

the  
CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM



# THE PARENT POWER INDEX

BACK-TO-SCHOOL 2013



How Much Influence Do Parents Really  
Have Over Their Children's Education?

**A STATE-BY-STATE  
PARENT POWER INDEX**

## HOW MUCH INFLUENCE DO PARENTS REALLY HAVE OVER THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION?

### A STATE-BY-STATE PARENT POWER INDEX

#### INTRODUCTION

“Parent Power” means giving parents **Access** to quality educational **Options** and providing them with good **Information** to make smart decisions about their children’s education.

While there is a growing body of data and information available about how our 50 states and the District of Columbia compare to one another in adopting and implementing laws that govern schools, none focus exclusively on how those policies effect and empower the most important consumer out there: the parent. **Until now...**

The Center for Education Reform’s Parent Power Index® (PPI) measures the ability in each state of a parent to exercise choices, engage with their local school and board, and have a voice in the systems that surround their child - no matter what their income or child’s level of achievement. The Parent Power Index gives parents an interactive tool to discover whether their state affords them power -- and if not, what they can do to get it.

The PPI is the first and only comprehensive evaluation of state education policy that is geared exclusively towards parents, is continuously updated in real-time, and provides an arsenal of state and local resources to ensure that parents have the knowledge they need to not only understand how education functions in their state but what they can do to make it work better for all children.

For the more politically inclined parents out there, the Index also provides a user-friendly guide to how well each state’s chief executive - the governor - performs on education reform, and whether his or her leadership advances Parent Power! and access to quality schooling options for all families.

Whether you are looking into how well your governor serves you, how well your local press covers the issues, or the quality of useful information your state provides to you about your schools, the Parent Power Index is a critical ingredient for making decisions affecting families and communities and for policymakers. It is a roadmap to economic and educational improvements across the states.



## THE STATE OF PARENT POWER IN THE U.S.

The Parent Power Index is not scoring whether a state’s education laws are good or bad, but rather if those policies allow a maximum number of parents to actually make choices. The truth of the matter is that while a majority of Americans support the basic civil rights of parents to make choices, no state currently affords parents an acceptable level of true power when it comes to their children’s education.

The 2013 Parent Power Index reveals that no state earned a rating above 87%, with only four states landing within the B grade range. Very few other

states managed to earn even a C, while the majority (35 states) earned Ds or Fs.

But there’s hope for parents everywhere, and the good news is that there is room for improvement across the board. It just takes more Parent Power!

The nation’s “Top Ten” states on the Parent Power Index have policies or programs that afford parents the most opportunities to engage directly in the education of their children. These states are headed in the right direction, and provide a blueprint for parents and policymakers in other states to follow.

## THE EMPOWERED

States that achieve higher scores on the Parent Power Index have several elements working together to create educational options for parents and students.

High Parent Power! scores stem from a strong charter school law, with multiple and independent charter authorizers and no cap on the number of charter schools that can be created. Choice programs such as scholarships and online learning are available to students to attend better schools no matter what their socio-economic status or zip code. Teacher effectiveness is regularly assessed and is based heavily on student achievement and growth. Information about schools and local elections is transparent and easy to access for parents. Typically, these states are more reliable in their media coverage of education-reform issues and have, or had at one point in time reform-minded executives leading their state.



U.S. RANK **#1** OVERALL PPI **87.0%** INDIANA

Whether it’s a strong charter law or a statewide school choice program, Indiana excels in nearly every Parent Power category, making it the “reformiest” state in the country. Because of programs such as the Choice Scholarship Program, recently upheld by the Indiana State Supreme Court and serving 10,000 students statewide, a robust charter school movement, and emerging digital learning options it’s no wonder why Indiana hangs on to its number one ranking.

