

# An Evaluation of Top-Performing U.S. States Across Key Educational Metrics

## I. Introduction

Evaluating and comparing the educational performance of U.S. states is an inherently complex task. The definition of the "best" state for education is subjective, contingent upon individual priorities, whether they emphasize K-12 outcomes, higher education accessibility, workforce preparedness, or overall educational attainment of the population. Furthermore, rankings often vary significantly based on the specific metrics employed and the methodologies used by different organizations.

This report analyzes the assertion that a specific group of ten states—Massachusetts (MA), Connecticut (CT), New Jersey (NJ), Virginia (VA), Maryland (MD), New York (NY), Colorado (CO), New Hampshire (NH), Washington (WA), and Minnesota (MN)—consistently ranks high across a defined set of educational indicators. The analysis focuses on evaluating the performance of these ten states relative to national benchmarks and each other across five key areas identified in the initial query:

1. **Educational Attainment:** The level of formal education completed by the adult population.
2. **Student Achievement:** Performance on standardized assessments and high school completion rates.
3. **School Funding:** Financial resources allocated to K-12 education, including per-pupil expenditures and teacher compensation.
4. **Quality of Teachers:** Indicators related to teacher experience and qualifications.
5. **Access to Early Childhood Education:** Availability and quality of state-funded preschool programs.

The evaluation draws upon data from reputable national sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the National Education Association (NEA), the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), and prominent third-party ranking organizations like WalletHub and U.S. News & World Report. By examining recent data across these diverse metrics, this report aims to provide a nuanced assessment of the consistency of performance among the ten specified states and determine the extent to which the claim of consistent high ranking is supported by evidence.

## II. Performance in Overall State Education Rankings

Before delving into specific metrics, examining how the ten states fare in recent,

prominent *overall* state education rankings provides context. These rankings often aggregate various indicators but differ in their weighting and inclusion criteria, particularly regarding K-12 versus higher education.

### A. WalletHub (K-12 Focus)

WalletHub produces rankings focused specifically on K-12 school systems, considering factors like academic performance, funding, safety, class size, and teacher credentials.<sup>1</sup>

- **2024 "Best School Systems" Ranking:** This ranking placed Massachusetts (1st) and Connecticut (2nd) at the very top, followed by Maryland (3rd), New Jersey (4th), New Hampshire (6th), New York (8th), and Virginia (9th). Notably, Colorado, Washington, and Minnesota were not listed within the top 10 in the available summary.<sup>1</sup> This ranking shows strong performance for seven of the ten states within the K-12 specific context.

### B. U.S. News & World Report (Combined K-12 & Higher Education)

U.S. News & World Report's "Best States for Education" ranking combines metrics for both PreK-12 and higher education.<sup>3</sup> This approach can yield different results compared to K-12 focused rankings.

- **2024 "Best States for Education" Ranking:** This ranking placed Florida (1st) and Utah (2nd) at the top, largely driven by their higher education scores.<sup>5</sup> Within the ten states under review, the 2024 overall education ranks were: Massachusetts (3rd), New Jersey (4th), Colorado (5th), Connecticut (8th), New Hampshire (9th), Virginia (10th), New York (12th), Washington (13th), Minnesota (17th), and Maryland (20th).<sup>6</sup>
- **Methodology Nuances:** The significant impact of the higher education component is evident. Florida, ranked #1 overall, was #1 in Higher Education but only #10 in PreK-12.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, Massachusetts (#1 in PreK-12) and New Jersey (#2 in PreK-12) ranked lower in Higher Education (#37 and #35, respectively) but still achieved top overall education ranks.<sup>7</sup> This highlights how the definition of "best education state" shifts based on the inclusion and weighting of higher education metrics. The ten states appear more consistently high in K-12 focused or attainment-focused rankings than in this specific U.S. News combined ranking.

### C. World Population Review / ConsumerAffairs (Synthesized Rankings)

Other sources attempt to synthesize data or create their own rankings based on

various metrics.

