More than preschool...

Strategies to improve child well-being are broadening, with greater emphasis on birth-to-3 years and help for parents

by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

ne of the more notable trends in state policy over the past decade has been the increased legislative activity and investment around early childhood education.

In the Midwest, countless laws and programs (some new, some long-standing) are now in place, from “Preschool for All” in Illinois to “Gearing Up for Kindergarten” in North Dakota. (See page 7 for details.)

While the region’s various prekindergarten initiatives vary in scope and design, they all reflect a belief among policymakers that a positive early learning experience can lessen achievement gaps, reduce the need for special supports as children get older, and produce better results for individuals and their communities.

But offering access to a good preschool is only one piece of a very complex policy puzzle.

To improve child well-being and long-term outcomes, states are looking to broaden their approach, in part by trying to reach more young people even earlier in life.

“What you begin to realize when you’re working with children who have already had three or four years of development is the importance of supporting early brain development — prenatal through age 3,” notes Virginia Knox, director of family and social policy research organization. That realization, for example, has led to a new campaign in Indiana to help expectant mothers make healthier lifestyle choices (for themselves and their babies) in order to reduce infant mortality and preterm birth rates.

In states such as Nebraska and Wisconsin, a greater emphasis is being placed on measuring and rewarding quality child care, while Minnesota has been a longtime leader in offering family education programs (through local school districts), including state-funded home visits to nurture positive parent-child interactions.

Challenging home environments can lead to toxic effects on children’s early development,” Knox says. “When you know that, the more you see the importance of supporting the environment where the child is being raised.

“The goal is to mitigate what otherwise might be [home] environments that are so challenging that they really have long-term effects on children’s development.”

Addressing these myriad policy challenges (and opportunities) is now a focus of the Midwestern Legislative Conference, the nonpartisan group of all legislators from 11 states and four Canadian affiliate provinces. (CSG Midwest provides staff support to the MLC.)

Wisconsin Rep. Joan Ballweg is chair of the MLC, and for her chair’s initiative, she has chosen to raise awareness about state programs that improve child well-being and lead to better long-term outcomes.

“Early investment translates to reduced costs and more productive citizens,” Ballweg says. (See page 6 for the full interview about her chair’s initiative.)

Breaking harmful cycles

One goal of these early interventions is to reduce the prevalence of “adverse childhood experiences,” or ACEs: traumatic events such as child abuse or neglect that have negative, lasting effects on a person’s well-being and behavior.

A state invests in a home-visiting program for at-risk families, for example, with the idea that cases of child maltreatment can be prevented. Or it ensures access to behavioral and mental health care for parents, because this can improve a child’s home environment.

But addressing (and not just preventing) these ACEs should also be a part of state strategies, Ballweg says. She notes that in Wisconsin, there has been a concerted effort among state leaders to promote trauma-informed care, which employs scientific research to help reverse the negative consequences of ACEs.

In Ohio, meanwhile, a three-year-old Strong Families, Safe Communities program is spreading evidence-based practices centered on trauma-informed care for parents.

States are exploring numerous ways to improve child well-being and long-term outcomes — from investments in quality child care, home visiting programs and preschool, to improvements in foster care and health care systems. Wisconsin Rep. Joan Ballweg, chair of the Midwestern Legislative Conference, has made this the focus of her MLC chair’s initiative in 2016.
States partner to ease soldiers’ move to civilian life by granting education credit for military work

The switch from military to civilian life holds many challenges, but a partnership of Midwestern states is hoping to ease this transition by using a service member’s military experience to increase postsecondary degree completion and streamline pathways for earning professional certification.

The Multi-State Collaborative on Military Credit is coordinated by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact, a nonprofit organization serving 13 states in the region.

Through this collaborative, states learn from each other’s successes or mistakes rather than constantly reinventing the wheel, says Sara Appel, program director for the initiative. Since the project began in 2014, education officials from each state have met regularly to share best practices and policies, with much of the focus on articulation of a service member’s military experience.

Traditionally, colleges receive a military transcript listing an individual’s occupation, training and coursework, and then begin deciding how many credits it should be awarded for that experience. The nature of military occupations can vary between branches and between ranks within the same branch, which makes credit articulation a time-intensive process.

Since 2006, a state law has required the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system to award educational credits for courses that were part of someone’s military training or service. In recent years, an accelerated system for evaluating military transcripts has begun to be used, and officials are now working to implement it in all of the state’s public colleges and universities.

Minnesota officials gather recommendations from the American Council on Education’s Military Guide and correlate them to courses offered at a particular institution, where career and technical education faculty then decide whether to accept the recommendations. This method allows faculty to proactively cover hundreds of military occupations rather than waiting for one to show up on a transcript, says Gina Sobania, director of adult learning services at MnSCU.

MnSCU is now offering technical assistance to education officials in all Midwestern states through the regionwide collaborative.

“We don’t want states to have to start from where we were eight years ago,” Sobania says.

In 2014, Ohio legislators passed HB 488, which requires postsecondary schools to set standards for awarding academic credit to service members. Other Midwestern states (see map) require licensing bodies to accept military experience as progress toward credentials for certain occupations — for example, work as a nurse or as an emergency medical technician.

**South Dakota allows for, but does not require, postsecondary institutions to award credit for military experience and coursework

Source: CSG Midwest research

**Katelyn Tye, staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Education Committee. She can be reached at ktyle@csg.org. The committee’s co-chairs are North Dakota Sen. Kyle Davison and South Dakota Rep. Jacqueline Sly.

Economic Development

**Kansas extends ‘angel investor’ tax credit; North Dakota mulls changes to its program

Lawmakers in two Midwestern states have given close scrutiny in recent months to a targeted tax credit that has become an increasingly popular policy tool for trying to help entrepreneurs and startup companies.

Known as “angel investor” tax credits, these incentives encourage investment in early-stage firms by mitigating some of the potential loss if a company fails. Most states in the Midwest have some form of this tax credit (see map at right).

Kansas’ 11-year-old program was on track to sunset this year, but passage of SB 149 extended it for five years. As a result, individuals can receive a tax credit of 50 percent on their investment in a business that has been in operation for less than 10 years; has gross revenue of less than $5 million; and has an innovative product or service.

Under the Kansas program, a total of $6 million is available every year. According to the state Department of Commerce, the program has so far helped 298 companies raise more than $342.9 million in capital investments and created more than 1,100 jobs.

