Heads Up on Current Education Issues

August 2012

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!

Third Grade Reading Policies - This paper outlines state policies relating to 3rd-grade reading proficiency, including identification of, intervention for, and retention of struggling readers in the P-3 grades. The paper provides a state-by-state policy summary, sample statutory language, and highlights from bills enacted this year.

Legislative Retrospective: College Completion and Workforce Policies 2011-2012 - With over 60% of jobs requiring some postsecondary education, it is critical for legislators to invest in strategies that will ensure their residents have the skills they need to access these jobs and earn a family-sustaining wage. In this legislative retrospective, you will find state policies related to higher education and workforce from the 2011 and 2012 legislative sessions.

Check out enacted state policies on virtual schools HERE.

New from NCSL!

Teaching in Charter Schools - This final brief of the Charter Schools in the States series from NCSL, explores the uniqueness of teaching in charter schools is explored. State legislators who hope to boost student success by providing more school choice through creation of charter schools also will want to consider whether state charter school policies ensure effective teaching in those schools. This brief discusses various policies related to teaching in charter schools, including licensure, turnover, compensation and collective bargaining.
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- **Workforce Development**: A Decade Behind: Breaking Out of the Low-Skill Trap in the Southern Economy
Some Assembly Required: Building a Better Accountability System for California - This report details the path one state, California, has taken in building its current student data and accountability system. The author argues that California and many other states have the foundations in place to build better accountability systems - systems that focus on meaningful school improvement; they just need to put the pieces together in the right way.
Source: Education Sector

Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism in Indiana: The Impact on Student Achievement - This report examines the effects of chronic absenteeism on student achievement in Indiana. The report has implications for all states, as attendance data in Indiana reflects national trends, and illustrates that missing school matters for future academic achievement.
Source: Center for Evaluation and Education Policy (CEEP)

The Effects of School Vouchers on College Enrollment: Experimental Evidence from New York City - In the first study to use a randomized experiment to measure the impact of school vouchers on college enrollment, researchers examine the college-going behavior through 2011 of students who participated in a privately funded school voucher experiment as elementary school students in the late 1990s. They find no overall impacts on college enrollment but do find large, statistically significant positive impacts on the college going of African-American students who participated in the study. The study’s estimates indicate that using a voucher to attend private school increased the overall college enrollment rate among African Americans by 24 percent.
Source: Brookings Institute

How Americans Would Slim Down Public Education - This report examines how voters think education spending should be reduced in tough budgetary times, and what programs should be protected. The authors found that 74% of respondents support performance-based layoffs, and 48% think the best solution to a severe budget deficit in their district would be to "cut costs by dramatically changing how it does business."
Source: The Thomas B. Fordham Institute

Challenges and Opportunities Facing Principals in the First Year at a School - First-year principals’ decisions influence school performance and their own success as school leaders. This study examines
first-year principals’ actions and working conditions, and how those factors relate to school achievement and principal retention. The authors found that principals’ use of time did not affect key outcomes but that their ability to foster teacher capacity and cohesiveness did. The study found no single strategy for principal success but suggests that a principal’s effectiveness as a manager of human capital is likely to contribute to improved school outcomes.

Source: RAND

**Designing Purposeful and Coherent Leadership Preparation Curriculum: A Curriculum Mapping Guide** - This document is designed to facilitate curriculum mapping or curriculum auditing for program development, review, and continuous improvement for leadership preparation programs. It outlines both a process and set of tools to aid program faculty in articulating and aligning leadership expectations and their program content and fostering program coherence.

Source: University Council for Educational Administration

**Series of Short Research Briefs on School Leadership** - Since 2009, UCEA has put out a series of research briefs on leadership ranging from topics such as the costs of exemplary principal preparation programs to characteristics of effective principals.

Source: University Council for Educational Administration

**No Child Left Behind Waivers: Promising Ideas from Second Round Applications** - The authors of this report find that the second round of No Child Left Behind waivers gave states an opportunity to spell out bold school improvement and student-achievement activities already underway. But, it was unclear if state interventions would really be targeted to subgroups who are falling behind their peers. States also were murky when it came to explaining how they’ll monitor the school turnaround process.

