Heads Up on Current Education Issues
September 2014

Heads Up, a monthly compilation of recommended research and reading on critical public education issues, comes to you as a complimentary service from the Education Commission of the States (ECS) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL).

New from ECS!

Open-source textbooks can help drive down the overall cost of college: There is growing national and international interest in postsecondary-level Open Educational Resources (OERs) as a way to reduce costs and save students money. This ECS document defines OERs, looks at how state policies have supported their use and profiles some non-legislative approaches.

States and the (not so) new standards -- where are they now?: There has been a flurry of activity around the Common Core State Standards, and while it seems the landscape is changing all the time, there has been very limited change in state standards. This report captures a snapshot of where states currently stand in regard to those standards.
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- Career/Technical Education: CTE Works!: 2014 Results from a National Survey
- College and Career Readiness: Definitions of College and Career Readiness: An Analysis by State
- Educational Attainment: A Longitudinal Investigation of African American and Hispanic Adolescents' Educational and Occupational Expectations and Corresponding Attainment in Adulthood
- High School Exit Exams: The Case Against Exit Exams
- Instructional Time – Math: Spending More of the School Day in Math Class: Evidence from a Regression Discontinuity in Middle School
- Postsecondary Affordability: A Gamble with Consequences: State Lottery-Funded Scholarship Programs as a Strategy for Boosting College Affordability
- Postsecondary Performance Funding: Tough Love: Bottom-Line Quality Standards for Colleges
- Postsecondary Students: Closing the Achievement Gap - Closing the Social-Class Achievement Gap: A Difference-Education Intervention Improves First-Generation Students' Academic Performance and All Students' College Transition
- School Turnaround and Early Learning:
  - Changing the Metrics of Turnaround to Encourage Early Learning Strategies
  - Framework for Rethinking Education Accountability and Support Birth Through High School
- State Department Audits: Ohio Department of Education Performance Audit
- Teaching Evaluations: Using Subject Test Scores Efficiently to Predict Teacher Value-Added
CTE Works!: 2014 Results from a National Survey - Ninety percent is the graduation rate for career/technical education (CTE) students, compared to the national rate of 75 percent; 85 percent of CTE students plan on going to college, according to a national survey of about 51,000 students and 900 teachers. A third said they’d gotten the chance to earn college credit, a certificate, or a degree for their CTE work. However, CTE teachers said their programs face funding challenges. Source: ACTE

Income and Poverty in the United States: 2013 - 2013 saw the first decrease in the child poverty rate since 2006. But while families' circumstances have improved, they have not done so evenly across the board. Poverty rates fell for white and Hispanic children, but increased slightly for black children. This report presents data on income and poverty coverage in the United States based on information collected in the 2014 and earlier Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplements. Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Definitions of College and Career Readiness: An Analysis by State - What does it mean to be college and career ready? Among the 36 states plus the District of Columbia that composed readiness statements, the definition varies. In 33, one definition is used for both college and career, assuming the skills required for each are essentially the same. Three quarters of the definitions determine readiness based on future outcomes so they can't be used to serve students in need of help to graduate on track for postsecondary success. Source: American Institutes for Research.

A Longitudinal Investigation of African American and Hispanic Adolescents’ Educational and Occupational Expectations and Corresponding Attainment in Adulthood - New to the ECS Research Studies Database - A study comparing African-American and Hispanic teenagers’ expectations for future schooling and work found a disconnect with the actual schooling and work obtained as adults. Supporting youth with high educational goals and increasing expectations for those with low goals appears to be especially important for increasing educational attainment of minority youth.

Spending More of the School Day in Math Class: Evidence from a Regression Discontinuity in Middle School - New to the ECS Research Studies Database - When students' math skills fall short of expectations, some public schools have begun increasing the quantity of time that struggling students spend in math class with the hope that students will catch up to expectations. Existing, but limited, evidence finds students do make meaningful gains under this kind of remedial intervention. This study explores the question of whether the gains persist.
- Postsecondary Affordability -

**A Gamble with Consequences: State Lottery-Funded Scholarship Programs as a Strategy for Boosting College Affordability** – This report finds that a growing number of states are using lottery money for college scholarships. But the politically popular lottery funds often fail to live up to their expectations. Source: American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

- Postsecondary Performance Funding -

**Tough Love: Bottom-Line Quality Standards for Colleges** - With roughly $180 billion in federal student aid and tax benefits provided each year to colleges and universities with virtually no performance strings attached regarding low-income student access, degree-completion, and post-enrollment success measures, these institutions are getting a pass. This report recommends targeting assistance to persistently underperforming public and nonprofit colleges and imposing tough consequences, including cutting off federal aid, on these institutions that fail to improve within a reasonable time period. Source: The Education Trust

- Postsecondary Students: Closing the Achievement Gap -

**Closing the Social-Class Achievement Gap: A Difference-Education Intervention Improves First-Generation Students' Academic Performance and All Students' College Transition** - New to the ECS Research Database - Researchers tested an intervention intended to improve prospects for freshmen college students who were first in their families to enroll in higher education. They found an awareness of background differences improved outcomes of first-generation students but also the outcomes of students whose parents had attended college.

- School Turnaround and Early Learning -

**Changing the Metrics of Turnaround to Encourage Early Learning Strategies** and the previously released [Framework for Rethinking Education Accountability and Support Birth Through High School](#) - address how current K-12 turnaround and accountability policies create a disincentive to local investment in early learning and K-2. To date, accountability and turnaround policies have focused on student test scores third grade (and up) as the primary measure of progress, ignoring what goes on in the early learning and K-2. But it's the first years of life that are the most important to a child's development. Source: Ounce of Prevention

- State Department Audits -

**Ohio Department of Education Performance Audit** - State department staff frequently ask ECS about how other state education agencies are structured and function. Some states conduct performance audits of agencies, and we find such reports fascinating. Source: Ohio State Auditor

- Teaching Evaluations -

**Using Subject Test Scores Efficiently to Predict Teacher Value-Added** - New to the ECS Research Studies Database - Measuring teacher effectiveness is increasingly important as school districts make decisions about contract renewals. Often, decisions concerning beginning or probationary educators need to be made with only one or two years of evaluation data. This recent study shows how using a model that
employs existing data across multiple subjects can more accurately predict teacher value-added, even when limited data are available.

- High School Exit Exams -

The Case Against Exit Exams - States' new assessments are being designed to include more critical thinking and complex items than previous standardized tests. While better assessments are welcome, a growing worry is that states will use these as exit exams. Authors of this report suggest using them toward final course grades instead.
Source: New America Education Policy Program

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.

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