This year’s Education and Workforce Development Committee meeting included presentations on “world-class” educational systems, teacher shortages and career pathways. Members also considered a resolution seeking increased funding for K-12 education from the federal government. The meeting concluded with reports from members on education and workforce development-related legislative challenges and action in their home states.

**World-Class Education**

The meeting kicked off with a presentation from Utah State Senator Howard Stephenson. Senator Stephenson served on the National Conference of State Legislature’s (NCSL) International Education Study Group—made up of legislators and legislative staff from across the country—which examined the educational systems of the ten top-performing countries in the world and heard from 25 international and state education experts. The study group issued a report titled “No Time to Lose: How to Build a World-Class Education System State by State,” which identified the common elements of these world-class systems. These include the following:

- Children come to school ready to learn, and extra support is given to struggling students so that they have the opportunity to achieve high standards.
- A world-class teaching profession supports a world-class instructional system, where every student has access to highly-effective teachers and is expected to succeed.
- A highly-effective, intellectually rigorous system of career and technical education is available to those preferring an applied education.
- Individual reforms are connected and aligned as parts of a clearly planned and carefully designed comprehensive system.

Based on these common elements, the Study Group suggested a number of action steps that states can take, which include creating a shared statewide vision for public education, building an inclusive team and setting priorities, investing the necessary time and “working through the messiness.”

Senator Stephenson concluded with a call to action: begin now. There is no time to lose!

**Teacher Shortages: What Can States Do?**

The second portion of the committee meeting focused on a challenge faced by many states: teacher shortages. Dr. Ellen Sherratt, Vice President for Policy and Research with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and Lyle Cox, Executive Director for Human Resources with the Washington County School District in St. George, Utah, offered two very different approaches to addressing this problem.

Dr. Sherratt began by discussing the importance of creating a coherent dialog about teacher shortages, beginning with clarifying what we mean by “teacher shortage.” She stressed that states must come to consensus on the most meaningful indicators of teacher shortage (e.g., total number of vacancies, applicants per position, teacher attrition, etc.). Education leaders
should also set targets for success and benchmarks along the way, and invest in quality supply and demand data.

Shortages involve both recruitment and retention. For recent college graduates, the primary reason not to choose teaching as a profession seems to be the perception that the pay is too low. Dr. Sherratt explained that although many factors contribute to a teacher’s decision to leave the profession, survey data indicate that the single biggest factor is a lack of supportive school leadership.

Dr. Sherratt shared a number of research-based strategies to address shortages across the teacher career continuum while also ensuring teacher quality, extended clinical experiences (i.e., student teaching), mentoring and induction programs, opportunities for teacher leadership and, of course, increased compensation.

As a human resources professional, Lyle Cox offered an approach aimed at better utilizing existing resources, i.e., school buildings and teachers’ time. He proposed a school calendar that divides the school year into trimesters and gives teachers the opportunity to teach more days, thereby earning more money and better utilizing school buildings. Under this model, districts could save money on benefits because instead of hiring additional teachers, they pay existing teachers more money to teach more days.

Career Pathways, Sector Partnerships and Stackable Credentials
The third portion of the meeting focused on workforce development and included presentations on how states can help fill the middle-skills job gap and develop stackable credentials that are valued by employers.

Amada Bergson-Shilcock, Director of Upskilling Policy at the National Skills Coalition, explained that middle-skills jobs are those that require education or training beyond high school, but not a bachelor’s degree. There are many such jobs available, but employers struggle to fill them. At the same time, many workers who could fill these jobs do not have access to the training they need.

Ms. Bergson-Shilcock shared several recommendations for state leaders, including support for industry-specific partnerships, work-based learning, stackable credentials, job-driven financial aid, and several others. Ms. Bergson-Shilcock shared several useful resources with the committee and advised members that her organization is available to provide technical assistance to state leaders who wish to take on the middle-skills gap.

Utah Senator Ann Millner, Professor of Health Administration and former President of Weber State University, shared her experience providing legislative support for, and helping develop, stackable credentials. Stackable credentials are short-term, industry-validated credentials that can be completed by working adults one at a time, as work or family obligations dictate, while continuing to progress toward a higher-level certificate or degree. Senator Millner’s 2016 bill, SB 103, provided support for the development of stackable credentials in high-demand occupations.

Resolution Requesting Additional Funding for Education from the U.S. Department of Education
Hawaii Representative Justin Woodson submitted a resolution for the consideration of the committee requesting new funding for states from the U.S. Department of Education through the federal Every Student Succeeds Act. The resolution called for new funding based on a number
of factors, including a state’s *National Assessment of Educational Progress* scores, level of per-pupil funding, and students’ average grade-level proficiency. While members supported many of the components of the proposed resolution, the committee ultimately voted not to submit it for consideration by the Executive Committee.