Heads Up on Current Education Issues
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*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!**

**States with Guaranteed College Admissions Policies for High School Graduates** - This brief summarizes legislative and postsecondary system efforts to guarantee admission to college for high school students who meet prescribed standards. The methods for measuring eligibility for automatic admission vary widely across the 10 states that have such rules. The automatic admission standards are instructive because they represent a state or system-wide understanding of what constitutes postsecondary readiness. Further, these policies, when paired with common placement standards and a shared definition of college and career readiness, could create true P-20 alignment in states.

**Math in the Early Years: A Strong Predictor for Later School Success** - This issue of The Progress of Education Reform reveals five surprising findings about the strong relationship between early math instruction and later student achievement. In fact, early development of mathematics skills may be a greater predictor than early reading of later reading proficiency.

**New from NCSL!**

**Comprehensive School Choice: A Guide for Legislators:** Since 2011, 49 states have considered school choice legislation in some form. This has raised many questions about choice. Does school competition change anything? How do other states fund charter school facilities? What is the fiscal impact of vouchers? Are scholarship tax credits constitutional? How do parents choose schools? NCSL addresses each of these questions and much more in this new first-of-its-kind report. Issues addressed in the guide include: Charter school policy, private school choice, parent triggers, communicating school data to parents, and how multiple forms of choice interact with one another within a state.
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- Achievement Gaps -

**Effects of School Racial Composition on K-12 Mathematics Outcomes: A Metaregression Analysis** - New from the ECS Research Studies Database. School racial isolation has a small, statistically significant negative effect on building-level mathematics outcomes, according to this study. The effect creates achievement gaps that widen over the years. Findings are important for public policy because how schools are organized is, in theory, more amenable to change through policy choices than student-level factors such as motivation or aptitude, or family characteristics such as cultural norms, family structure, parental education, or income, all well-known contributing factors to mathematics outcomes.

**Social Policy and the Achievement Gap: What Do We Know? Where Should We Head?** - New from the ECS Research Studies Database. Although it remains logical to argue that social reforms might dramatically affect academic performance in a way that would shrink the achievement gap, the current evidence does not allow for much certainty as to exactly how this might be accomplished.

- Assessments -

**Evaluating the screening accuracy of the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR)** - Student performance on the interim Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR) was analyzed across grades 4-10 with the end-of-year Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) 2.0 to determine how well the FAIR and the 2011 FCAT 2.0 scores predicted 2012 FCAT 2.0 performance. The first key finding was that the reading comprehension screen of the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR) was more accurate than the 2011 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) 2.0 scores in correctly identifying students as not at risk for failing to meet grade-level standards on the 2012 FCAT 2.0. The second key finding was that using both the FAIR screen and the 2011 FCAT 2.0 lowered the underidentification rate of at-risk students by 12-20 percentage points compared with the results using the 2011 FCAT 2.0 score alone.

Source: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Evaluation

- Curriculum – Math -

**After Two Years, Three Elementary Math Curricula Outperform a Fourth** - New findings shed light on mathematics curricula by showing how four math curricula affect students' achievement across two years -- from first through second grade. Math Expressions, Saxon, and SFAW/enVision improved 1st-through-2nd math achievement by similar amounts. All three outperformed Investigations. Results by the end of the first grade favored Saxon and Math Expressions, but by the end of the second grade, SFAW/enVision students caught up to Math Expressions and Saxon students, whereas Envision students continued to lag.

Source: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance

- Curriculum – Social Emotional -

**Social-Emotional Learning** - For those new to Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) or confused by the various interpretations of exactly what it is, this brief gives an overview, a description of SEL approaches and policy initiatives, and questions policymakers might want to ask about the state of SEL in their states. Their definition: SEL refers to a holistic approach to education, one that addresses not only students' academic needs but also their development as individuals, classmates, neighbors, and citizens. Its origins as a popular concept are traced to Daniel Goleman's book, Emotional Intelligence in 1995.

Source: National Association of State Boards of Education
Navigating the Digital Shift: Implementation Strategies for Blended and Online Learning - Blended learning is defined as "a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through the online delivery of content and instruction, with some element of student control over time, place, path and/or pace." In this second version of a blended learning implementation guide, the authors point out that a confluence of factors could make this era a turning point in the history of education: the Common Core, the shift to online assessments, the availability of affordable devices, and the growing number of high-quality digital instructional tools. These make possible personalized learning around the individual needs of every student.

