High Quality Early Childhood Education
In order to adequately prepare students, states in 2014 will look to expand access to high quality early childhood education. The early years of a child’s life are critically important to shape key academic, social and cognitive skills that prepare them for future success in school and life. Investments in preschool, Head Start and child care have been shown to reduce the need for developmental education, referral to special education services and grade repetition. Early childhood education also has been shown to prevent academic achievement gaps before they start, decrease a child’s likelihood to become involved in the criminal justice system and increase a child’s earnings as an adult. As states review policies to develop and improve successful systems and expand access, services should increase for low and moderate income children and those with special needs.

College, Workforce and Life Readiness
With evolving technology and its inseparable link to the skills required for current professions, the need for advanced and critical problem-solving skills is foremost on the minds of educators. Educational systems must provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge and solve complex problems. Students must be able to work independently and with each other; they also need to communicate ideas effectively. To be successful in today’s world, every student must graduate from high school with the skills and dispositions needed for success in college, the workforce and life. Rigorous standards are needed to ensure high school graduates have academic knowledge and skills. In addition, students need an environment where they can succeed and be better prepared for two- and four-year colleges and universities, beginning a career and obtaining life skills.

K-12 Assessment and Accountability Systems
States have become innovators because of the federal waiver process required for exemption from No Child Left Behind’s most onerous accountability requirements. The majority of states now include a myriad of learning goals for students and a wider range of interim performance targets that extend beyond reading and math. Schools now must meet complex performance indexes that determine their progress and serve as a way to identify struggling schools for intervention. These multiple measures of student success must include formative and summative assessments including performance-based assessments and longitudinal data systems that efficiently collect, analyze and disperse information for well-informed decision-making. The end result will be a system that measures knowledge, understanding and application with an authentic, real-world purpose and audience that shows students can reason, problem-solve and collaborate with others to produce individual responses.

Technology and Digital Learning
Digital learning increasingly is being used to supplement face-to-face instruction and plays a variety of roles in student access and success. State policymakers will turn their attention to how the fast-growing array of free and fee-based online courses can be optimally packaged into competency-based and credit-bearing credentials. A growing trend is Massive Open Online Courses, which allow students to take courses without a cap on enrollment. These courses can be a highly affordable alternative to a traditional brick-and-mortar classroom, but policymakers will be confronting the accreditation and crediting of these courses in 2014. State officials also are being asked to financially support technology in the classroom which enhances online learning, blended classrooms, teacher professional development and instructional practices all focused on informing instruction that is more personalized and tailored to meet students’ needs. Flexibility in awarding credit for digital education also is key as policymakers open the door for changes to the traditional school day and calendar, professional learning communities, learning inside and outside of the classroom, and less emphasis on “seat time” versus competency-based learning.

Degree Attainment and College Completion
The U.S. economy increasingly demands a well-educated workforce. Careers requiring no more than a high school diploma a generation ago now necessitate some higher education, at a minimum. The two-year degree or certificate has become the new minimum standard for many professions. As employers expect their workers to have increased skills and knowledge, unless states increase degree attainment, the end result will be a workforce that is unprepared for the job requirements of the 21st century due to the increasing skills gap. Developing a system of higher education to compete with a rapidly evolving global workforce will require the informed involvement of state legislators and higher education leadership. State policymakers must focus on outcomes, providing a world-class higher education system that is student-centered and aligned with the knowledge and skills students need to succeed.

For more information on these topics and for additional resources on education policy, see » www.csg.org/top5in2014
YOUR CSG EDUCATION RESOURCE »

PAM GOINS

Pam Goins is the director of CSG’s Center for Innovation and Transformation in Education located at the headquarter office in Lexington, Kentucky. She initiates policy analysis and dissemination to executive, legislative, and judicial government officials around the country. In addition, she serves as the lead staff liaison to the Education Public Policy Committee comprised of nearly 100 governmental leaders and private sector members who address emerging challenges and issues arising from dynamic educational conditions in the states. Members of the committee focus on rising trends, innovative and effective solutions, and viable policy positions and response projects.

Prior to coming to the council in 2005, Pam served as a program consultant for the Kentucky Department of Education for eleven years serving in a regulatory and policy compliance capacity as well as Associate Director for KYCID, a state-wide center working with 176 local school districts in Kentucky on positive behavior supports for students. She is a Certified Educational Mediator and Certified Kentucky Administrative Hearing Officer. Ms. Goins completed her bachelor’s degree in psychology from Eastern Kentucky University and her master’s degree in education from the University of Kentucky.

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CSG provides state leaders a variety of regional and national opportunities to actively engage on issues of importance to their jurisdictions and constituents. CSG’s regional and national committees and task forces are designed to encourage multi-state problem solving, the sharing of best practices, and networking among state officials and between the public and private sectors.

CSG’s Education Policy Task Force is co-chaired this year by Rep. Sara Gelser, Oregon and Rep. Jeff Thompson, Idaho. The vice-chair is Commissioner Terry Holliday, Kentucky. Over the past two years, the task force has focused on several key issues, including creating a college-going culture, using public-private partnerships to enhance educational outcomes, the nexus of education and workforce development, and seeding the knowledge economy.

The committee will hold its next meeting as part of the combined CSG National & CSG West 2014 Annual Conference, August 9-13 in Anchorage, Alaska.

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