Heads Up on Current Education Issues
February 2014

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!

Dual Enrollment
Increasing Student Success in Dual Enrollment Programs: 13 Model State-Level Policy Components – ECS identified 13 model state-level policy components that may increase student participation and success in dual enrollment programs. These components fall under four broad categories: access, finance, ensuring course quality and transferability of credit. Examples of state laws containing these components are incorporated throughout this report.

Special Education
States Grapple with Autism’s Rising Tide – Autism Spectrum Disorders are the fastest-growing developmental disability in the United States. As states have struggled to respond to the phenomenon, they have formed task forces, created pilot programs and launched resource and support services. This report highlights some of what states are doing to address the issue.

Virtual Charter Schools
The Progress of Education Reform: What State Policymakers Need to Know about Funding Virtual Charter Schools – A rapidly growing number of virtual charter schools is forcing states to re-evaluate their school finance formulas, with several opting to pay less per student to fund these cyber charters. This analysis of this new type of public education, which delivers 100 percent of courses online, outlines key funding differences between virtual schools and traditional brick-and-mortar schools.

New from NCSL!

Summer Learning
Minding the Gap – Summer is still four months away, but many parents, schools and communities already are thinking about how to keep children mentally engaged when school lets out. This article, from the latest issue of State Legislatures Magazine, highlights states’ work on summer learning programs that seek to narrow the opportunity gap and engage students in learning year-round.
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- STEM: The Condition of STEM 2013
- Students – Records/Rights: Protecting Student Privacy While Using Online Educational Services: Requirements and Best Practices
- Accountability – Sanctions/Interventions -

“Extraordinary Authority Districts”: Design Considerations—Framework and Takeaways – Early implementation states such as Connecticut, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan and Tennessee offer insights into takeover authority, funding and operations, and long-term viability. For those in the midst of implementation, this paper offers advice on best strategies for school operations, central office design, nonprofit partner roles, school selection and exit strategy.
Source: Public Impact

- Choice – Charters –

Estimated Number of Public Charter Schools & Students, 2013-2014 – Approximately 600 new public charter schools opened in the school year 2013-14, adding 288,000 students to the charter school roster; 200 closed. Using information from state departments of education, this brief estimates there are now 6,400 public schools enrolling 2.5 million students nationwide.
Source: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

- Choice – Charters – Cyber Charters –

Virtual Schools: Assessing Progress and Accountability: Final Report of Study Findings – In assessing progress and accountability in virtual schools, this new report concludes that the same protocol should be followed for all schools: focus on outcomes and track student growth throughout the year. Because students may be highly mobile, use on-demand assessments and because they may be over-age and under-credited, schools should create accountability systems that are rigorous but sensible, according to the report. The report adds that schools should make sure student data can be portable from school to school and that positive and negative consequences attached to performance be ramped up.
Source: National Charter School Resource Center

- Curriculum – Financial Literacy/Economics Ed -

Survey of the States: Economic and Personal Finance Education in Our Nation’s Schools - This biennial report collects data from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and includes commentary from experts and educators in the field to provide a comprehensive look into the state of K-12 economic and financial education in the United States. The survey found that a majority of the public school students in the United States are not exposed to economics or personal finance education despite the lessons of the recent recession.
Source: Council for Economic Education

- Economic/Workforce Development – Value of an Education -

Six Key Findings About Going to College – The cost of not going to college is going up, according to this brief. There's a wider earnings gap between college-educated and less-educated millennials compared to previous generations, and those grads are more satisfied with their jobs. College majors matter. Science and engineering grads are most likely to say their current job is closely related to their field of study and least likely to say that a different major would have better prepared them for the job they wanted. Read the full report.
Source: Pew Research Center
Where Value Meets Values: The Economic Impact of Community Colleges – This report assesses the impact of America’s public community colleges on the national economy and the return on investment for the colleges’ key stakeholder groups: students, society, and taxpayers. Among the findings: community-college graduates receive nearly $5 in benefits for every dollar they spend on their education, while the return to taxpayers is almost six to one.
Source: American Association of Community Colleges

- Finance -

Financing Expanded Learning Time in Schools: A Look at Five District Expanded-Time Schools – With new research and examples of how increased learning time can yield better outcomes, more schools are looking to join the 1,500 that have gone down that path. But how to pay for it? This brief identifies five district schools that answer key questions: 1) How much do schools pay for expanded time, specifically how much per hour and per student? 2) How are costs allocated across categories of school expenditures? 3) What are key sources of funding to cover each model? 4) What are the benefits for teaching and learning?
Source: National Center for Time and Learning and The Wallace Foundation

