Heads Up on Current Education Issues
May 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!

School Grades
States are struggling to create school accountability systems that are easy to find, meaningful to parents and filled with the data experts recommend, according to an ECS review of school report cards in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The report, Rating States, Grading Schools: What Parents and Experts Say States Should Consider to Make Accountability Systems Meaningful, is intended to help states policymakers create accessible, useful and effective school accountability systems.

Teacher Evaluations
An increasing number of states are using teacher performance, as measured by evaluations, in key employment decisions about who gets -- and keeps -- tenure and who gets laid off. A 50-state review of laws related to K-12 teacher tenure or non-probationary status also found a small but growing number of states attempting to eliminate continuing contracts for educators altogether. ECS released three short reports providing an overview of trends in state tenure laws since 2011, an examination of tenure and reduction-in-force policies and a look at teacher evaluations and decisions to grant or remove tenure.

States Address Civics with Mandated Task Forces
This brief identifies the creation of a task force on civic education as a mechanism states are using to evaluate the current status of civic education from kindergarten to postsecondary and to promote opportunities that would support programs that support civics skills.

Career and Technical Education
The latest issue of The Progress of Education Reform explores recent policy trends intended to expand the number of skilled workers trained to fill high-need labor market shortages. Of note, 2013 alone saw at least 78 substantive policy changes via legislation, substantive state board rules and executive orders specific to CTE and workforce development.

Completion May Depend on Number of Credits Transferred
A recent analysis finds that too many community college students are losing credits when they transfer to a baccalaureate program. This notable report points to the relationship between the number of credits that transfer and the likelihood that a student graduates. Find out which transfer policies your state has in place through ECS' May 2014 Transfer and Articulation Database.
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Common Core State Standards

**State Implementation of Common Core State Standards**: The report provides a look at how 15 states -- are doing with the Common Core. All 15 states are teaching Core standards and seven administer Core-aligned assessments. Leading states are Kentucky and New York; other strong states are Alabama, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland and North Carolina. The report goes on to evaluate teaching resources, professional development, evaluation of teachers and leaders and accountability.

*Source: Southern Regional Education Board*

School Course Choice

**Expanding the Education Universe: A 50-State Strategy For Course Choice**: Choice has become more than changing schools. When that isn't an option or when a child's present school is fine except for a few drawbacks, choice may now mean a choice of classes taught either online or from unconventional providers. This report outlines policy questions and options to weigh when designing course-choice programs, including issues of student eligibility, course providers, funding, quality control, and accountability.

*Source: Thomas B. Fordham Institute*

Finance

**Public Education Finances: 2012**: Public elementary and secondary education revenue declined in FY 2012 for the first time since 1977, when the Census Bureau began collecting education finance data. This report offers figures on revenues, expenditures, debt and assets of school systems, including statistics on spending -- instruction, transportation, salaries and employee benefits -- at the national, state and district levels. State governments were the leading source of revenue closely followed by revenue from local sources. Of the largest school systems, the highest spender per pupil in 2012 was New York City at $20,226.

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau*

P-3: Assessments

**Formative Assessment: Guidance for Early Childhood Policymakers**: Formative assessment, a process that is one component of the comprehensive assessment system, allows teachers to observe and interact with their students, learning daily about their development. Each child gets individualized instruction, a particular challenge with young children because they develop at different rates and their learning patterns can be uneven and rapid. This report provides a guide for policymakers considering formative assessment and issues involved in implementation.

*Source: Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes*

P-3 – Preschool

**The State of Preschool 2013**: According to this First Look, 40 states and the District of Columbia had state-supported preschool in 2012-13, serving 1.34 million children. Total enrollment decreased by 4,319 from the year before. Cost per child varied from the District of Columbia at $14,700 to less than $2,500 in nine states. State funding per child declined in 21 of 41 states.

*Source: National Center for Education Statistics*

Postsecondary - Financial Aid

**Should All Student Loan Payments Be Income-Driven**: The complex federal student loan system is ripe for streamlining, the authors of this report argue, mapping out pros and cons of income-driven repayment plans (IDRs) and passive repayment systems such as paycheck withholding. Requiring IDRs for all borrowers may have unintended consequences. On the plus side, they could help make monthly payments manageable, thus reducing student debt defaults. The downside might be that IDRs can increase the amount of time borrowers have debt, which might reduce access to other forms of credit.
Postsecondary Remediation – Math Courses:

*Increasing Access to College-Level Math: Early Outcomes Using the Virginia Placement Test*: This report compared student outcomes in college-level math before and after Virginia introduced a new placement policy and assessment. The new system removed intermediate algebra as a remedial prerequisite to college-level math for liberal arts degrees, and introduced a new assessment designed to be more aligned with what students need to know in their chosen program of study.

*Source: Community College Research Center (CCRC)*

Rural Education

*Why Rural Matters 2013-14*: This report, seventh in a series of biennial reports analyzing the contexts and conditions of rural education in each of the 50 states, calls attention to the need for policymakers to address rural education issues in their respective states. While it is the seventh in a series, this report is not simply an updating of data from earlier editions. The authors have deliberately altered the statistical indicators and gauges from one report to the next to call attention to the variability and complexity of rural education.

*Source: The Rural School and Community Trust*

School Turnaround

*Choosing A Lead Partner: State Education Agency Strategies For Recruiting And Evaluating Lead Partners To Support Turnaround*: This guide for state education agencies focuses on how to attract, recruit and develop best organizations to turn around low-performing districts and schools. Sought-after lead partners offered their views on what kind of regulatory environment they need to accomplish their best work. Then advice is given on crafting a request for proposal that will solicit and help evaluate applicants.

*Source: Mass Insight Education*

Teacher Evaluations

*Alternative Student Growth Measures for Teacher Evaluation: Profiles of Early-Adopting Districts*: While many states now evaluate teachers based on student growth, using state student assessments is problematic – they are typically administered in grades 3-8 and only in math and reading. This report looks at alternative student growth measures, first alternative assessment-based value-added models that use end-of-course assessments or commercially available tests, then student learning objectives which are determined by individual teachers and approved by principals.

*Source: REL Mid-Atlantic*

*State Requirements for Teacher Evaluation Policies Promoted by Race to the Top*: This brief describes the extent to which states required teacher evaluation policies aligned with Race to the Top as of 2012. Findings indicate that most states required less than half of eight teacher evaluation policies aligned with Race to the Top. Many aligned with policies requiring multiple evaluation measures and annual evaluations. Few aligned with using evaluation to make promotion and compensation decisions.

*Source: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance*
Policymakers are revolutionizing teacher evaluation by attaching greater stakes to student test scores and observation-based teacher effectiveness measures, but relatively little is known about why they often differ so much. Researchers found that some principals give high value-added teachers low ratings because they exert too little effort and are "lone wolves" who work in isolation and contribute little to the school community.

Student Data

Empowering Parents with Data: Ensuring Parents Have Data to Make Informed Choices: User-friendly data can help parents answer questions about their child's education and make crucial decisions: Is my child on track for career and college readiness? How does my child's school compare to others? Schools and districts provide such information to parents but states also can ensure accessible data. For example, 44 states provide growth reports, but only 22 tailor reports for parents.

Source: Data Quality Campaign

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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