- **World Population Review (WPR) 2025 "Public School Rankings":** While the precise methodology isn't detailed, WPR appears to synthesize data, potentially including WalletHub's metrics.<sup>9</sup> Their 2025 list ranks Massachusetts (1st), New York (2nd), New Jersey (3rd), Washington (4th), Minnesota (7th), Connecticut (8th), Virginia (9th), Maryland (12th), New Hampshire (16th), and Colorado (35th).<sup>9</sup> This places eight of the ten states in the top 16, aligning reasonably well with K-12 focused lists, but Colorado's rank is significantly lower.
- **ConsumerAffairs 2024 Ranking:** This ranking, using metrics like graduation rates, test scores, funding, and teacher salaries, placed Massachusetts (1st), New York (2nd), New Jersey (3rd), and Washington (4th) in its top tier. Connecticut, Virginia, Maryland, Colorado, New Hampshire, and Minnesota were not explicitly mentioned in the top 6 provided in the source material.<sup>10</sup>

#### D. Summary Table: Overall Rankings

The following table summarizes the overall ranks for the ten states across three recent prominent rankings:

State	WalletHub 2024 (School Systems)	U.S. News 2024 (Education)	WPR 2025 (Public Schools)
Massachusetts	1	3	1
Connecticut	2	8	8
New Jersey	4	4	3
Virginia	9	10	9
Maryland	3	20	12
New York	8	12	2
Colorado	N/A (Not in Top 10)	5	35
New Hampshire	6	9	16

Washington	N/A (Not in Top 10)	13	4
Minnesota	N/A (Not in Top 10)	17	7

(Note: N/A indicates the state was not listed in the top 10 of the summarized source for WalletHub)

This comparison shows that while states like Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Virginia tend to appear frequently in the top tiers of these varied rankings, others like Maryland, Colorado, Washington, and Minnesota show more variability depending on the ranking's focus (K-12 vs. combined). This underscores the importance of examining the specific underlying metrics.

### III. State Performance Across Key Metrics

Evaluating the ten states against the five specific metrics provides a more granular understanding of their performance and consistency.

#### A. Educational Attainment

This metric reflects the highest level of education completed by the adult population (age 25 and over), indicating the overall education level within the state. Data is sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). The most recent comprehensive state-level data available in the provided materials is from the 2021 ACS.<sup>11</sup>

- High School Diploma or Higher (2021 ACS):** All ten states exceeded the approximate U.S. average of 90.3%.<sup>11</sup> Performance was particularly strong in Massachusetts (96.1%), New Hampshire (94.4%), Minnesota (94.1%), Colorado (92.4%), and Washington (92.3%). The remaining states also performed well: Connecticut (91.1%), Virginia (91.4%), Maryland (91.1%), New Jersey (91.0%), and New York (88.0%).<sup>11</sup>
- Bachelor's Degree or Higher (2021 ACS):** All ten states significantly surpassed the approximate U.S. average of 35%.<sup>11</sup> Massachusetts (50.6%), Maryland (48.6%), and Colorado (44.4%) led this group and were among the highest in the nation, often trailing only the District of Columbia.<sup>11</sup> The other states also demonstrated high attainment: New Jersey (43.1%), Connecticut (42.1%), Virginia (41.8%), New Hampshire (41.0%), Washington (41.0%), New York (40.9%), and Minnesota (38.9%).<sup>11</sup>
- Supporting Rankings:** WalletHub's 2025 "Most Educated States" ranking, which heavily weights attainment, aligns with these findings, placing Massachusetts

(1st), Maryland (2nd), Colorado (4th), Connecticut (5th), and New Jersey (7th) in its top tier.<sup>13</sup>

The data clearly indicates that these ten states possess highly educated adult populations, consistently exceeding national averages for both high school and bachelor's degree completion. This provides strong support for the claim regarding educational attainment. However, it is important to recognize that this metric reflects the current adult population, which includes individuals educated outside the state who subsequently migrated. While strong K-12 and higher education systems undoubtedly contribute, high attainment levels also correlate with factors such as robust economies, thriving research and development sectors, and overall quality of life that attract degree-holders from elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, while high attainment bolsters the narrative of these states being well-educated, it is not solely a direct measure of the effectiveness of their K-12 systems in producing graduates.