U.S. RANK **#2** OVERALL PPI **84.0%** FLORIDA

The sun is definitely shining in a state that provides scholarship programs for low-income and disabled students, and the ability to navigate important information very easily on the state's school directory. Although lacking independent charter school authorizers that would provide more and better options for parents, and still without a parent trigger law, Florida has striven to facilitate parent empowerment through choice programs, the largest online learning population in the country, and strong teacher accountability.

U.S. RANK **#3** OVERALL PPI **82.0%** OHIO

Ohio remains in the top five on the Parent Power Index for having a proportionately higher number of quality schooling opportunities from which parents can choose, above-average teacher quality measures, and strong online educational options. Choice programs are wide-ranging, from a new disabilities-based scholarship to a voucher program in Cleveland, and a statewide program that serves 16,000 students. A reform pioneer, Ohio continues to build on its legacy of placing choice in the hands of parents and students.

U.S. RANK **#4** OVERALL PPI **81.0%** LOUISIANA

Louisiana has reversed decades of poor policy by adopting in the last seven years improvements to school choice, including comprehensive performance pay policies and accountability reporting requirements for all schools. In April 2013, however, the State Supreme Court struck down the funding mechanism for Louisiana's statewide scholarship program, violating the civil rights of the 5,000 income-qualifying students that innovative program serves. Finding a new avenue for funding these important scholarships and strengthening its charter law will be key steps to bolstering Parent Power! in the Bayou State.

U.S. RANK **#5** OVERALL PPI **80.0%** ARIZONA

This Southwestern state has long been an oasis for quality educational options. With several different choice programs available, including the only educational savings account program, Arizona is a true pioneer when it comes to empowering parents. Arizona also has a strong charter school law featuring all of the major components of a high-quality charter law. With all the options available to parents it's no wonder that this state moves into the top five.

## ELEMENTS OF POWER

### CHARTER SCHOOL

The degree to which states offer or provide for a significant number of charter school opportunities to families is another important piece of parent power. States that have stronger laws ensure greater access to quality charter school options.

### SCHOOL CHOICE

School choice programs are evaluated on their potential to reach all children across a state. Programs where significant numbers of parents throughout the state can obtain scholarships and other forms of state support to send their kids to schools of their choice score higher than those that have limitations based on geography, appropriations, categories of need or appropriations. This element of power was scored using data and analysis provided by the The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice.

### TEACHER QUALITY

Teacher quality is an equally important facet of the Parent Power Index. States that ensure high quality individuals can teach without barriers to entry score higher. States where teacher effectiveness is judged on objective data fare better than states with little focus on attracting, retaining, and rewarding teachers. This portion of the Parent Power Index is derived from The National Council on Teacher Quality's detailed analysis in its annual State Teacher Policy Yearbook.

### TRANSPARENCY

States are judged based on the transparency and accessibility of data for the average person. States that provide comprehensive and user-friendly report cards, share information about school options, and explain how well their schools perform can gain points in their overall PPI. Similarly, states where parents are able to vote in school board races during the general election cycle, as opposed to off times of the year when turnout is low, tend to afford parents more power in their decision-making.

### ONLINE LEARNING

Online learning is a relatively new component of education reform, and for most states, is still a work in progress. The data and analysis for this element is attributed to Digital Learning Now's evaluation of state policies and their alignment to the 10 Elements of High Quality Digital Learning.

## EMERGING STATES

The number of states currently reforming education policies is a testament to the growing consensus surrounding the demand for more Parent Power! In the legislative chambers of these states are an increasing number of emboldened lawmakers who are – finally – implementing meaningful reforms that help put more power and decision-making where it belongs, in the hands of parents and students.



School reform and steps toward parent empowerment this year in Idaho weren't exactly small potatoes. Thanks to a law passed in April 2013, colleges and universities are now permitted to authorize charter schools, a move which in other states has created a plethora of quality choices for parents. Add in facilities funding for charter schools and Idaho is well on its way up the Parent Power ladder.



