Heads Up on Current Education Issues

February 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!

Educators’ Perceptions of How Schools Can Foster Successful Service-Learning - In 2010, the National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) established the Schools of Success, a national network of 19 schools that use service-learning as an instructional strategy. The schools were part of a three-year project to examine how the elements of service-learning might enhance key student outcomes, such as academic performance and civic engagement. Through this project, the NCLC also has gathered information on school administrators’ and teachers’ perceptions of the facilitators and barriers to successful service-learning. In general, teachers and administrators identified lack of time as the most critical barrier to service-learning success.

Moving the Needle on Degree Completion: The Legislative Role - The College Completion Agenda hinted at how legislators could initiate effective reform. This document, produced with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, provides a roadmap that state leaders can use to reach their goals and presents action-oriented policymaking models that could sustain reform. (Matthew Smith, ECS, February 2013)

ECS has launched a new Kindergarten Database that provides state policy information as of December 2012 on the 50 states and the District of Columbia, including: whether a Child Must Attend Kindergarten, Kindergarten Entrance Age, Compulsory School Age, Kindergarten Readiness Assessments, Curriculum, Minimum Required Days/Hours for Kindergarten, Kindergarten Standards - General Information and Teacher/Student Ratios.

Find information on the education-related proposals from 46 Governor’s in their State of the State Addresses. Search by state or issue area HERE.

New from NCSL!

State Policies to Improve Student Transfer - This brief reviews state policy options that can strengthen the pathway between community and four-year college and discusses the benefits of such policies to colleges, students and the state. Such polices can create a coherent, statewide procedure for transferring; establish a common course numbering system throughout the state higher education system; identify a general education core that is accepted by all institutions; and facilitate direct transfer of a two-year degree to a four-year university. Other strategies states are considering include maintaining a website to host information about the transfer process, establishing a reverse transfer policy and creating transfer pathways.
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- School Turnaround: Turning Around Low-Performing Schools in Chicago
- Student Mobility: The Longitudinal Effects of Residential Mobility on the Academic Achievement of Urban Elementary and Middle School Students
- Teacher Issues: When Teachers Choose Pension Plans: The Florida Story
The Effect of ESEA Waiver Plans on High School Graduation Rate Accountability – This report finds that many states granted Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waivers by the U.S. Department of Education are implementing policies that depart from the 2008 regulations on reporting high school graduation rates and graduation rates of student subgroups that are traditionally underserved. This results in a possible loss of accountability, the authors argue. A state-by-state chart of highlights and recommendations follows. Source: Alliance for Excellent Education

Testing Integrity Symposium: Issues and Recommendations for Best Practice - In light of the recent reports of misconduct by school officials in the test administration process, and the importance of that process, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) sought to collect and share information about practices and policies that have been used to prevent, detect, and respond to irregularities in academic testing. Source: U.S. Department of Education

Measuring Up to the Model: A Ranking of State Charter School Laws – This report ranks state charter school laws against The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools’s model charter law and found the top-rated states were Minnesota, Maine, Washington, Colorado, and Florida. Source: The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

KIPP Middle Schools: Impacts on Achievement and Other Outcomes - This report finds that students in KIPP charter schools experience significantly greater learning gains in math, reading, science, and social studies than do their peers in traditional public schools. For example, the study concludes that KIPP students, over a three-year period, gained an additional 11 months of learning in math and eight additional months in reading. Source: Mathematica Policy Research [Note: Full Report is 180 pages]

Developmental Education: A Barrier to a Postsecondary Credential for Millions of Americans – This is one of several "memos" produced in the Looking Forward series for policymakers. These briefs lay out in two pages the bottom line, what is known, and what is next. Bottom line, community colleges are under the gun from two directions: too many students arrive unprepared, and expectations are higher than ever for the colleges to produce educated, career-ready workers. What do we know? Completion rates are low because students don’t survive developmental ed. Short-term reforms have short-term results. Comprehensive reforms are hard to scale up. Showing promise: letting student enroll in regular classes with a companion developmental class. Next? Aligning common core high school standards with college standards so students come in better prepared. Source: MDRC

