Heads Up on Current Education Issues
December 2013

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!

Dual Enrollment
Dual Enrollment Database - This 50-state database of dual enrollment policies provides information on 20 policy components, including program basics, access, finance, ensuring program quality, and transferability of credits earned through dual enrollment programs.

English Language Learners
English Language Learners: A Growing—Yet Underserved—Student Population - The latest issue of the Progress of Education Reform explores the research and data underscoring the urgency of better serving the growing English language learner (ELL) population, and highlights research and approaches that may inform state responses.

New from NCSL!

Funding Strategies for Charter School Facilities - Hear the recorded podcast from a webinar where NCSL explores the complexities of funding charter school facilities. Experts discuss the various strategies states have implemented to support the acquisition of facilities for charter schools.

Evaluating School Principals: From the Statehouse to the Schoolhouse - Hear the recorded podcast from a webinar that takes an in-depth look at how a state and large urban district are working together to evaluate and support principals, with particular attention to supporting principals as evaluators of teachers.

Performance Based Funding for Higher Education - Hear the recorded podcast from a webinar that highlights metrics and strategies to evaluate the short-term effects of performance-based funding formulas.
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- Attendance – Compulsory Age -

**Does Raising the State Compulsory School Attendance Age Achieve the Intended Outcomes?** - Eleven states raised their compulsory school attendance age from 2002 to 2011, but few outcome studies were conducted and many of those were flawed, researchers found. Findings were mixed as to changes in dropout, truancy, and disciplinary actions. Maryland intends to raise the compulsory attendance age from 16 to 17 in the 2014-15 school year and from 17 to 18 the following year, thus presenting a new opportunity for a well-designed, more definitive study. Authors recommended that states instituting such policies combine them with supporting retention and dropout prevention strategies.

Source: Institute of Education Sciences

- Career and Technical Education -

**Trends in CTE Coursetaking** - According to this report, the average number of Career and Technical Education (CTE) credits earned by public high school graduates declined from 1990 to 2009, from 4.2 to 3.6 credits, while the number of credits earned in other areas -- English, math, science, and social studies -- increased. However, within occupational CTE, some areas saw increased participation: communications and design, health care, public services, and consumer and culinary services. Meanwhile, participation in business, manufacturing, computer and information sciences, engineering technologies, and repair and transportation dropped.

Source: NCES

- Common Core – Assessments -

**Report on Options for Assessments Aligned with the Common Core State Standards** - This report urges Michigan to proceed with plans to introduce the Smarter Balanced exam for 2014-15 as a replacement for the state’s standardized exam. The report, requested by lawmakers after they removed a funding block for implementation of the Common Core, examines 12 test options in the marketplace. It provides summaries on the cost of each test, scoring and reporting methods, test security transparency, and overall design.

Source: Michigan Department of Education

- Curriculum – Math (Algebra) -

**Does an Algebra Course with Tutoring Software Improve Student Learning?** - Blending use of a conventional algebra textbook with tutoring software -- Cognitive Tutor Algebra I -- resulted in an overall increase in achievement equivalent to moving from the 50th percentile to the 58th. In a study which looked at algebra students in 73 high schools and 74 middle schools in seven states, improvements occurred in the second year perhaps because teachers and schools needed time to implement CTAI effectively. The cost was about $70 more per student than a traditional textbook algebra course.

Source: Rand

- Finance - State Budgets -

**The Fiscal Survey of States** - State finances are modestly improving in fiscal 2014, the fourth consecutive year of general fund spending growth, according to this Fall/December report. Budget cuts and gaps have declined and overall revenue collections have exceeded projections. Signs of fiscal distress continue to subside. Spending increases in fiscal 2014 were generally directed at K-12 education and
Medicaid, although five states enacted budget cuts to K-12. Higher education, transportation and corrections also experienced increases. Six states cut higher education budgets.
Source: National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO)

- NCLB Waivers – School Accountability -

It’s All Relative: How NCLB Waivers Did—and Did Not—Transform School Accountability - This report found that, on average, two-thirds of the schools identified for improvement in 2011-12 under No Child Left Behind were not identified as such once waivers allowed states to rank schools on a relative rather than an absolute basis of performance. And the variation in state accountability systems makes it difficult to determine if the "right" schools are identified as the lowest-performing. The primary reason behind these changes is not additional performance measures, or complicated school grading systems in states, but rather the new federal approach for identifying the worst schools. With NCLB, schools in improvement fell short of a pre-determined performance standard: Adequate Yearly Progress. With waivers, however, the “standard” is the number of schools that must be identified—at least 15 percent of Title I schools must become priority or focus schools.
Source: New America Foundation

- Postsecondary -

Constructive Innovation: Recapping 2013 Higher Education Legislative Activity in the West - For the first time in years, revenues have increased to the point that some states were able to appropriate more money for higher education. This brief on legislative activity in the West also highlights such issues as performance funding, college affordability, in-state tuition for undocumented students, guns on campus, and state authorization of online education.
Source: WICHE

- Remediation -

Rethinking 12th Grade: Preparing All Students for College Before College - Seven states and the District of Columbia have implemented initiatives for transition-to-college courses in high school: Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia, according to this brief. The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) is working with its 16 member states to embrace a college-readiness agenda and has developed model transition courses available online to everyone. For example, Tennessee offers a bridge math course, which this year is expanding to 9,000 students who will then be eligible to take a tuition-free math class for dual credit.
Source: Jobs for the Future

- Teacher Certification – Math -

Student Math Achievement and Out-of-Field Teaching – New from the ECS Research Studies Database - Researchers used the National Center for Education Statistics' High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLS:09) to investigate the distribution of math teachers with a math major or certification and to show how HSLS:09 can be used. They found that 10% of 9th graders have math teachers with neither a math major nor math certification and that low-achieving 9th graders are much more likely than higher-scoring students to have a teacher without those qualifications.
- Teacher Evaluation -

**Incentives, Selection, and Teacher Performance: Evidence from Impact** – New to the ECS Research Studies Database, a look at IMPACT, the controversial teacher evaluation and compensation system implemented in the District of Columbia by then-Chancellor Michelle Rhee, found that dismissal threats implied by a "minimally effective" rating had meaningful effects, inducing voluntary attrition among low-performing teachers and improvements in the subsequent performance of those who stayed. Further, for high-performing teachers, a stronger financial incentive meaningfully improved subsequent teacher performance.

- Teacher Preparation -

**Training Out Future Teachers** - Although effective research-based strategies do exist to help new teachers manage their classrooms, an analysis of 122 teacher preparation programs finds most don't draw from research. Half ask candidates to develop their own "personal philosophy of classroom management." Based on 150 studies, five of the most important classroom strategies include: establish rules that teach behavior expectations, build structure and routines to guide students in a variety of situations, reinforce positive behavior with praise, impose consequences for misbehavior, and engage by teaching interesting lessons that include opportunities for student participation.

Source: National Council on Teacher Quality

- Teaching Quality -

**Who Considers Teaching and Who Teaches? First-Time 2007–08 Bachelor’s Degree Recipients by Teaching Status 1 Year After Graduation** - Anticipating a teacher shortage -- especially teachers of color, male teachers, science, and math – the authors of this brief compared four groups of bachelor's degree recipients from 2007-08 and found that the representation of males and Black and Hispanic graduates was higher among those who considered teaching but didn't teach prior to graduation or after graduation. The highest proportion of STEM majors did not consider teaching. College graduates who taught before or after graduation earned higher annual incomes in 2009 and reported higher job satisfaction than those who considered or who prepared for teaching but didn’t teach.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

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**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*.

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