally, within each sub-topic labels such as “Strength,” “Mid-Level,” and “Weakness” are provided. The “Money” category, for instance, uses these additional ratings for such factors as Budget Process, Long-Term Outlook, and Financial Controls. The letter grade approach is also used by the American College of Emergency Physicians *National Report Card on the State of Emergency Medicine*.⁴ This report assigns an overall letter grade to each state, followed by grades on topics such as “Access,” “Quality/Patient Safety,” “Public Health/Safety,” and “Medical Liability.” The strengths and challenges of each state are then described in text, providing further detail and an explanation of the grade.

Some reports use a mix of the “rank” and “grade” systems, such as the University of Baltimore *Obesity Report Card*.⁵ The key graphic of this report is a map of the United States. Each state is color-coded with a letter grade on its efforts to control obesity. Within the state is a number, from 1 through 50, indicating its rank on prevalence of obesity (1 indicating highest prevalence and 50 lowest prevalence). This system displays two indicators simultaneously— a ranking on the state’s prevalence of the problem and a letter grade on response to the issue. The Cato Institute’s *Implementing Welfare Reform: A State Report Card*⁶ also uses the mixed rank and grade system. Unlike the *Obesity Report Card*, however, the grade and rank display the same information. Each state is ranked 1 through 50 based on its overall welfare reform implementation score which is based on numerous factors. The same score is then used to generate a letter grade for the state.

Finally, some report cards do not assign an overall rank, score, or grade at all, reporting a score or grade only for subtopics. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce educational effectiveness report card *Leaders and Laggards* uses this approach.⁷ No overall grade or score is assigned. Rather, letter grades are given for such sub-topics as “Academic Achievement,” “Academic Achievement of Low-Income and Minority Students,” “Return on Investment,” “Rigor of Standards,” etc. The American Lung Association’s *State of Tobacco Control 2007* report also does not assign an overall grade or score to states.⁸ Individual grades are given in such areas as “Tobacco Prevention and Control Spending,” “Smokefree Air,” “Cigarette Tax,” and “Youth Access.” Additional detail is provided under each topic. Under Cigarette Tax, for example, the tax on a pack of cigarettes is listed. Tobacco control laws are described with brief indicators such as “ban” or “restriction” (such as “government workplace: ban” or “restaurants: restricts”).

This summary is not intended to be inclusive of all recently published “report card” projects. Rather, it provides an overview and examples of the major approaches to depicting information like that used in the Report Card. Some report card projects rank states 1 through 50 on a score or index, while others assign a letter grade to each state. Others use a mix of the two systems. In all cases, additional information is usually provided in the form of scores or grades for sub-topics. Finally, other report cards dispense with an overall assessment entirely. Such publications assign grades or scores only for sub-topics and do not rank states.

Based on this review and the limitations of the data sets used for the Report Card on homeless children, we decided to rank the states numerically and not grade the state or comment on how well each state is doing. Rather we decided to provide as much descriptive information as possible and then invite the field to embellish the information presented in the Report.

¹ Brady Campaign to End Gun Violence. (2007). Brady state scorecard 2007. Retrieved October 28, 2008 from www.bradiycampaign.org/legislation/state/

² Opdycke, S. & Miringoff, M. (2008). The social health of the states 2008. Poughkeepsie, NY: Institute for Innovation in Social Policy

³ Center for Innovation in Social Policy, Vassar College.

⁴ Pew Charitable Trust. (2008). Grading the states 2008. Retrieved October 17, 2008 from www.pewcenteronthestates.org/gpp_report_card.aspx

⁵ American College of Emergency Physicians. (2006). National report card on the state of emergency medicine: Evaluating the environment of emergency care systems state by state. Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved October 17, 2008 from my.acep.org/site/DocServer/2006NationalReportCard.pdf

⁶ University of Baltimore. (2006). Obesity report card. Retrieved October 17, 2008 from my.acep.org/site/DocServer/2006-NationalReportCard.pdf?docID=221

⁷ Ziegler, J. (2004). Implementing welfare reform: a state report card. *Policy Analysis*, 529, 1-92. Retrieved October 17, 2008 from www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa529.pdf

⁸ U.S. Chamber of Commerce. (2007). Leaders and laggards: A state-by-state report card on educational effectiveness. Retrieved October 17, 2008 from www.uschamber.com/reportcard

⁹ American Lung Association. (2007). State of tobacco control: 2007. New York: Author.