

December 2010

EDUCATION

CHARTER SCHOOLS: A REPORT ON RETHINKING THE FEDERAL ROLE IN EDUCATION

Brookings Institution, December 16, 2010

http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2010/1216_charter_schools/1216_charter_schools.pdf

Charter schools offer choice to parents who would otherwise be constrained to having their children attend a residentially assigned traditional public school. The number of charter schools has increased steadily in the last decade, reflecting their popularity with parents and the general public. They vary substantially in their missions, the students they serve, and their effectiveness. Research suggests that charter schools are particularly effective in raising the achievement of low-income and minority students in urban areas. Charter schools are underfunded in comparison to traditional public schools and have particular challenges in finding and paying for school facilities.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM PISA 2009: PERFORMANCE OF U.S. 15-YEAR-OLD STUDENTS IN READING, MATHEMATICS, AND SCIENCE LITERACY IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

National Center for Education Statistics, December 7, 2010

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011004.pdf>

This report provides international comparisons of average performance in reading literacy and three reading literacy subscales and in mathematics literacy and science literacy. It includes the percentages of students reaching PISA proficiency levels, for the United States and the OECD countries on average, and trends in U.S. performance over time. It also reports average scores by gender for the United States and other countries and by student race/ethnicity and school socioeconomic contexts within the United States.

TRENDS IN HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT AND COMPLETION RATES IN THE UNITED STATES: 1972–2008

National Center for Education Statistics, December 8, 2010

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011012.pdf>

This report builds upon a series of National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports on high school dropout, completion, and graduation rates that began in 1988. The report includes discussions of many rates used to study how students complete or fail to complete high school. It presents estimates of rates for 2008 and provides data about

trends in dropout and completion rates over the last three and a half decades (1972-2008) along with more recent estimates of on-time graduation from public high schools. Among findings in the report was that in October 2008, approximately 3 million civilian non-institutionalized 16- through 24-year-olds were not enrolled in high school and had not earned a high school diploma or alternative credential. These dropouts represented 8 percent of the 38 million non-institutionalized, civilian individuals in this age group living in the United States.

HEALTH CARE

EASING THE BURDEN: USING HEALTH CARE REFORM TO ADDRESS RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN HEALTH CARE FOR THE CHRONICALLY ILL

Center for American Progress, December 16, 2010

http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/12/pdf/chronic_disparities.pdf

Chronically ill Americans from racial and ethnic minorities have much to gain from the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. These Americans are more likely to be without health insurance coverage—they make up more than half of America’s uninsured—and they suffer higher rates of chronic illness than the general population. They are more likely to have the risk factors such as obesity that predispose them to chronic illnesses, and are less likely to receive the preventive screenings, regular care, and necessary medications that could prevent or ameliorate their chronic conditions.

FACT SHEET: HEALTH DISPARITIES BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

Center for American Progress, December 16, 2010

http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/12/pdf/disparities_factsheet.pdf

The reports “Easing the Burden: Using Health Care Reform to Address Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care for the Chronically Ill” and “Measuring the Gaps: Collecting Data to Drive Improvements in Health Care Disparities” outline how robust implementation of provisions in the Affordable Care Act can help address these disparities and ensure that all Americans, regardless of race and ethnicity, get the quality health care services they need when they need them.

MEASURING THE GAPS: COLLECTING DATA TO DRIVE IMPROVEMENTS IN HEALTH CARE DISPARITIES

Center for American Progress, December 16, 2010

<http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/12/pdf/measuringgaps.pdf>

There are currently large and worrisome health disparities across the United States in access to quality health care between racial and ethnic minority groups and white Americans. In some cases these disparities have existed for a long time and are getting worse.

Collecting and analyzing valid and reliable data regarding these disparities provides the building blocks for identifying differences in care and developing targeted interventions to improve the quality of care delivered to specific population groups—regardless of whether those population groups are identified by geography, disability, socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity.

WHY WE NEED THE MINIMUM COVERAGE MANDATE

Center for American Progress, December 14, 2010

http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/12/mandate_needed.html

A district court judge in Virginia ruled yesterday that the “minimum coverage” requirement in the Affordable Care Act is unconstitutional. The opinion is clearly at odds with other rulings in Virginia and in Michigan, where courts upheld the law.

Judges may disagree, but there’s a consensus among legal and economic scholars that this requirement to purchase health insurance is essential to making health insurance available and affordable to everyone, without regard to health status or “pre-existing conditions.”

Without this provision, the law is unworkable and the consumer protections it provides become unenforceable. As the issue wends its way through the courts, it is useful to review why this requirement is in the law.

IMMIGRATION

THE DREAM ACT: A BIPARTISAN OPPORTUNITY

Brookings Institution, December 6, 2010

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2010/1206_dream_act_cardenas.aspx

In a year in which much of the immigration debate was dominated by polarizing legislation such as the Arizona Immigration law, the DREAM Act represents a bipartisan opportunity for the U.S. Congress to pursue a sensible first step toward greater immigration reform.

