States prioritizing help for jobless, ‘disconnected’ youths

Late entry into workforce has long-lasting impact on earnings

by Laura Tomaka (ltomaka@csg.org)

I imagine being in your mid- to late 20s and walking into a workplace for the very first time as an employee. For many of today’s young Americans, this delayed entry into the workforce has become a harsh reality.

During the Great Recession, unemployment rates soared for all age groups. But young people were hit particularly hard. In April 2010, the jobless rate for people between the ages of 16 and 24 reached a record high of nearly 20 percent. Today, youth unemployment in the United States still tops 10 percent, more than double the overall jobless rate.

These federal unemployment figures only count people who are actively seeking work, and the disparity in jobless rates among different ages is not new. But there also is concern about the number of young people not being counted in the federal data — those who have dropped out of the labor market altogether.

Illinois Rep. Elgie Sims says his state has a “youth unemployment crisis,” one that is disproportionately affecting young people of color and those growing up in low-income communities. (Illinois has the Midwest’s highest jobless rate among 16- to 24-year-olds; see table on page 7 for state-by-state data.)

“Td deeply concerned that they are not developing those early, productivity skills. … Then they come into the workforce a step behind,” Sims notes. “Teaching them in the classroom is one thing, but developing real-world habits through real-world experience is really what is going to be critical for their long-term success.”

People who do not hold jobs in their teens and early 20s are more likely to be unemployed later in life and less likely to rise to higher levels of employment. One estimate put the lifetime cost to taxpayers for young people who are not working or in school at more than $1.5 trillion.

And for states, the impact extends beyond lost tax revenue, says Tom Luna, former Illinois secretary of state. “There is a cultural value that we are teaching kids that the best way to be productive and self-reliant is to take pride in their work. They learn that better when they are working in the classroom is one thing, but developing real-world habits through real-world experience is really what is going to be critical for their long-term success.”

Illinois Rep. Elgie Sims’ concerns about the situation in Illinois led him this year to introduce and help pass HB 5668, which led to creation of the Youth Employment Task Force. By year’s end, this group — a cross-section of state agencies, community leaders, educators and business leaders — will submit recommendations for legislative and gubernatorial action.

HB 5668 requires the task force to examine not only the overall impact of youth unemployment in Illinois, but “its particular effect on young people of color, including recommendations on how to improve employment among young people of color.”

Nationwide, close to 14 percent of people between the ages of 16 and 24 are “disconnected,” meaning they are not in school and not working, according to the bipartisan national campaign Opportunity Nation.

And these rates are especially high among minority groups in large metropolitan areas — for example, 24 percent of African Americans in Chicago and 25 percent of African Americans in Detroit (compared to 13 percent and 17 percent, respectively, for young people working or in school).
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Nebraska seeks more certainty over livestock sitting, while maintaining local control

The siting of large livestock facilities continues to be a contentious issue across the Midwest, with some states such as Wisconsin preempting local authority and setting statewide standards. But Nebraska has kept local control over the rules determining decisions on new or expanded operations. Thirteen years ago, with an eye toward supporting the industry but not stripping away local zoning authority, the Nebraska Legislature gave counties across the state the chance to be designated as “livestock friendly.”

Today, nearly half of Nebraska’s counties (41 of 92) have sought and received the designation. According to a University of Nebraska–Lincoln study, cattle operations in the state’s livestock-friendly counties expanded by 12 percent from 2002 to 2012. Over that same period, the growth rate for other counties was 8 percent. Although the number of hog farms dropped in most Nebraska counties between 2002 and 2012, the decline was much less severe in livestock-friendly counties: 16 percent vs. 62 percent.

To receive the designation, a county board in Nebraska passes a resolution and then completes an application with the state Department of Agriculture. State officials then use a range of criteria to determine whether the designation is warranted. For example:

- Does the local government agree not to exceed state standards on livestock sitting, unless stronger environmental standards are “supported by a scientifically justified environmental risk analysis”?
- Is it using “objective, science-based standards” to govern land use and issue permits?
- Does it have plans in place to reduce nonfarm development in areas traditionally used for agriculture?

Along with helping counties market themselves as “livestock friendly,” the program provides an outside evaluation of how local zoning regulations and other requirements affect future development of a key industry across the state.

The Livestock Friendly County program was launched as a result of the state Department of Agriculture released a matrix tool in September.

Nebraska counties designated as “livestock friendly” by state Department of Agriculture (shaded)

And with passage of LB 106 in 2015, Nebraska legislators gave local producers and county leaders another tool — an assessment matrix developed by the state Department of Agriculture to evaluate siting applications. The criteria for livestock-permit applications include how well the proposals protect public health and control odors, as well as whether they are cost-effective and add economic value to the community.

“The matrix is a scorecard that a farmer can use to evaluate [his or her] livestock expansion proposal and be fairly certain it will be approved by local zoning boards,” explains Al Juhnke, a former Minnesota state legislator who now serves as executive director of the Nebraska Pork Producers Association.

The state Department of Agriculture released the matrix tool in September.

Use of the matrix is voluntary, but the state is hoping that counties adopt the criteria, thus providing more certainty and a greater use of quantitative assessments to govern siting decisions.

“The goal of the Livestock Friendly County program and the livestock-siting matrix is to provide clear science-based guidelines for farmers,” Nebraska Sen. John Kuehn says. “Reducing uncertainty of the process promotes goodwill among livestock producers and local communities, as well as facilities investment in rural Nebraska.”

Midwest-Canada Relations

Work on new bridge at vital Detroit-Windsor trade corridor could begin as soon as 2018

Design and construction of a new international bridge between Detroit and Windsor, Ont., could begin in just over a year.

In November, the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority issued a request for proposal to design, build, finance, operate and maintain the new crossing, which will be located at the busiest trade corridor along the U.S.-Canada border.