Estimating the Impact of the Massachusetts English Immersion Law on Limited English Proficient Students’ Reading Achievement - New from the ECS research studies database: Whether English immersion or bilingual education is best for limited English proficiency (LEP) students has been the subject of much controversy. The authors looked at reading tests of LEP 3rd graders before and after Massachusetts’ sheltered English immersion law was passed and concluded the law had no statistically significant, negative effect.
- Expanded Learning Opportunities -

**Year-Round Learning: Continuity in Education Across Settings and Time Through Expanded Learning Opportunities**

In the third brief in this series explores four benefits of year-round learning. In particular, continuity across time and settings allows: shared resources among educational partners; family and youth engagement in learning, prevention of summer learning loss; and coordinated systems to track and use data. This brief provides examples of year-round learning programs along with recommendations for policymakers looking for ways to increase youth engagement in learning.

Source: Harvard Family Research Project and the National Conference of State Legislatures

- Leadership -

**Cultivating Great Principals: The District Role** - Great principals are key to turning around urban schools. But effective school leadership rarely just happens by itself; it needs to be cultivated by school districts. This publication draws on a decade of foundation research and work in school leadership to describe nine steps districts can take to ensure they have principals capable of boosting teaching and learning. Actions include everything from establishing selective hiring procedures to providing mentoring to novice leaders.

Source: The Wallace Foundation

**Operating in the Dark: What Outdated State Policies and Data Gaps Mean for Effective School Leadership** - This report offers an analysis on states’ policies that affect principal preparation, licensure, tenure, and data collection. This report explores how states are using their authority to increase the supply of effective principals focused on raising student achievement. The findings are based on self-reported data from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Included are state policy recommendations to drive needed reforms and give the educational community new insights on promising efforts by states to improve the supply of high-quality principals.

Source: George W. Bush Institute, Alliance to Reform Education Leadership’s Principal Policy

- Online Learning -

**Adaptability to Online Learning: Differences Across Types of Students and Academic Subject Areas** - Online education is often held out as a way to increase access to higher education, especially for those who have historically been underrepresented in college. This study suggests that some of the students most often targeted in online learning’s access mission are less likely than their peers to benefit from -- and may in fact be hurt by -- digital as opposed to face-to-face instruction.

Source: Columbia University

- P-3 -

**From Birth to Graduation and Beyond: Aligning Best Practices in Educational Systems to Improve Learning Outcomes** – Through the evaluation of case studies, this report describes various leadership approaches, structures, policies, practices, and challenges that characterize efforts to align and integrate P-3 education systems and services as of 2011.

Source: Center for the Study of Educational Policy, Illinois State University

- Postsecondary - College Completion -

**Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates** - A report digs deeper into college graduation rates. It finds that of the 1.9 million students enrolled for the first time in all degree-granting institutions in fall 2006, 54% had graduated within six years. Another 16.1% were still enrolled in some sort of postsecondary program after six years, and 29.8% had dropped out altogether.

Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center
- School Turnaround -

**Turning Around Low-Performing Schools in Chicago** - This report focuses on student outcomes, as well as the demographic changes in students and teachers. The authors find that four years after undergoing dramatic reform efforts such as turnaround, very low-performing elementary schools in Chicago closed the gap in test scores with the system average by almost half in reading and two-thirds in math. The improvements took time to develop; test scores were not significantly better in the first year of reform, but grew larger over time.

Source: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research

- Student Mobility -

**The Longitudinal Effects of Residential Mobility on the Academic Achievement of Urban Elementary and Middle School Students** – New from the ECS research studies database: This research study explores the effect of changing residences on young people’s academic achievement and finds that residential moves in the early elementary years have a negative effect on math and reading achievement in 3rd grade and a negative effect on the trajectory of reading scores thereafter.

- Teacher Issues – Pensions -

**When Teachers Choose Pension Plans: The Florida Story** – How would prospective teachers feel about? The authors of this report looked at the choices new Florida teachers made between new 401K-type pensions, which could save states and districts money, as opposed to traditional pensions. The authors found that a quarter to a third of new Florida teachers opted for the 401K-style pensions. Teachers with more career options—those with advanced degrees or STEM specialties—also were apt to choose 401K-type pensions, as were charter teachers. The attrition rate was much higher for those choosing 401Ks.

Source: Fordham B. Institute

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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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