ELECTIONS ALTER THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE FOR IMMIGRATION POLICY DEBATE

Migration Policy Institute, November 15, 2010

<http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?ID=807>

Riding a wave of voter discontent with the state of the US economy, Republicans won many key races in the 2010 midterm elections, dramatically altering the landscape for immigration policy changes at the federal, state, and local levels.

IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

Migration Policy Institute, November 2010

<http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?id=806>

The 613,000 apprehensions in 2009 were lower than the number in 2008, which had been the lowest point since 1975. The 23 percent decline in apprehensions between 2008 and 2009 may indicate that the economic crisis and resulting scarcity of jobs made the United States a less attractive destination in 2009. It is also possible that recent increased enforcement measures have effectively deterred some potential migrants.

JUSTICE

POLL SHOWS GROWING SUPPORT FOR ALTERNATIVES TO THE DEATH PENALTY

Death Penalty Information Center, November 16, 2010

<http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/documents/topline.DPIC.DPNDP.pdf>

A national poll of 1,500 registered voters conducted by Lake Research Partners shows growing support for alternatives to the death penalty compared with previous polls. A clear majority of voters (61%) would choose a punishment other than the death penalty for murder, including life with no possibility of parole and with restitution to the victim's family (39%), life with no possibility of parole (13%), or life with the possibility of parole (9%).

SLAMMING THE COURTHOUSE DOORS: DENIAL OF ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND REMEDY IN AMERICA

American Civil Liberties Union, December 2010

http://www.aclu.org/files/assets/HRP_UPRsubmission_annex.pdf

Actions of the executive, federal legislative, and judicial branches of the United States have seriously restricted access to justice for victims of civil liberties and human rights violations, and have limited the availability of effective (or, in some cases, any) remedies for these violations. Weakened judicial oversight and recent attempts to limit access to justice by attacking plaintiffs' and defendants' standing, discovery rights and the courts' jurisdiction, are denying victims of human rights violations their day in court and protecting responsible officials and corporations from litigation.

LABOR

CREATING 21ST CENTURY JOBS: INCREASING EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES FOR AMERICAN WORKERS IN A CHANGING WORLD

Brookings Institution, December 2010

http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2010/12_thp_cap/12_21st_century_jobs.pdf

The U.S. labor market has not delivered for many Americans since the early 1970s. Over the whole period, the real wage of the median worker is largely unchanged, and the real earnings for non-college educated workers have declined. At the same time, the wages of the highly skilled have increased dramatically. Furthermore, in the last two decades, employment opportunities have become more polarized to disproportionately favor high and low skill sectors. The result of these changes is a sharp rise in income inequality that threatens the social fabric of the nation.

MEDIA

MEDIA LAW HANDBOOK

U.S. Department of State, International Information Programs, December 2010

<http://www.america.gov/media/pdf/books/media-law-handbook.pdf#popup>

What are the privileges and responsibilities of a free press? In Media Law Handbook, Professor Jane Kirtley, Silha Professor of Media Ethics and Law at the University of Minnesota, explores how free societies answer this question.

RELIGION

THE OLD AND NEW POLITICS OF FAITH: RELIGION AND THE 2010 ELECTION

Brookings Institution, November 17, 2010

http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2010/1117_faith_dionne_galston/politicsoffaith.pdf

Economic convulsions have a way of changing the priorities of voters. Although concerns for their own and their families' well-being are never far from citizens' minds, these matters are less pressing in prosperous times. At such moments, voters feel freer to use elections as ways of registering their views on matters related to religion, culture, values and foreign policy.

RETURN OF THE CULTURE WARS: TEA PARTY'S SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS AGENDA AND HOW PROGRESSIVES CAN RESPOND

Center for American Progress, November 29, 2010

http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/11/culture_wars.html

Now that the midterm congressional elections are over and a sizable number of conservatives—including Tea Party members—have won office based on promises to slash federal spending and shrink the government, people might think that economic issues have trumped social-cultural issues in the public mind. They might also think that the highly charged culture wars that have raged for decades over abortion and same-sex marriage have finally been replaced by battles over government size, effectiveness, and spending. Not so fast.

SOCIAL SECURITY

THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL SECURITY: SOLVENCY, WORK, ADEQUACY, AND EQUITY

Urban Institute, November 12, 2010

<http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412253-Social-Security-Solvency.pdf>

Social Security faces a \$5.4 trillion shortfall over the next 75 years, but modest adjustments can halt that slide. Some argue that those adjustments should go beyond solvency, to improve the adequacy and equity of benefits, better protect vulnerable workers, and encourage work at older ages. Although the how and when are still up for debate, policymakers can address these problems without removing the basic protections provided by one of the nation's most popular and successful programs.

All previous web alerts can be found at:
<http://france.usembassy.gov/web-alert.html>