Heads Up on Current Education Issues
July 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!

**Vergara v. California**
The court’s decision in *Vergara v. California* asserts that some teacher job protections don’t support an environment that provides the most effective teachers to all students. While the decision would completely eliminate these job protections, other policy options exist for improving teacher quality argues this ECS policy analysis. Retaining current tenure laws or eliminating protections represent two extremes. However, understanding the debates playing out in *Vergara* and similar lawsuits can help prepare state policymakers and education leaders for similar discussions.

**The civics education initiative of 2015**
Ensuring all students are taught basic civics and learn to be ready for active, engaged citizenship is a goal that both sides of the aisle can agree upon. The means to that goal is hotly debated. A new report from Education Commission of the States takes a look at what is happening in the states.

**State funding for students with disabilities**
State funding for students with disabilities is becoming increasingly important as service costs rise and the federal share of the cost drops. While all states provide some funding for students with disabilities, the way funds are distributed to districts varies greatly from state to state. This 50-state review, along with a related database, focuses on states' primary funding mechanisms for students with disabilities. The report also clarifies strengths and weaknesses of these mechanisms and provides other funding considerations.
In this issue:

- HS Completion: Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic
- Rural Education: Uncovering the Productivity Promise of Rural Education
- Teaching Evaluations-Observations: Support for growth: How states can improve quality of post-observation feedback
- Teaching Quality- Preparation: A Million Teachers Are Coming
- P-3 Early Intervention: Emerging State and Community Strategies to Improve Infant and Toddler Services
- Major Education Reports: The Condition of Education 2015
- School Safety: Public School Safety and Discipline 2013-2014
- Postsecondary- Remedial Education: Statewide Developmental Education Reform: Early Implementation in Virginia and North Carolina
- Postsecondary- Completion: Credentials for all: an Imperative for SREB States
- School Finance- Equity:
  - Is School Funding Fair? A National Report Card
  - Cheating Our Future: How Decades of Disinvestment by States Jeopardizes Equal Educational Opportunity
  - Public Education Finances: 2013
- School/District Structures: Redefining the School District in America
- Students-Records: Trends in State Legislation on Student Data Privacy
Building a grad nation: Progress and challenge in ending the high school dropout epidemic
For the third year, the nation remained on pace to meet the goal of 90 percent on-time graduation by 2020; the national high school graduation rate hit a record high of 81.4 percent. This sixth annual update on America’s high school dropout challenge shows these gains were made by raising graduation rates for students who have traditionally struggled to earn a high school diploma.
Source: Civic Enterprises and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins School of Education

Uncovering the productivity promise of rural education
State education agencies have an instrumental role to play in supporting the work of rural education, according to this report. While rural schools are asked to stretch their dollars further, they are more likely to face limited economies of scale, difficult teacher labor markets and inadequate access to time and money-saving technologies. Yet rural schools and districts are innovative in how they manage these problems and much can be learned from them.
Source: Edvance Research Center

Holding public charter school authorizers accountable: State experiences and policy recommendations
State policy provisions on authorizer accountability recommended by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools are examined in this brief along with the extent to which states have adopted them. Then the author presents experiences and lessons from four states – Colorado, Hawaii, Minnesota and Ohio – that have taken action on authorizer accountability in diverse policy and authorizing environments.
Source: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

Support for growth: How states can improve quality of post-observation feedback
For more effective teachers and better-prepared students, high-quality feedback following teacher observation is essential. This report suggests that observers go beyond accurate assessment and identify specific and actionable next steps for teachers to improve their practice. States and districts must give principals training, support and resources to help teachers improve through feedback, and then hold principals accountable for doing so.
Source: Reform Support Network

A million new teachers are coming: Will they be ready to teach?
If the 1.5 million teachers entering the profession in the next decade are poorly prepared, they could block efforts to reform education. Some teacher prep programs are doing a better job than others and some candidate qualities predict better teaching. This brief advises choosing teacher candidates better, reaching consensus on desirable skills, demanding well-prepared mentors for student teachers and requiring rigorous assessments for licensure.
Source: American Institutes for Research
Highly qualified teachers enrolled in programs providing routes to teacher certification or licensure
Alternative certification or licensure is intended to expand the pool of potential teachers, especially in hard-to-staff schools and subjects. For Congress, the Department of Education looked at the degree to which states and districts use highly qualified teachers enrolled in alternative programs. The answer is a small degree -- overall across 48 states and the District of Columbia 1.5 percent of highly qualified teachers were enrolled in alternative programs.
Source: U.S. Department of Education