Every year, approximately 2.5 million trucks travel through the corridor (in addition to passenger vehicles); they currently use the more-than-80-year-old Ambassador Bridge. It remains unclear when the new bridge will open; initial plans had targeted the year 2020.

The Gordie Howe International Bridge will be built and maintained through a public-private partnership. A private-sector partner (to be chosen over the next 18 months at the conclusion of the RFP process) will assume the initial financial burden and risks for construction. It will then be paid based on meeting specific goals (such as finishing the project on time and certain performance standards once the bridge is open to the public.

The Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority — a non-profit crown corporation owned by the government of Canada — is overseeing the entire project, including the procurement process. In addition, a six-member, binational board (with members representing the government of Canada and the state of Michigan) will approve key phases of the project.

The government of Canada is providing much of the upfront funding needed for the project, including the U.S. customs plaza (to be repaid with toll money from the bridge).

When complete, the new bridge will be approximately 1.5 miles long, have six lanes and provide direct connections to Highway 401 in Ontario and Interstate 75 in Michigan.

The privately owned Ambassador Bridge will continue to operate once the new crossing is built. However, the Ambassador does not have adequate capacity and could not accommodate a customs plaza with enough lanes needed for vehicles and drivers that are part of the countries “trusted traveler” programs, which allow low-risk, frequent business and tourist travelers to move across the border more quickly.

The new bridge also will provide redundancy in case of a major accident or terrorist incident. As it stands now, if the Ambassador Bridge were to shut down for an extended period, truck traffic on this vital commercial corridor between the U.S. and Canada would come to a standstill.

Midwest is central to largest trade relationship in world

- Two-way trade between the U.S. and Canada equaled $670 billion in 2015, making this the largest bilateral trading relationship in the world.
- Canada is the largest trading partner for every state in the Midwest.
- In 2015, $106 billion in goods crossed the border by truck at Detroit-Windsor in 2015 (30 percent of the total annual U.S.-Canada trade carried by truck).

Sources: Government of Canada and U.S. Department of Transportation.
Great Lakes

Phosphorus-fed algal growth leads Michigan to label part of Lake Erie watershed ‘impaired’

T
ough it likely won’t change much of the work already under way to protect western Lake Erie from excessive algal blooms, Michigan’s recent designation of its part of the watershed as “impaired” signals the importance of reaching new binational goals to control phosphorus runoff.

Every two years, as part of compliance with the Clean Water Act, all states must determine which of their water bodies are polluted and/or don’t meet water quality standards. They then submit their impairment list to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The new designation for western Lake Erie is due to the presence of excessive algal blooms and their harmful effects on fish and wildlife. Michigan environmental officials say the blooms are the result of excessive levels of phosphorus.

“When we looked at our part of the lake, all of the waters were either impaired or susceptible to impairment,” says Kevin Goodwin, a senior aquatic biologist with the state Department of Environmental Quality’s Water Resources Division.

In contrast, Ohio has only listed its part of the western Lake Erie shoreline as impaired.

But both Michigan and Ohio, along with Ontario, have agreed to meet the same goal — reduce total phosphorus loads to Lake Erie by 40 percent by 2025.

“Those are the state targets set under the U.S. Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement of 2012. Reaching this goal will require limiting the amount of nutrient runoff from agricultural operations, and in recent years, states have begun to put new controls in place. Ohio’s SB 1, for example (enacted in 2015), prohibits manure and fertilizers containing phosphorus and nitrogen from being spread on frozen, snow-covered or saturated ground. And legislation passed in 2014 (SB 150) will soon require Ohio farmers to be trained and certified before applying fertilizer to their land.”

In Michigan, Goodwin says, three separate state agencies are working on a “domestic action plan.” That work, along with the strategies being developed in Ohio and Ontario, will serve as the foundation of a regionwide plan to prevent algal blooms and reduce phosphorus loads in Lake Erie.

One traditional government approach to reducing nutrient runoff has been offering farmers financial incentives to keep environmentally sensitive land out of production — for example, the federal Conversation Reserve Program (CRP). In Ohio, legislation was introduced this fall (HB 607) to create a state-funded Water Quality Improvement Program modeled after the CRP.

But in a University of Michigan-led study released earlier this year, researchers concluded that “traditional, incentive-based programs would have to be implemented at an unprecedented scale” to reach the new goals for protecting Lake Erie.

Reaching that objective, researchers concluded, also will require the widespread use of effective nutrient-management practices (especially the subsurface application of phosphorus-based fertilizer) and a significant conversion of cropland to grassland.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is working with Michigan and Ohio to reach the new phosphorus-reduction goals.

But in a December letter to the EPA, U.S. Reps. Debbie Dingell of Michigan and Marcy Kaptur of Ohio urged the federal agency to list the open waters of western Lake Erie as impaired.

“The path to recovery requires additional legal reinforcement,” they wrote.

Great Lakes advocacy groups also have called for this federal designation, saying it would trigger an assessment of where the pollutants are coming from and in what amounts. That information then would be used to create a legally enforceable “pollution diet” to restore water quality in Lake Erie.

Health & Human Services

Group of Wisconsin lawmakers unveils plan to boost health workforce, services in rural areas

A

n informal group of 20 to 24 lawmakers in Wisconsin will concentrate its efforts in 2017 on proposals to boost the state’s supply of rural health care workers and services.

The Rural Wisconsin Initiative unveiled its legislative agenda during the latter part of 2016. The new package of bills includes:

• a $750,000 annual grant program, with preference given to rural hospitals that partner with educational institutions to form training programs for advanced practice clinicians (nurse practitioners and physician assistants, for example); funding would be used to create the educational infrastructure needed for the training, as well as provide for tuition assistance and stipends for living expenses;

• a one-time $500,000 grant for the creation of wellness facilities or programs in rural areas (funding would be available to communities with a demonstrable need where matching funds are available); and

• a $250,000 annual grant program that would be available to hospitals and educational entities that form training partnerships focused on allied health professionals such as dental hygienists, radiographers, physical therapists, nutritionists and respiratory therapists.