It seems that Granite State lawmakers finally might be getting the message. Not only was the moratorium on new charter schools lifted, but funding has been allocated for newly authorized schools as well.



Everything is bigger in Texas, including the potential for more Parent Power! The state expanded its already solid online learning presence, allowing public charter and home-schooled students to participate in virtual coursework. Although not removed, the cap on charter schools was raised, and funding is now available for charter schools to upgrade their facilities.



The new charter school law allowing for 40 new schools is modest, to be sure, but at least it finally creates something on which to build. A news report in July 2013 signaled that charter schools might be coming to Spokane, though Seattle had yet to take any significant action. Furthermore, a lawsuit filed by the BLOB of union interests challenging the constitutionality of the new charter law is a strong indicator that Washington's parent-empowering education policy is heading in the right direction.

## STAGNANT

States that are the bottom dwellers on the Parent Power Index actually have a few significant characteristics in common that contribute to their stagnation. Some of these states are home to very homogenous populations where disrupting the status quo appears to be undesired by parents and lawmakers alike.

Other states have shown activity on parent-empowering education reforms, but have not delivered meaningful results. Year after year in states such as Kentucky and Montana, for example, groups of lawmakers try to introduce charter school laws, and year after year those charter laws fail to come to fruition. Performance statistics in some of these states may appear favorable, but efforts to aid average and failing students to bolster their achievement level remain woefully behind. If a state's political leadership is not talking about education-reform issues, they're telling parents that what their kids have is just good enough.



A lack of a charter law on the books is sadly one of several Cornhusker deficiencies in giving parents access to opportunities for their children. There is no annual statewide teacher evaluation system, and when evaluations are conducted they're not tied to student growth. Students can enroll in schools outside of their home districts, but it doesn't make up for no charter law, no school choice scholarship programs, and limited online learning opportunities.



A weak charter law that combines restrictive personnel policies with confining students to schools in their home districts has demonstrated how little Iowa lawmakers value the role of parents and choice in education. However, Governor Branstad in June 2013 signed into law an annual teacher evaluation system based in part on student growth, a possible sign reform is making inroads into the Hawkeye State.



Although efforts have been made to enact better laws, the folks in Frankfort just can't seem to get much done in the way of real reform. Kentucky can point to moving school board elections to general election dates, but not much else.



With only 36 percent of students proficient in reading by the 4th grade, it's time North Dakota lawmakers shake up the status quo and allow more high-quality educational options. One of only eight remaining states with no charter school law, North Dakota also offers little flexibility on schooling options.



It's difficult to say which aspect of Montana education policy is the most disappointing. Parents can easily locate school data on the state website and enroll their children in another public school statewide. But aside from that, they do not have the choice to send their children to charter schools, enroll them in a full-time online school, or have a 'parent trigger' option to revamp a failing school.