In North Dakota, meanwhile, an interim legislative committee has been exploring ways to improve its state’s tax credit for angel investors. (Under a law passed last year, all of North Dakota’s tax incentive programs must be reviewed once every six years.)

“The No. 1 concern is that credits can be given out for money in a fund that may never be invested in a company,” notes North Dakota Sen. Dwight Cook, a member of the interim committee and chair of the Senate Finance and Taxation Committee.

This is because the state currently allows tax credits for investment in an angel fund, regardless if those funds are invested in a business. Another concern is the lack of assurances that the money gets invested in North Dakota-based entrepreneurs and firms.

“T was surprised at the level of out-of-state investments by the angel funds,” he adds, “and I fully expect legislation to be introduced to limit angel funds’ investments to companies with 51 percent of their employees in North Dakota.” (Other states have included this type of requirement in their laws.)

While new statutory language, more oversight and better reporting requirements are needed, Cook says, the tax credits remain good policy because of their role in encouraging investments of venture capital in the state’s fledgling businesses. These firms, in turn, can create more jobs and economic activity.

Between 2011 and 2014, North Dakota provided $16.7 million in tax credits for investments totaling $41.3 million in 22 different angel funds.

**See maximum credit in parentheses

Source: Angel Capital Association and CSG Midwest

**Michigan’s program expired in 2012; South Dakota has no state income tax

Brief written by Laura Tomaka, staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Economic Development Committee. She can be reached at ltomaka@csg.org. The committee’s co-chairs are Michigan Sen. Ken Hum and Nebraska Sen. Heath Meller.

Issue Briefs cover topics of interest to the various groups and policy committees of CSG Midwest, including the Midwestern Legislative Conference, Great Lakes Legislative Caucus, Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission and Midwestern Radioactive Materials Transportation Committee.
Agriculture & Natural Resources

North Dakota’s success in extending fiber optic Internet access could be a model for region

Fiber optic connection is considered the “gold standard” for quality, high-speed Internet access, and in the Midwest, it’s in pretty short supply.

Except in North Dakota.

In the region’s most sparsely populated state, 60 percent of the households, including those on farms in far-flung areas, have fiber. (That compares to 24 percent in the Midwest, where most of the existing fiber networks serve urban areas.) In all, North Dakota ranks fifth in the nation in fiber access.

This is amazing enough, considering many of the obstacles typically cited as responsible for the dearth of high-speed technologies in rural parts of the Midwest—for example, the high costs of serving low-density areas.

But the story of North Dakota’s prominence in fiber access is also a testament to entrepreneurship in the nation’s heartland, and perhaps a model for the rest of the Midwest.

In 1993, US West (now named Quest) began selling off its unprofitable rural telephone lines, including 65 phone exchanges in North Dakota, to independent and cooperative telecommunications companies. As a result, 18 small, independent providers serve 96 percent of North Dakota’s population and have invested heavily in the effort to get fiber optic to every residence.

Carrington-based Dakota Central Telecommunications Cooperative provides one example of how North Dakota achieved this success. On many exchanges managed by the cooperative, the copper wire was reaching the end of its functional life at about the same time fiber optic cable was becoming more affordable. According to state Rep. Craig Headland, a longtime director of DCTC, the cooperative saw a need in the community and made the commitment to borrow funds for fiber optic. As a result, it became one of the first operators in the nation to be 100 percent fiber-based.

This kind of investment was repeated across the state by those 18 independent providers.

“As a state legislator, we are invested in our districts,” Headland says. “It’s where we live, so we are committed to their success. These independent and cooperative telecoms also are committed to their communities, so investing revenue back into the community to better it for the residents was the right thing to do.”

The state has also provided help along the way. With the passage in 2009 of SB 2040, property used to deploy telecommunications services was exempted from sales and use taxes. (The idea for this exemption came from a legislative study showing that business development lagged in areas of the state without Internet service.)

It was estimated that the exemption would cause a $3 million biennial drop in tax revenue, but the cost during the most recent budget cycle was only $1.7 million. And in the last two years, the state’s telecommunications providers have invested $1.15 million in infrastructure. “DCTC would have moved to fiber optic without the exception,” Headland says, “but [the law] has been a huge benefit in driving the speed and timing of [that] investment.”

This exemption is only in place through 2017, and it is fairly unusual. Only six U.S. states, including Kansas and Minnesota in the Midwest, have some sort of tax exemption for telecommunications infrastructure.

In remote areas, the independent telecoms are the ones driving investment in high-speed Internet, says Dave Cruthers, a vice president at the North Dakota Association of Telecommunications Cooperatives.

“It took foresight or stupidity for these small private or cooperative telecoms to take out $50 million in loans,” he adds, “but they have paid off for the cooperative as well as the community. Every public official should be asking its utilities, ‘What are your plans for helping residents get broadband?’”

Health & Human Services

Minnesota results show cost-cutting promise of patient-centered health care homes

Minnesota was an early adopter of the use of health care homes, and a five-year study of their impact shows promising results for any state looking to reduce health costs and improve patient outcomes.

“Given how much is spent for Medicaid, Medicare and dually eligible enrollees, you can create large savings and bend the cost curve,” says Douglas Wholey, a professor of health policy at the University of Minnesota and the study’s lead evaluator.

The savings amounted to 4 percent to 4.5 percent per year over the five-year study period—for a total of about $1 billion between 2010 and 2014—a rate that Wholey says is consistent with past studies of health care homes. These reduced costs come from fewer hospitalizations, shorter hospital stays and fewer prescriptions.

For example, over the five-year period, the rate of inpatient hospital admissions for Medicaid enrollees in a health care home was 77.3 per 1,000. That compares to 100.3 for Medicaid enrollees in traditional care.

This model of health care delivery (adopted by the Minnesota Legislature in 2008 as part of a larger package of reform) aims to provide better-coordinated and -integrated services, especially for patients with one or more chronic diseases.

The goal in Minnesota has been to improve primary care across the state, in order to prevent costly chronic illnesses and provide appropriate early treatment.

Health care homes — called HCH clinics in Minnesota—provide patient-centered, coordinated care for all patient populations. Made up of doctors, nurses and other health professionals, these clinics either deliver the care themselves or work with other local providers. An HCH clinic receives a per-patient payment for coordinating care.

By the end of the University of Minnesota study period, 40 percent of the state’s primary-care physicians were practicing in a certified HCH clinic.