Other legislative priorities include helping rural hospitals set up compliance and “best practice” programs, as well as requiring the state to conduct biannual surveys that pinpoint shortages in the health care workforce — where they are occurring and in what occupations.

“Most of the proposals … in the overall light of a $30 billion to $40 billion budget, aren’t going to be deal-breakers,” says Ed Brooks, who helps lead the Rural Wisconsin Initiative.

And the group notes that having a solid base of health care workers and services is essential to a rural community’s ability to attract and retain a vibrant population. For example, businesses, young families and senior citizens all make decisions on where to locate or live based in part on access to quality health care.

The Rural Wisconsin Initiative also will push for more funding for the state’s Physician Residency Assistance Program.

Established in 2010 by state legislation, the program provides grants and technical assistance in order to establish medical residencies in underserved and rural communities. It helped fund 93 percent (77 of 83) of Wisconsin’s rural residency programs in 2015.

The Rural Wisconsin Initiative convened early in the state’s 2016 legislative session to train a spotlight on rural concerns. It then quickly introduced a package of eight bills to improve access to health care, education, technology, and workforce opportunities.
U.S. Congress sets up new programs to keep lead out of drinking water

Exposure to high levels of lead can have adverse health effects for people of all ages, but it is especially dangerous for young children and the unborn. Behavioral problems, lower IQ scores, hearing and speech problems, and slowed growth have been associated with high levels of lead in the blood, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

One of the national success stories in public health over the past 30 years has been a dramatic reduction in the number of children testing for high levels of lead in their blood. Reasons for the decline have included prohibitions on the sale of leaded gasoline and household paint containing lead. But the crisis in Flint, Mich., is a reminder that lead contamination also can come from the lead pipes, fixtures and faucets that bring drinking water to residences, day care facilities and schools. Just weeks before it adjourned for the year, the U.S. Congress approved several new measures to help states, local communities and schools do more to prevent lead contamination or mitigate the damage from it. Examples include:

- authorizing $20 million to start a grant program for schools and day care facilities that voluntarily decide to test their drinking water for lead contamination;
- establishing a $60 million-a-year grant program to replace lead service lines, with priority given to financially strained communities that have had high lead levels in their water within the previous three years;
- requiring the U.S. EPA to alert the public within 24 hours (if the state does not do so) of high lead levels in a local drinking water supply;
- providing $15 million a year for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Lead Poisoning Prevention Fund; and
- funding programs to create a lead exposure registry and Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program.

These bipartisan measures were signed into law in December.

% of U.S. children tested who had high levels of lead in their blood (under age 6), 1997-2015

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

States put greater emphasis on lead testing after water crisis in Flint

When the problem of tainted drinking water created a public health crisis in the Michigan city of Flint, the state’s legislators had two clear missions to fulfill.

First, fix the problem, with strategies — both immediate and longer-term — that help affected residents, bring back some normalcy to their lives, and then assist in the entire community’s recovery.

Second, find ways to prevent the problem from ever occurring in another Michigan city.

And that idea of prevention has spread well beyond the borders of Michigan, with legislators in nearby states taking notice of the crisis and beginning to think more about the safety of the water supply in their own districts.

“The tragedy of Flint definitely was felt here,” says Illinois Rep. Sonya Harper, who represents a part of Chicago’s South Side. “It made you think whether it could have happened here, and to think about ways to prevent it from happening.”

As a first step, she is hoping for passage of SB 550, a bill that would require many elementary schools in Illinois (those built before 2000) to have their water tested for lead. The mandate also would extend to certain day care facilities.

“It’s such a huge undertaking to think about testing all the water sources in the state for high levels of lead, but I think what we’ve done makes sense — require the testing in schools, because lead contamination hits the children the most,” Harper says.

Her daughter’s own school, in fact, was shown to have high levels of lead in its drinking water as part of voluntary testing done over the past year. In all, the water fountains in more than 300 Chicago Public Schools were tested, and about one-third had elevated levels of lead.

As of December, SB 550 had not yet been passed by the Illinois General Assembly, in large part because of questions of how to pay for the tests (they cost an average of $15 per drinking water sample, according to the Illinois attorney general’s office). Harper says the two mostly likely funding sources are local water suppliers, the schools themselves, or some combination of the two.

In September, New York became the first U.S. state to require all of its schools to test their drinking water for lead contamination. Any schools with contaminated water supplies would then have to implement a lead remediation plan. The state will help fund the local testing and remediation.

Ohio’s HB 512, meanwhile, will require the state’s local water suppliers to test for lead and copper and to map areas being served by lead service lines. The legislation, signed into law in May, also mandates that the operators of public water systems undergo training on how to identify lead in drinking water and control corrosion.

In Michigan, a joint committee of six legislators began meeting in early 2016 and released a final report this fall with more than 30 policy proposals. It’s ideas to prevent another situation such as Flint’s include:

- tightening the state’s rules on lead and copper in drinking water, including new standards that would exceed those at the federal level;
- creating an Amber Alert-style system to notify residents of public health emergencies;
- instituting a more robust blood-level screening policy for school-age children;
- providing more funds for the testing and monitoring of water supplies; and
- establishing new competency and experience requirements for the operators of water treatment facilities.

The legislative committee was formed a month after Flint’s water crisis led to emergency declarations by Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder and President Barack Obama. The six lawmakers (four Republicans, two Democrats) held six hearings and listened to the testimony of more than 60 people.

Their policy recommendations to help Flint residents include creating a “toxic exposure registry” to track the health of residents exposed to tainted drinking water and connect them particularly children with elevated levels of lead in their blood — to intervention services.

According to the committee’s final report, the percentage of Flint children with elevated blood-lead levels rose from 2.5 percent in 2013 to as much as 5 percent in 2015.

