Heads Up on Current Education Issues
July 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!

Dual Enrollment
As dual-enrollment programs surge in popularity, policymakers and advocates are wrestling with how to pay the costs and promote access for all high school students who are eligible to earn college credit, especially low-income and minority populations. Read the ECS report on dual enrollment.

Guided Pathways
ECS produced a summary of state legislation policies enacted in the past few years that address a range of guided pathways strategies. Guided pathways can include degree maps or plans and support services from high schools, postsecondary institutions or both.

Science in the Early Years
A new report from ECS finds that science does not detract from literacy development among young students and in fact contributes to the goal that all children can read proficiently by third grade.

Charter Schools
A growing number of states have enacted legislation on the oversight and performance of charter schools in an effort to establish standards for the semi-autonomous public schools. While most states have charter school laws, more states are concentrating specifically on authorizers and the role those entities play. Check out ECS’ 50-state database.

Veterans
"Veteran and Military Students," a new state-by-state summary report from ECS, describes policies that align with the Lumina State Policy Agenda: developing lower-cost pathways to degrees, ensuring availability of competency-based programs and re-enrolling adults with some college and no degree.

Remedial Education
A review of state-level practices that identify, track and regularly report the numbers of students identified for remedial instruction shows remarkable inconsistencies. In writing this report, ECS hopes to begin a national dialogue regarding if and how states could share information about students' referral to and success in remedial and college-level courses.

Remedial Reporting
In December 2013, ECS convened a steering committee of state education policy leaders from across the nation to discuss implications of the inconsistent remedial education reporting practices in the states. After the conversation, the Remedial Reporting Steering Committee — which included elected officials,
chief state school officers, state higher education executive officers and numerous education policy experts — advanced two recommendations.

**New from NCSL!**

**School Principals**
This concise, two-page brief provides an overview of why school leadership matters, why it's a good investment and what state policy approaches state are taking to build a pipeline of effective school principals.

**Principal Pipeline**
State legislators, school districts and district leaders are in a unique position to initiate meaningful school reform by building a pipeline of effective school principals. This brief summarizes a recent NCSL meeting that examined the current body of research, highlighted lessons learned from states and districts and featured state policy levers and examples.

**Arts in Education**
Decades of research connects arts education to higher levels of student engagement, attendance, self-confidence, persistence, civic engagement, creativity, problem solving and critical thinking. Moreover, the benefits of arts education are more dramatic in schools where family income and achievement levels are particularly low. Challenges in providing a quality arts education include funding, competing priorities, time in the school day and finding qualified instructors. Read NCSL LegisBrief on Arts in Education.
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- Teacher Evaluations - Using Subject Test Scores Efficiently to Predict Teacher Value-Added
- Workforce Demands – STEM Fields: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education Assessing the Relationship Between Education and the Workforce
- Child Well-Being -

**KIDS COUNT Data Book** – This 2014 edition examines how U.S. kids have fared in 16 indicators since 1990. Nationally, children made gains in health, education and safety, but they lost ground in poverty rates. The top three states in child well-being were Massachusetts, Vermont and Iowa. See where your state ranks.

*Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation*

- College and Career Readiness -

**Definitions of College and Career Readiness: An Analysis by State** - What does it mean to be college and career ready? Among the 36 states plus the District of Columbia that composed readiness statements, the definition varies. In 33, one definition is used for both college and career, assuming the skills required for each are essentially the same. Three quarters of the definitions determine readiness based on future outcomes so they can't be used to serve students in need of help to graduate on track for postsecondary success.

*Source: American Institutes for Research*

- Data-Driven Decision Making -

**A Conceptual Framework for DataDriven Decision Making** – A positive relationship exists between data use and student improvement. This framework helps readers understand the benefits and limitations of data, know which data are relevant for decision making and know also how the data are to be appropriately used. It is presented as two figures: one providing a generalized theory of action of how data-driven decision making can lead to improved student success, and the other that maps the decision-making process at different levels of the system.

*Source: Mathematica*

- English Language Learners -

**The Gap That Can't Go Away: The Catch-22 of Reclassification in Monitoring the Progress of English Learners** – New to the ECS Research Studies Database - The progress of English language learners (ELLs) is tracked at the state and federal levels for two years after reclassification as English language proficient. This analysis of California data found that ELLs' achievement levels decline over time because each successive grade "skims off" the most successful ELLs through reclassification. However, the authors found that this overlooks the high achievement of reclassified ELLs, particularly in secondary grades.

