Heads Up on Current Education Issues
May 2013

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!

Linking Service-Learning and the Common Core State Standards: Alignment, Progress, and Obstacles - New case studies from the National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) at ECS examine whether and how four diverse sites utilize high-quality service-learning as a teaching strategy for implementation of the Common Core State Standards. The report also includes recommendations for the types of supports teachers and administrators need to effectively implement the Common Core using service-learning, which is a proven strategy for deeper learning.

Learning Time in America: Trends to Reform the American School Calendar: A Snapshot of Federal, State, and Local Action - In just two years, the drive to enable more schools to expand time has grown significantly. Policy opportunities at both the state and federal levels, combined with significant initiatives in large districts, have acted to shift the concept of expanded time from a secondary education reform strategy to one that has become central to the national effort to improve schools serving high-poverty students. This brief includes policy recommendations that provide policymakers a roadmap for how they can best support efforts to effectively expand learning time in schools.

Linking Education and Economic Development: A Very Local, Very Rural Vignette - Eleven years ago, West Virginia took over McDowell County’s schools system where more than 70 percent of its children now live in households where no adult is employed and the median income is $21,000. Little improvement resulted. Appalled at that, State Board of Education Vice President Gayle Manchin reached out to Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), in the fall of 2011. The two women developed a vision and enlisted a coalition of labor unions, nonprofits, governments and Fortune 500 companies to make that vision a reality. Now called Reconnecting McDowell, this report focuses on this five-year effort some consider to be the first of its kind.

New from NCSL!

Legislators’ Guide to Educator Effectiveness Policy – This is a guide for state legislators as they consider policies that support educators and improve the quality of teaching. It provides an overview of the major areas of educator policy, lists questions state legislators might ask as they consider their own policy context, and offers policy options states are considering.
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- Teaching Quality: Teacher Training, Teacher Quality and Student Achievement
Grading New York: Accountability and Student Proficiency in America’s Largest School District – This study evaluates the influence of New York City’s school grading policy on student math and English language arts (ELA) achievement. Findings indicate that assigning failing grades to low-achieving schools as an accountability tool can have a positive, substantive effect on student achievement but that schools did not otherwise respond well to receiving punitive grades other than F. (New to the ECS Research Studies Database)

How Career and Technical Education Can Help Students Be College and Career Ready: A Primer - This study argues that modern CTE pathways must ensure that coursework involves applied, contextual learning so students can see relevance in their studies and a relationship to their goals. Evolving into an academically rigorous course of study, CTE now is seen as preparation for both college and careers. The authors suggest states can move CTE along by providing alternative certification options for industry experts to become CTE instructors, professional development for current and would-be CTE instructors, and soliciting feedback from workforce stakeholders. Source: American Institutes for Research

2012 Alternative Accountability Policy Forum - On Nov. 16-17, 2012, the School for Integrated Academics and Technologies (SIATech) and the Reaching At-Promise Schools Association (RAPSA) hosted the Alternative Accountability Policy Forum in San Diego. This event included presenters and practitioners who serve re-engaged dropouts and other at-risk students to discuss what accountability policies are most appropriate. This report is a summary of the key points and recommendations of those sessions. It is intended to continue the conversation about what educational policies are appropriate for serving the most at risk students. Source: SIATech

Enhancing GED Instruction to Prepare Students for College and Careers: Early Success in LaGuardia Community College’s Bridge to Health and Business Program - The GED Bridge to Health and Business at La Guardia Community College program was the subject of this small, multi-year study comparing Bridge students with those in traditional GED programs. Bridge students were more likely to finish the course, pass the exam, and enroll in college. Why? Bridge instructors are full time and don't focus solely on passing the test. The Bridge GED curriculum incorporates areas of student interest--health care or business--students were intensively advised, and they spent more time in class. Source: MDRC

The ABCs of Keeping On Track to Graduation: Research Findings from Baltimore - This study probes the relationship between 8th and 9th grade early warning indicators as predictors of graduation outcomes, as well as the relationship between 9th grade indicators and college enrollment outcomes. Findings indicate that equipping schools to implement interventions to address chronic absenteeism and course
failure in 9th grade is a crucial strategy for increasing both high school graduation and college enrollment. (New to the ECS Research Studies Database)

- P-3 – Teacher Evaluations -

An Ocean of Unknowns: Risks and Opportunities in Using Student Achievement Data to Evaluate PreK-3rd Grade Teachers - This paper provides a snapshot of how student achievement data are being used in teacher evaluation systems in the early grades (P-3) today and illuminates the issues causing states and school districts the most struggles. Most states are using one of or some combination of three approaches: student learning objectives, shared assessments, and shared attribution. The author of this report examines these approaches in five states (Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Rhode Island and Tennessee) and three school districts (Austin, Texas; Hillsborough County, Florida; and Washington, D.C.) and finds that each of the approaches carries its own risks and opportunities.

- Postsecondary Enrollment: Minorities -

High School Drop-out Rate at Record Low: Hispanic High School Graduates Pass Whites in Rate of College Enrollment – This report finds that for the first time, Latino high school graduates passed whites in college enrollment rates. In the fall class of 2012, 69 percent of Latino high school graduates enrolled in college compared to 67 percent of their white counterparts. The achievement gap hasn't closed, however. Latinos are still less likely to enroll in a four-year institution, more likely to be part-time students, and less likely to complete a bachelor's degree than whites. The original data source is the October school enrollment supplement of the Current Population Survey collected by the Census Bureau.
Source: Pew Hispanic Center

- STEM -

Modeling Entrance into STEM Fields of Study Among Students Beginning at Community Colleges and Four-Year Institutions - This research study found that interest in math and science is the primary indicator of whether students enter a STEM major. Once students entered such programs, however, academic preparation, socioeconomic status, and institutional choice (e.g., two-year versus four-year institutions) play a more significant role in whether students complete a degree or certificate. (New to the ECS Research Studies Database)

- Student Achievement -

Breaking the Glass Ceiling of Achievement for Low-Income Students and Students of Color - To close the achievement gap, the authors of this report call for more efforts to help low-income and students of color succeed at the highest academic levels. While fewer of these students are scoring "below basic" in reading and math national assessments, the report shows that they aren't making similar progress at "advanced" levels, and the problem is even more pronounced in high school.
Source: Education Trust

- Teacher Evaluations -

How Much Are Districts Spending to Implement Teacher Evaluation Systems? Case Studies of Hillsborough County Public Schools, Memphis City Schools, and Pittsburgh Public Schools - This report presents case studies of the efforts by three school districts to launch, implement, and operate new
Teacher training, teacher quality and student achievement. - While research points to the critical role of teaching quality in improving student achievement, little consensus exists on which factors best enhance educator effectiveness. This research study found that the impact of professional development, advanced degrees, and in-service experience varied dramatically based on whether a teacher taught in an elementary, middle, or high school. As a result, state policymakers should consider their investments based on which factors most affect teacher productivity in each school context. (New to the ECS Research Studies Database)