Heads Up on Current Education Issues
August 2015

*Heads Up* comes to you as a complimentary service from the Education Commission of the States (ECS) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and is a monthly compilation of recommended research and reading on critical public education issues.

**New from ECS!**

**The Progress of Education Reform: Health barriers to learning and the education opportunity gap** - This Progress of Education Reform explores health barriers to learning including history, key trends and approaches that policymakers can consider.

**GED, HiSET and TASC Test: A comparison of high school equivalency assessments** - This trends report provides a comparison of the GED and two alternative assessments, HiSET and TASC, along with aspects of testing programs states have weighed when deciding which high school equivalency exam to offer and the decision-making process states have used to select one or more alternatives to the GED.

**State Homeschool Policies: A patchwork of provisions** – Knowing that states regulate homeschooling in a wide variety of ways, policymakers can better inform their decisions by understanding what others around the country are doing or have done to address the topic.

**Postsecondary Financial Aid 50-state database** – This policy database provides a comprehensive look at the 100 largest state-funded financial aid programs across the country. This resource is intended to inform discussions surrounding current program design, innovative models already in practice in the states, and assist states in identifying peer programs. The 50-state data also reveals opportunities for states to rethink aid programs in light of contemporary students.

**Instructional Time Trends** - This education trends report provides an overview of the impact of instructional time on achievement, variation in school start dates, and trends in school day and year length.

**Reverse Transfer: Paving the pathway** – This education policy analysis, the second in a series of three briefs, discusses reverse transfer policies, their implementation and outcomes data from the states.
In this issue:

- Charter Schools:
  - DC Public Charter School Board: On the Road to Success 2015
  - Chartering Turnaround: Leveraging Public Charter School Autonomy to Address Failure
- Community Colleges: California Community Colleges Task Force on Workforce, Job Creation and a Strong Economy: Report and Recommendations
- Early Childhood Education Financing: Innovative Financing for Early Childhood Education: State and Local Options
- Governance: Schools of Thought: A Taxonomy of American Education Governance
- Postsecondary Accountability & Governance - Inputs, Outcomes, Quality Assurance: A Closer Look at State Oversight of Higher Education
- School Discipline: Advancing School Discipline Reform
- Teacher Preparation: Rethinking Teacher Preparation: Empowering Local Schools to Solve California’s Teacher Shortage and Better Develop Teachers
- Teacher Professional Development: The Mirage: Confronting the Hard Truth About Our Quest for Teacher Development
Responding to Opt Out Requests: The Opportunity for State Boards - Mixed responses to parents who want to opt their children out of testing represent a missed opportunity for states to communicate the tests' importance and the consequences of a failure to assess all students. Standardized tests can help districts determine how well their schools serve subgroups and can help parents and schools understand how well individual children are progressing. To minimize testing, boards can encourage districts to search for overlap in state and school-issued assessments.
Source: National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)

DC Public Charter School Board: On the Road to Success 2015 - Charter schools now serve nearly half of the District of Columbia's public school students and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools named D.C.’s charter school sector the healthiest in America. According to its 2015 annual report, 4,667 more students attend a high performing or Tier 1 school, four schools gained Tier 1 status in 2014, and eight of the top 10 schools serve between 75 and 100 percent low income-students. Of the 23 schools rated Tier 3 since 2011, six improved and 13 were closed.
Source: D.C. Public Charter School Board

Chartering Turnaround: Leveraging Public Charter School Autonomy to Address Failure - Autonomies related to staffing, curriculum, and general operations provided by state charter laws can be used to catalyze school turnaround efforts. To date, however, states and districts have not fully leveraged strategies that involve granting traditional public schools charter school freedoms as part of the turnaround process. This brief looks at successful models through three charter management organizations that have restarted traditional schools in Los Angeles, Nashville, Philadelphia and Camden.
Source: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015: National - Potential first-generation college students made up 18 percent of the national 2015 ACT-tested graduating class. While the percent meeting three or four ACT College Readiness Benchmarks went up slightly from 39 to 40 percent, 31 percent of the ACT-tested graduating class are not meeting any of the Benchmarks. The good news is, an opportunity to improve on student college and career readiness can be found in reading and science where 10 percent of students were only one or two points below the Benchmark.
Source: ACT

