



NATIONAL CONFERENCE of STATE LEGISLATURES

The Forum for America's Ideas

National Conference of State Legislatures International Education Study Group

Debbie Smith
*Senate Assistant Minority Leader
Nevada
President, NCSL*

Margaret 'Peggy' Piety
*Senior Staff Attorney
Legislative Services Agency
Indiana
Staff Chair, NCSL*

William T. Pound
Executive Director

In July 2014, The National Conference of State Legislatures embarked on a 18-month effort to bring key legislators together study lessons about education from high-performing countries and share findings with their fellow state legislators. This effort is very timely: state legislators are interested in learning more about the policies and practices in other countries that contribute to high student achievement and the lessons that might be applied to state education policy.

Legislative Interest in International Comparisons

State Legislators know that the United States is falling behind other countries in educational outcomes and want to understand why. The PISA and PIAC international comparisons provide an opportunity to study that question. While many policymakers feel that the US cannot fairly be compared to other countries that have centralized education governance systems or less diverse populations, OECD's analysis of the PISA results indicates that countries doing well have certain consistent education policies, including a clear national commitment to education improvement, a professionalized teaching corps, widely available early education opportunities, high standards, a strategic assessment process, subsidized higher education, and clear workforce/education options. In addition, many of these countries look like our states – and education reform is primarily a state matter that will be accomplished state by state.

While many international policies are not feasible in the United States, there are components of these policies that are worthy of study and discussion. In addition, lessons from high-performing countries are particularly valuable at a time when continued federal inaction on reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has left states balancing state reform efforts with federal requirements.


NCSL's International Study Group and Scope of Work

NCSL has appointed a high-level Study Group of 24 legislators and 6 legislative staff who have expertise, experience and interest in this topic. The Study Group is bipartisan and geographically representative and will work with the NCSL Education Standing Committee to host discussions and conversations. Legislative participants include current and previous chairs and vice chairs of the NCSL Standing Committee, legislators in NCSL leadership, education committee chairs, and other knowledgeable and experienced legislators recommended by NCSL leadership or state legislative leadership.

The Study Group came together in person for its first meeting in early September 2014 for a day-long organizational meeting and for 2 additional days with 20 other education committee chairs from across the country to begin to study education policies and approaches in high-performing countries. They learned

Denver
7700 East First Place
Denver, Colorado 80230-7143
Phone 303.364.7700 Fax 303.364.7800

Washington
444 North Capitol Street, N.W. Suite 515
Washington, D.C. 20001
Phone 202.624.5400 Fax 202.737.1069


Website www.ncsl.org
Email info@ncsl.org

from international education policy experts, including Marc Tucker, William Schmidt, Pasi Sahlberg, Andreas Schleicher, Ben Jensen and Linda Darling-Hammond. Since then the Study Group has met in person and via webinar to learn more about PISA and international comparisons; hear from leaders in some of the top performing countries as well as state leaders who are implementing reform here at home. The Group is particularly interested in how these countries and states have reformed the teaching profession, developed high standards and key tests, designed pathways for college and careers, strengthened early education opportunities, and implemented equity of funding and resources.

The final products of the Study Group will be (1) a set of findings for state legislators to consider about the most important lessons for the states from other countries to be released at the end of the project; (2) a major session on the topic to be held at the 2015 Legislative Summit; and (3) in-state presentations by NCSL staff or Study Group members about the findings and policy considerations. The final report will be written by the members of the Study Group specifically for a state legislative audience. It will explore questions such as:

- Why should the US pay attention to international comparisons?
- What is working in other countries and why?
- What can states learn from these experiences?
- What is unique to these countries?
- What fundamental principles support reform in successful countries and are relevant for states?
- What are opportunities and roadblocks for states in pursuing education reform?

Study Group Members:

Rep. Alice Peisch, Massachusetts
Rep. Betty Komp, Oregon
Senator David Sokola, Delaware
Rep. Eric Fresen, Florida
Rep. Harry Brooks, Tennessee
Senator Howard Stephenson, Utah
Rep. Jacqueline Sly, South Dakota
Senator John Ford, Oklahoma
Senator Joyce Elliott, Arkansas
Senator Joyce Woodhouse, Nevada
Rep. Ken Dunkin, Illinois
Senator Luther Olsen, Wisconsin
Rep. Lynn Gattis, Alaska
Rep. Mary Gile, New Hampshire

Senator Peggy Lehner, Ohio
Senator Richard Madaleno, Maryland
Rep. Robert Behning, Indiana
Senator Robert Plymale, West Virginia
Rep. Roy Takumi, Hawaii
Senator Sharon Tomiko Santos, Washington
Rep. Tom Dickson, Georgia
Rep. Wendy Horman, Idaho
Anita Thomas, North Dakota
Ben Boggs, Kentucky
Phil McCarthy, Maine
Julie Pelegrin, Colorado
Todd Butterworth, Nevada
Rachel Hise, Maryland

Partners:

National Center on Education and the Economy
Business Roundtable
National Education Association

ACT
American Federation of Teachers
Microsoft

NCSL Project Staff:

Julie Davis Bell, Education Group Director
303/856-1351, julie.bell@ncsl.org

Michelle Exstrom, Education Program Director
303/856-1564, michelle.exstrom@ncsl.org

Lee Posey, Federal Affairs Counsel
202/624-8196, lee.posey@ncsl.org

Madeleine Webster, Research Analyst
303/856-1465, madeleine.webster@ncsl.org