Source: Center for American Progress

**Where to Begin? The Evolving Role of Placement Exams for Students Starting College** - For years, colleges have used placement exams to determine whether to deem incoming students “college ready” or assign them to developmental education. But emerging information reveals the tests have little correlation to students’ future success, casting doubt on their use even as the high stakes for students of taking remedial courses become clear. This report explores whether the tests are fair and wondering if their traditional use constitutes a barrier to college completion.

Source: Achieving the Dream; Developmental Education Initiative; Jobs for the Future

**State Policy Approaches to Support Prior Learning Assessment: A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR STATE LEADERS** - This resource guide is geared to state leaders who are increasingly aware of Prior Learning
Assessment’s (PLA) value in helping adult learners complete a degree faster and at a lower cost. This guide is intended to serve as a resource for state leaders who wish to promote PLA, whether through new higher education regulatory language or through legislation. 

Source: Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and HCM Strategists

Strategies for Success: Promising Ideas in Adult College Completion - WICHE has been leading a Lumina Foundation funded effort called The Adult College Completion Network for nearly two years. To share some of the initial ideas learned from this project, the organization has released a report focusing on adult college completion strategies and tools being employed by diverse efforts across the country.

Source: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE)

- Public Attitudes -

Highlights of the 2012 PDK/Gallup Poll: What Americans said about the public schools - This report presents the results from the 44th annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the public’s attitudes toward public schools. Results show that Americans have a number of conflicting and hardening viewpoints in their appraisal of and preferences for directing, managing, and investing in the schools. For example, we are divided on whether teachers should be evaluated based on student standardized test scores and on which political party and which presidential candidate can more positively influence public education in America.

Source: Phi Delta Kappan International

- Reading/Literacy -

Is Retaining Students in the Early Grades Self-Defeating? – This report considers whether students who have not acquired a basic level of reading proficiency by grade three be promoted along with their peers or be retained and provided with intensive interventions before moving on to the next grade. The authors acknowledge arguments posed by critics that retained students have worse social-emotional outcomes than superficially similar students who are promoted, yet use examples from Florida’s successful third grade retention policy to show that such policies can significantly raise student achievement.

Source: Brookings Institution

Open Court Reading – This report outlines the Open Court Reading© program which is a core reading program for grades K-6 designed to teach decoding, comprehension, inquiry, and writing in a logical progression. The report includes research and summary findings on the program, and shows evidence of a positive effect on comprehension.

Source: The What Works Clearinghouse
- Student Discipline -

**Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School** - According to this analysis of federal data, nearly one in six African-American students was suspended from school during the 2009-10 academic year, more than three times the rate of their white peers. And one in four black children with disabilities was suspended at least once that year. The report includes state-by-state data and recommendations for addressing the disparities.
Source: The Civil Rights Project

- Teacher Preparation -

**CALDER Conversations: Evaluating Teacher Training Programs** - Can the value-added method be used, fairly and reliably, to differentiate among teacher preparation programs? According to scholars who have studied the issue, this remains something of an open question. CALDER has produced four working papers examining pre-service teacher training programs (TTPs) and the authors of these papers discuss both conceptual and technical challenges to examining the effectiveness of TTPs.
Source: Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER)

- Teacher Retention – Urban Schools -

**The Irreplaceables: Understanding the Real Retention Crisis in America’s Urban Schools** – This study finds that urban schools are systematically neglecting their best teachers, while they keep many of their lowest-performing teachers. The authors find that policies at the state and local level often cause them to earn less than their least effective colleagues and fail to protect them in the event of layoffs. They also endure districts and schools that fail to value their talents and do not provide them with supportive school cultures. The report concludes with sound recommendations for improving teacher quality in urban schools.
Source: The New Teacher Project (TNTP)

- Workforce Development -

**A Decade Behind: Breaking Out of the Low-Skill Trap in the Southern Economy** - The South is about a decade behind the rest of the country in the kinds of high-skill, high-wage jobs that require education beyond high school, which, despite relatively strong job growth in the region, could keep it stuck in an economic rut, according to this study.
Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.
What is YOUR State Doing?

Send along any information 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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