According to Wholey, the successful implementation of health care homes was partly due to support from groups such as the Minnesota Medical Association and to the work of task forces appointed by the state’s political leaders. Another factor was developing certification standards, with community input, for health care homes. Minnesota is now refining the next generation of HCH clinics, again with input from the community.

The model has worked in rural and urban areas, the study found, though with local differences.

“Urban clinics could specialize in certain patients,” Wholey notes, “such as those with the most complex issues.” The economics justify a specialized team.

The federal Affordable Care Act permits states to submit a Medicaid state plan amendment to add health care home services as an optional benefit. To encourage states to do so, a temporary 90 percent federal match is available during the home’s first two years of operation.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation
Four states in region projected to lose seats in next reapportionment

The Midwest stands to lose four U.S. House seats and four Electoral College votes following the 2020 Census and reapportionment, if population-shift projections from Election Data Services, Inc., are correct.

EDS uses the U.S. Census Bureau’s total population estimates for its forecast. The political consulting firm predicts Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota and Ohio will each lose one House seat once all 435 are redistributed by population after the next census. In all, nine U.S. states are projected to lose a seat after 2020 (the others are Alabama, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and West Virginia).

States gaining influence (both in the U.S. Congress and the Electoral College) are Texas (three additional seats and votes); Florida (+2); and Arizona, Colorado, North Carolina and Oregon (+1). If this comes to pass, the 2024 presidential election (first one following 2020’s reapportionment) will continue the Midwest’s long-term electoral muscle atrophy.

In the 1972 presidential election, the region held 133 Electoral College votes — 49.2 percent of the 270 needed to win. This year, the region’s 108 votes account for 40 percent.

If EDS’ projection is accurate, the region’s 104 votes will be just 38.5 percent of the total come the 2024 presidential contest.

However, Kimball Brace, president of the EDS, notes that unforeseen circumstances can change growth patterns and reapportionment, with Hurricane Katrina and the “Great Recession” five years ago to project shifts over the next five years.

For Midwest, population growth will be a greater demographic, policy challenge in years ahead

The story of outmigration from the Midwest to other parts of the country is as old as the advent and widespread use of home air conditioning.

So the most recent federal data on trends in domestic migration among states is not surprising: net gains for the South and West at the expense of the nation’s two other regions.

“The Midwest and Northeast are at a terrible disadvantage because of the weather; it’s not a level playing field,” says Wendell Cox, principal of Demographia, an international public policy and demographics firm.

Other oft-cited reasons for these long-term trends include the decline in manufacturing employment, improvements in other regions’ transportation infrastructure, and company relocations due to lower labor costs or more favorable business regulations.

But sometimes lost in the outmigration narrative is the fact that Midwestern states have still been able to gain in population because of two other factors: more births than deaths (referred to as “natural increases”), and the influx of arrivals from other countries.

In the U.S. Census Bureau data showing population trends between 2010 and 2015, only two states in the Midwest — South Dakota and North Dakota — had net gains in domestic migration. And five of the 10 states with the largest population losses due to movement within the United States were Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Kansas and Wisconsin.

Yet every Midwestern state gained in total population during the first five years of this decade, anywhere from a rate of 12.5 percent in North Dakota (highest percentage increase in the nation) to 0.2 percent in Illinois (fourth-lowest in the nation). According to Cox, adding population is critical to the growth of regional and state economies.

And for state policymakers in the Midwest, some problematic trends appear to lie ahead. The Minnesota State Demographic Center outlined these challenges last year in a study for the state Legislature.

“By the early 2040s, if our state is to experience any population growth at all, it will necessarily be from migration,” the report’s researchers conclude. That is because the number of deaths in Minnesota is expected to begin outpacing the number of births within the next three decades as the baby-boomer generation gets older and older. (Today, in Minnesota and every other Midwestern state, the number of births eclipses the number of deaths.)

The state, meanwhile, will also have to deal with a major upheaval in its labor market: “Over the next 15 years, Minnesota will see more people moving out of the workforce and into retirement than in the last six decades combined.”

The North Star State’s demographic projections are far from unique, but rather emblematic of what is likely to occur in many parts of the Midwest. Nationwide, in fact, the number of people 65 and older is expected to increase by more than 70 percent between 2015 and 2040; in contrast, the rise in 18- to 64-year-olds will be less than 10 percent.

This will make trends in domestic migration of even greater interest to states, especially since much of this movement involves young people. Minnesota researchers found, for example, that two-thirds of the state’s domestic net losses could be attributed to individuals moving away for postsecondary school.

“The numbers returning [after completing school] are far less than those exiting Minnesota during their college years,” the study found.

There is a incentive for states, then, to not only keep their own college-bound students, but also to attract those from out of state. Earlier this spring, for example, the South Dakota Board of Regents approved a plan to extend in-state tuition to students from Iowa.

Will these types of policies become more commonplace as states compete to land young people? Will states seek new ways to become destinations for international arrivals? Because of the demographic pressures ahead, the answers to both these questions might very well be “yes.”

Factors in Midwest’s changing population numbers: 2010-2015

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Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Article written by Tim Anderson, CSG Midwest publications manager, who can be reached at tandem@csg.org.
Love or hate the office, lieutenant governors are key to succession plans

by Jon Davis (jdavis@csg.org)

N o state has eliminated its lieutenant governorship since Florida in 1885, but Illinois flirted with the idea earlier this year. A proposed constitutional amendment that would have axed the office and handed next-in-line succession to the state's attorney general cleared the House, but was shunted aside in the Senate. The Illinois House of Representatives (IHRC) 5 made its way through the General Assembly, proponents cited the savings as part of their pitch — an estimated $1.6 million a year. The measure won easy passage in the House (95-10), but that question of succession never could get resolved. Some senators, for example, instead preferred a plan that would tap the next constitutional officeholder of the governor’s political party.

Either of Illinois' proposed succession plans would have been unique in U.S. state government. Right now, in 45 of the 50 states (including all in the Midwest), the lieutenant governor is next in line. The remaining five states make either the secretary of state or senate president the next in line. New Jersey is the most recent state to create a lieutenant governorship as part of a succession plan, having done so via a 2005 voter-approved constitutional amendment. (The lieutenant governor also serves in the governor's cabinet as secretary of state.)

State officials have realized that clearer lines of succession — and definitions of when a governor is “disabled” — are needed because there really could be mass casualty or epidemic events, says Julia Hurst, executive director of the National Lieutenant Governors Association.