- High School – Exit Exams -

The Case Against Exit Exams - States' new assessments are being designed to include more critical thinking and complex items than previous standardized tests. While better assessments are welcome, a growing worry is that states will use these as exit exams. Authors of this report suggest using them toward final course grades instead.

*Source: New America Foundation*

- High School – Small Choice Schools -

**Inside Success: Strategies of 25 Effective Small High Schools in NYC** - When New York City's high school graduation rate was hovering at 50 percent more than a decade ago, reforms were launched, closing some large, comprehensive high schools and opening hundreds of "small schools of choice." This report looked at 25 of the most effective to discover the roots of their success. Personalized learning, high expectations and flexible teachers were often cited.

*Source: Research Alliance for New York City Schools*
- **P-3 – Opportunity Gaps**

*Access to High Quality Early Care and Education: Readiness and Opportunity Gaps in America* – This report describes readiness and opportunity gaps in access to high quality early education. The report describes the “readiness gaps” at kindergarten entry as of 2010, and examines the extent to which there are “opportunity gaps” in early care and education services that may be associated with those readiness gaps.

*Source: CEELO and NIEER*

- **P-3 – Full Day Kindergarten**

*Effects of Full-Day Kindergarten on the Long-Term Health Prospects of Children in Low-Income and Racial/Ethnic-Minority Populations* – The authors of this study conclude that Full Day Kindergarten, if targeted to low-income and minority communities, can advance health equity. There is strong evidence that FDK improves academic achievement, a predictor of longer-term health benefits. They argue that to sustain early benefits, intensive elementary school education is needed.

*Source: CDC*

- **Postsecondary – Performance Funding**

*Performance Funding at MSIs: Considerations and Possible Measures for Public Minority-Serving Institutions* - More than half of all students of color enrolled in public institutions of higher education are attending Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This report addresses ways in which state-level decisions on use of performance funding can differentially impact MSIs. Recommendations: include MSI leaders in policy development, reconsider the utility of commonly used metrics, make sure metrics are responsive to input factors (like low-income minority students), address data capacity before implementing policy, and use performance funding policies to address racial and ethnic equity.

*Source: Southern Education Foundation*

- **School Calendar – Year Round Schools**

*Year-Round Schools: In Brief* - Year-round schools reorganize the traditional school year so there are no extended breaks in instruction, such as the 10-week summer vacation. This brief reviews the schools' growing popularity, the inconclusive research on their efficacy, and their pros and cons. There were about 410 year-round schools serving 350,000 students in 1985, and that number grew to 3,059 schools serving 2.2 million students in the 2011-12 school year.

*Source: Congressional Research Service*

- **School Discipline**

*The School Discipline Consensus Report: Strategies from the Field to Keep Students Engaged in School and Out of the Juvenile Justice System* – This report presents a comprehensive set of consensus-based and field-driven recommendations to improve conditions for learning for all students and educators, better support students with behavioral needs, improve police-schools partnerships, and keep students out of the juvenile justice system for minor offenses. Included are more than two dozen policies and 60 recommendations to keep more students in productive classrooms and out of court rooms and examples of promising practices.

*Source: The Council of State Governments*

- **Teacher Evaluations**

*Using Subject Test Scores Efficiently to Predict Teacher Value-Added* - New to the ECS Research Studies Database - Measuring teacher effectiveness is increasingly important as school districts make decisions about contract renewals. Often, decisions concerning beginning or probationary educators need to be made with only one or two years of evaluation data. This recent study shows how using a model that
employs existing data across multiple subjects can more accurately predict teacher value-added, even when limited data are available.

- Workforce Demands – STEM Fields-

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education Assessing the Relationship Between Education and the Workforce – Findings indicate that both the number of science, technology, engineering and mathematics degrees and the number of jobs in STEM fields increased in recent years. The number of STEM degrees awarded grew 55 percent from 1.35 million in the 2002-03 school year to more than 2 million in 2011-12, while degrees awarded in non-STEM fields grew 37 percent. The number of STEM jobs increased 16 percent from 2004-12, while there was little growth in non-STEM jobs. It is difficult to know if STEM graduates are aligned with workforce needs because demand fluctuates.

Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office

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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