The state of Michigan already has been providing support to Flint in a number of ways — replacing old pipes, faucets and lead service lines, for example, and opening new early-education centers and expanding the availability of health screenings.

% of children, under age 6, tested in the state who had high lead levels in their blood (10 micrograms per deciliter or more)*

* Data collection methods vary from state to state. Rates are for the year 2015, except for Iowa and Kansas, where the last available data were for 2012. No statistics are available for Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota, where these three states have not been part of the national surveillance system. Over the past two decades, the percentage of children testing for high levels of lead has dropped significantly across the Midwest and country.

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
L
ost in the din of Kansas’ recent budget woes, an innovative mechanism is quietly funding dozens of early-childhood education and wellness programs across the state.

The Children’s Initiatives Fund, Kansas Endowment for Youth and the state’s Children’s Cabinet were created in 1999 to support programs promoting the health and welfare of Kansas children using the state’s share of the national tobacco Master Settlement Fund.

Settlement payments are deposited in the endowment, which then distributes money to the Initiatives Fund.

Disbursements began in 2001. In fiscal year 2016, $45.2 million was disbursed from the endowment to the Children’s Initiatives Fund; in FY 2017, $35 million was allocated, but another $13 million was “swept” by legislators for other purposes. Of that, however, $11 million was replaced by funds reallocated from the state’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families fund.

In Kansas, special fund delivers millions of dollars to children’s programs

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One of the programs administered by the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund is the Kansas Early Childhood Block Grant.

These funds are distributed through grants to school districts, child care centers and homes, Head Start sites and community programs that provide research-based child development services for at-risk infants and toddlers and their families. Money also goes to local preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds.

The block grant process is driven by accountability measures and research-based programming, with a focus on at-risk children and underserved areas.

At least 30 percent of the block grant funding is set aside for evidence-based programs for at-risk infants, toddlers and expecting parents.

Begun in 2009, the Early Childhood Block Grant has been very successful because it’s flexible, yet carries a clear set of rules and performance-based measurements, and is based on a community’s assessment of its own needs, says Children’s Initiative Fund executive director Janice Smith.

For example, Smith says, among the block-grant recipients in Wichita are a private child care company serving children from low-income households and a consortium of community groups (including a local school and a YMCA) that provide family and parenting programs; while in western Kansas, a grant recipient serves 15 rural counties connecting people with resources and teaching parenting skills.

“When you’re dealing with children, whether in an urban setting or a rural setting, you’re looking at the same set of standards [such as literacy rates],” she adds. “It’s very tied to what the community decides. It’s not top-down, but bottom-up, it’s a very grassroots approach.”

The Children’s Cabinet, a committee consisting of legislative and gubernatorial appointees as well as ex-officio members, advises Kansas’ elected leaders on the uses of money credited to the Children’s Initiatives Fund.

This 15-member group also evaluates programs using Children’s Initiatives Fund money, assists the governor in developing and implementing a coordinated, comprehensive delivery system to serve children and families of Kansas; and supports the prevention of child abuse and neglect through the Children’s Trust Fund.

When this cabinet was first formed, Smith says, money was spent under looser definitions of which organizations constituted “children.” But the emphasis has since been on reaching young people at the earliest stages of development.

“As brain science results came in [showing the importance of early intervention], the focus shifted from keeping kids out of the justice system to early-childhood education because of the cost savings,” Smith says.

“That’s where you get a lot of return [for the investment].”

This article was written as part of this year’s Midwestern Legislative Conference Chair’s Initiative of Wisconsin Rep. Joan Ballweg. This initiative is focused on state policies that strengthen families, improve opportunities for children, and yield better longer-term outcomes. CSG Midwest provides staff support to the MLC.

“QUESTION OF THE MONTH”

In 1980, Wisconsin became the first U.S. state to establish a statutory bill of rights for crime victims. Since then, state constitutions across the country have been amended to provide an even greater level of protections to this group of citizens.

Most recently, voters in North Dakota (62 percent to 38 percent) and South Dakota (60 percent to 40 percent) approved November ballot measures to amend their constitutions. These new provisions to protect crime victims are part of a national movement and are collectively known as “Mary’s Law.” They include a right to:

- have your privacy protected,
- be protected from the person accused of the crime,
- have your safety and welfare considered when bail is set for the accused,
- provide input during all phases of the criminal justice process,
- be heard in any criminal proceeding, and
- receive full and timely restitution.

Prior to this fall’s vote, North Dakota and South Dakota had been two of the Midwest’s four states without constitutional protections for crime victims. (The other two, Iowa and Minnesota, do provide various rights for crime victims in state statute).

Two years ago, nearly 80 percent of voters in Illinois approved a version of Mary’s Law. The state already had provided constitutional rights for crime victims, but language in the 2014 amendment ensures that individuals have the chance to secure these rights in court. Then, one year later, Illinois legislators passed a bill (HB 1121) clarifying the procedures for crime victims to assert those rights, as well as the role of prosecutors, judges and the victims’ attorneys.

In the Midwest, other state constitutional protections date back to between 1988 and 1996. They commonly give victims the right to be “treated with fairness, dignity and respect” and to be informed and present at hearings of the criminal justice process. States such as Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska and Wisconsin include a right for victims to make statements at an offender’s sentencing. Michigan and Wisconsin also include a right to restitution.

QUESTION: Do states in the Midwest provide crime victims with constitutional rights and protections?

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Problem of unemployed youths requires multifaceted response from states respectively, of all 16- to 24-year-olds in those two cities.

"When these people lose hope, it generally manifests itself in a number of ways that are generally unhealthy," says Sims, whose legislative district includes portions of Chicago’s South Side and southwest suburbs. "If we don’t recognize that these challenges exist, the violence you see in these communities is not going to go away."

