Heads Up on Current Education Issues
August 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!

State Exemplars of School Accountability “Report Cards” — This report highlights how different states present school accountability "report cards." Nine states and the District of Columbia are highlighted, with links.

The Progress of Education Reform: A Hidden Cause of Rising Tuition — This issue of The Progress of Education Reform examines tuition discounting, the practice of awarding targeted financial incentives to students, usually in the form of merit awards or needs-based grants. Specific attention is focused on the impact state-legislated tuition caps can have on the practice.
In this issue:

- Accountability – Test-Based: Fixing Our National Accountability System
- Assessments – Online: 2012 Grade 4 Writing Computer-Based Assessment Study
- Common Core State Standards: A Compendium of Research on the Common Core State Standards
- English-Language Learners: The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2013: Linguistically Diverse Students
- P-3: Principal Preparation – Preparing Principals to Support Early Childhood Teachers
- Postsecondary Completion:
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  - America’s College Dropout Epidemic: Understanding the Dropout Population
- Postsecondary Readiness: The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2014: National
- Reading Interventions: Extensive Reading Interventions for Students With Reading Difficulties After Grade 3
- School Choice: Making School Choice Work
- School Start Times: School Start Times for Adolescents
- State Longitudinal Data Systems - Beyond Borders: Understanding the Development and Mobility of Human Capital in an Age of Data-Driven Accountability
- Student Health: The Effects of Adolescent Health-Related Behavior on Academic Performance: A Systematic Review of the Longitudinal Evidence
- Teaching Force: Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force
Fixing Our National Accountability System - Calling for a greater role for state education agencies, Marc Tucker writes that our current system of accountability is punitive to the point that teacher morale is low, teachers are leaving for more rewarding, lucrative professions, and fewer students are applying to education schools. His solution is to test less and use test data to identify struggling schools which state education agencies then would help turnaround. Teachers wouldn't be judged by students' scores but would be part of a professional team, helping each other toward greater student achievement. It is a model used by more successful education systems in other countries.

Source: National Center on Education and the Economy

2012 Grade 4 Writing Computer-Based Assessment Study - This study by NAEP to find out if fourth graders were computer-savvy enough to take a digital writing assessment concluded their abilities varied. As a result, NAEP modified the test, presenting one instruction at a time; for example, rewriting directions using fewer words and changing the text-to-speech icon from a person with a speech bubble to an ear with sound waves. Forty-seven percent of student responses received a three or four, which represents developing or adequate writing skills.

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress

A Compendium of Research on the Common Core State Standards - Fulfilling the need for a synthesis of existing research on the Common Core State Standards, this compendium will inform policy discussions and implementation as well as future research. Each research summary includes focus, methodology, key findings, a URL when available or a citation. The studies have been categorized into nine areas: communications and public opinion; comparison of CCSS content to wide-scale assessments; content, curriculum and alignment; cost analysis; governance and leadership; implementation; teacher preparation; professional development and testing and assessment.

Source: Center on Education Policy

The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2013: Linguistically Diverse Students - Help for English language learners - Looking at the 2013 career- and college-readiness status of linguistically diverse high school students, ACT found 45 percent did not meet any of ACT’s college-readiness benchmarks. That’s compared to 31 percent of all high school graduates. Results point to the need for special attention, including out-of-school support on Saturdays, during summer and after school. Communities are encouraged to take advantage of federally funded programs like TRIO and GEAR UP, and districts are urged to track these students with longitudinal data systems.

Source: ACT

Preparing Principals to Support Early Childhood Teachers - Early childhood content isn’t a required element of principal preparation or professional development in most states. In this brief, CEELO recommends that principal preparation include a wide range of experiences, including classes on child development. There should be incentives to include early childhood content in school administrator licensure and professional development. Selected state examples of early childhood focused principal professional development models provide real-world examples.

