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.

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- Charter Schools -

*New Orleans-Style Education Reform: A Guide for Cities* – this report offers insights and lessons learned from the New Orleans’ post-Katrina effort to develop a choice-based, predominantly charter system. (Source: New Schools for New Orleans)

- College Readiness -

*Defining College Readiness* – This issue of The Progress of Education Reform considers potential ways states might define "college readiness," identifying for each approach: potential benefits, potential drawbacks and key components to consider. (Source: Education Commission of the States)
- Performance-Based Education -

State Strategies for Awarding Credit to Support Student Learning – According to this issue brief, awarding credits based on student mastery of content and skills can remove barriers to increasing student readiness for college and careers. This brief illustrates how governors can lead efforts to foster alternative methods of awarding credit by working to build flexibility in state policy for students to earn credit based on learning; modify school funding formulas to allocate resources based on student mastery of content and skills as opposed to enrollment; ensure data systems are linked across state agencies and education providers; and require public institutions of higher education to accept student transcripts with credits earned by demonstration of mastery. [See also: 2011 ECS Progress of Education Reform – Credit Recovery and Proficiency-Based Credit]  
(Source: National Governors Association)

- Finance -

Competing for School Improvement Dollars: State Grant-Making Strategies – This paper takes a closer look at state grant-making strategies for federal school improvement dollars. It reviews the way in which state funding practices for school improvement have changed as a result of the updated School Improvement Grant program (SIG) requirements and how states have used their flexibility to implement a competitive grant process. Specifically, the paper details the approach that three states have taken in administering their grant competitions. These states illuminate the spectrum of competitiveness in the state grant-making process that has emerged as a result of the new school improvement regulations.  
(Source: Center for American Progress)

- P-3 -

VPK Teachers’ Education Level Does Not Substantially Influence Kindergarten Readiness Scores: Program and Provider Differences Affect Readiness Rates – This study found that, for students attending voluntary pre-k [VPK], having a teacher with a bachelor’s degree or higher did not substantially influence kindergarten readiness. Researchers also found that children participating in school-year programs fared better on kindergarten readiness assessments than those attending summer programs.  
(Source: Florida’s Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA))

Starting School at a Disadvantage: The School Readiness of Poor Children – This report examines the reasons why poor children are less ready for school and evaluates three interventions for improving their school readiness. The authors find that, of the three interventions they considered, preschool programs offer the most promise for increasing children’s school readiness.  
(Source: Brookings Institution)

- Parental Involvement -

The Family: America’s Smallest School – This publication provides highlights from an ETS symposium addressing the role of family in education. The article discusses the elements of home life that influence education and suggests ways to strengthen struggling families and build connections between the home and school.  
(Source: Educational Testing Service (ETS))
**Parent/Teacher Home Visits** – This issues brief presents a model for parent-teacher home visits based on the experiences of Seattle, Washington and Springfield, Massachusetts, two of the NEA Foundation’s Closing the Achievement Gaps Initiative sites.
(Source: NEA Foundation)

- *Postsecondary – Financial Aid*

**Effective Oversight of the Tuition Assistance Program: Schools Can Avoid Disallowances by Ensuring Eligibility** – This special report summarizes the findings of New York State’s Tuition Assistance Program audits released since 2007. Those audits recommended repayments totaling $11 million to cover grants distributed to ineligible students. This report offers guidance on how to avoid common and costly errors related to eligibility, clarifies audit protocols for school leaders, and recommends actions to strengthen the administration of this grant program.
(Source: State of New York, Office of the State Comptroller)

- *Postsecondary Success*

**Do High-Stakes Placement Exams Predict College Success?** – A recently-entered research study in the ECS database analyzes the predictive validity of one of the most commonly used assessments and examines whether other measures of preparedness, such as high school background and prior college-preparatory units completed, might be equally or even more predictive of college success.
(ECS Research Studies Database)

**Finding Your Workforce: The Top 25 Institutions Graduating Latinos** – This first brief in the Finding Your Workforce series provides a summary of Latinos’ college completion for 2009-10 along with a list of the top 25 institutions at each academic level graduating Latinos from certificates to doctoral degrees. Future briefs in the Finding Your Workforce series will provide lists of the top institutions graduating Latinos by specific disciplines (STEM, health, business, education, and liberal arts) complimented by more detailed information and examples of institutional efforts to improve Latinos’ college completion linked to the workforce.
(Source: Excelencia in Education)

- *Rural/Charter Schools*

**Beyond City Limits: Expanding Public Charter Schools in Rural America** – The authors explore how public charter schools can meet the educational needs of rural communities. They assert that flexibility afforded to charter schools can assist rural communities as they navigate complex funding, human capital and transportation obstacles. The issue brief offers practical solutions for growing the number of high quality public schools for students in rural communities.
(Source: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools)

- *Teaching Quality*

**The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher** – This survey conducted annually examines the views of teachers, parents and students about the teaching profession, parent and community engagement, and effects of the economy on teaching and learning in schools.
(Source: MetLife, Inc.)
Primary Sources: America’s Teachers on the Teaching Profession – The authors asked more than 10,000 teachers about their schools and classrooms, about student and teacher performance and about the ways it should be evaluated, supported and rewarded. They shared their honest, professional opinions on everything from the role of standardized tests to teacher tenure, from family involvement to job satisfaction, and from digital content to salaries. 
(Source: Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation)

Many Ways Up, No Reason to Move Out – This report offers a new model for teaching and learning aimed at keeping teachers in the profession of teaching while giving them the ability to move up in stature, experience, responsibility, authority and pay. 
(Source: Center for Teaching Quality)

Preparing Teachers and Developing School Leaders for the 21st Century: Lessons from Around the World – This publication evaluates education systems around the world, identifies the best ways to improve the quality of teaching, provides available research about what can make educational reforms effective, and highlights examples of reforms that have produced specific results, show promise, or illustrate imaginative ways of implementing change. 
(Source: OECD)

Does Money Buy Strong Performance in PISA? – In this brief, the authors find that the success of a country’s education system depends more on how educational resources are invested than on the volume of investment, especially among high-income countries. Findings indicate that the strongest performers among high-income countries and economies tend to invest more in teachers and set high expectations for all of their students. 
(Source: OECD)

What is YOUR State Doing?
What is your state doing to tackle current education issues? Have you set up interim studies or task forces? Have you located research that has assisted you in developing sound policies? Well, we want to hear about it! Send along any information 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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