Heads Up on Current Education Issues
January 2014

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!

Pre-K Funding
State Pre-K Funding – 2013-14 Fiscal Year – ECS conducted an analysis of 2013-14 preschool allocations by the 50 states and the District of Columbia. For the second year in a row, even in the midst of continuing state budget constraints, policymakers are making significant investments in state-funded pre-K programs.

School Accountability
School Accountability “Report Card” Database – This 50-state database of school accountability systems provides information on state rating systems including the metrics used by states to measure school performance (what gets measured), the information and metrics schools must report to the public on their report cards (what gets reported), and the type of system used to rate the schools.

Civic Education
Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning – This guidebook serves as a resource—a what’s next?—for teachers, administrators, policymakers, and other education leaders who want to put the “Six Proven Practices of Effective Civic Learning” in place but are not sure how to begin.

New from LESN!

2014 LESN Hot Topics
NCSL and ECS have once again compiled some great resources on hot education policy issues for 2014. Here you’ll find links to more information on early childhood and higher education and everything in between.

New from NCSL!

Education Federal Update
Staff in NCSL’s Washington office provides the latest information on actions by Congress and the Administration in the latest issue of Education Federal Update. In this issue: how education programs fared in omnibus appropriations; committee hearing on TRIO and GEAR UP; addressing campus sexual violence; and House Committee hearing on disadvantaged students.
In this issue:

- Accountability – School Improvement: Examining Turnaround Efforts Funded by School Improvement Grants
- Choice – Charters: Is There Empirical Evidence That Charter Schools “Push Out” Low-Performing Students?
- Common Core – Assessments: A Primer on Common Core-Aligned Assessments
- English Language Learner/Bilingual:
  - Home Language Survey Practices in the Initial Identification of English Learners in the United States
  - Nearly 50 Years Post-Jim Crow: Persisting and Expansive School Segregation for African American, Latina/o, and ELL Students in Texas
- High School - College Readiness: Early Assessments and Transition Curricula: What States Can Do
- NCLB Waivers: Advancing Comprehensive Reform: Rethinking District Use of Title I Resources
- P-3: Subprime Learning: Early Education in America Since the Great Recession
- Postsecondary – Success:
  - Predictors of Postsecondary Success
- Postsecondary – Participation: Determinants of Mismatch Between Students and Colleges
- Special Education:
  - Educational Accommodations for Students With Behavioral Challenges: A Systematic Review of the Literature
  - Variation Found in Rates of Restraint and Seclusion Among Students With a Disability
- Teaching Quality:
  - Comparing Estimates of Teacher Value-added Based on Criterion- and Norm-referenced Tests
  - Summary of Research on the Effectiveness of Math Professional Development Approaches
Experiencing Turnaround Efforts Funded by School Improvement Grants – To get an idea of the impact of federal School Improvement Grants, researchers compared low-performing schools that got the grants with similar schools that didn’t. They looked at three inter-related levers for school improvement: decision-making power, state and district support for turnaround, and state monitoring. In almost all operational areas, they found less than half of both groups reported having primary responsibility for decision making. Most states, districts and schools reported providing or receiving some turnaround support, and most states reported that monitoring involved site visits and analysis of student data. Source: Mathematica Policy Research

In School + On Track: Attorney General’s 2013 Report on California’s Elementary School Truancy & Absenteeism Crisis – To be smart on crime, combating truancy must be a core goal of California public safety policy, argue the authors of this study on truancy and absenteeism in that state. One out of five elementary school students -- 691,470 -- were reported truant in the 2011-12 school year. Statewide, 38% of all truant students were elementary school children. Estimates for 2013 indicated 1 million elementary school children were truant, 83,000 chronically truant -- missing 10% or more of the school year. Levels of intervention and recommendations for stakeholders are identified. Source: California Attorney General

Is There Empirical Evidence That Charter Schools “Push Out” Low-Performing Students? – New to the ECS Research Studies Database – As publicly funded schools, charter schools are expected to serve all types of students; however, there has been concern that not only do charters lure the best students away from traditional public schools, but they "push out" the lowest achieving students. This study finds that low-performing students are neither more nor less likely to transfer out of charter schools than out of traditional schools.

A Primer on Common Core-Aligned Assessments – This primer on Common Core assessment is for state policymakers, advocates, educators, and other stakeholders who are transitioning to new systems that measure student achievement under the new standards. Goals of the Common Core are explained as well as how those goals affect the new assessments. Comparisons are made with current state tests, ACT Aspire, PARCC and SBAC. Source: Education First

Home Language Survey Practices in the Initial Identification of English Learners in the United States – New to the ECS Research Studies Database – Most states require some form of state- or district-created Home Language Survey (HLS) for determining English-language learner status of students. To date, however, there is little evidence about the validity of HLS as a method for identifying potential English
language learners. For instance, the number and phrasing of HLS screening items varies widely and may or may not provide valid and reliable information, raising issues of equity. Because of the fundamental role these surveys play, their use and the instruments themselves need further scrutiny. This study concludes with recommendations for federal- and state-level action.