For example, she says, if your governor is overseas when a disaster strikes, can he or she govern at that moment? Can someone recovering from a coma govern? "This is post-9/11. People really started looking at their successions in a different light," Hurst adds. Aside from their “just in case” function, the power and authority that states give their lieutenant governors vary as widely as the states’ shapes.

Indiana, for instance, vests its lieutenant governor with constitutional authority as Senate president, who can introduce bills and participate in debates as well as vote to break ties. The office also has statutory authority as head of the Agricultural Commission and as chair of offices on rural affairs, energy, tourism and housing. In addition, Indiana’s lieutenant governor appoints members to various councils and commissions, and is a participating member of five other state boards.

Then there is Illinois' love-hate relationship with the lieutenant governorship.

Dave O’Neal, a lieutenant governor under Gov. Jim Thompson, quit in 1981, citing boredom. And Bob Kustra, who became lieutenant governor on a ticket with Gov. Jim Edgar, almost quit in 1994 to become a radio talk show host. He reneged after Edgar underwent emergency heart surgery, but did resign four years later to become a university president. Yet Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn stepped seamlessly into the governorship on Jan. 29, 2009, upon then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich's unconditional conviction by the state Senate (following impeachment by the House).

Illinois' lieutenant governor also once served as Senate president, but these powers were stripped with the writing of a new Constitution in 1970. Today, the person holding this office serves as chair of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, the Illinois River Coordinating Council and the Rural Bond Bank of Illinois, while also leading the state's Main Street Program.

Since 1973, resolutions to abolish the office by constitutional amendment have been offered seven times.

People look at the lieutenant governor's office as "not needed until it is," and at its abolishment as a way to save money, says Charles N. Wheeler III, director of the public affairs reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

"It's always been a topic of conversation, but it's never been one where people would go to the wall to get it," says Wheeler, who covered Illinois' 1970 Constitutional Convention as a reporter. "The office is still there; it's probably not going to go away. It's going to be whatever the occupant makes of it."

As for Florida? The lieutenant governorship was resurrected in the state's 1968 Constitution.

Capital Closeup is an ongoing series of articles focusing on institutional issues in state governments and legislatures. Previous articles are available at www.csgmidwest.org.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

QUESTION: Do any Midwestern states require post-election audits to ensure that electronic voting systems accurately record and count votes?

Three states in the Midwest (Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin) currently have laws requiring these audits, which are done by comparing a hand count of voter-verified paper records with totals collected by the electronic voting system, according to the Verified Voting Foundation. Legislators have established these mandatory checks to deter fraud, find errors, reveal when recounts are necessary, and promote public confidence in the elections process.

Under Illinois’ 2005 law, all election contests and ballot issues are audited; Minnesota's and Wisconsin's statutes require audits only in cases of contested elections. In Minnesota, the results of these post-election audits are “binding” meaning they are used to determine official election results and can trigger a full recount. Audit results in Illinois and Wisconsin, on the other hand, are nonbinding. Here is an overview of how post-election audits work in each state.

- Illinois — Five percent of precincts in each election jurisdiction are randomly selected by the Secretary of State. This year, bills to require manual post-election audits failed to pass in Iowa (HF 2304) and Kansas (HB 2543).

According to the Verified Voting Foundation, a good auditing process must check all types of ballots (early and absentee, overseas, regular and provisional) for accuracy and be completed in a timely manner. Other important features include having a transparent, random selection process (for determining which precincts to audit) and adopting clear procedures to address any discrepancies found via the audit. Finally, the foundation notes, states should encourage rigorous chain-of-custody practices throughout the auditing process.

Previous articles are available at www.csgmidwest.org.
From trying to strengthen families to improving foster care, states have many policy options

care, while also targeting improved treatment and care coordination for young people in crisis or suf-
fering from a mental illness.

The name of Ohio’s program underscores the importance of many of these new state programs and laws on child well-being: fostering “strong families” as the way to help young people thrive.

“If you start thinking of it as a two-generation problem,” Knox says, “then some policies going to be aimed at parents and their well-being, so that the whole family can have either economic se-
curity or a strong home environment for children.”

That “two-generation strategy can take the form of income, housing or employment supports so that children grow up with more economic se-
curity, she adds, or it can mean providing parents with the resources and care they need to cope with their own adverse childhood experiences.

Role of foster care in child well-being

Yet some children inevitably come to rely on a state’s foster care system. In 2014, for example, more than 200,000 young people entered the nation’s foster care system — from 999 in North Dakota to 9,924 in Ohio. (That same year, more than 400,000 children were in the nation’s foster care system.)

“It is everything to these kids,” Michigan Rep. Jim Runestad, a longtime foster care parent, says about the system.

“You listen to them talk, and even though they address concerns about this or that, you’ll also hear some of them — a significant portion of them — say the foster care system saved their lives.”

He has used his platform as a legislator to raise awareness about the system’s importance, along with some of its shortcomings. At “KidSpeak” events hosted by Runestad, children in foster care have told their stories — of being separated from their siblings, for example, or of being moved from school to school or home to home multiple times in a single year.

“Listen for 20 minutes to their stories,” he says, “and it will change your outlook.”

The personal stories of children, in fact, helped lead to the introduction of legislation this year in Michigan that would create a Foster Care Children’s Bill of Rights. At committee meetings a few years ago to create a Foster Parents Bill of Rights, legislators heard from the children as well. Rep. Marcia Howe-
Wright recalls. It became clear then, she adds, that young people’s rights should be codified as well.

“I view it as common-sense things that all kids should have a right to,” Hovey-Wright says.

Passed by the Michigan House earlier this year, the legislation (HB 4976-4978) would ensure access to behavioral health services, a plan to be placed in a permanent home and help with the transition to independent living. It also requires the state to place children with close relatives and friends and to keep siblings together whenever possible.

“If we as a state are going to take them out of the home, then we better provide the services they need,” Hovey-Wright says.

Hovey-Wright, a Democrat, and Runestad, a Republican, are co-sponsors of the legislative package — just one indication that there is plenty of room for bipartisan agreement on state policies to improve child well-being.

Q&A with Rep. Joan Ballweg on her MLC chair’s initiative: State policies to promote child well-being

Every year, the leader of CSG Midwest’s Midwestern Legislative Conference chooses a policy issue as her MLC chair’s initiative. That decision helps guide the session topics for the MLC Annual Meeting and the research done by CSG Midwest on behalf of the region’s state legislators.