-P-3 Early Intervention-

Emerging state and community strategies to improve infant and toddler services
As communities work to align infant and toddler services by increasing access to available programs and resources, creating centralized intake systems and targeting interventions to specific populations, federal policy should support them by increasing investments and providing long-term and continuous funding, according to this article. It should initiate a permanent cross-agency office at the federal level that would focus specifically on infants and toddlers.
Source: Center for American Progress

-Major Reports-

The condition of education: 2015
Good news in NCES’ annual report to Congress on all levels of U.S. education: in fall 2010, about 26 percent of kindergartners were rated by their teachers as having positive approaches to learning behaviors “very often,” and 47 percent were rated as demonstrating these behaviors “often.” Swinging to an older demographic, in 2014, some 91 percent of 25- to 29-year-olds had received at least a high school diploma or equivalent. It’s a heavy tome (320 pages) so a highlights version is offered as well as an at a glance version.
Source: National Center for Education Statistics

-School Safety-

Public school safety and discipline: 2013-2014
Almost all (93 percent) of public schools report controlled access to buildings, according to this study of school safety and discipline. Eighty-eight percent have procedures to follow in the event of shootings. Student bullying was reported to occur at least once a month at 37 percent of schools and, overall, 65 percent of schools reported at least once violent incident during the 2014-13 school year.
Source: National Center for Education Statistics

-Postsecondary – Remedial Education-

Statewide developmental education reform: Early implementation in Virginia and North Carolina
Community college systems in Virginia and North Carolina lead in statewide efforts to improve developmental education. Both states redesigned their remedial English and math courses, their assessment instruments and placement policies to decrease the number of referrals, reduce the time students spend in remedial classes and align developmental education across colleges and with college-level courses. This report provides preliminary results.
Source: Community College Research Center
-Postsecondary- Completion-

**Credentials for all: An imperative for SREB states**
To double the number of young adults who hold a credible credential or degree by age 25, this report offers eight actions states can take, including: align college readiness academics and challenging technical studies through real-world assignments, engage students in career guidance starting in the middle grades, allow high school students to learn in settings that put them on the fast track to earn advanced industry credentials and college credits.
*Source: SREB Career and Technical Education Commission*

-School Finance- Equity-

**Is school funding fair? A national report card**
Public school funding in most states continues to be unfair, especially to students in poverty. Unlike other nations, public education here is a state responsibility -- the federal government pays only about 10 percent -- and most states use formulas that are inequitable. This report lists only Minnesota, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Delaware as having fair funding.
*Source: Education Law Center at Rutgers*

**Cheating our future: How decades of disinvestment by states jeopardizes equal educational opportunity**
Colorado, Mississippi, Pennsylvania and South Carolina provide compelling evidence of unfair school funding, even for students within the same state. Students in rural and urban areas vividly lack the same access as their peers in better-funded school systems to the same academic courses, before- and after-school programs, extracurricular activities, well-qualified teachers and principals and transportation.
*Source: The Leadership Conference Education Fund and the Education Law Center at Rutgers*

**Public Education Finances: 2013**
State per-pupil spending nationally is $10,700, but the low is $6,555 in Utah and the high is $19,818 in New York. Look at the largest 100 school districts -- the spread is Jordan, Utah, at $5,708 and Boston, Mass., at $20,502. Such factoids abound at the U.S. Census Bureau's Public Education Finances: 2013.
*Source: U.S. Census Bureau*

-School/District Structures-

**Redefining the school district in America**
States embarking on the difficult task of turning around failing schools may learn from the wins and losses of states that have gone before them. Among recommendations in this report: carefully read the state constitution which may require an amendment to set up a state district, decide criteria to be met before a school returns to its home district, expect course corrections and give locals a chance to apply for work under the new arrangement.
*Source: Thomas B. Fordham Institute*

-Students Records-

**Trends in state legislation on student data privacy**
This year, 47 states introduced more than 180 laws on student data privacy. Of those, 111 were aimed at establishing better safeguards for the collection, use and disclosure of student data. Another 64 prohibited districts or service providers from selling student data or using it for commercial reasons. Twenty-six concerned protecting certain kinds of data such as biometric and sensitive information. Five states introduced legislation creating a chief privacy officer.
*Source: NASBE*
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.