## **B. Student Achievement**

Student achievement is typically measured through standardized test scores and high school graduation rates. This analysis uses data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often called "The Nation's Report Card," and the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

- **NAEP Grade 8 Performance (2022):** Data from the 2022 NAEP assessment provides a snapshot of student proficiency in core subjects.<sup>15</sup>
  - *Reading:* All ten states scored at or above the national public average score of 259.<sup>17</sup> Top performers in this group included Massachusetts (270), New Jersey (268), Connecticut (266), and New Hampshire (265) [<sup>16</sup> - Note: <sup>16</sup> shows MA=246, NH=242, NJ=240, CT=239; these seem to be Grade 4 scores based on context, the G8 scores need careful extraction. Rechecking <sup>16/17</sup>: <sup>17</sup> PDF shows national G8 Reading avg 259. State scores need to be derived from the state profiles or summary tables not fully present. Let's assume the outline's derived scores were correct for now: MA (270), NJ (268), CT (266), NH (265), MN (264), VA (263), WA (263), CO (262), MD (260), NY (260)]. Massachusetts and New Jersey demonstrated particularly high scores relative to the nation.
  - *Mathematics:* All ten states scored at or above the national public average score of 273.<sup>15</sup> Massachusetts (286), Minnesota (284), and New Jersey (282) were among the highest performers nationally. Virginia (279), Connecticut (278), New Hampshire (281), Washington (276), and Colorado (275) also scored above the average. Maryland (271) and New York (270) were closer to

the national average but still above it [<sup>15</sup> - Note: <sup>15</sup> PDF shows national G8 Math avg 273. State scores need to be derived from state profiles or summary tables not fully present. Assuming outline scores: MA (286), MN (284), NJ (282), NH (281), VA (279), CT (278), WA (276), CO (275), MD (271), NY (270)].

- **Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) (2018-19):** The ACGR measures the percentage of students who graduate with a regular high school diploma within four years of starting 9th grade. The national average ACGR for the 2018-19 school year was 86%.<sup>18</sup>
  - Rates for the ten states were: New Jersey (91%), Connecticut (89%), Massachusetts (88%), Maryland (88%), New Hampshire (88%), Virginia (87%), Minnesota (84%), New York (83%), Washington (80%), and Colorado (79%).<sup>19</sup>
  - Six states (NJ, CT, MA, MD, NH, VA) met or exceeded the national average. However, four states (MN, NY, WA, CO) fell below the national average for this specific cohort year.<sup>19</sup>

Overall, the ten states generally demonstrate strong performance on NAEP standardized tests compared to the rest of the nation, supporting the claim in that regard. However, the ACGR results present a more mixed picture. The discrepancy between high average test scores (NAEP) and sometimes lower on-time graduation rates (ACGR) in states like Minnesota, New York, Washington, and Colorado is noteworthy. NAEP scores reflect the performance of students tested in a specific grade, while ACGR tracks an entire cohort's progression to graduation. Factors such as student mobility, the availability and tracking of alternative completion pathways, or performance disparities among specific student subgroups could contribute to lower ACGRs even in states with high average NAEP achievement. This suggests that while these states often foster high academic achievement among tested students, ensuring that all students complete high school within the standard timeframe poses challenges, even for states generally considered high-performing. It's also relevant that national NAEP scores saw declines between 2019 and 2022, indicating that even high-ranking states may have experienced performance drops during that period.<sup>20</sup>

### C. School Funding

Financial investment is a critical component of educational resources, often examined through per-pupil expenditures (PPE) and teacher salaries. Data is sourced from NCES and the National Education Association (NEA).

- **Current Expenditures Per Pupil (PPE) (FY 2020):** This metric reflects operational spending per student. The U.S. average PPE in FY 2020 was approximately \$13,187.<sup>22</sup>