Rep. Ballweg explains here why her MLC chair’s initiative is focusing on policies that strengthen families, improve child well-being and lead to better long-term outcomes.

Q: How did you first get involved in these issues that center on child well-being and long-term outcomes?

A: I was first invited by Wisconsin First Lady Tonette Walker, along with three other legislators, to join the Fostering Futures Policy Advisory Committee. Her Fostering Futures Initiative began in 2011 with the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Mrs. Walker started work with state and national experts to spread the understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and to promote a trauma-informed culture throughout Wisconsin. Today, we see a visible change with both statewide understanding of ACEs and their importance, and the presence of Trauma Informed Care (TIC) in both policy and practice across Wisconsin. A network of TIC trainers is now available. Both agencies and organizations throughout the state have taken advantage of this free program.

Q: What do you see as the role of states, in particular, in trying to promote strong families and to create better long-term outcomes for children?

A: As we know, states make the rules and hold the purse strings in areas like education, protecting children at risk, foster care, income maintenance, Medicaid, law enforcement and corrections. Science shows us that a child’s brain development is greatly impacted from birth to 3, before most children are in formal educational programs. Encouraging early, high-quality child care, along with parental support when necessary, will have positive results down the road for those children. We can see that in terms of school success, reduced law enforcement/corrections interactions and more positive life outcomes. Early investment translates to reduced costs and more productive citizens. It’s a smart investment for the state and an important investment for Wisconsin’s children.

Q: What are some of the policy areas that you think warrant more attention from states?

A: Home visiting is an important policy area that states can continue to invest in. Wisconsin currently funds 14 evidence-based home visiting programs that operate in 15 counties and tribal communities. Our program is voluntary, serving at-risk families living in high-risk communities. The goal is to serve pregnant women, children from birth to 8, and their families. Home visiting has been found to improve parenting, school readiness and health. It can also help prevent child abuse and neglect.

Q: Are there promising new programs, initiatives or laws in Wisconsin that you’ve seen?

A: This year, we embarked on an exciting and important new initiative — the Wisconsin Legislative Children’s Caucus. Our first program was held in April; it featured experts in the field of early brain development and covered the benefits of investing in early childhood education as well as different programs dedicated to improving childhood outcomes. Our agenda included presentations from a bio-related psychologist, a social scientist and an economist. I believe the diversity of these experts speaks volumes about how far the field of early childhood has come. We are cutting across disciplines, landing at the same point — a point of great focus and concern on early childhood.

Another promising Wisconsin initiative is the YoungStar Program, which was implemented in 2010 and is run by the Department of Children and Families. It’s a five-star quality rating system for child care providers based on education, learning environment, business methods, and practices around child health and well-being. Through YoungStar, the state is addressing several key issues in Wisconsin’s child care system. Over the past two years, Wisconsin has seen an increase in the number of children served by high-quality programs. It’s a positive move for Wisconsin’s children and their families.
Paths to better long-term outcomes for children and families: Examples of recent state legislation, new laws and noteworthy programs in Midwest

**Fostering Futures, Improving Mental Health Care in Wisconsin** — Wisconsin’s Fostering Futures initiative aims to help individuals move beyond the cycles of harm caused by adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, such as physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Part of its goal is to raise awareness about how and why to provide trauma-informed care to individuals affected by ACE. Laws enacted in 2014, meanwhile, have sought to strengthen the state’s entire mental health system.

**Helping Hands for Infant Children, Families in Crisis** — One year after the Iowa Legislature established a special working group to look at ways to improve services for children and families in crisis (SF 505), entitled funding in the 2016 state budget for two of that group’s recommendations. Lawmakers appropriated $300,000 for planning grants (SF 2446) as the first step in a plan to improve access to mental health crisis services — intensive, face-to-face interventions provided to children and/or their families in inpatient or outpatient settings. Secondly, the state will fund the creation of three to five ‘Children’s Well-Being Labs’ with the goal of finding strategies that help young people with ‘complex needs.’

**KANSAS ENDOWMENT FOR YOUTH** — A decision made by the Kansas Legislature 17 years ago continues to support programs that promote the health and welfare of young children. Lawmakers at the time chose to dedicate money from the settlement with tobacco companies to the Kansas Endowment for Youth. Today, that endowment is used to fund programs focused on early learning, health and child welfare. For example, early-childhood block grants are provided to providers that offer services for expectant parents, at-risk infants, toddlers, preschool students and young families. A Kansas Children’s Cabinet (also created by the Legislature) reviews and evaluates endowment-funded programs.

**South Dakota’s Bill of Rights for Foster Parents** — In an effort to increase support for foster parents, South Dakota’s Division of Child Protection Services created a special work group composed of foster parents, legislators, state agency staff and others. That group then developed a handbook with a 17-point “Foster Parent Bill of Rights” — for example, the right to receive the training and support needed to provide quality services to a child and the right to receive timely screenings. Approximately 128,062 parents and 122,123 children participated in the program’s various activities in 2010. The state requires parent education and early-childhood educators in the program to be licensed.

**Help for Young Families in Minnesota** — Created as a statewide initiative in 1984, the Early Childhood Family Education program was the first of its kind in the country. Today, it continues to offer free- or no-cost services (via the state’s local school districts) to all Minnesota families with children ages birth to 4, regardless of income. The program offers everything from parent discussion groups and learning workshops for children, to home visits and health and child-development screenings. Approximately 128,062 parents and 122,123 children participated in the program’s various activities in 2010. The state requires parent education and early-childhood educators in the program to be licensed.

**Preschool for All in Illinois** — Illinois’ Preschool for All program helps young people in crisis. Grants are awarded to projects that provide treatment and improved care coordination for youths at risk of self-harm or aggression due to a mental illness or developmental disability. The state is also raising awareness about trauma-informed care, a framework for treatment that recognizes the consequences of trauma and how to help people recover from it. Illinois Trauma-Informed Care Initiative spreads evidence-based practices among behavioral health providers, child welfare agencies, the courts, and local schools and law enforcement.

