Heads Up on Education Issues

September 2011

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). Sometimes you’ll find that we produced a document, but we’ve also reviewed many other recent reports for you and selected these as relevant and reflective of information you can trust.

First of all, check out our new LESN logo!!

Access and Success

The National Council of State Directors of Community Colleges responds annually to a survey of access and finance issues. The Education Policy Center at the University of Alabama compiles and releases the annual survey.

Bullying

The Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA has released a very thoughtful report on bullying as a barrier to learning and teaching.

Choice

The Center for Evaluation and Education Policy has released a report that assesses the status of vouchers and tax credits across the nation and looks at the new choice provisions enacted by the Indiana General Assembly during the 2011 session.

College Completion

A new Complete College America report presents state-by-state data on the educational progress of all postsecondary students (part-time, adult, full-time, those taking remedial courses, etc.) in 33 states. The results are not encouraging.

The latest issue of ECS’ The Progress of Education Reform focuses on higher education reform — recent research in the areas of assessing student learning, the use of technology in instruction, and models for providing the academic and social support students need to stay on track and earn a postsecondary credential.
Common Core Standards

A recent report from the Center on Education Policy looks at the progress and challenges in school districts’ implementation of the common core standards.

Expanded Learning Opportunities

Colorado’s Department of Education, together with the Colorado Legacy Foundation, released a report outlining the findings of the Expanded Learning Opportunities commission as well as recommendations for future reform. Read the report summary.

The National Center on Time and Learning studied three districts using expanded time to improve schools. Read the report.

Federal Programs

ECS’ Mike Griffith has released a report estimating the impact of the proposed American Jobs Act.

International Comparisons

NCES has released another international comparison report with results from PIRLS 2006, TIMSS 2007 and PISA 2009. The analysis used the International Data Explorer, a web-based data tool on the NCES Web site that allows users to produce their own statistical analyses online, to compare the average scores of U.S. students in each subject and at each grade level with their peers from around the world.

Leadership

Costly superintendent contract buy-outs and early terminations are increasingly in the news. This ECS compilation captures both the landscape of current state policy and new elements that could help limit potential taxpayer liability and promote transparency in district leader contracts.

Legislative Effectiveness

NCSL’s Karl Kurtz recently conducted a national survey of all legislative staff asking about the challenges facing legislative staff. Here are the summary results. For another view of the subject, scroll down to open Tim Rice’s “Top 10 Challenges for Legislative Staff.”

Middle Schools

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE) released a report examining 12 middle schools in Georgia witnessing great success in preparing their students for future academic and work challenges. Following a 2009 report that identified high-performing middle schools, this new report identifies characteristics common to these schools that ultimately contribute to student success.

Postsecondary Finance

State appropriations for higher education are highly cyclical, with downturns in funding during difficult financial times followed by increases in funding when state finances improve. This policy brief from the Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education shares recent research about
whether the duration of recoveries from cuts in appropriations for higher education has changed over time and which characteristics of states are associated with shorter or longer durations for recovery.

Kentucky’s Council on Postsecondary Education aims to accelerate educational improvements with aggressive 2015 state performance targets. The 13 new state targets represent the levels of improvement that the state needs to make on performance metrics by 2015 to stay on track with legislated mandates.

Community colleges are viewed as key players in raising national educational levels, yet as the recession hit in 2009, two-year institutions also were the sector of higher education that took the hardest financial hits, according to a Delta Cost Project report. The recession also has exacerbated the gap between higher-education’s haves and have-nots.

School Calendar

This ECS StateNote answers: How long is the school year? When does school begin? How long does a day need to be to count as a “full day” of instruction?

Student Achievement

Here is a newly released summary of NAEP data, the Nation’s Report Card 2009. This is a compilation of executive summaries from the reports from the 2009 mathematics, reading, science and High School Transcript Study and includes results for the nation and participating states and districts.

A new report from the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy examines the challenges of students changing schools in the middle of the school year for both students and teachers and identifies promising strategies for overcoming these challenges.

This new report released by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and produced in partnership with the Northwest Evaluation Association finds that many high-performing students struggle to maintain their performance over the years and often fail to improve their reading ability at the same rate as their average and below-average classmates. Educators walk a tight-rope as they try to close the achievement gap and not ignore the needs of the more talented student.

The Hamilton Project released a report looking at organizing schools in ways to improve student achievement. Each is a change which would produce “more bang for the buck.”

Students with Disabilities

SRI International prepared a report for IES looking at the post-high school outcomes of young adults with disabilities up to eight years after high school. The report looks at the experiences of these students in postsecondary education, employment, independence and social domains in their first eight years out of high school.
Hot off the press is a report from Communities for Teaching Excellence titled on creating a meaningful yet fair evaluation system.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released Beginning Teacher Attrition and Mobility, outlining the findings of a recent beginning teacher longitudinal study. The report finds that, of teachers who began teaching in 2007 or 2008, 12% were no longer teaching in 2009-2010. For those teachers who were not assigned a mentor, 23% were no longer in the teaching profession.

If you have questions or comments about “Heads Up on Education Issues” please contact Melodye Bush at ECS.

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