A state’s policy response to these challenges can take many forms — preventing students from dropping out; providing alternative pathways to a high school diploma; funding new work-based learning programs (apprenticeships and summer employment, for example); and opening new pathways to postsecondary education.

And there are longer-term strategies for states to consider as well, including greater investments in evidence-based early-childhood programs that help build the social and emotional skills tied to long-term workforce success.

"If you look at the disconnected youth population, that group is quite heterogeneous. … You have to think about where they fall in the education-skill-employment spectrum," says Farhana Hossain, a research associate with the MDRC, an education and social policy research organization.

Hossain notes, too, that various risk factors can pose barriers to employment. For example, is the "disconnected" young person homeless? Is he or she a parent who needs help with child care? Does he or she need access to medical and mental health care?

In Michigan, the charter school Covenant Academy has opened facilities in different parts of the state to work with high school dropouts as well as other at-risk young adults. The academy’s year-round schools serve individuals between the ages of 16 and 22.

"It helps folks who have dropped out or are facing other challenges [to employment]; a lot of them are homeless," says Michigan Sen. Geoff Hansen, who helped secure state funding for the Muskegon Covenant Academy in fiscal year 2017.

"We are trying to make sure they get an education that they can use to break the cycle and be able to get jobs and support themselves and a family," Hansen sees promise in Covenant’s approach to helping disconnected youth earn a high school diploma, because in addition to providing classroom instruction, the school helps students access counseling, behavioral health care and other wrap-around services.

Another approach being tried in Michigan is the use of “middle/early-college programs,” which allow students to stay in high school for an extra year, at no cost to them.

By the time they leave high school, these students sometimes have enough credits for an associate’s degree (they can start taking college classes as early as the ninth grade).

"Early college students graduate high school, earn college degrees or sub- substantial college credit in high school, enter college, and persist in college at rates that surpass students nationwide," according to a 2014 study from the nonprofit group Jobs for the Future.

Last year, Michigan lawmakers approved an additional $10 million in funding for school districts to create an early/ middle college or invest in a career-technical education program.

Connecting youth to high-demand jobs

In a much-cited 2013 study examining the future of work, researchers at the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce estimated that by the end of this decade, two-thirds of U.S. jobs would require training and education beyond high school.

But “beyond high school” doesn’t necessarily mean earning a four-year college degree. In fact, the National Center for Workforce Skills has estimated that 54 percent of all work is a “middle skills” job — requiring some level of
Education, credentials or training beyond high school, but not a four-year degree.

With these workforce trends in mind, policymakers have stepped up efforts to better connect education systems with the needs of employers in their state, or within a particular labor market of their state.

“I think we need to do a much better job helping kids in high school understand what’s available out there,” Iowa Rep. Dave Deyoe says. “There’s a tendency to push everyone into a four-year college, and that’s not [always] where the highest-earning fields are.”

This year, he and other lawmakers overhauled Iowa’s law governing local career and technical education (CTE) programs in the state.

CTE is a learning approach that provides students with technical skills and knowledge to prepare them for careers or further education after high school. Iowa’s reforms in 2016 included better aligning local CTE course offerings with the needs of students, employers and the labor market. In addition, students will be taught about the workforce earlier in their K-12 education careers and offered more work-based learning opportunities.

Nationally, 2.5 million high school and college students are enrolled in a CTE program. In Iowa, the high school population of CTE students is nearly 100,000.

Deyoe also was involved in getting legislation passed in Iowa a few years ago to expand the state’s apprenticeship program, which connects students in community colleges to local employers.

With an apprenticeship, students learn a skill or trade on the job while being paid. They also typically earn industry credentials and/or postsecondary credits. These apprenticeships are usually offered in high-demand fields; as a result, individuals who complete the programs are often hired into permanent positions.

Since 2014, Iowa has tripled its investment in apprenticeships (currently at $5 million).

Companies in more than 1,000 occupations in high-demand fields are eligible for the state’s training grants. They include apprenticeships in manufacturing, construction, health care, transportation, energy and culinary arts. Apprentices can start at the age of 16.

According to Deyoe, this ability for students to “earn while they learn” has opened up career pathways in a number of “middle skill” careers — for example, as welders, tool and die makers, diesel mechanics, heating and cooling technicians, electricians and plumbers.

**Aligning curricula to labor market needs**

In Illinois, along with creating a task force to begin addressing the problem of youth unemployment, Rep. Sims has been working with businesses to get a better idea of what they want and need from workers.

“They in partnership with education, we can establish curriculum that can match what [businesses] are telling us,” he says.

One idea, for example, is to create a vocational education a curriculum that focuses on careers in high-skilled manufacturing — the subject of legislation that Sims introduced earlier this year (HB 5570) and that he plans to revisit.

And if a state’s schools succeed at bringing more real-world skills to K-12 instruction, Luna says, they may keep some young people from getting disconnected in school and, ultimately, disconnected.

“The more engaged they will be in their education, the more relevance they will see to what they are learning, and the more likely they will be to choose those kinds of courses that are going to help them be better prepared for the workforce,” he adds.

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### Youth unemployment in Midwest (2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Jobless rate, ages 16-24*</th>
<th>Compared to overall jobless rate (%-point difference)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>+7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>+6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>+4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>+3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>+6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>+3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>+3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>+1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>-7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>+6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>+4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on average annual unemployment rates

Source: Governing magazine (from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data)

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**A high school diploma is a critical first step to workforce success, and graduation rates are on the rise**

For states looking to improve the long-term success of their young people — in the workforce and beyond — one crucial step is raising high school graduation rates.

Over the course of their lives, individuals who drop out of a state’s K-12 system earn less and have a harder time finding work compared to their counterparts. And these disparities in the labor market begin to show very early on. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, recent high school graduates not attending college are much more likely to be employed than their peers who have dropped out of high school: an employment-to-population ratio of 51.7 percent vs. 28.7 percent.