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**Foster Care Advances in Missouri** — Missouri lawmakers created a continuum of services for foster children built on the foundation of the Missouri Department of Social Services. The state has created a system of quality rating ‘knots’ for foster care homes, and has launched a campaign to raise awareness about receiving mental care and preventing behaviors that can lead to preterm births (smoking, for example). These births are the greatest contributor to infant deaths. Preterm babies also are more likely to have long-term health problems and neurological disorders. And in 2014, Indiana legislation passed a bill to begin addressing the problem of neonates being exposed to addictive drugs or alcohol while in the mother’s womb. SB 452 requires better identification and data collection of cases involving Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome.

**Fostering Futures, Improving Mental Health Care in Wisconsin** — Wisconsin’s Fostering Futures initiative aims to help individuals move beyond the cycles of harm caused by adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, such as physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Part of its goal is to raise awareness about how and why to provide trauma-informed care to individuals affected by ACE. Laws enacted in 2014, meanwhile, have sought to strengthen the state’s entire mental health system. AB 452 provides state guidance to pediatricians on how to treat children with mental health needs, while AB 453 increases children’s access to mental health in rural areas by allowing these services to be provided via “telehealth.”
Iowa Rep. Chris Hagenow

Majority leader always trying to find balance, whether it’s working on budget or meeting demands of family, work and public service

by Ilene Grossman (igrossman@csg.org)

On the same day that the local paper ran an announcement of the birth of his oldest child, Chris Hagenow had news to share of a very different kind — a press release in that same newspaper declaring his run for a seat in the Iowa House.

“As I have found out in politics, sometimes you don’t get to pick your spots,” he now recalls, “so there was this opportunity, and I went for it.”

Hagenow survived the challenge of simultaneously adjusting to fatherhood and running a first political campaign, and eight years later, he has had two more children while also rising in the ranks of his House Republican caucus. (He also is a partner in a law firm.) And that connection between fatherhood and service in the Iowa Legislature remains as strong as ever.

“I want my children to have great opportunities in Iowa so they won’t have to move out of state to chase their dreams,” he says.

In a recent interview with CSG Midwest, the sixth-generation Iowan reflected on his legislative tenure to date, talked about his new role as majority leader and looked ahead to 2017. Here are excerpts.

Q: You were chosen last August as House majority leader. What have been some of the key challenges for you with this new position?

A: I had to work through the mechanical process of getting legislation ready for the floor. This and some of the other jobs of the majority leader were new to me, but it made it a lot easier that we were not new to the majority. Having Speaker [Linda] Upmeyer right next door, who had done this job for five years, was very helpful.

I would like to think that, by and large, it was a fairly seamless transition, but the challenges include a lot bigger demand on your time, and finding ways to manage my own schedule, so that I can get things done and be effective. Every legislator faces the challenge of balancing family and work. My law partners are very understanding of the demands on time. But you don’t get to pick your spots, “he now recalls, “so there was this opportunity, and I went for it.”

Q: What are the challenges as a leader when one chamber is controlled by Republicans and the other by Democrats?

A: We are in year six of the current balance of power. Most of the same players have been in leadership all six years, including the [Republican] governor, and I think we have grown to understand the issues on which we can work together, and where will we not be able to agree. We have a good understanding of what is possible, and we try to focus on issues where we can find common ground.

I think legislators in Iowa are able to have productive conversations across the aisle. That is an advantage of state-level lawmaking as opposed to what happens at the federal level. ... We have authentic relationships, so we can work through differences.”

Q: What were some of the biggest issues the Legislature faced this year, and what do you see as some of its biggest accomplishments in 2016?

A: The big accomplishment this year, and every year we have been in the majority, was to balance the state budget and to make sure that we do not spend more than the state collects in ongoing revenue. That is always a difficult challenge, and was maybe more so this year because we had our revenue estimate cut in March.

Within that, we also had to fund K-12 public education. The two sides [Democrats and Republicans] have been far apart over the last several years, but we were able to find common ground. We put 77 percent of new dollars from year-over-year revenue growth into our K-12 education system.

Q: What are your legislative priorities for 2017 and beyond?

A: Both parties have expressed interest in some kind of income tax reform, but what shape that takes is an unknown at this point. Another issue our caucus spent a lot of time on this year was funding for water quality improvements. This year we passed a bill in the House funding improvements with existing revenue, and next year we want to find new money to invest.

Q: What are the legislative priorities for 2017 and beyond?

A: There are a number that I have been a part of and enjoyed working on. ... A few years back, I floor-managed a bill to expand the School Tuition Organization tax credit, which provides scholarships to children from lower-income families to attend private schools. Individuals in Iowa can make a donation into the STO and receive a tax credit for their contribution, and the STO provides the scholarship. I have had the chance to meet a lot of students and families that have benefited from that.

Bio-sketch of Rep. Chris Hagenow

- elected majority leader in August 2015; previously served as majority whip (first elected to Iowa House in 2008)
- attorney who practices law in Des Moines
- lives in Windsor Heights, a suburban town just west of Des Moines
- graduate of University of Northern Iowa and University of Iowa College of Law
- he and his wife, Amanda, have three young children

“I [We] are able to have productive conversations across the aisle. That is an advantage of state-level lawmaking as opposed to what happens at the federal level. ... We have authentic relationships, so we can work through differences.”
New Wisconsin cell phone law sends message on domestic violence

Victims can now retain phone access without abuser’s approval


Our nation’s most difficult problems often require a most difficult solution. The issue of domestic violence is no different. Imagine a scenario in which a young woman, married with children, makes the incredibly difficult decision to leave an abusive relationship. After securing her safety, finances and shelter (among other factors) for her and her children, she discovers that yet another barrier stands between her and freedom from her abuser: her cell phone plan.

Prior to April 2016, in Wisconsin, as in many other states across the country, wireless service plans such as the typical shared family plan could not be separated without prior consent from the primary account holder. This means a victim would not only be required to abandon her cell phone but would also need to acquire a new number.

Sadly, this is not an uncommon experience for someone trying to escape an abusive relationship. Domestic abuse is not a new problem plaguing our society. In fact, the common occurrence of and statistics surrounding domestic abuse are staggering.

Statistics underestimate deadly reality

In Wisconsin alone, each year at least 30,000 instances of domestic violence are reported to law enforcement, according to the Wisconsin Governor’s Council on Domestic Abuse. The numbers soar even higher when one considers that most incidents of domestic violence are never reported.

The horrifying consequences of domestic abuse account for dozens of deaths each year and can leave lifelong scars for survivors.

