Heads Up on Current Education Issues
October 2015

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!

Deeper learning: A primer for state legislators - A growing number of schools across the country are working hard to provide a “deeper” learning experience for their students, and state legislators are being asked to create policies that support wide-scale implementation of 21st century learning practices. This primer is created for state policymakers seeking to modify instruction and assessment policies to better engage today’s students.

Aligning K-12 and postsecondary career pathways with workforce needs - Policy efforts were developed in 13 states to improve alignment between high school and postsecondary career/technical education (CTE) programs and workforce needs. This report summarizes policy activity that establishes a process for educators and employers to convene and use workforce data to set priorities and sets forth strategies to enhance and scale up career pathways bridging K-12 and postsecondary, designed to prepare students for high-skill, high-demand jobs.

State education policy checklist - This collaboratively developed resource provides policymakers with a tool to help develop new legislation and maximize future success.

Emerging state turnaround strategies - Three school turnaround strategies are gaining traction around the nation—innovation zones, recovery districts and receiverships. This report provides information and available outcomes data for each of these three strategies, as well as policy considerations that should be integral to a strategic approach to turnaround efforts.

New from NCSL!

Hot Topics in Higher Education: Student Loan Debt - In recent years, the number of student borrowers, balance per borrower, and total amount of outstanding debt increased rapidly, leading to concerns of a student debt crisis in the U.S. This brief reviews recent trends in student borrowing and highlights several policy options states have taken to address the growing loan burden of college students.

Hot Topics in Higher Education: Tuition Policy - Tuition policy, appropriations and financial aid are the three strongest policy levers legislatures have at their disposal to craft a robust higher education finance
policy structure capable of meeting state goals. As part of a series on each lever, this brief highlights recent trends in tuition prices, some causes of tuition increases, and policy options states have considered.

**Hot Topics in Higher Education: Appropriations** - This brief focuses on appropriations for higher education institutions and reviews the economic rationale for public investment in higher education, models for allocating state funding, and policy options states have taken, or are considering, to maintain future investment in higher education.

**Hot Topics in Higher Education: Financial Aid** - This brief focuses on financial aid, highlighting several innovative policy changes states have recently enacted.

**English Language Learners** - State legislatures can craft policies to enhance the academic outcomes for English Language Learners by utilizing standard definitions to identify who an ELL is, what types of language programming are best suited to meet their needs, creating clear and equitable accountability policies, and providing more rigorous professional development, teacher preparation and bilingual educator endorsements, state legislatures can craft policies to enhance the academic outcomes for this group.
In this issue:

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- High School - College and Career Readiness: What Can State Boards Do?
- P-3 Preschool: Outcomes in Georgia Pre-K Programs
- Student Achievement: Educational Improvement in 50 Cities
- Teaching Quality: Career Paths of Beginning Teachers
- Teaching Quality: Implementing New Teacher Evaluation Systems

– Assessments –

**Calibrating Performance Standards Across State Lines: How PARCC Predicts College Readiness** - The new exam designed by Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is effective in identifying students who are ready for college and predicts college grades. Students deemed college-ready by the PARCC exam have more than a 75 percent chance of earning a “C” average in college; the test also predicts a “B” or higher. Researchers compared PARCC to the rigorous Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and found PARCC’s math standard was higher than the “proficiency” standard used by MCAS. Given that the MCAS is rigorous, the PARCC exam may outperform other state assessments.

Source: Mathematica

– Choice – Charters –

**Online Charter School Study** - Comparing the growth of students who attended online charter schools to those in traditional public schools and students in brick-and-mortar charters, the authors found online charter students had weaker growth than the VCRs (virtual control record, obtained by averaging together up to seven students in feeder public schools). Pre-online mobility was the same for online charter students and their VCRs and some online charters that were part of multi-school networks had average academic growth stronger than the typical online charter.

Source: CREDO

**2015 State Legislative Session Highlights for Public Charter Schools** - A summary of state legislative highlights for public charter schools during the 2015 state legislative seasons, this brief includes a variety of factoids: Alabama became the 43rd state to enact a public charter school law; Connecticut defeated a proposed two-year moratorium on the opening of new charters and secured a 25 percent increase in the number of charter seats; and Indiana increased school autonomy, strengthened school and authorizer accountability and created and funded a $20 million performance-based facilities grant program.

Source: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
Toward a Better Balance: Bolstering the Second “C” in College and Career Readiness - What can state boards do to advance career readiness? A study group recommends building knowledge and understanding of postsecondary, business and workforce initiatives. Also: Engage with a broad spectrum of stakeholders to define career readiness and ensure state policies value career readiness, including teacher preparation and professional development. These topics are addressed in depth and resources are provided.

Source: National Association of State Board of Education (NASBE)

Children’s Pre-K Outcomes and Classroom Quality in Georgia’s Pre-K Program: Findings from the 2013-2014 Evaluation Study: Results suggest children who attend Georgia's Pre-K program enjoy a good quality educational experience, resulting in positive outcomes across all domains of learning. The authors believe it may be worthwhile to consider expanding the program to provide the same educational benefits to a wider population.

Source: University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute

Measuring Up: Educational Improvement & Opportunity in 50 Cities: The pathway out of poverty for vulnerable youth has eroded, but inequity isn't inevitable. For example, in 20 of 50 cities black students take the ACT/SAT at the same or better rates than white students. Performance, however, in most cities is flat, poor and minority students still face staggering academic inequalities, and the picture is especially bleak for black students.

Source: Center on Reinventing Public Education

Career Paths of Beginning Public School Teachers: Results from the First through Fifth Waves of the 2007-08 Teacher Longitudinal Study: Tracking the paths of beginning public school teachers, researchers found 75 percent taught all five years of the study. A larger percentage of those who were assigned a mentor (80 percent) taught five years. The percentage of teachers who taught five years was smaller among those earning less than $40,000 and 80 percent of teachers who taught recently in schools with below 50 percent free or reduced lunch eligibility lasted five years, compared to 75 percent who taught in poorer schools.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

State Education Agencies and the Implementation of New Teacher Evaluation Systems: In the three years since Race to the Top grant winners piloted teacher evaluation systems, states have made varying degrees of progress. For policymakers, this brief recommends reallocating state education agency resources for discrete functions and regional support, aligning teacher evaluations with new assessments, supporting principals in evaluation efforts, providing evaluator training and certification, using evaluation to facilitate coaching and engaging stakeholders.

Source: CPRE
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.
Please send information to Emily Workman at eworkman@ecs.org.