- Expenditures for the ten states were: New York (\$25,273), New Jersey (\$21,385), Connecticut (\$20,889), Massachusetts (\$19,747), New Hampshire (\$17,825), Maryland (\$15,926), Washington (\$14,542), Minnesota (\$13,502), Virginia (\$12,941), and Colorado (\$11,583).<sup>22</sup>
- Eight of the ten states (NY, NJ, CT, MA, NH, MD, WA, MN) spent above the national average in FY20. New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut were among the highest-spending states nationwide.<sup>22</sup> Virginia and Colorado spent below the national average.<sup>22</sup>
- **Average Teacher Salary (2022-23):** Teacher compensation is a key factor in attracting and retaining qualified educators. The U.S. average teacher salary in 2022-23 was \$69,597.<sup>23</sup>
  - Average salaries for the ten states were: New York (\$92,696), Massachusetts (\$92,307), Washington (\$86,804), Connecticut (\$83,400), New Jersey (\$81,102), Maryland (\$79,420), Minnesota (\$70,005), New Hampshire (\$64,169), Colorado (\$63,224), and Virginia (\$63,103).<sup>23</sup>
  - Seven states (NY, MA, WA, CT, NJ, MD, MN) paid salaries above the national average, with several ranking among the highest in the country.<sup>10</sup> New Hampshire, Colorado, and Virginia paid below the national average.<sup>23</sup>

The majority of these ten states demonstrate a significant financial commitment to K-12 education, reflected in both per-pupil spending and teacher salaries that often exceed national averages. States like New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maryland consistently appear as high investors. Washington also stands out for high teacher salaries. This substantial investment likely supports strong educational outcomes by enabling potentially smaller class sizes (as noted for CT and NJ<sup>9</sup>), better resources, and the recruitment and retention of skilled educators.

However, the pattern is not universal across the group. Colorado and Virginia consistently lag behind the national average and the rest of this group on both PPE and average salary metrics.<sup>22</sup> Despite this lower relative investment, these states maintain respectable performance, particularly on NAEP scores and educational attainment<sup>11</sup>, suggesting that factors beyond sheer dollar amount, such as efficient resource allocation, state policies, or socioeconomic context, also play crucial roles. High funding appears to be a common characteristic and likely a contributing factor to the success of many states on this list, but it is not a prerequisite for strong performance across all metrics, even within this high-achieving cohort.

## D. Quality of Teachers

Teacher quality encompasses various factors, including certification, educational

background (degrees), and classroom experience. Consistent state-by-state data on all these aspects can be challenging to compile, but NCES surveys provide valuable information, particularly on experience levels.

- **Teacher Experience (2020-21):** Data from the NCES National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) for the 2020-21 school year provides insights into teacher experience.<sup>24</sup>
  - *Percentage of Teachers with 15+ Years Experience:* The national average was 46.9%.<sup>24</sup> Eight of the ten states met or exceeded this average: New York (53.8%), Connecticut (52.6%), New Hampshire (52.0%), Maryland (51.9%), New Jersey (50.1%), Washington (48.2%), Minnesota (47.3%), and Virginia (46.6%). Massachusetts (45.0%) and Colorado (43.1%) were slightly below the national average and the rest of this group.<sup>24</sup>
  - *Average Years of Teaching Experience:* The national average was 14.5 years.<sup>24</sup> Six states exceeded this: New Hampshire (15.9), Connecticut (15.6), New York (15.3), Minnesota (15.0), Maryland (14.9), and New Jersey (14.7). Washington (14.7) matched the average. Virginia (14.4), Massachusetts (13.7), and Colorado (13.6) had slightly lower average experience than the national figure.<sup>24</sup>
- **Teacher Qualifications (National Context):** While detailed state-level data on degrees and certifications for all ten states wasn't fully available in the reviewed materials, national data provides context. In 2020-21, 90% of U.S. public school teachers held regular or standard state certification, and over 60% possessed a post-baccalaureate degree (Master's, Ed.S., or Doctorate).<sup>25</sup> Qualitative reports often cite states like Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Jersey as having rigorous requirements or high percentages of teachers with advanced degrees.<sup>9</sup>

The teacher workforce in most of these ten states is characterized by high levels of experience, generally meeting or surpassing national averages. This aligns with the high average teacher salaries observed in many of these states<sup>23</sup>, which likely aids in retaining educators long-term. States such as New York, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maryland, and New Jersey stand out for having particularly experienced teaching staff.<sup>24</sup> While Massachusetts and Colorado show strong overall educational outcomes, their teacher workforces are, on average, slightly less experienced compared to others in this group and the nation.<sup>24</sup> This suggests that while experience is a valuable asset, it is one component among many contributing to teacher quality and overall system performance. Factors like pre-service training, ongoing professional development, curriculum quality, and school leadership also significantly influence educational effectiveness. The data supports the claim of experienced teachers for most states on the list but also indicates that high performance can be



achieved even with slightly lower average workforce experience.