Nationwide, according to NO MORE.org, approximately “12.7 million people are physically abused, raped or stalked” in one year. According to the site, that figure equals the total population of Los Angeles and New York City combined, and even worse, the abuser is often someone the victim knows.

For someone trying to escape an abusive relationship, there is nothing worse than encountering subsequent barriers after making the brave decision to leave.

With my colleague Sen. Roger Roth and wireless provider AT&T Wisconsin providing the impetus for the bill, we authored Assembly Bill 767, legislation that allows victims of domestic violence in our state to have a shared wireless service plan separated without approval from the primary account holder.

Cell phones have become an essential tool in our everyday lives, containing phone numbers, addresses and even personal banking information. Having to purchase a new phone and number is an unnecessary hurdle for a victim trying to escape an abusive relationship.

In early April, Gov. Scott Walker signed several new laws, including Wisconsin Act 353 (AB 767), that strengthen protections for victims of domestic abuse and increase funding for victim protection programs in the state.

The new laws provide needed protections for victims, but legislation should not be the only way to combat domestic violence.

Powerful campaigns have been waged recently to raise awareness to end domestic abuse.

Prominent NFL players, for example, partnered with NO MORE, releasing an ad campaign called “NFL Players Say No More.” The campaign features well-recognized NFL stars with somber expressions, each saying “no more,” directly into a camera.

These public service announcements began airing during televised football games and inside stadiums during the 2014 season.

A similar ad called “Text Talk” aired during the Super Bowl this past February. The NO MORE campaign has developed into a nationwide effort featuring athletes, celebrities and well-known figures joining the cause.

Problem requires community response

Partnerships with prominent organizations such as the NFL and NO MORE are a key component in the fight to end domestic abuse.

U.S. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan once said that two crucial elements to resolving our most persistent issues are people and local communities — communities with a passionate group of stakeholders.

Government should carry the torch. But it only makes perfect sense to bring in a variety of people, community members and experts who have experience successfully solving these issues.

Perhaps government can be the catalyst to bring these groups to the table, where ideas and strategies can be shared to develop an effective plan that will eradicate domestic violence.

A number of invested stakeholders came to the table before AB 767 was drafted in the Wisconsin Legislature. Nonprofit organizations such as End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin, as well as major cell phone carriers, contributed to the final legislation. The president of AT&T Wisconsin even joined me to testify on behalf of the legislation.

Domestic violence is a chronic social issue that continues to plague our country. The solution will not be easy, but it is time we develop an inclusive, effective strategy to stem the problem and bring a voice to those who have been suppressed.

We owe it to the victims, those women, men and children who have had their lives altered by the cowardice of an abuser.

Rep. Jessie Rodriguez, a Republican from Oak Creek, was first elected to the Wisconsin Assembly in 2013.

Submissions welcome

This page is designed to be a forum for legislators and constitutional officers. The opinions expressed on this page do not reflect those of the Council of State Governments or the Midwestern Legislative Conference. Responses to any FirstPerson article are welcome, as are pieces written on other topics. For more information, contact Tim Anderson at 630.925.1922 or tanderson@csg.org.

For someone trying to escape an abusive relationship, there is nothing worse than encountering subsequent barriers after making the brave decision to leave.
The upcoming Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting in Milwaukee will begin with a series of policy sessions hosted and led by the MLC’s five policy committees. Open to all meeting attendees, these sessions will explore a wide range of issues of importance to the Midwest’s states and provinces. They will begin at noon on Sunday, July 17. Detailed committee agendas are available at www.csgmidwest.org. Here is a list of topics.

**Agriculture & Natural Resources**
- The Midwest’s “Protein Highway”
- Impact of New Federal Food Safety Rules
- Economic Outlook for the Rural Midwest

**Economic Development**
- The Midwest’s Entrepreneurial Economy
- Career Readiness in K-12 Education
- Bridging the Education-to-Workforce Gap

**Education**
- Quality Early Childhood Care and Education
- Trends in State Education Funding
- Impact of the Every Student Succeeds Act

**Health & Human Services**
- Minnesota’s Use of Health Care Homes
- Future of Critical Access Hospitals
- Building Better Behavioral Health Care Systems

**Midwest-Canada Relations**
- Value of U.S.-Canada Economic Relationship
- Benefits and Challenges of Energy Collaboration
- How to Improve Cross-Border Travel

Led by legislative co-chairs (and, in some instances, vice chairs), the MLC’s bipartisan policy committees include lawmakers from 11 Midwestern states and four Canadian provinces.

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**Topics include education, health care and the future of the Midwest economy**

The Council of State Governments was founded in 1933 as a national, nonpartisan organization to assist and advance state government. The headquarters office, in Lexington, Ky., is responsible for a variety of national programs and services, including research, reference publications, innovations transfer, suggested state legislation and interstate consulting services. The Midwestern Office supports several groups of state officials, including the Midwestern Legislative Conference, an association of all legislators in 11 states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin. The Canadian provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan are MLC affiliate members.

The only event designed by and for the Midwest’s state and provincial legislators will begin soon, and registration for this premier event remains open. Led by Rep. Joan Ballweg, chair of the Midwestern Legislative Conference, Wisconsin legislators are serving as hosts of this year’s MLC Annual Meeting.

Meeting registration can be completed at www.csgmidwest.org, where a full agenda is available. The event will run from July 17-20 in Milwaukee; it includes daytime events for youths and adult guests as well as evening activities for everyone. Below are some of the meeting’s featured sessions and speakers:

**Future of water and water policy**

This year’s keynote session will include a presentation by Charles Fishman, author of the highly acclaimed book “The Big Thirst: The Secret Life and Turbulent Future of Water.” Sessions will also be held on nutrient runoff and water quality, the Midwest’s water infrastructure, and the use of water as an economic tool.

**Investing in children and families**

As her MLC chair’s initiative, Rep. Ballweg has chosen to focus on ways for states to help the families of young children and create better long-term outcomes for young people (see this month’s cover story). A series of sessions will be held around her MLC chair’s initiative.

**Featured speakers on politics**

This year’s featured topics include three timely presentations on politics. Ken Rudin, the former political editor for NPR, will preview the 2016 elections. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, the co-founder of factcheck.org, will offer tips on political communication in a polarized environment, and University of Wisconsin professor Stephen Lucas will discuss political speeches that have changed the course of U.S. history.

Various policy sessions and professional development workshops will also be held during the four-day event.