California Community Colleges Task Force on Workforce, Job Creation and a Strong Economy: Report and Recommendations - Faced with more jobs than educated workers to fill them, a California task force came up with 25 recommendations for its 113-college system. Among key recommendations: to revise career technical education (CTE) curriculum approval processes to ensure instructional programs keep pace with industry needs, to increase the pool of CTE instructors and to establish a sustained, supplemental funding source to increase community college capacity to create, adapt and maintain quality CTE courses.
Source: California Community Colleges Task Force

- Early Childhood Education Financing -
Innovative Financing for Early Childhood Education: State and Local Options - A toolbox of solutions to bridge the gap between lawmakers' desires to expand early childhood education and balance the budget at the same time, this white paper offers ideas from expanding private investment to cutting wasteful government spending, creating parity between higher education and early education, and levying excise taxes. Minnesota and North Carolina have declared that e-cigarettes are subject to the tobacco tax. Other states are considering it.
Source: Save the Children Action Network

- Governance -

Schools of Thought: A Taxonomy of American Education Governance - Classifying state education governance structures, this study found Hawaii and North Carolina concentrate by far the most authority at the state level, while Wyoming leaves the most authority to local districts. Florida had the most consolidated system with authority concentrated in the state board and the state's few large districts. Alaska had the most distributed system and the most restrictive state in the union was Minnesota. No known education governance type is discernibly best for students, researchers concluded.
Source: Thomas B. Fordham Institute

- Postsecondary Accountability & Governance -

Inputs, Outcomes, Quality Assurance: A Closer Look at State Oversight of Higher Education - State authorization of postsecondary institutions varies by who is involved in the process, what authorizers require and what they measure. The authors recommend a risk-based approach in which authorizers focus their resources on cases that pose the most risk to consumers. They would set up politically independent oversight boards, then make sure wage information from unemployment insurance is connected to postsecondary enrollment so it’s transparent who is doing a good job and who isn’t.
Source: American Enterprise Institute

- School Discipline -

Advancing School Discipline Reform - Punitive discipline doesn't work and often backfires. As states, districts and schools wrestle with the simultaneous problems of improving instruction and school climate, they should shift toward more supportive approaches to school discipline, the authors assert. Research is shedding light on what alternative strategies work better. Examples are given of school, district, SEA and state regulations that seem to be working.
Source: National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)

- Teacher Preparation -

Rethinking Teacher Preparation: Empowering Local Schools to Solve California's Teacher Shortage and Better Develop Teachers - As teacher shortages affect more California districts, the situation can be seen as a challenge, but also an opportunity to improve the numbers and quality of new teachers. This brief recommends asking districts and charters to take greater responsibility for cultivating their own teacher pipelines and giving them the flexibility to do so. They can demand that preparation programs put consumer needs first; support partnerships between districts or charter schools and preparation providers; and integrate teacher preparation with broader human capital strategies.
Source: Bellweather Education Partners
The Mirage: Confronting the Hard Truth About Our Quest for Teacher Development - Despite the fact that districts spend a massive amount on professional development - $18,000 per teacher annually - most teachers don't improve substantially. Even when teachers did improve, the authors said they were unable to link that growth to any development strategy. They recommend redefining what it means to help teachers improve, reevaluating existing professional learning supports and programs and reinventing how to support effective teaching at scale.
Source: TNTP Reimagine Teaching

What is YOUR State Doing?
Send along any information or state analyses you consider useful for your fellow legislative staffers, and we will see that it is included in the next issue of Heads Up.
Please send information to Emily Workman at eworkman@ecs.org.