**Nearly 50 Years Post-Jim Crow: Persisting and Expansive School Segregation for African American, Latina/o, and ELL Students in Texas** – New to the ECS Research Studies Database – Despite two decades of high-stakes testing and accountability as systemic reforms, Texas English-language learners continue to be segregated. The authors of this study suggest several possible reasons: residential segregation in urban neighborhoods and -- increasingly -- suburban neighborhoods, as well as segregation in race, poverty, and language proficiency.

**Early Assessments and Transition Curricula: What States Can Do** – When states crank out Common Core assessments -- or similar tests -- a lot of 11th graders are going to find out they're not college ready and, barring some kind of intervention, are headed for remedial college classes which are expensive and offer no credit. This two-page brief, based on a longer study, discusses potential ways to help students avoid that costly, unrewarding path. Some states, districts, and schools already offer 12th-grade transition classes, but of the 38 states who assess college readiness in some way, not all provide an intervention. Transition curricula are offered in 29 states; of these, eight are statewide initiatives.

Source: Community College Research Center

**Advancing Comprehensive Reform: Rethinking District Use of Title I Resources** – Analysts looked at district-level responses to Massachusetts' February 2012 waiver from the No Child Left Behind Act, a waiver that included greater flexibility with Title I funds. Districts took the opportunity to support low-income students and turn around under-performing schools by extending instructional time through longer school days and years and summer programming. Also, they used new monies to hire data coaches to better identify low-performing students and schools or paid for teachers to learn data analysis.

Source: Rennie Center

**Subprime Learning: Early Education in America Since the Great Recession** – Five years after the height of the Great Recession, the authors looked at an array of indicators in policy, funding, family well-being, and achievement for children from birth through third grade. They note progress in home visitation, infrastructure-building, standards and accountability, but conclude those years have not worked in favor of young children. They saw more child poverty, a lack of attention to English language learners, years of reduced state funding and sequestered federal funding.

Source: New America Education Policy Program

**Predictors of Postsecondary Success** – Intended to help policymakers and educators identify qualities that predict postsecondary success, this brief summarizes research on the subject from early childhood.
to high school. At the lower levels, predictors mostly leapfrogged to achievement at higher levels -- for example, kindergarten readiness correlating with 3rd-grade reading proficiency. At the high school level, there were numerous indicators and predictors reflecting a breadth of research.

Source: American Institutes for Research

Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002): A First Look at 2002 High School Sophomores 10 Years Later -- This longitudinal study found that ten years after they were high school sophomores, students who'd earned at least a bachelor’s degree were less likely to have lost a job since January 2006 (19%) than those with only a high school credential (40%). The study, which sheds light on how key markers affect life outcomes, also found that among those who began their postsecondary education within three months of high school completion, 42% had earned a bachelor’s degree by 2012; among those who began their postsecondary education 13 or more months following high school completion, 6% had earned a bachelor’s degree by 2012.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

- Postsecondary - Participation -

Determinants of Mismatch Between Students and Colleges -- New to the ECS Research Studies Database -- This study reports that a majority of students are mismatched in college -- the quality of the college they attend does not match their academic ability. Mismatch has implications for the design of state higher education systems and for student aid policy.

- Special Education -

Educational Accommodations for Students With Behavioral Challenges: A Systematic Review of the Literature -- New to the ECS Research Studies Database -- Schools must use teaching accommodations to help students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) to achieve their educational goals. This study looked at numerous research studies about different types of accommodation strategies and found little evidence that commonly used accommodations are effective.

Variation Found in Rates of Restraint and Seclusion Among Students With a Disability -- This study found that across school districts there were 2.6 instances of restraint for every 100 students with a disability for the 2009-10 school year compared to 0.1 instances for students without a disability. The majority of U.S. school districts do not restrain or seclude students with a disability. However, low-poverty, low-diversity districts use restraint and seclusion more than twice as often as high-poverty, high-diversity districts. The authors conclude, "One compelling explanation for the tremendous range in rates of restraint and seclusion is profound differences in policy."

Source: Carsey Institute

- Teaching Quality -

Comparing Estimates of Teacher Value-added Based on Criterion- and Norm-referenced Tests -- Designers of new performance evaluation systems need to understand the factors that can affect the validity and reliability of value-added results or other measures based on student assessment data used to evaluate teacher performance. This study provides new information on the degree to which value-added estimates of teachers differ by the assessment used to measure their students’ achievement growth.
Summary of Research on the Effectiveness of Math Professional Development Approaches — This comprehensive literature review identified 643 studies of professional development interventions related to math in grades K–12. Thirty-two of the studies used a research design for assessing the effectiveness of math professional development approaches, and five of those met What Works clearinghouse evidence standards. Of the five, only two found positive effects on student math proficiency.

Source: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance

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