- High School – Advanced Placement -

AP Report to the Nation – Advanced Placement has increasingly broadened high school students’ access to higher education and more of them are scoring high enough on the AP tests to get college credit. In the 10th Annual Report to the Nation, the news is that the number of students who’ve taken AP classes has nearly doubled in the past decade, and the number of low-income students taking AP has more than quadrupled.
Source: College Board

- High School – Early Colleges/Middle Colleges -

Early College, Continued Success: Early College Impact Study – An update of findings released in June 2013, this analysis of schools in the Gates funded Early-College High School Initiative found students in those high schools were much more likely to enroll and complete college. They were compared to students who applied for the schools’ lottery-based admission but attended traditional schools. In the early-college model, students can earn up to two years of college credit, or get an associate degree from nearby colleges and universities.
Source: American Institutes for Research

- Leadership -

Effective Instructional Time Use for School Leaders: Longitudinal Evidence from Observations of Principals – New to the ECS Research Studies Database – Scholars have long argued that principals should be instructional leaders, but few studies have empirically linked specific instructional leadership behaviors to school performance. This study examines the associations between leadership behaviors and student achievement gains using a unique data source: in-person, full-day observations of approximately 100 urban principals collected over three school years.
2013 State of States’ Early Childhood Data Systems – Most states cannot answer basic questions about their own children: are they on track to succeed in school, do they have access to quality early care, is the early care workforce adequately trained? Data on young children are in multiple, uncoordinated systems. Based on a survey of 50 states and the District of Columbia, analysts concluded that in 49 states and the District of Columbia, data on children across different programs aren’t linked. Only Pennsylvania can link across state and federal systems though such information can help policymakers improve programs, ECE professionals tailor programs and parents select needed services.

Source: Early Childhood Data Collaborative/Data Quality Campaign

Labor Intensive or Labor Expensive? Changing Staffing and Compensation: Patterns in Higher Education – Assuming that higher education's workforce must be considered in any analysis of skyrocketing costs, this report looks at employment changes over the past two decades. While the education workforce grew by 28 percent, higher education's growth was in administrative jobs and new professional positions, rather than executive and managerial positions. Colleges and universities invested in professional jobs that provide noninstructional student services, not just business support. Meanwhile the number of faculty and staff per administrator continued to decline. Part-time faculty and graduate assistants account for at least half of instructional staff.

Source: Delta Cost Project at American Institutes for Research

Performance Funding: Impacts, Obstacles, and Unintended Outcomes – As legislators develop and refine performance funding policies, it is important to consider what the research tells us about the impacts of performance funding on student outcomes and institutional behavior, as well as the obstacles and unintended effects that performance-based funding programs may encounter. This brief summarizes findings from extensive reviews of the research literature on performance funding nationwide.

Source: Community College Research Center

AASA Legislative Trends Report – In response to the U.S. departments of Education and Justice release last month of a voluminous compendium of U.S. laws relating to discipline, here is an analysis of that compendium, exploring commonalities and recent trends. The report analyzes rules on truant students, the ability of teachers to remove students, policies concerning suspension or expulsion and more.

Source: AASA, the School Superintendents Association

The Condition of STEM 2013 – The good news is that interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) is high – almost half of high school students tested expressed an interest and/or revealed a STEM affinity in an interest inventory, according to this national study. Of concern, however, is the 8.5 percent of students with a STEM affinity who have no interest in pursuing a STEM major. Math and science achievement levels were highest among those students who had both expressed an interest and
showed an affinity in the interest inventory. Here is an interactive map to check out individual state results.
Source: ACT

- Students – Records/Rights -

Protecting Student Privacy While Using Online Educational Services: Requirements and Best Practices –
Students’ privacy protection guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of Education sought to help schools and districts take advantage of rapidly evolving learning technology while not jeopardizing the privacy of students who use it. Explaining relevant laws and best practices, the advice is non-binding, but comes amidst an atmosphere of growing urgency over the issue with several state and federal legislators poised to introduce legislation. A baseline standard is that student information should only be used for educational purposes, not to sell snacks or video games.
Source: Privacy Technical Assistance Center, February 2014

- Teaching Quality – Evaluation and Effectiveness -

Evaluating Teachers More Strategically: Using Performance Results to Streamline Evaluation Systems –
In response to complaints of inefficiency and burdensome costs, many states and districts have begun to alter their original, one-size-fits-all evaluation processes to bring greater quality and efficiency to their evaluation systems. For example, Tennessee and others replaced their original approaches with more differentiated models, using past performance data to determine which teachers should be evaluated with more or less intensity in following evaluation cycles.
Source: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of 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.
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