Heads Up on Current Education Issues

May 2015

*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!**

- **Redesigning State Financial Aid: Principles to guide state aid policymaking** - Changing demographics and shifting expectations for higher education create fertile ground for states to redesign and re-conceptualize financial aid programs and this report advances the idea that such a redesign should be student centered, goal driven and data informed, timely and flexible, and broadly inclusive of all students’ educational pathways.

- **Free and compulsory school age requirements** - More and more, state policymakers are exploring options to increase the age range that a student is required to attend school -- with goals of boosting high school graduation rates and producing a better prepared workforce that can meet the needs of modern employers.

- **State approaches to funding dual enrollment** – This report explores how states are addressing funding for this popular educational strategy. The efforts of several states are highlighted and detailed in depth, including the mechanism for funding dual enrollment, potential benefits and drawbacks of each approach, student access and program outcomes, and considerations on the politics or culture underlying the funding approaches.

- **Reverse Transfer: The path less traveled** - Higher rates of degree completion for students in higher education cannot be reached without innovation, for example reverse transfer. A unique process for awarding associate degrees to students who have transferred to four-year institutions from community colleges, reverse transfer policies and programs allow students to combine credits they earned at two- and four-year institutions. They earn an associate degree while also working toward a bachelor’s degree.

- **The shaping of federal education policy over time** - Christopher Cross presents an overview of major events in federal education policy history, events that shaped today's individual opinions and current federal jurisdiction. With the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act being one of the most significant K-12 policy events in history, this report includes a synopsis of the current state of waivers, extensions and possible next steps for ESEA reauthorization.
New from NCSL!

Early Mathematics Education - While numerous policies address early literacy skills for children in pre-kindergarten through third grade, early math has actually been demonstrated to be a stronger predictor for future academic achievement. This policy brief focuses on the benefits of early math and provides examples of enacted legislation.

Harnessing the Power of Technology in the Classroom - States are increasingly providing or enabling digital devices and digital content for students and educators to use in school and at home, redefining textbooks to include digital content and the necessary devices, and investing in training for teachers to better incorporate technology to enhance learning both in and out of school.

Expanding Broadband Access for All Learners - State legislatures are enacting policies that emphasize state and district planning, standards, methodology and funding to upgrade broadband and education technology infrastructure.

Protecting Student Privacy in a Networked World - States are addressing student privacy through a variety of policies, including creating governance structures to oversee transparency, protecting the privacy of student data collected in schools and online, and prohibiting specific uses and sharing.

Promoting Digital Literacy Among Students and Educators - State legislatures are investing in programs and professional development to provide digital literacy skills for students and educators. A handful of states are modifying teacher training program requirements to include digital age literacies.
In this issue:

- Common Core & Teacher Leaders: Teacher Leadership: The Pathway to Common Core Success
- Early Learning – Diversity Matters - A Better Start Why Classroom Diversity Matters in Early Education
- Early Learning - Learning, social and emotional - Efficacy of the Responsive Classroom Approach: Results from a 3-Year, Longitudinal Randomized Controlled Trial
- English Language Learners - The Case for a Two-Generation Approach for Educating English Language Learners
- Postsecondary Completion: Supporting College Completion for Students Experiencing Homelessness
- Postsecondary Student Recruitment: The Out-of-State Student Arms Race: How Public Universities Use Merit Aid to Recruit Nonresident Students
- Postsecondary – Value of an Education: Beyond College Rankings A Value-Added Approach to Assessing Two- and Four-Year Schools
- Pre-K: The State of Preschool: 2014
- Pre-K – Access: A Better Start: Why Classroom Diversity Matters in Early Education
- School Closures: School Closures and Student Achievement: An Analysis of Ohio’s Urban District and Charter Schools
- School Turnaround: State Capacity to Support School Turnaround
- Teaching Quality - Instructional Alignment as a Measure of Teaching Quality
Teacher Leadership: The Pathway to Common Core Success - Teacher leadership can play an important role in ensuring the success of the Common Core. This paper describes districts throughout the country that smoothed Common Core's path by involving teachers in various ways, including using them in district and school governance, giving them special assignments, giving them time for collaboration, and having them write, develop and choose instructional materials. 
*Source: Center for American Progress*

Digital Learning: Report Card 2014 - States are graded in overall digital quality and in 10 elements: student eligibility, student access, personalized learning, advancement (students progress based on demonstrated competencies), quality content, quality instruction, quality choices, assessment and accountability, funding and delivery (infrastructure supports digital learning).
*Source: Digital Learning Now*

A Better Start Why Classroom Diversity Matters in Early Education - Racial, ethnic and economic disparities persist in preschool classrooms across America. This report calls for policymakers to focus on the value of diversity in early education classrooms to increase equity and quality. It finds children from low-income families and Hispanic children are less likely than high socioeconomic and non-Hispanic children to be enrolled in center-based early childhood programs. Most children in public preschool programs attend classrooms that are segregated by family income and often by race/ethnicity as well.
*Source: The Century Foundation and Poverty & Race Research Action Council*

Efficacy of the Responsive Classroom Approach: Results from a 3-Year, Longitudinal Randomized Controlled Trial - There is increasing interest in social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, which help students develop skills like social awareness and responsible decision making but little is known about their impact on student achievement. The authors of this study found that generally, students receiving SEL instruction did not show significant improvement in performance. However, a small group of students showed academic gains when their teachers used the curriculum *exactly* as it was designed.

