Heads Up on Current Education Issues
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*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!**

**Blueprint for College Readiness**
ECS launched the [Blueprint for College Readiness](#) initiative to provide guidance and support to the growing number of states working to improve student success and transition from high school into postsecondary. Designed by state leaders for state leaders, the Blueprint features a menu of 10 critical policies promoting college readiness and success. A 50-state analysis explores the extent to which states are pursuing these policies. Accompanying resources, technical assistance and [online database](#) are designed to respond to the unique needs of states.

**Effectiveness-focused teacher preparation**
This [issue](#) of the Progress of Education Reform explores why obtaining meaningful information on how well teacher-preparation programs are preparing our nation's teachers often remains such a challenge. Moving in the direction of effectiveness-focused preparation is presented as an effective strategy and one that a number of states already have initiated.

**Closing the achievement gap: Four states' efforts**
A new [report](#) highlights the efforts of four states -- Connecticut, Massachusetts, Washington and Wisconsin -- to reduce their achievement gaps through state-level task forces or commissions and other legislative action. These four states historically boast average or strong academic achievement levels, but all are facing achievement gaps, some of them significant.
In this issue:

- Assessment: A New Era for Educational Assessment
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- Common Core State Standards and Assessments:
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- Curriculum – Mathematics: The Unintended Consequences of an Algebra-for-All Policy on High-Skill Students: Effects on Instructional Organization and Students’ Academic Outcomes
- P-3 Kindergarten: The Longitudinal Effects of Kindergarten Enrollment and Relative Age on Children’s Academic Achievement
- Postsecondary Completion: U.S. high school dropout rate reaches record low, driven by improvements among Hispanics, blacks
- School Vouchers: Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program
- State Longitudinal Data Systems: Empowering Parents and Communities through Quality Public Reporting
- Student Achievement: Evidence of Deeper Learning Outcomes
- Teaching Quality – Compensation: Teacher Pay and Career Paths in an Opportunity Culture
**- Assessment -**

**A New Era for Educational Assessment** - The time is ripe for a major shift in educational assessment. State and federal policymakers should reconsider their overreliance on standardized tests, and they should embrace the use of multiple measures that, in combination, provide much deeper and more useful information about students' readiness to succeed after high school.

Source: Jobs for the Future

**- Charter Schools -**

**2010 Charter School Facility Finance Landscape** - An overview of current financing options from foundations and nonprofit financing organizations, this report also provides a description of the tax-exempt bond market for charter schools. It details federal and state policies as they concern charter school facilities, including tax credit programs, credit enhancement and loan programs.

Source: Local Initiatives Support Coalition Educational Facilities Financing Center

**- Common Core State Standards and Assessments -**

**Common Core State Standards & the Transformation of Professional Development** - Ninety percent of district leaders in states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards agree the new standards are more rigorous than their state's previous standards in math and English language arts. In addition, about three quarters of them believe the Common Core will improve students' skills.

Source: Center on Education Policy

**District Implementation of Consortia-Developed Assessments** - States that have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will begin testing students' progress later in this school year. A survey of districts found the vast majority are making plans to target support services for students who may need additional assistance to pass the tests and most foresaw technological challenges.

Source: Center on Education Policy

**Common Core State Standards & the Transformation of Professional Development** - Professional development has been viewed as the "ugly stepchild" of education reform, according to this report. But the Common Core, with its focus on content and instructional shifts that support delivery of that content, could be the vehicle to transform professional development. This executive summary links to three briefs.

Source: Education First

**- Curriculum - Mathematics -**

**The Unintended Consequences of an Algebra-for-All Policy on High-Skill Students: Effects on Instructional Organization and Students' Academic Outcomes** - Policies that require algebra for all ninth grade students can increase opportunities to take algebra for students who have previously enrolled in remedial math. However, little has been known about how schools respond to these policies in terms of organizing math classrooms to accommodate curricular changes. This study found that although many students enter high schools with very weak math skills, the algebra-for-all policy did not offer additional supports for struggling students to master algebra or professional development for teachers around how to teach algebra in mixed-ability classrooms. Simply mandating a college-prep curriculum for all students is not sufficient to improve the academic outcomes of all students.

**- P-3 Kindergarten -**
The Longitudinal Effects of Kindergarten Enrollment and Relative Age on Children’s Academic Achievement - New to the ECS Research Studies Database - A new study predicts the extent to which delayed, on-time or early kindergarten enrollment influences children’s future academic achievement. By following students' progress from kindergarten to third grade, the authors find that academic success depends on socio-demographic factors and the relative age of other kindergarteners in the same class. They suggest that delaying kindergarten enrollment is not an effective way to improve long-term achievement.

- Postsecondary Completion-

U.S. high school dropout rate reaches record low, driven by improvements among Hispanics, blacks - According to data from the Census Bureau, last year just 7 percent of the country’s 18- to 24-year-olds had dropped out of high school; in 2000, that number was 12 percent. At least in part, the decline has been driven by fewer Latino and African-American youth dropping out of school.
Source: Pew

- School Vouchers -

Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program - The only voucher program created and funded by the U.S. Congress, the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) was changed at its reauthorization two years ago. This report suggests those changes have not drawn more private schools into the OSP and that participating schools are now more likely to report tuition rates above the OSP amounts and to have less diverse populations.
Source: Institute of Education Sciences

- State Longitudinal Data Systems -

Empowering Parents and Communities through Quality Public Reporting - Publicly reporting data, though it could be a powerful way for states to promote transparency, now mostly responds to state and federal laws. This brief recommends ensuring data are accurate and safeguarded, maintaining coordination across P-20/workforce entities, ensuring data meet the needs of all stakeholders and ensuring that it is accessible.
Source: Data Quality Campaign

- Student Achievement -

Evidence of Deeper Learning Outcomes - A “deeper learning” movement has been swelling in the United States and this is a series of three reports looking at high schools organized around the promotion of deeper learning -- their strategies, opportunities and outcomes.
Source: American Institutes for Research

- Teaching Quality - Compensation -

Teacher Pay and Career Paths in an Opportunity Culture - To reach more students with excellent teaching, leaders must change how teaching roles are organized then align pay to support that reorganization. This brief overview and graphics show how career paths and pay work at a glance.
Source: Public Impact

- Teaching Quality – Evaluation and Effectiveness -

Teaching Quality: What metrics best measure teacher effectiveness? - New to the ECS Research Studies Database - New evidence from experimental studies of the Rapid Assessment of Teacher Effectiveness (RATE) suggest bigger, faster, cheaper observations are possible.
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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