# THE PARENT POWER INDEX SCORING RUBRIC

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STATE	PERCENT PPI	Rank as of August 2013	Rank as of April 2013	Rank as of January 2013	Rank as of Sept 2012	Charter Schools	School Choice	Teacher Quality	Online Learning	AVERAGE	Parent Trigger	Transparency	School Board Elections	Bonus Points	FINAL SCORE
INDIANA	87.0%	1	1	1	1	4.0	3.0	2.3	2.0	3.16	✓	✓		0.06	3.22
FLORIDA	84.0%	2	2	2	2	3.3	2.0	3.0	3.7	2.83		✓	✓	0.02	2.85
OHIO	82.0%	3	4	3	3	2.3	3.3	2.7	1.3	2.60	✓	✓	✓	0.07	2.67
LOUISIANA	81.0%	4	3	6	6	2.3	3.0	1.7	2.3	2.49	✓	✓		0.06	2.55
ARIZONA	80.0%	5	6	4	4	3.3	2.5	1.3	1.3	2.50		✓	✓	0.02	2.52
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	79.0%	6	5	5	5	4.0	1.3	1.0	N/A	2.41		✓	✓	0.02	2.43
WISCONSIN	77.5%	7	8	9	10	2.3	3.0	1.0	1.0	2.24				0.00	2.24
GEORGIA	77.0%	8	7	12	12	2.3	1.7	2.0	3.0	2.13		✓	✓	0.02	2.15
MINNESOTA	76.6%	9	9	7	9	4.0	0.0	1.7	3.0	2.09		✓	✓	0.02	2.11
UTAH	76.4%	10	10	10	8	2.7	1.0	1.7	3.7	2.06		✓	✓	0.02	2.08
MICHIGAN	76.2%	11	11	11	11	4.0	0.0	2.3	2.0	2.04		✓		0.01	2.05
PENNSYLVANIA	73.0%	12	12	8	7	2.3	2.0	1.3	0.0	1.78		✓	✓	0.02	1.80
COLORADO	72.0%	13	13	14	14	3.0	0.5	2.0	1.3	1.73			✓	0.01	1.74
SOUTH CAROLINA	71.0%	14	16	23	25	2.7	0.5	1.7	2.0	1.66		✓	✓	0.02	1.68
OKLAHOMA	71.0%	15	14	13	13	2.0	1.0	2.7	1.0	1.59				0.00	1.59
NEW YORK	70.5%	16	15	16	16	3.3	0.0	2.0	0.0	1.49		✓		0.01	1.50
NORTH CAROLINA	70.0%	17	21	31	31	1.7	1.0	1.7	1.7	1.44		✓	✓	0.02	1.46
CALIFORNIA	68.5%	18	17	22	20	3.0	0.0	1.3	0.0	1.29	✓			0.05	1.34
IDAHO	68.0%	19	18	15	15	2.7	0.0	1.3	1.0	1.30		✓		0.01	1.31
RHODE ISLAND	67.6%	20	19	21	22	1.3	0.5	2.7	1.3	1.18			✓	0.10	1.28
MISSOURI	67.4%	21	20	17	17	3.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	1.25				0.00	1.25
WASHINGTON	67.2%	22	38	28	30	2.0	0.0	1.7	2.0	1.21		✓		0.01	1.22
DELAWARE	66.4%	23	22	24	24	2.3	0.0	2.0	0.0	1.11		✓		0.01	1.12
TEXAS	66.2%	24	23	20	21	1.7	0.0	1.7	1.7	1.06	✓			0.05	1.11
NEVADA	66.0%	25	24	19	19	2.0	0.0	1.7	1.0	1.09		✓	✓	0.02	1.11

