ECS 50-state database: More states administering kindergarten entrance assessments as policymakers continue focus on school readiness

DENVER – More than half the states and the District of Columbia have enacted legislation to administer kindergarten entrance assessments as policymakers continue their emphasis on school readiness.

The Education Commission of the States today released a 50-state database on kindergarten policies, reporting on indicators ranging from compulsory school age to standards to student/teacher ratios.

The database, which builds on earlier work by ECS, showcases the following trends:

- 26 states plus D.C. require kindergarten entrance assessments, known as KEAs, and another three states are developing the exams. In 2013, Iowa, Nevada, Oregon and Wisconsin took action on KEAs.
- Many states are moving up their kindergarten entrance age cut-off dates, resulting in slightly older students entering kindergarten. Examples include Kentucky, where students now must be 5 on or before Oct. 1 to enter kindergarten – in 2017-18, the cut-off date will move up to Aug. 1.
- States continue to vary widely on the minimum hours and/or days required for kindergarten. States such as Illinois, Montana, Utah and Vermont require a minimum of two hours per day while Texas requires seven hours per day in its full-day program. In 2013, Arizona and Minnesota increased their kindergarten hours.

ECS has documented an increasing emphasis on early learning and school readiness in various reports, including an analysis in January that found 30 states increased their investment in preschool in 2013.

In addition, an ECS review of State of the State addresses by the nation’s governors found more than a dozen highlighted preschool proposals in 2014, focused primarily on expanding access through increased funding, universal pre-K and public-private partnerships.

Bruce Atchison, director of the Early Learning Institute at ECS, said state leaders are focused on early learning to ensure their high school graduates will meet college- and career-readiness standards. He expects the use of kindergarten entrance assessments will continue to grow as state leaders try to get a sense of preparedness levels when students walk into public schools for the first time.

“KEAs can provide valuable information for educators and parents,” said Atchison, a former preschool teacher and preschool program manager. “We need to know where kids are so we can meet them and move them forward appropriately.”

The Education Commission of the States was created by states, for states, in 1965. We track policy, translate research, provide unbiased advice and create opportunities for state policymakers to learn from one another.