The Education Commission of the States Surfaces Tough Education Issues Shared by 12 Midwestern States

Denver, CO – While recently hosting top education officials from 12 Midwestern states in Kansas City, MO, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) focused on two primary challenges: how to improve the quality and supply of mathematics and science teachers, and how to boost the effectiveness of state P-20 councils and education alignment from preschool through higher education.

“The solutions we apply to these critical issues will shape staffing for schools and districts for years to come and will have a direct impact on how we prepare American students to lead the global economy,” said Roger Sampson, ECS president. With generous support from the Kauffman Foundation, education leaders from Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma and Wisconsin convened in Kansas City, MO at the Kauffman Foundation Center, to shed light on these fundamental issues. “Even in tough economic times, states are aware that investments have to be made now to address these challenges.”

According to Sampson, a number of barriers surfaced with regard to recruiting and retaining qualified science and math teachers, including: a lack of competitive teacher salaries and benefits; attractive non-teaching career options for math and science teachers; burdensome certification and licensure requirements; the diminished status of the teaching profession and public indifference to improved math and science education; as well as outdated, inflexible postsecondary structures and operations.

“With the help of leaders from the Midwestern states, we have identified several viable solutions,” notes Sampson. Potential state-level policy changes could include: support for master teaching programs; collaboration between teacher preparation programs and public schools; and expanded innovative models such as U-Teach and Teach for America, among many others. “There is a grave need for students to master course materials and exhibit 21st century skills in communication, problem solving, creativity and innovation.”

In some states, P-16 or P-20 councils are voluntary or structured in a way that gives them no real authority. Collaboration between local councils and state-level councils; efforts to retool skilled workers to filled math and science teacher shortages; and closer alignment between K-12 and higher education are all among the policy solutions emerging from the meeting. Sampson admits, “States must get serious about aligning the education system from early learning through higher education (P-20) if we expect to increase graduation rates and the number of students leaving high school ready to enter the skilled workforce or further education successfully. This is now a matter of national importance.”

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The Education Commission of the States (ECS) is the only nationwide, nonpartisan interstate compact devoted to education. ECS helps governors, legislators, state education officials and others identify, develop and implement public policies to improve student learning at all levels. A nonprofit organization, ECS (www.ecs.org) was formed in 1965 and is located in Denver, Colorado.

About the Kauffman Foundation — The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation is a private nonpartisan foundation that works to harness the power of entrepreneurship and
innovation to grow economies and improve human welfare. Through its research and other initiatives, the Kauffman Foundation aims to open young people’s eyes to the possibility of entrepreneurship, promote entrepreneurship education, raise awareness of entrepreneurship-friendly policies, and find alternative pathways for the commercialization of new knowledge and technologies. It also works to prepare students to be innovators, entrepreneurs and skilled workers in the 21st century economy through initiatives designed to improve learning in math, engineering, science and technology. Founded by late entrepreneur and philanthropist Ewing Marion Kauffman, the Foundation is based in Kansas City, Mo. and has approximately $2 billion in assets. For more information, visit www.kauffman.org.