



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Math, Money and Letter Grades: Top 5 Questions of 2013

DENVER -- Analysts at the Education Commission of the States' Information Clearinghouse field questions every day on education topics from preschool to postsecondary and beyond.

Over a year's time, the questions provide a sense of what's trending across the country, from the Statehouse to the playground, with callers ranging from harried legislative staffers to anxious parents.

So what was hot in 2013? Kathy Christie and Jennifer Dounay Zinth, co-directors of the Clearinghouse, compiled the top 5 questions they received:

#5 . How many states require Algebra 2 for graduation?

Zinth, who specializes in high school policy, said 16 states and the District of Columbia include Algebra 2 in their requirements, though some states have provisions for opt-outs. This topic hit the radar in 2013 after two states, Florida and Texas, decided to pull back from requiring Algebra 2 for all students. That set off a national conversation about tracking, particularly for low-income and minority students.

#4. Are more states dropping high school exit exams in favor of end-of-course exams?

A number of states took action on exams used to determine whether students have learned the subjects they need to graduate. As examples, Zinth pointed to Arizona, which dropped its comprehensive exit exam; Nevada, which is transitioning from a single exit test to end-of-course exams; and Pennsylvania, which will soon require all students to complete end-of-course exams.

#3. Which states assign letter grades to schools?

Fourteen states have adopted letter grades for schools and districts. But that doesn't mean that grades are not controversial, as the basis for calculating the grades is very much in question in a number of states, said Christie, who's preparing a 50-state database on school accountability systems that's slated for release in January.

#2. Are states using student achievement in evaluating teachers?

As states figure out the components of their evaluation plans, Christie said, policymakers want to know where to look for lessons learned. They're hungry for information about measuring tools that are fair and accurate as well as what components, in addition to student achievement, they should be considering.

#1. How does our state funding formula stack up nationally?

Christie, who's led the clearinghouse since 1999, said the recent recession might have helped push this topic to first place. But funding is always a popular issue, particularly with new state lawmakers trying to understand a big chunk of their budgets. "Are we doing this like other people or are we out on a limb?" was the gist of many questions, Christie said.

Bonus -- Parents' top question: When can kids start kindergarten? "Parents care a lot about this," said Christie, who's been asked to predict whether certain states might change their start dates -- and when.

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[The Education Commission of the States](#) was created by states, for states, to work with governors, legislators, chief state school officers, higher education officials, and other leaders across all areas of education, from pre-K to college and the workforce. Since 1965, we have tracked policy, translated research, provided unbiased advice, and created opportunities for state policymakers to learn from one another as they improve their education systems.