Source: Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes
**Postsecondary Completion**

**Maximizing Resources for Student Success by Reducing Time- and Credits-to-Degree** - Excessive time-to-degree is worsening, according to this paper, not just from part-time enrollment, but also from excess credits. Strategies to improve time-to-degree are divided into demand-side and supply-side ideas. For students, authors offer intrusive advising, degree roadmaps and information campaigns. For institutions, remedial education reform, simplifying degree requirements and improving course availability. Concrete examples are given with assessments on student impact, financial feasibility and ease of implementation. Source: HCM Strategists

**America's College Dropout Epidemic: Understanding the Dropout Population** – New from the ECS Research Studies Database - More than 40 percent of full-time, four-year college students fail to earn a bachelor’s degree within six years, and many never complete their education. A new study examines dropout patterns in an attempt to better support students as they make enrollment decisions. Findings suggest that while preparation in secondary schools needs to improve, it is also important to encourage students with weaker academic preparation to consider starting college at a two-year institution (about a third of four-year college dropouts would have a higher chance of bachelor’s degree completion, had they begun there.)

**Postsecondary Readiness**

**The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2014: National** - For the 10th straight year, the number of students who took the ACT reached new records. While it's disappointing that scores remained flat, the good news is that many high school graduates were close to college readiness levels -- 15 percent were within two points of the science benchmark, for example. Earlier identification of academic deficiencies might elevate scores. Data show encouraging growth in the eight states that administer the ACT to all students.

Source: ACT

**Reading Interventions**

**Extensive Reading Interventions for Students With Reading Difficulties After Grade 3** - New to the ECS Research Studies Database - Schoolwide models for extensive literacy instruction and intervention, such as “response to intervention” models, have proved effective in improving reading skills for children in kindergarten through third grade. An evaluation of the effects of those same interventions on students in grades 4 through 12 finds that the effects are far smaller, indicating that accelerating reading growth in the upper grades may be more challenging than in the earliest grades.

**School Choice**

**Making School Choice Work** – This report explores challenges facing urban school choice programs including issues like replacing low-performing charter schools with successful ones, providing adequate transportation for low-income families, and ensuring equitable access to high-quality schools.

Source: Reinventing Public Education

**School Start Times**

**School Start Times for Adolescents** - Early school start times -- before 8:30 a.m. -- are strongly implicated in adolescent sleep deprivation, according to a statement released this week by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Chronic sleep loss among teenagers has increasingly become the norm due to several
factors, including a later release of melatonin, lifestyle choices and academic demands. Later start times, however, are the easiest and cheapest solution.
Source: American Academy of Pediatrics

- State Longitudinal Data System -

Beyond Borders: Understanding the Development and Mobility of Human Capital in an Age of Data-Driven Accountability - A pilot project looked at whether and how states might share data from their longitudinal systems to learn more about higher education and employment outcomes without compromising confidentiality. Known as the Multistate Longitudinal Data Exchange (MLDE), the pilot used data from Hawaii, Idaho, Oregon and Washington and proved the MLDE is feasible, data sharing provided more comprehensive information than individual state systems could yield, and offered the possibility of better workforce planning.
Source: WICHE

- Student Health -

The Effects of Adolescent Health-Related Behavior on Academic Performance: A Systematic Review of the Longitudinal Evidence - New to the ECS Research Studies Database - Schools are increasingly involved in efforts to promote health and healthy behavior among their adolescent students, but are healthier students better learners? A recent study found that healthy eating habits and team sports participation have positive effects on adolescents’ school grades. Early sexual activity, alcohol use, smoking, bullying and screen time have more complex relationships with academic achievement. The authors suggest that these effects are not straightforward but interact with, or are mediated by, factors such as socio-economic status and psychological and social problems.

- Teaching Force -

Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force - Authors of this report were surprised to find:
1) PreK-12 teachers, who make up the largest occupational group in the nation, ballooned in number in the two decades prior to 2008, then decreased a little during the recession; 2) the number of teachers in private schools has grown faster than in public schools, despite a sharp decrease in private school students; and 3) the trend of teacher retirements causing a teacher shortage is pretty much over. The portion of teachers 50 years or older has decreased since 2008, as have the number retiring.
Source: Consortium for Policy Research in Education

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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