Digest of Education Statistics: 2013 - The National Center for Education Statistics released its Digest of Education Statistics, chock full of every imaginable factoid concerning things educational from preschool to graduate school. There’s good news: fall 2013 marked a new record for public elementary enrollment, which will continue increasing; dropout rates declined from 12.1 percent in 1990 to 6.6 percent in 2012; Americans are completing more years of education.
*Source: NCES*
children, investing in these two populations is critical to the success of families and the economy. This brief looks at the U.S. ELL population, explains why a two-generation approach is a valuable strategy and presents case studies of promising approaches for educating ELL students and parents while providing critical wraparound services.

*Source: Center for American Progress*

- Postsecondary Completion -

**Supporting College Completion for Students Experiencing Homelessness**: Since the College Cost Reduction and Access Act was signed into law in September 2007, the issue of college access for homeless youth has garnered increased attention. Among other provisions, the CCRAA confers independent student status on unaccompanied homeless youth, helping to ensure that they have access to the financial support necessary to pay for college. Gaining entry to college and securing financial aid are only the first steps to degree completion. This brief explores how colleges are supporting their homeless student populations.

*Source: National Center for Homeless Education*

- Postsecondary Student Recruitment -

**The Out-of-State Student Arms Race: How Public Universities Use Merit Aid to Recruit Nonresident Students** - Public universities are using non-need-based aid to recruit out-of-state students at the expense of low-income and in-state students, according to a new report. The report also describes the factors that have led to what has become a widespread practice.

*Source: New American Foundation*

- Postsecondary – Value of an Education -

**Beyond College Rankings A Value-Added Approach to Assessing Two- and Four-Year Schools** - Arguing that earnings are an important measure of well being, this study focuses on economic outcomes, mid-career earnings, occupational earnings and student loan repayment rates. It isn't just the nationally recognized universities -- Cal Tech, MIT and Stanford -- that are high value-added, but also Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in Indiana, Colgate in upstate New York and Carleton in Minnesota.

*Source: Brookings*

- Pre-K -

**The State of Preschool: 2014** - The good news: state funding for Pre-K increased by nearly $120 million in 2013-14. The bad news: programs have yet to fully recover from the impacts of half a billion dollars cut in 2011-12, according to this report. Enrollment growth grew modestly by 8,535, nearly half of which went to recouping 4,000 seats lost in 2012-13. State Pre-K quality standards improved. Mississippi started a program in January 2014 and simultaneously met all 10 NIEER benchmarks. An analysis of each state is featured.

*Source: NIEER*

- Pre-K - Access -

**A Better Start: Why Classroom Diversity Matters in Early Education** - This report presents the results of a review and analysis of demographic data, current research, and position statements of national early childhood organizations. The demographic data reveal troubling racial/ethnic and economic disparities in preschool enrollment and in the quality of preschool that children experience, which beckon policy changes to provide all families with access to affordable, high-quality preschool options.

*Source: National Center for Children and Families, Teachers College, Columbia University*
- School Closures -

**School Closures and Student Achievement: An Analysis of Ohio’s Urban District and Charter Schools** - An examination of school closures in Ohio's Big Eight urban areas reveals that students displaced by closure were disproportionately black, economically disadvantaged and low achieving. On average, displaced students ended up in more effective schools populated by higher achieving students. Overall, closing schools and charters in Ohio's urban districts had a positive impact on displaced students' academic achievement.

*Source: Thomas B. Fordham Institute*

- School Turnaround -

**State Capacity to Support School Turnaround** - Most states reported prioritizing turnaround as a statewide education policy in spring 2012 and spring 2013. However, they also reported that turnaround was one of their three most difficult policy goals to achieve. Factors contributing to this difficulty may include significant gaps in expertise for supporting school turnaround, which 21 of these states reported in both spring 2012 and spring 2013.

*Source: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance*

- Teaching Quality -

**Instructional Alignment as a Measure of Teaching Quality** - New to the ECS Research Studies Database - The authors of this study found that the correlations between instructional alignment and indicators of effective teaching were much smaller than expected. The findings raise questions about the validity of inferences made on the basis of value-added assessment data and suggest that policymakers should consider whether state tests should be used to differentiate effective from ineffective teaching.

**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 eeworkman@ecs.org.