STATE	PERCENT PPI	Rank as of August 2013	Rank as of April 2013	Rank as of January 2013	Rank as of Sept 2012	Charter Schools	School Choice	Teacher Quality	Online Learning	AVERAGE	Parent Trigger	Transparency	School Board Elections	Bonus Points	FINAL SCORE
TENNESSEE	65.6%	26	25	18	18	2.0	0.0	2.7	0.0	1.09		✓		0.01	1.10
MAINE	65.4%	27	26	37	36	1.7	0.5	0.7	1.3	1.08				0.00	1.08
NEW MEXICO	65.2%	28	27	32	32	2.0	0.0	1.3	1.0	1.04		✓		0.01	1.05
MASSACHUSETTS	65.0%	29	28	25	23	2.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	1.00		✓		0.01	1.01
OREGON	64.6%	30	29	27	28	2.0	0.0	0.7	0.7	0.93		✓		0.01	0.94
NEW JERSEY	64.4%	31	30	33	33	2.0	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.91		✓		0.01	0.92
HAWAII	64.2%	32	32	38	42	1.7	0.0	0.7	1.0	0.85				0.00	0.85
ARKANSAS	63.5%	33	33	34	34	1.3	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.74		✓		0.01	0.75
ILLINOIS	63.0%	34	31	26	29	1.3	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.74		✓		0.01	0.75
NEW HAMPSHIRE	62.5%	35	34	40	39	1.0	0.5	0.7	0.0	0.65		✓		0.01	0.66
CONNECTICUT	62.0%	36	35	36	37	1.0	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.59	✓		✓	0.06	0.65
WYOMING	61.0%	37	36	30	26	0.7	0.0	1.0	1.3	0.55				0.00	0.55
MARYLAND	60.6%	38	37	39	38	1.0	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.54				0.00	0.54
VIRGINIA	60.4%	39	39	35	35	0.0	0.0	1.3	2.7	0.50		✓		0.01	0.51
KANSAS	60.2%	40	41	49	49	0.0	0.0	1.0	2.7	0.46				0.00	0.46
MISSISSIPPI	59.6%	41	40	41	40	0.0	0.5	1.3	0.0	0.35	✓	✓		0.06	0.41
ALABAMA	59.4%	42	46	42	41	0.0	0.5	1.7	0.0	0.40				0.00	0.40
ALASKA	59.2%	43	42	29	27	0.7	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.39		✓		0.01	0.40
WEST VIRGINIA	58.6%	44	43	44	44	0.0	0.0	1.3	1.3	0.33				0.00	0.33
IOWA	58.4%	45	48	46	46	0.0	0.5	1.0	0.0	0.31		✓		0.01	0.32
SOUTH DAKOTA	58.2%	46	44	48	48	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.3	0.29		✓		0.01	0.30
VERMONT	57.5%	47	45	45	45	0.0	0.5	0.7	0.0	0.28			✓	0.01	0.29
KENTUCKY	57.0%	48	47	43	43	0.0	0.0	1.3	0.7	0.25			✓	0.01	0.26
NORTH DAKOTA	56.5%	49	49	47	47	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.13		✓		0.01	0.14
NEBRASKA	56.0%	50	50	50	50	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.09				0.00	0.09
MONTANA	0.0%	51	51	51	51	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.00				0.00	0.00

Note: The formula was created with individualized scores for each Element of Power, each converted to a four-point scale and combines to make up an averaged GPA which was then converted to a percentage of power for each state. Charter Schools and School Choice were weighted as 75% of the overall grade. Bonus points are calculated based on whether a state has a parent trigger law, and whether or not information on schools and school board elections are transparent, or available to the public. States earn .05 for having a parent trigger law and .01 each for transparency of schools and school board elections, for a possible bonus total of .07. Ties are broken based on choice implementation and how influential these categories are on affording parents true power.

## OTHER FACTORS

Whether state executives are *pro-reform* or not is an important element in ensuring parents have power. While governor or candidate positions are not factored into a state's overall PPI score, it's clear that states with more reform-minded leaders have policies in place that result in greater parent power.

The *media* also plays a big role in informing the public and policymakers on education. But when reporting lacks balance, context, and sound data, it is no longer a reliable source for parents to make smart decisions about their kids schooling. Media reliability is not factored into a state's Parent Power Index score, but the Center for Education Reform's Media Bullpen provides a critical eye to help parents better understand the complexity of the issues being reported and gives them numerous tools to be a stronger voice in education reporting.

Finally, the increasingly popular "*parent trigger*" laws provide parents and educators the opportunity for parents to turn around failing schools. As this is a significant lever for change, the seven states that afford parents this kind of power earned a boost on the Index.

## ABOUT THE PARENT POWER INDEX

The Center for Education Reform has nearly two decades under its belt working to empower parents. Since 1999, CER has been providing Parent Power!, a program aimed at helping parents make sense of schooling. Parent Power! started out as a quarterly magazine, but as the World Wide Web grew, so did Parent Power! CER has helped develop and network over 10,000 grassroots groups all across the country.

Find out how much power you have and what you can do to get more by calling 800-521-2118 or visiting The Parent Power Index online at: <http://www.edreform.com/in-the-states/parent-power-index/>



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