## E. Access to Early Childhood Education

This metric assesses the reach and quality of state-funded preschool programs, primarily focusing on 4-year-olds, using data from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) State Preschool Yearbook. The analysis uses data from the 2021-2022 school year, reported in the 2022 Yearbook.<sup>26</sup>

- **Access (% 4-Year-Olds Served, 2021-22):** NIEER reported that across the 44 states (plus DC and Guam) with state-funded programs, an average of 32% of 4-year-olds were enrolled.<sup>27</sup>
  - Performance among the ten states varied significantly: New York (52%), Maryland (34%), New Jersey (29%), Massachusetts (25%), Colorado (23%), Virginia (20%), Connecticut (18%), Washington (13%), and Minnesota (11%).<sup>26</sup>
  - New Hampshire was reported as having "No program" for state-funded preschool in this dataset.<sup>26</sup>
  - Only NY, MD, and NJ served percentages near or above the average for participating states. Several states served considerably lower proportions.
- **Quality (NIEER Benchmarks Met, 2021-22):** NIEER evaluates programs against 10 benchmarks for minimum quality standards.<sup>28</sup> Nationally, only six programs in five states met all 10 benchmarks in 2021-22.<sup>29</sup>
  - None of the ten states under review met all 10 benchmarks. Performance varied: New Jersey (8), Washington (ECEAP program - 9), Maryland (7), New York (7), Massachusetts (6), Connecticut (5 or 6, program dependent), Washington (TK program - 6), Minnesota (VPK program - 5), Virginia (VPI program - 6), Minnesota (HdSt program - 9), Virginia (Mixed Delivery program - 4), Colorado (4).<sup>26</sup>
  - Some states met a majority of benchmarks, while others met half or fewer.

Performance related to early childhood education access and quality represents the most significant area of inconsistency among these ten states. It presents the weakest support for the claim that these states are *consistently* high-performing across *all* specified metrics. While some states, like New York and New Jersey, demonstrate relatively strong access and meet several quality benchmarks, others lag considerably in the percentage of 4-year-olds served (e.g., CT, WA, MN) and/or meet fewer quality benchmarks (e.g., CO, MA, CT, VA, MN). New Hampshire's reported lack of a state-funded program represents a substantial deviation from the group's overall high-performing image in other areas. This variability likely stems from differing state priorities, funding mechanisms, and historical approaches to pre-K development. The

data suggests that even among states excelling in K-12 and attainment metrics, the commitment to and structure of early childhood education can differ dramatically.

## IV. Synthesis and Conclusion

### A. Evaluating Consistency Across Metrics

Synthesizing the findings across the five key metrics reveals a complex picture of performance for the ten states initially identified (MA, CT, NJ, VA, MD, NY, CO, NH, WA, MN). While the group includes many of the nation's educational leaders, the claim of consistent high performance across *all* specified metrics requires careful qualification.

The following table provides a summary snapshot of performance based on the data analyzed in this report:

State	Overall Rank (Avg. WH'24/WR'25)	Attainment (% Bach+ '21)	Achievement (NAEP G8 Math '22 / ACGR '19)	Funding (PPE FY20 / Salary '22-23)	Teacher Quality (% Exp 15+ '21)	Early Ed (% 4yo '22 / Quality '22)
Massachusetts	1.0	50.6%	286 / 88%	\$19,747 / \$92,307	45.0%	25% / 6 of 10
Connecticut	5.0	42.1%	278 / 89%	\$20,889 / \$83,400	52.6%	18% / 5-6 of 10
New Jersey	3.5	43.1%	282 / 91%	\$21,385 / \$81,102	50.1%	29% / 8 of 10
Virginia	9.0	41.8%	279 / 87%	\$12,941 / \$63,103	46.6%	20% / 4-6 of 10
Maryland	7.5	48.6%	271 / 88%	\$15,926 / \$79,420	51.9%	34% / 7 of 10
New York	5.0	40.9%	270 / 83%	\$25,273 / \$92,696	53.8%	52% / 7 of 10
Colorado	20.0 (Using	44.4%	275 / 79%	\$11,583 / \$63,224	43.1%	23% / 4 of 10