Source: Digital Learning Now

Postsecondary Enrollment

The ACT of Enrollment: College Enrollment Effects of State-Required College Entrance Exam Testing – New from the ECS Research Studies Database. For many years, states have used financial aid as a lever to increase college enrollment. While generally effective at increasing college-going rates, these policies can be expensive. Some states have explored non-financial levers to address enrollment challenges. This study evaluates the effect of one of these policies: a statewide requirement for schools to administer college entrance exams to all 11th grade students. The study analyzes college enrollment changes in Colorado, Illinois, and Maine.

High School Socioeconomic Segregation and Student Attainment - New from the ECS Research Studies Database. Resegregation has been more pronounced along socioeconomic lines than racial lines in recent years, exacerbated by the widening earnings gap between low- and high-income families. This study looks at high school graduation and college enrollment differences between schools of high and low socioeconomic status. Students who attend a high socioeconomic composition (SEC) school have a 68% higher probability of enrolling in a four-year college than students who attend a low SEC school.

Postsecondary Finance: Performance-Based Funding

Performance-Based Funding: The National Landscape - Relying on a formula utilizing performance indicators, performance-based funding (PBF) is gaining a national foothold. This brief offers a look at where states are: 22 have PBF in place, seven are in transition, 10 are in formal discussion, 12 -- including the District of Columbia -- had little evidence of activity. Researchers haven't yet found a link between PBF and improved student outcomes. States considering implementation or modification should consider stakeholder involvement, sector-specific measures, linking measures with state goals, and gradual phase-in.

Source: University of Alabama Education Policy Center

Postsecondary Governance

Conditioning Role of State Higher Education Governance Structures - New from the ECS Research Studies Database. Several states have reformed postsecondary governance by adjusting the powers and duties of state and system boards. This study evaluates the effect of consolidated governing boards on appropriations patterns and trends. The findings support the notion that statewide higher education governance structures buffer political actors from the constant lobbying of higher education institutions.
and interest groups. However, these boards also appear to increase significantly the influence that legislatures and governors have on state higher education budgeting.

- Postsecondary Online Education-

Not Yet Sold: What Employers and Community College Students Think About Online Education - Though perceived value of postsecondary online classes has improved over the past two years, most employers still prefer job applicants with traditional degrees from average schools over applicants with an online degree from a top university, according to this brief. The majority of community college students believe online classes take more self discipline than in-person classes, and they are split on whether learning in person is greater or the same as online. Many community college students wish they could take fewer online classes than they do.
Source: Public Agenda

- Teacher Evaluations -

Leading via Teacher Evaluation: The Case of the Missing Clothes? - New from the ECS Research Studies Database. In evaluating the effects of teacher evaluation, the authors of this study conclude that we should be cautious in accepting claims about the ability of teacher evaluation, even in its newest form, to power significant school improvement or effectively inform personnel decisions.

- Teaching Effectiveness -

The Effectiveness of Secondary Math Teachers from Teach For America and the Teaching Fellows Programs - Although critics claim that Teach for America (TFA) and Teaching Fellows teachers are not as well prepared as traditionally prepared teachers, this study concludes secondary TFA math teachers are more effective than other math teachers and Teaching Fellows teachers are as effective and, in some cases, more effective than other math teachers in the same schools. The conclusion: TFA and Teaching Fellows teachers offer promising options for high-needs secondary schools.
Source: Mathematica Policy Research

- Teaching Quality -

An Opportunity Culture for All: Making Teaching a Highly Paid, High Impact Profession - The bad news: Between 1970 and 2010, per pupil spending went up almost 150%, but only 11% went to teachers. Teacher salaries and student outcomes stagnated. There's a better way, the authors argue. Junk the one-teacher-one-classroom model. Create teaching teams led by one excellent teacher so more kids get exposed. Use digital instruction and paraprofessionals to save money and spend that money on better teacher pay. Be more selective about which teachers enter, which teachers stay.
Source: Public Impact

- Third-Grade Reading Proficiency -

A Governors’ Guide to Early Literacy: Getting All Students Reading by Third Grade – This guide examines the gap between research and policy and describes the five policy actions that governors and other state policymakers can take to ensure that all children are reading on grade level by the end of third grade.
Source: National Governors Association
Recovery: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2020 - Assuming Congress can resolve budgetary challenges, this study predicts there will be 55 million job openings through 2020 with 24 million newly created and 31 million due to retiring baby boomers. About 65% of those jobs will require some postsecondary education and -- at current rates of production -- the United States will fall short of workers with postsecondary education by 5 million.

Source: Center on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University

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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