Heads Up on Current Education Issues
November 2013

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!

2013 Legislative Scan: P-3 Policies
ECS conducted a scan of enacted policies from the 2013 legislative sessions to capture the ongoing work that lawmakers across the country are engaging in to strengthen their P-3 systems. This report provides summaries of 38 bills from 25 states that illustrate the breadth and depth of P-3 policies enacted in 2013 legislative sessions. Highlights include the creation of two new state-funded voluntary pre-K programs and ongoing efforts in many states to ensure reading proficiency by third grade.

Iron Range Engineering
Everybody wins when local youth can attend engineering school closer to home, when local industries support the school and its students, and when those industries get engineers who, upon graduation, already are trained because their third and fourth years are spent not in a classroom, but on industry projects. The school is Iron Range Engineering, and it is garnering attention worldwide.

New from NCSL!

The Fiscal Impact of School Vouchers and Scholarship Tax Credits
One argument made by policymakers who advocate for private school choice is that policies such as school vouchers and scholarship tax credits can save taxpayers money. These programs frequently are designed so the amount of tuition support provided is less than the amount the state otherwise would pay for a student to attend public school, with the state recovering the difference. Although this approach seems straightforward, policymakers have found it challenging to accurately measure the fiscal impact of these programs. This brief discusses the factors fiscal analysts and legislators will want to consider when estimating the fiscal impact of private school choice policies, including the fiscal impact of existing programs.
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Why the Gap? Special Education and New York City Charter Schools - A national gap in enrollment rates of special education students persists between charter schools and public schools with charters lagging at about 3%. The author looked at a similar gap in New York City and found students with disabilities -- especially those with autism or a speech or language impairment -- are less likely to apply to charters in kindergarten. Surprisingly, the results do not suggest that charter schools are refusing to admit or are pushing out students with special needs. In fact, more students with previously identified disabilities enter charter schools than exit them as they progress through elementary grade levels. 
Source: Center on Reinventing Public Education

District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Actions Needed to Address Weaknesses in Administration and Oversight – According to this report, the local agency that administers D.C.'s school vouchers has so many faulty internal systems and missing policies that it can't manage the program. GAO investigators also found that the U.S. Education Department, which is responsible for oversight of the city's vouchers, has provided limited help and monitoring of the program. 
Source: US Government Accountability Office (GAO)

The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2013: First-Generation Students – According to this report, about a quarter of high-school graduates who took the ACT in 2013 met all four of its college-readiness benchmarks, in English, reading, math, and science. But only 9% of students whose parents did not go to college met all four benchmarks. Still, 94% of these students hoped to earn a college degree and 60% took the core courses ACT recommends. 
Source: ACT

Skilled for Life? Key Findings from the Survey of Adult Skills – According to this report, American adults did poorly in mathematical and technical skills compared to their counterparts in most developed countries. Young American adults not only lagged behind their international competitors in math and technology, but also in literacy. 
Source: OECD

U.S. States in a Global Context: Results From the 2011 NAEP-TIMSS Linking Study – This report compares individual states' math and science scores with 47 different countries so readers can see how their state stacks up. Using results from the 2011 U.S. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) tests from the same year, researchers constructed easy-to-follow charts mixing countries and states. In mathematics for example, they show the highest-scoring U.S. state, Massachusetts, outscored 42 of 47 participating international education systems. 
Source: Institute of Education Sciences
The First Eight Years: Giving Kids a Foundation for Lifetime Success - This analysis of 13,000 young children tracked from kindergarten through middle school found that only about one-third were on track with cognitive skills by 3rd grade, underlining the need for a comprehensive early-childhood education, particularly for low-income children, according to an report. The report offers several policy recommendations and includes state-by-state data on childhood well-being. Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation

- Postsecondary Affordability -

Redesigning the Pell Grant Program for the Twenty-First Century - The authors of this report argue that in order to fit the needs of a 21st century economy and student population, the Pell Grant program needs fundamental reform requiring significant congressional action. They recommend establishing support with tailored guidance and services, simplifying eligibility and application, and offering incentives to students to increase completion rates. Source: Hamilton Project

Trends in College Pricing 2013 - This report shows prices of higher education tuition, fees, and room and board nationally, and by state/region. In response to the Great Recession, fees skyrocketed, but the 2013-14 increase was the smallest in years. Still, grant aid has slowed and students face increases in the prices they pay. Two-thirds of full-time students get grant aid. Readers will find wide variations: the highest tuition and fees charged at public four-year institutions are in New Hampshire ($14,665) and Vermont ($13,958), while the lowest are Wyoming ($4,404) and Alaska ($5,885). Source: College Board

- STEM -

High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLS:09) First Follow-up: A First Look at Fall 2009 Ninth-Graders in 2012 - This newly released "First Look" introduces new data from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 -- data collected in the spring of 2012 when most sample members were in their 11th-grade year. Of those still enrolled in high school in spring 2012, 18% reported taking no science at all and 11% of students reported no math course enrollment. Source: Institute of Education Sciences

- Student Demographics -

A New Majority: Low Income Students in the South and Nation – According to this report, a majority of students throughout the South and West are low-income for the first time in at least four decades - a demographic shift with broad implications for the country. By 2011, almost half of the nation's 50 million students -- 48% -- qualified for free or reduced-price meals. In some states, such as Mississippi, that proportion rose as high as 71%. Source: Southern Education Foundation

- Teacher Certification -

Student Math Achievement and Out-of-Field Teaching - New to the ECS Research Studies Database - Researchers used the National Center for Education Statistics’ High School Longitudinal Study of 2009
(HSLS:09) to investigate the distribution of math teachers with a math major or certification and to show how HSLS:09 can be used. They found that 10% of ninth-graders have math teachers with neither a math major nor math certification and that low-achieving ninth-graders are much more likely than higher-scoring students to have a teacher without those qualifications.

- Teacher Evaluations -

**Toward Better Teaching: A View of Evaluation Policies, Practices and Lessons in SREB States** - This report provides an update on teacher evaluation policies, practices, and lessons in the 16 Southern Regional Education Board states, many of which have begun to overhaul their teacher evaluation systems. Variation among them is the rule.
Source: Southern Regional Education Board

**SB10-191 Implementation Support Planning Tool** - Although this is a Colorado-based tool to support teacher evaluation and professional development, other state policymakers may be interested in taking a look at it. A web-based application, it organizes information regarding major requirements of the state's new evaluation law in one place intended for use by superintendents, principals, and other district administrators and educators. Along with each requirement, available resources and district examples are provided.
Source: Colorado Legacy Foundation

**Leading via Teacher Evaluation: The Case of the Missing Clothes?** – New from ECS research studies database: In evaluating the effects of teacher evaluation, the authors of this study conclude that we should be cautious in accepting claims about the ability of teacher evaluation, even in its newest form, to power significant school improvement or effectively inform personnel decisions.

- Teacher Issues -

**The Student Has Become the Teacher: Tracking the Racial Diversity and Academic Composition of the Teacher Supply Pipeline** - A longitudinal statewide database tracks students through the new teacher supply pipeline from high school through college and initial teacher certification. Looking at how each stage influences the characteristics of those who enter the teaching profession, the report pays particular attention to academic skills and racial/ethnic diversity. It finds transition from certification to employment was one of the most critical stages in the new teacher pipeline.
Source: Illinois Education Research Council

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**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*.

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