Most people go from high school, and for each of the past five years, the numbers have hit all-time highs. Nationwide, the graduation rate was 83.2 percent for the 2014-15 school year. Across the Midwest, graduation rates have improved since 2010, and most states in the region have rates higher than the national average (the two exceptions are Michigan and Ohio).

“I think everyone would agree that we are doing some things better, but it’s not an indication that our work is done,” says Tom Luna, senior vice president and chief governmental relations officer with the national education organization Project Lead The Way.

According to Luna, states should continue looking for ways to bring more rigor and relevance to K-12 instruction, and to ensure “the diploma has value and that it is recognition of what a student really does know and what a student can do.”

There is some debate over whether the recent rise in graduation rates reflects a true advancement of the nation’s education system, or simply a lowering of expectations or requirements (for example, granting multiple types of diplomas that allow students to take less-rigorous coursework).

Education experts, though, do point to state and local policy changes that likely have contributed to higher graduation rates, from new school-accountability laws and the closure of underperforming schools, to new initiatives that offer students alternative pathways to a diploma. And in states such as Iowa (which has one of the nation’s highest graduation rates among all students as well as among low-income students), programs are in place to help disadvantaged young people make it to the finish line of their K-12 careers. Examples include free day care, smaller class sizes and flexible scheduling.

Over the past few years, graduation rates have increased among all races and ethnic groups, and the U.S. achievement gap has narrowed. Still, there remains a significant disparity in graduation rates between white and black students (13 percentage points) and white and Hispanic students (10 percentage points). Gaps remain, too, between lower-income students and their peers (see table).
Longtime legislator discusses dual role of serving in minority:
Articulate policy differences, but find ways of working across aisle

by Ilene Grossman (igrossman@csg.org)

About to enter his 20th year in the Indiana Senate, Tim Lanane does not know what it is like to serve in a majority party caucus. But over the years, he has learned that being outnumbered doesn’t necessarily mean being counted out of the legislative process.

“’There are opportunities to get things done,’” he says.

Over the years, his legislative accomplishments have included being part of new laws to protect homeowners from predatory lending practices (the Indiana Homeowner Protection Act) and to bring a casino to a horse-racing track in his home district.

Most recently, based on the idea of a constituent, Lanane helped get legislation passed in 2016 to expand the availability of concussion training. Under the new law, Indiana’s elementary schools will get the training. (It already was provided for high school coaches.)

“It was really gratifying to get that passed,” Lanane says.

But there are admittedly challenges and frustrations for legislators serving in the super-minority (Republicans hold a 41-9 edge in the Indiana Senate). And that goes, too, for being the Senate Democrats’ top leader — a position that Lanane has held since 2012. He was recently re-elected to serve in that same position for the coming legislative year.

“We work with the majority where we can,” he says, “but where there is a need to speak up and point out differences on policy or opinion, we have a duty to do that and do it in an effective way.”

Lanane’s personal interest and involvement in politics dates back decades. In college, he volunteered for the George McGovern presidential campaign and then went to law school “with the idea of not just practicing law, but seeing where it led politically.”

He later joined a law firm where his local state senator (and, as it turns out, his predecessor in the state Senate) was practicing.

“I began watching what he was doing … and my interest developed from there,” Lanane says.

It eventually led to his appointment to the state Senate in 1997; ever since then, he has been serving his northern Indiana district, which includes the city of Muncie and most of neighboring Anderson.

In a recent interview with CSG Midwest, Lanane talked about his leadership style, as well as his caucus’s legislative priorities and strategies. Here are excerpts.

Q: What are your legislative priorities for the year ahead?
A: This is a budget year [Indiana has a biennial budget], so all of this goes back to our funding priorities. One of the issues that our caucus has been pushing for a number of years is early-childhood education. That again will be one of our key priorities. Indiana has begun this effort, but in my opinion, we have been a bit timid about comprehensively getting these programs implemented throughout the state.

We are also going to continue to pursue civil rights protections for LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] people. We believe that Indiana should be amending its Civil Rights Act to include these protections, and we will be pushing for that. And we want to help working families and believe we should be raising the minimum wage, while looking at other ways to help as well — whether it is raising the Earned Income Tax Credit or increasing child care tax credits. Lastly, we will continue to be strong advocates for public education, and we want to look at ways to assist struggling local governments. We put the cramps on them with property tax caps. Is there some other way that we can make sure they can provide the necessary local services?

Q: How would you describe your legislative leadership style for working inside and outside your Democratic caucus?
A: I want to make sure that everyone in our caucus is heard, that they are respected for what they say, and that the debate is open and honest. My caucus also expects that, when necessary, we will go to the majority leadership and voice our opinions. I want to make our points in a logical way and don’t want to base my arguments only on emotion or passion, because that doesn’t usually work.

I find that the people on the other side of the aisle are, for the most part, fairly reasonable. They may disagree with you, but they will listen to you if you have a point to make, and that is how I try to approach it. My belief is the first approach should be, “Can’t we work this out in this office and see if we can come to an understanding?” When we feel like we are being totally ignored or the public needs to know, that is different. And when it comes time to discuss the actual issues, then debate has to be out in the open.

Q: You’ve said that one important role for your caucus is to be an effective voice of opposition. What is your approach to accomplishing this?
A: We need to make sure there is a vetting and a public awareness of the issues. That is the most important challenge we have. Of course, how you do that effectively is the issue that faces a minority. I know there are some leaders who revel more in sound bites, but that is not really my way. Yes, I want to effectively communicate, but in a way that makes sense and does not just use inflammatory rhetoric.
Buffers for our waterways

In South Dakota, proposals seek tax incentives for agriculture producers as way to keep pollutants out of lakes and rivers

by South Dakota House Minority Leader Spencer Hawley (Spencer.Hawley@sdlegislature.gov)

Farming and ranching are South Dakota’s biggest industries. Together they contribute $21 billion to our economy. Our history and culture are tied to agriculture.