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**Introducing the MLC Annual Meeting app**

All of this year’s attendees are encouraged to download a new mobile app for the MLC Annual Meeting. It includes up-to-date information and meeting alerts, facilitates networking among attendees, and allows people to save and view presentations. To download the new app, go to https://eventmobi.com/2016MLC.
Legislators from nine U.S. states and Canadian provinces gathered in the Twin Cities in early June for a two-day meeting that focused on cross-border energy collaboration.

Through a mix of presentations and discussions, participants explored opportunities to expand the region’s renewable energy sector. The following legislators participated in the event:

- Alberta MLA Cameron Westhead,
- Illinois Rep. Rob Hagedorn,
- Iowa Rep. Rob Taylor,
- Minnesota Sen. David Senjem,
- North Dakota Sen. Tom Campbell,
- Ontario MPP Cheri DiNovo,
- Ontario MPP Jim McDonell,
- Ontario MPP Glenn Thibeault,
- North Dakota Rep. David Monson,
- Saskatchewan MLA Dan D’Autremont (chair of the subcommittee),
- Saskatchewan MLA Randy Wekes,
- South Dakota Rep. Fred Romkema,
- South Dakota Rep. Roger Solom, and

The event was organized by the Midwestern Legislative Conference’s Midwest-Canada Energy Subcommittee. (CSG Midwest provides staffing services to the MLC and its various interstate committees of state and provincial legislators.)

Speakers included representatives from Manitoba Hydro and Minnesota Power as well as MISO, the regional transmission organization that manages most of the Midwest’s energy market. Subcommittee members also visited the Xcel Energy Control Center in Minneapolis and District Energy in St. Paul.

The MLC’s binational subcommittee was created last summer. A few months later, the group held its first meeting in Saskatchewan, where they visited the world’s first commercial-scale carbon capture and sequestration facility.

Corrections and additions: The 2016 class of BILLD Fellows

In the May edition of Stateline Midwest listing this year’s class of BILLD Fellows, the names and photos of the three Wisconsin legislators chosen for the program were mistakenly omitted.

They are Reps. David Bowen, Mike Rohrkaste and Lisa Subeck.

In addition, one Canadian provincial legislator has since been added to the 2016 class for the Bowhay Institute of Legislative Leadership Development: MLA Bronwyn Eyre of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly.

A full list of this year’s BILLD Fellows can be found at www.csgmidwest.org. Through a mix of sessions led by policy and professional development experts, as well as the Midwest’s legislative leaders, the BILLD program offers new lawmakers the unique chance to build and hone their skills. The 2016 institute will be held Aug. 12-16 in Madison, Wis.
Life-without-parole sentences for juveniles banned in Iowa

Iowa has joined the growing number of U.S. states that ban life-without-parole sentences for individuals 17 and under. The state Supreme Court issued its ruling in May, arguing that such sentences violate the Iowa Constitution’s ban on cruel and unusual punishment. The decision does not entitle juvenile offenders to parole, but does eliminate “up-front determinations” (namely life-without-parole sentences by a judge).

According to The Des Moines Register, the recent ruling overturns legislation (SF 448) passed by Iowa lawmakers in 2015. That measure gave prosecutors the option of seeking life-without-parole sentences for some convicted juveniles.

Kansas and South Dakota are among the other U.S. states that ban life-without-parole sentences for juveniles, the Campaign for Fair Sentencing of Youth reports. It also notes that over the last four years, the number of states with such bans in place has tripled.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that age and other mitigating factors must be considered before a young offender is sentenced to life without parole. However, judges still have the authority to impose such sentences, absent a state law or court ruling such as Iowa’s.

North Dakotans uphold corporate farming ban by ‘vetoing’ 2015 bill

Voters in North Dakota have overturned a legislative decision in 2015 to provide new exemptions to the state’s decades-old ban on corporate farming.

Under last year’s law (SB 2351), corporations were allowed to own up to 640 acres for pork and dairy operations. (Corporate ownership of any other type of farming operation, or of farmland, remained illegal.) According to The Bismarck Tribune, supporters of SB 2351 said by allowing non-family members to form corporations and share in investment, the state would help revive its floundering pork and dairy industries.

But in North Dakota, residents are given a check on bills passed by the Legislative Assembly, via a veto referendum. (Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio and South Dakota also allow for veto referenda, according to Ballotpedia.) Soon after legislators passed SB 2351, opponents of the bill began a statewide campaign to get it overturned. In June, 75 percent of North Dakotans voted against the legislation.

This year, two other Midwestern state legislatures have voted to ease their restrictions on corporate ownership in agriculture: Nebraska (LB 176) and South Dakota (SB 98).

Minnesotans move from presidential caucuses to primary system

Four years from now, at least one Midwestern state will be trying a new way of selecting the two major political parties’ presidential candidates.

Minnesota’s SF 2985/HF 3594 moves the state from away from its existing caucus system in favor of a presidential primary. The measure was signed into law in May after receiving bipartisan legislative support. According to Secretary of State Steve Simon, this change will allow Minnesotans to take advantage of the many conveniences now afforded voters for other elections — for example, early voting, same-day registration and no-excuse absentee balloting.

In 2016, Minnesota was one of five Midwestern states that used a caucus system for the presidential primary. The others were Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska and North Dakota. (In Nebraska, the Democratic Party used the caucus system, the Republicans held a presidential primary.)

Under the new Minnesota law, voters at the polls must sign on to the following statement: “I am in general agreement with the principles of the party for whose candidate I intend to vote, and I understand that my choice of a party’s ballot will be public information.”

All Nebraska students will take college exam under new law

Starting in 2017, all of Nebraska’s high school juniors will take a college admissions exam such as the ACT or SAT. Under the recently enacted LB 930, the state Department of Education can use lottery proceeds to pay for administration of the test.

Lawmakers cited several reasons for making the change. First, students may be more motivated to do well because SAT and ACT results can help them get into college or secure a scholarship. (Students have instead been taking the Nebraska State Accountability Assessment.) Second, all 11th-graders, regardless of income, will now have access to a college admission test. Third, the change will provide a clearer picture of whether young Nebraskans are prepared for postsecondary success.

According to Education Week, Minnesota, North Dakota and Wisconsin are among the U.S. states where either the ACT is administered to all 11th-graders or where all students are given free access to the test. Illinois and Michigan recently switched from the ACT to the SAT.

Under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, states can measure high school achievement with college entrance exams instead of standards-based assessments.