Heads Up on Education Issues

February 2011

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). Sometimes you’ll find that we produced a document, but we’ve also reviewed many other recent reports for you and selected these as relevant and reflective of information you can trust.

If there’s something you’d like to suggest for the next issue, please let us know. State reports often cover topics which would be of great interest to other states. Feel free to send information about such reports for inclusion in an upcoming issue.

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Blended Learning

A report from Innosight Institute looks at the future of blended learning at the K-12 level.

Career Pathways

Harvard researchers acknowledge that academe’s concentration on four-year college as a goal has failed a vast number of students needing preparation for careers requiring less than a bachelor’s degree. They argue for articulating a student’s career options as early as middle school and defining coursework and training required.

Charter Schools

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers has released its latest authorizer survey report—an annual portrait of authorizer successes and struggles.

Charter schools have freedoms not afforded to traditional public school districts. The author of this Center on Reinventing Public Education report observes that autonomy creates opportunity but it doesn’t guarantee it. The report points out some of the pitfalls of charter school autonomy.

College Readiness

Achieve has released their sixth annual report on closing the expectations gap through alignment of high school policies with the knowledge and skills needed for college or career readiness.

College Completion

The National Governors Association convened a Work Group on Common College Completion Metrics to make recommendations on common higher education measures that states should collect and report publicly.
District Consolidation

Policymakers often view district consolidation as a means of conserving valuable school dollars. This National Education Policy Center policy brief finds that consolidation will generally not save money or improve education outcomes.

Dropout Prevention

NCSL’s Task Force on School Dropout Prevention and Recovery offers recommendations that can help ensure all children have a path to high school graduation and are prepared for success in college, work and life. The report is free to legislators and legislative staff.

Early Learning

A new Vanderbilt University study, which will be fully released this week, found that children who attended Tennessee's public pre-kindergarten gained an average of 82% more on early literacy and math skills than comparable children who did not attend. The initial results are from the first rigorous longitudinal study of the effects of public pre-K attendance on a statewide scale.

This latest study entered into the ECS research study database evaluates the technical adequacy and information/cost return of computerized adaptive test assessments and several established assessments used in early reading programs.

English Language Learners

Another ECS research study entry provides a comprehensive, user-friendly, review and analysis of recent research to inform and improve instructional practices to help English learners.

Finance—American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

To capture grants from the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, states had to assure they would make progress in K-12 education reform. The Center on Education Policy report on states’ strategies, plans and progress in addressing these reforms in More to Do, But Less Capacity to Do It.

Listserv Queries

Summaries of recent questions to LESN members can be found on NCSL’s web site. The queries included are on the states considering statewide teacher furloughs, state board of education appointments, state education standards and cost effectiveness of the 12th grade.

Online Education

After examining how technology has “disrupted” and reshaped the manufacturing industry, Clayton Christensen turned his gaze to higher education and points out the problems it may face if it doesn’t change to meet emerging challenges. Here is the executive summary.

Pensions

The National Education Association recently reported on the “Characteristics of Large Public Education Pension Plans.” In particular note Chapter 5, beginning on page 51, which shows the amount employees chip in across the states.

Don’t miss this timely webinar. Public Pensions: Truth or Scare? Presented by the NCSL Labor and Economic Development Committee. Guaranteed to provide factual information on the state of public pension plans and actions taken by the states to address underfunding and projected shortfalls. Click here to register.
Postsecondary Finance—Tuition and Fees

The State Higher Education Executive Officers have released the current financial assistance policies for public colleges and universities.

Remedial Education

More students are enrolling in college. Many of them, however, flunk placement tests, must take remedial courses, and fail to finish a degree. Find out what states are doing to help these students earn a degree in NCSL’s new brief, Reforming Remedial Education.

School Calendar

SREB’s Focus series looks at the alternative school calendar, year-round school programs and provides an update on the four-day school week in the SREB states.

STEM

The current issue of ECS’ Progress of Education Reform identifies promising and research-based approaches for enhancing student interest and achievement in STEM disciplines, including approaches that come with a smaller state-budget price tag.

Teacher Compensation

With so much attention going to teacher compensation, you may want to review Michael Griffith’s Progress of Education Reform: Teacher Merit Pay.

Tenure

States address the issue of teacher dismissal in various ways. Some have eliminated the term “tenure”. Others have repealed tenure and tightened the due process timelines.

Did you know

Last edition we highlighted examples of ECS expertise, but here are NCSL staff members who can provide testimony, state policy information and answers to your questions on a number of issues:

Washington, D.C. Office
Lee Posey (lee.posey@ncsl.org)--federal education issues, NCLB, NCSL Standing Committee on Education

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Brenda Bautsch (brenda.bautsch@ncsl.org)--college access, success and affordability; remedial education; community colleges

Julie Davis Bell (julie.bell@ncsl.org)--higher education funding, accountability, online learning
Josh Cunningham (josh.cunningham@ncsl.org) alternative education, class size, vouchers, school safety, character education, civics education, community service, compulsory education, expulsion, parental involvement, religion in schools, suspension, social promotion, school safety, testing, truancy, general legislative tracking

Sunny Deyé (sunny.deye@ncsl.org) -- dropouts, K-16 issues, middle schools, high school reform, college and career readiness

Michelle Exstrom (michelle.exstrom@ncsl.org) -- teaching quality, NCSL Education Committee

Michelle Liu (michelle.liu@ncsl.org) college access and success, adult learning

Yilan Shen (yilan.shen@ncsl.org) -- charter schools, school choice, school bullying, education technology

Sara Shelton (sara.shelton@ncsl.org) -- school leadership, school governance

Ashley Wallace (ashley.wallace@ncsl.org) -- after-school, summer learning and other expanded learning opportunities, school calendar

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