Unfortunately, crop and animal production has contributed to the pollution of our lakes and rivers — and good stewardship of our natural resources is another strong part of our culture. The decline in water quality also threatens our fish and wildlife heritage.

The Big Sioux River, which flows for 420 miles north and south across our most fertile cropland, was recently named to a list of America’s dirtiest rivers. Many other lakes and rivers are also being harmed.

But farmers and ranchers are historically good stewards of our outdoor resources, and on this issue our agricultural community has been at the forefront of efforts to find solutions.

That is very encouraging because we’ll need everyone in order to make progress. With that in mind, we continue to work on policies in the Legislature that encourage the use of riparian buffers, a proven way to protect our waterways.

South Dakota is rich in rivers, lakes and streams — a blessing for wildlife but a challenge for us as policymakers.

In 2015, we watched our neighbors to the east in Minnesota enact a legislative mandate for riparian buffers. Their program seemed like a healthy step toward nonpoint source pollution of waterways from adjacent land, lessening bank erosion and protect wildlife and aquatic environments.

How riparian buffers protect water

Riparian areas are simply the transitional zones between land and water. A “healthy” grassy riparian area is extremely important to water quality because it screens sediment, nutrients, pesticides and other materials that would otherwise drain into lakes and rivers. (These areas are also critical to fish and wildlife habitat, especially pheasants.)

When uncontrolled runoff occurs on tilled land, the sediment can carry pollutants such as phosphorus, a nutrient commonly used in fertilizers. When phosphorus enters our lakes, it causes excessive algae growth and depletes oxygen levels in the water — which degrades water quality.

Towns along the waterways spend millions of dollars every year to clean the water for human consumption. Some of South Dakota’s largest cities lie along the troubled Big Sioux River, including Watertown, Brookings and Sioux Falls.

Concerns about costs and water quality point to the need for the use of more grass buffer strips, which have the capacity to remove 50 percent or more of nutrients and pesticides and 75 percent or more of sediment. Properly maintained buffer strips along waterways are also a proven way to diminish soil erosion.

The ‘carrot’ approach in South Dakota

In South Dakota, agricultural land is taxed by two classifications of soil type: cropland and noncropland. On the same piece of ground, the difference in taxation between the two classifications can result in a difference of about 25 percent on property taxes.

SB 136 would have encouraged landowners to voluntarily put crop-rated soils within 50 feet of a lake, river or stream to use as a riparian buffer.

This land would then be assessed at noncropland. SB 136’s success — or failure — could provide a model for similar approaches in other states.

In his veto message, the governor said SB 136 would result in a loss of property tax valuation and shift the tax burden to other property owners.

The governor also noted that he had a problem with definitions within the bill and with possible unintended consequences.

But as this article was being written, Gov. Daugaard announced he was drafting his own measure for the 2017 legislative session (see summary box at left for details).

Though it would have been nice to start the program last year, perhaps the wait has convinced others of the importance and value of riparian buffers.

Sen. Peterson has retired from the Senate, so he won't be in Pierre to help pass the governor’s package. Still, his passion for the issue will not soon be forgotten by our colleagues.

We hope that at this time next year, all South Dakotans will be benefiting from the increased use of riparian buffers — and the waterways that they help protect.

South Dakota House Minority Leader Spencer Hawley, a Democrat from Brookings, was first elected in 2010.

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@cs.org.

Overview of South Dakota governor’s draft bill on riparian buffers

Section 1 creates a separate classification for eligible riparian buffer strips and provides for a reduced property tax assessment for this type of land.

• Only agricultural land within 120 feet of a listed lake, river or stream that meets certain criteria is eligible to be classified as a riparian buffer strip. (The classification covers 575 lakes and some 11,000 miles of streams.)

• The strip must be in perennial vegetation 50 to 120 feet wide.

• Owners of such land will receive a tax reduction for crop-rated and noncrop rated soils at 60 percent of its assessed value.

Section 2 establishes criteria and the application process for the buffer strip classification.

• Perennial vegetation in a strip can be harvested or mowed after July 10, but at least 6 inches of cover must be maintained at all times.

• Grazing in the area is prohibited from May 1 through Sept. 30 (the recreation season set by South Dakota’s standards for surface water quality).

Section 3 provides a penalty for anyone who misrepresents facts to receive a reduced assessment.

• Violators will have a penalty of $2 per $1,000 of taxable valuation on the land; the penalty becomes a lien on the property until it is satisfied.

Daugaard announced he was drafting his own measure for the 2017 legislative session (see summary box at left for details).

South Dakota House Minority Leader Spencer Hawley, a Democrat from Brookings, was first elected in 2010.
Iowa Sen. Janet Petersen will lead nonpartisan group of state legislators in 2017

A four-member leadership team of state lawmakers will guide the work of the Midwestern Legislative Conference over the next year.

The MLC is a nonpartisan professional association of legislators from the 11-state Midwest. All state lawmakers from the region are members of the MLC and encouraged to make the most of its various programs and services. Provincial legislators from Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan also take part in the MLC as affiliate members.

Leading the group over the next year as its chair will be Janet Petersen, a member of the Iowa Senate since 2013. She served in the Iowa House from 2001 to 2012.

As chair, Sen. Petersen plans to raise awareness among state leaders about state policies and programs that help promote safe pregnancies for women and children. She has long been a leader on this issue, helping form the Healthy Birth Day in 2008 with four other women in central Iowa.

Over the next several months, Petersen will also lead the efforts of her home state in hosting the 2017 MLC Annual Meeting.


Under the current leadership rotation, Hite and Sims are in line to serve as MLC chair in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Ballweg led the group in 2016.

In addition to these four officers, the MLC is governed by a nonpartisan Executive Committee made up of legislators from each of the Midwest's 11 states and four affiliate provinces.

The Midwestern Office of The Council of State Governments provides staff support to the MLC.

