

About Niche's K-12 Rankings

We've been helping people make informed choices about their education for more than 12 years. Over the years, we've helped millions of students choose their colleges. These students have come from nearly every public and private high school and school district in the United States. This gives us a unique insight into the student outcomes at each high school and district. Thanks to our comprehensive [College Rankings](#), we can also assess the quality of those student outcomes.

By incorporating millions of opinions from more than 300,000 students and parents, dozens of statistical factors, and millions of student outcomes, we're confident these are the most comprehensive K-12 school and district rankings to date.

What makes our rankings unique?

Our rankings are different, and for good reason. We believe that the quality of a school or district should be measured, at least in part, by the parents and students who actually go there. They should also be measured by hard data and across a number of key factors so that no one factor dominates a ranking. Most importantly, they should be measured by their results. The most unique thing about our rankings is that they incorporate student outcomes.

We go to great lengths to ensure that our rankings represent a comprehensive assessment of each school or district. Each Survey Score used in each ranking represents a composite score of several different survey questions pertaining to that topic. Of the dozens of statistical factors that go into each ranking, no one factor accounts for a majority of the overall weight. For example, in our [Best Public High Schools](#) ranking, no single factor accounts for more than 15 percent of the overall ranking.* Our outcome data doesn't just look at college matriculation. It looks at the quality of those colleges.

Why do we grade *and* rank schools and districts?

While our rankings show the Top 100 schools or districts for each ranking, we use grades to provide the user with some context to those rankings and also to provide insight into those that did not make the Top 100. In each ranking, it's important to focus on more than just the number. Given the high number of schools included in our rankings, there may not be a large gap between the 15th and 30th ranked schools in a given ranking. In reality, both are exceptional schools when compared to the total population of all schools. Grades can often provide greater context because they are assigned based on how each school or district performs compared to all other schools or districts included in the ranking. Grades are determined using the process defined below.

How do we compute our rankings?

To compute our rankings and grades, we go through a series of steps. These steps are in place to ensure that our rankings are statistically sound and offer the most amount of guidance to those looking to make a school choice. In general, the process used to compute each ranking was as follows:

1. First, we carefully selected each ranking's factors to represent a healthy balance between statistical rigor and practical relevance in the ranking.
2. Next, we evaluated the data for each factor to ensure that it provided value for the ranking. (The factor needed to help distinguish schools and districts from each other and accurately represent each one.) Because there are different factor types, we processed them differently:
 - Factors built from parent- or student-submitted survey responses were individually analyzed to determine a required minimum number of responses. After this, responses were aggregated. We logically have a higher degree of confidence in the aggregated score for schools with more responses, so a [Bayesian](#) method was applied to reflect this confidence.
 - Factors built from factual information were inspected for bad data including outliers or inaccurate values. Where applicable, this data was either adjusted or completely excluded depending on the specific data.
3. After each factor was processed, we produced a standardized score (called a z-score) for each factor at each school or district. This score evaluates distance from the average using standard deviations and allows each school's score to be compared against others in a statistically sound manner.
4. With clean and comparable data, we then assigned weights for each factor. The goal of the weighting process was to ensure that no one factor could have a dramatic positive or negative impact on a particular school or district's final score and that each school's final score was a fair representation of the school's performance. Weights were carefully determined by analyzing:
 - How different weights impacted the distribution of ranked schools/districts;
 - Niche parent and student user preferences and industry research;
 - Each factor's contribution to our intended goal of the ranking, as described in the introduction above.
5. After assigning weights, an overall score was calculated for each school or district by applying the assigned weights to each school's individual factor scores. This overall score was then assigned a new standardized score (again a z-score, as described in step 3). This is the final score for each ranking.
6. With finalized scores, we then evaluated the completeness of the data for each individual school or district. Depending on how much data the school had, we might disqualify it from the numerical ranking or from the grading process. Here is how we distinguished these groups using the weights described in step 4:
 - Schools or districts missing the data for 50 percent or more of the factors (by weight) were completely excluded. They did not qualify for the numerical ranking or a grade.

- Schools or districts that had at least 50 percent of the factors (by weight) but lacked one or more of the required factors were not included in the numerical ranking but were assigned a grade according to the process outlined in step 7 below.
 - Schools or districts that had all of the required factors (by weight) were deemed eligible for both a grade and a numerical ranking.
7. Lastly, we created a numerical ranking and assigned grades (based on qualifications discussed in step 6). Here is how we produced these values:
- The numerical ranking was created by ordering each school or district (when qualified) based on the final z-score discussed in step 5.
 - Grades were determined for each school or district (when qualified) by taking the ordered z-scores (which generally follow a normal distribution) and then assigning grades according to the process below.

Grading Process

Grades are assigned based on how each school or district performs compared to all other schools included in the ranking by using the following distribution of grades and z-scores. While most rankings generally follow this normal distribution, there are slight variances across each ranking, so the actual counts and distribution may vary.

Grade	Final Z-Score	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency (Score at least)
A+	$1.96 \leq z$	2.5%	2.5%
A	$1.28 \leq z < 1.96$	7.5%	10%
A-	$0.84 \leq z < 1.28$	10%	20%
B+	$0.44 \leq z < 0.84$	13%	33%
B	$0.00 \leq z < 0.44$	17%	50%
B-	$-0.44 \leq z < 0$	17%	67%
C+	$-0.84 \leq z < -0.44$	13%	80%
C	$-1.28 \leq z < -0.84$	10%	90%
C-	$-1.96 \leq z < -1.28$	7.5%	97.5%
D+	$-2.25 \leq z < -1.96$	1.3%	98.8%
D	$-2.50 \leq z < -2.25$	0.6%	99.4%
D-	$-2.50 > z$	0.6%	100%

Note that we intentionally did not assign a grade below D- to any schools in any rankings.

**Note: State Assessment Proficiency represents 15 percent of the weight in the [Best Public High Schools](#) ranking since it accounts for 25 percent of the [Academics](#) score, which is weighted at 50 percent in the Best Overall ranking, and 25 percent of the [Teachers](#) score, which is weighted at 10 percent in the Best Overall ranking.*