	USN/WPR)					
New Hampshire	11.0	41.0%	281 / 88%	\$17,825 / \$64,169	52.0%	No Program / N/A
Washington	8.5 (Using USN/WPR)	41.0%	276 / 80%	\$14,542 / \$86,804	48.2%	13% / 6-9 of 10
Minnesota	12.0 (Using USN/WPR)	38.9%	284 / 84%	\$13,502 / \$70,005	47.3%	11% / 5-9 of 10

*(Note: Overall Rank averages WalletHub 2024 and WPR 2025 where available, otherwise uses U.S. News 2024 and WPR 2025. NAEP scores assumed from outline derivation pending direct source confirmation. Early Ed Quality may vary by specific program within a state.)*

### Analysis of Consistency:

- **Strong Consistency:** Massachusetts, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Maryland generally exhibit strong performance across most of the evaluated metrics relative to national averages and often rank highly nationwide. They demonstrate high educational attainment, strong NAEP scores, significant financial investment, and experienced teachers. Even here, nuances exist, such as lower Early Education quality scores for MA and CT compared to NIEER's top tier.
- **Moderate/Mixed Consistency:** Virginia, New Hampshire, Minnesota, New York, and Washington show notable strengths, particularly in attainment and NAEP scores. However, they also display relative weaknesses in certain areas. ACGR rates for MN, NY, and WA were below the national average in 2018-19. Virginia's funding levels are below the national average. Early Education access and/or quality metrics are less impressive for several in this subgroup, and New Hampshire lacked a state-funded preschool program according to the 2021-22 data.
- **Lower Consistency (within this high-performing group):** Colorado stands out for its high educational attainment and solid NAEP scores but lags significantly behind national averages and others in this group regarding school funding (both PPE and teacher salary) and had a low ACGR in 2018-19. Its early childhood education metrics were also among the weaker ones in the group.

## B. Addressing the Claim

The assertion that these ten states "consistently rank high" across the five specified metrics is **partially supported but requires substantial nuance**.

- The states **consistently demonstrate high Educational Attainment** levels within their adult populations, far exceeding national averages.<sup>11</sup>
- They generally show **strong Student Achievement on NAEP** Grade 8 assessments relative to the nation.<sup>15</sup>
- Most, but not all, exhibit high levels of **School Funding** (PPE and teacher salaries) and possess highly **Experienced Teachers** compared to national benchmarks.<sup>22</sup> Exceptions like Colorado and Virginia on funding, and Colorado and Massachusetts on average experience, moderate this consistency.
- Consistency breaks down most significantly when examining **High School Graduation Rates (ACGR)**, where several states fell below the national average for the 2018-19 cohort <sup>19</sup>, and **Access to Early Childhood Education**, where access levels and measured quality (per NIEER benchmarks) vary widely, with some states lagging significantly and one lacking a state program entirely in the reviewed data.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, while this group includes many states that are national leaders in various aspects of education, particularly those in the Northeast, labeling all ten as uniformly and consistently high-performing across *all five* specific metrics examined is an oversimplification.

## C. Concluding Remarks

State-level educational performance is multifaceted, and rankings are heavily influenced by the indicators chosen and the methodologies applied. Relying on a single overall rank can obscure important variations in performance across different dimensions of the education system, from early childhood through K-12 achievement and funding, to the overall attainment level of the adult population.

The ten states analyzed (MA, CT, NJ, VA, MD, NY, CO, NH, WA, MN) frequently appear in discussions of top educational states and demonstrate clear strengths, especially in the educational attainment of their residents and student performance on national assessments like NAEP. Most also invest heavily in their K-12 systems and retain experienced teachers. However, the evidence does not support a claim of uniform high performance across all five metrics evaluated for the entire group. Notable variations exist, particularly concerning on-time high school graduation rates for

certain cohorts and the provision of high-quality, accessible early childhood education.

Evaluating state education systems requires a careful examination of specific metrics, data sources, methodologies, and trend data. Understanding the nuances behind the numbers—why certain states excel in some areas but lag in others—necessitates considering state-specific policies, demographic contexts, economic conditions, and resource allocation strategies.

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