Heads Up on Education Issues

December 2009

**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). Some pieces we've produced. But we've also reviewed many other recent reports for you and selected these as relevant and reflective of information you can trust.

If there’s something you’d like to recommend for the next issue, please let us know.

**Assessments**

The Center on Education Policy has released a study on exit exams looking at trends in test programs, alternative pathways and pass rates.

**Charter Schools**

A new Education Sector report takes a look at how prepared the nation’s best charter schools are to meet the challenge of rapid expansion. The report traces the history of a number of new charter management organizations (CMOs), nonprofit enterprises that create a group of schools with a shared mission and educational vision. It shows where CMOs have succeeded and where they have fallen short.

**Class Size**

This November 2009 ECS StateNote reports that the majority of states (36) currently have at least one policy via statute or regulation at the state level that places a limit on the number of students that may be in any one general-education classroom.

**Data Systems**

Each year, the Data Quality Campaign surveys all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico to assess states’ progress toward implementing the 10 essential elements of a high-quality longitudinal data system. According to the recently published progress report, this year, 11 states have all 10 elements.

**Early Learning**

Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers: Recommendations for States was recently released by the Zero to Three Policy Center.

Celebrating Improvements in Infant-Toddler Policy: Top 10 Policy Achievements of 2009. This new brief takes a look at the top policy achievements at both the state and the national level.

**Homeschooling**

An ECS StateNote identifies: (1) educational qualifications for homeschool instructors; (2) testing or evaluation requirements for homeschooled students; (3) examples of state policy language pertaining to assessing homeschooled students; and (4) links to state department of education homeschool Web pages.

**International Benchmarking**
A new AIR report notes how ARRA funds are being used to develop common U.S. standards in reading and math, an “historic policy reversal.” To help inform this process as it relates to mathematics the report sees what lessons we can learn from three high-achieving countries: Singapore, Hong Kong and Korea.

**Learning Time**

*Tracking an Emerging Movement: A Report on Expanded-Time Schools in America* was released in December by the National Center on Time and Learning. The report analyzes the schools’ key characteristics, as well as survey data on a subset of 245 schools on how the added time is utilized and funded. They also report the findings of an exploratory analysis on student outcomes.

This ECS *StateNote* examines measures in six states that authorize moving to a four-day school week.

**Finance: ARRA Update**

The latest alert from ECS on the stabilization funding includes information on front loading of funds, state plans versus actual spending, splitting education funds, and state variation on planned expenditures of government service funds.

**Postsecondary**

*Four Steps to Finishing First in Higher Education* was developed by the Lumina Foundation. A summary piece and more in-depth pieces outlining each of the four steps are provided. There is a combination of case examples, resources and lessons learned.

In the past, higher education officials attributed the decline in college completion rate on high schools not adequately preparing students. This study pins the bulk of the decline on the change in types of institutions students are attending—community colleges and non-flagship public institutions—and the decline in resources available at those institutions.

The book *Crossing the Finish Line* was released in September 2009 addressing the failure of flagship public universities to graduate enough students in general and little to improve the completion rates of low-income and minority students. This research study synthesizes the important findings of the book.

This new ECS paper engages education, policy and workforce leaders to explore how to effectively align education, workforce and economic development policy to meet state and regional workforce needs. The paper provides examples of promising policies and programs states are using to create greater alignment as well as practical steps state leaders can take in their states to fully leverage their education assets to meet state workforce and economic development goals.

New NCSL report, *The Path to a Degree: A Legislator’s Guide to College Access and Success* contains five briefs that provide an overview of key issues, discuss research findings, and offer examples of specific state action that can improve college access and success for underrepresented students.

**Student Achievement**

The Progress of Education Reform: This issue on *Service-Learning* looks at four research studies that explore the impact of service-learning on student achievement and civic engagement.

**Student Engagement**

While students often are portrayed as not caring about school or learning, many are looking for something more complex than statistics can measure. Results from the *High School Survey of Student Engagement* reveal that students are looking to be interacted with, cared about, challenged and valued. In creating engaging schools, these student voices are important and
insightful. Schools that listen to their students and utilize their survey data to take action have started down the path to engaging all students.

Teaching Quality
This product from the Regional Education Lab—Northeast and the Islands questions whether alternative certification programs train effective teachers.

If you have questions or comments about “Heads Up on Education Issues” please contact Melodye Bush at ECS.

Happy New Year!

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