Overview of products, services of Midwestern Legislative Conference

- **MLC Annual Meeting** — This annual event brings hundreds of legislators to a different Midwestern city and state every year. In 2017, the MLC will hold its 72nd Annual Meeting on July 9-12 in Des Moines, Iowa.

- **Professional development training** — The Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development, or BILLD, offers five days of intensive training to Midwestern legislators in their first four years of service. BILLD has trained hundreds of legislators, many of whom have since moved on to serve in key legislative leadership positions in their states or have been elected to the U.S. Congress.

- **Policy training** — The MLC's Under the Dome initiative brings training on professional development and policy issues to the Midwest's state capitols. These training workshops are developed with input from the state's legislative leaders.

- **Research assistance** — CSG Midwest provides tailored research assistance to the region's legislators and legislative staff through its Information Helpline (csgmi@csg.org or 630.925.1922). In addition, all of the policy research done on behalf of the MLC is available at www.csgmidwest.org and knowledgecenter.csg.org.

- **Stateline Midwest** — This monthly publication aims to capture noteworthy policy trends and innovations occurring in the Midwest's state capitols.

- **MLC policy committees** — The MLC will have six interstate legislative committees in 2017 and 2018: on agriculture and natural resources, criminal justice and public safety, economic development, education, health and human services, and Midwest-Canada relations. These committees provide a forum for legislators to learn from and work with one another, explore issues of regional importance, and provide a voice for the region (through the passage of resolutions sent to members of the U.S. Congress or the president, for example).

MLC Annual Meeting will include diverse mix of featured speakers

As if peer interaction and informative sessions aren’t reason enough to attend the 2017 Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting, four featured speakers have been lined up to discuss topics ranging from the lasting impact of this country’s “great migration” of the 20th century to the future of the global food supply.

The event’s speakers will include:

- Isabel Wilkerson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author of “The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration”;
- Harry Enten, senior political writer and analyst for the website FiveThirtyEight;
- Denise Kiernan, journalist and author of “The Girls of Atomic City: The Untold Story of the Women Who Helped Win World War II”, and
- Kenneth Quinn, former U.S. ambassador to Cambodia and current president of the Iowa-based World Food Prize Foundation, which awards the World Food Prize annually to recognize individuals working to improve the quantity, quality and availability of food.

The 2017 MLC Annual Meeting will be July 9-12 in Des Moines, Iowa. It also will feature expert-led sessions on a range of policy issues of interest to the Midwest and its state legislators.

Meeting registration will open in early 2017.

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.
In 2017, more than 350 legislators will be new to their positions in the Midwest’s 21 state legislative chambers, and The Council of State Governments will work over the next few months to introduce all of them to the nonpartisan organization’s various products and services.

That outreach began this fall. CSG Midwest director Mike McCabe traveled to Indiana and Wisconsin to participate in the new-member orientations run by those states’ nonpartisan legislative service agencies. He also took part in a training session for newly elected Michigan lawmakers.

Every legislator in this region’s 11 states is a member of the Midwestern Legislative Conference and has access to CSG’s and CSG Midwest’s programs and resources. CSG is a national organization serving all three branches of state government. CSG Midwest provides staff support to the Midwestern Legislative Conference.

For every state in this region, CSG Midwest has a staff member dedicated as the point person for providing assistance (research or otherwise) to legislators and legislative staff. These staff members also organize the office’s annual visits to state capitols.

Both new and veteran state legislators are encouraged to set up a time to meet with CSG staff during these annual visits.

Leaders of Midwestern Legislative Conference travel to Canada to strengthen cross-border relationships

In two separate visits to Canada this fall, officers of the Midwestern Legislative Conference met with legislative leaders in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, including the new speakers of those provinces’ legislative assemblies. Wisconsin Rep. Joan Ballweg is pictured above with Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan Speaker Corey Tochor. Rep. Ballweg, the 2016 MLC chair, also traveled to Manitoba in October with Iowa Sen. Janet Petersen, MLC chair in 2017. The Honorable Myrna Driedger is the speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

Four Canadian provinces are affiliate members of the MLC: Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan. The MLC also has a Midwest-Canada Relations Committee that gives state and provincial legislators the opportunity to work together on various cross-border issues. (photo: Office of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan)
Illinois approves a major overhaul of its energy policies

Illinois will give Exelon Corp. $235 million in ratepayer subsidies to keep the company’s Clinton and Quad Cities nuclear power plants open, as part of a bipartisan deal that drew support from the state’s renewable-energy community.

The legislation also updates Illinois’ renewable-energy portfolio standard, expands efficiency programs and preserves net metering for rooftop solar projects. The final version scrapped Exelon’s proposed mandatory demand charges on all residential customers.

Gov. Bruce Rauner signed SB 214 into law on Dec. 7. Exelon Corp. had said the two nuclear plants would soon close if the legislation failed to pass.

Michigan’s Agency for Energy was watching the proceedings in Illinois with some interest, because the Clinton and Quad Cities plants contribute to the Midcontinent Independent System Operator’s reserve margin, upon which the state relies for summertime electricity imports.

Midwest Energy News reported on Dec. 5 that Michigan’s three nuclear power plants — Palisades, Cook and Fermi 2 — are on solid financial footing at least through 2021. Palisades’ power-purchase agreement with Consumers Energy expires in 2022, however.

Results coming in from states’ drug testing of welfare recipients

A yearlong pilot program in Michigan to screen welfare recipients for drug use found no substance abusers, legislators were told.

The program tested 14 of 443 participants (either applicants or recipients) of the state’s Family Independence Program in three counties between October 2015 and September 2016, according to The Detroit News. Only one applicant was found to have a “reasonable suspicion of use of a controlled substance and required a substance use test,” said a report from the Department of Health and Human Services. (That person dropped off the welfare roll before being drug-tested, for an unrelated reason, the report said.)

Kansas and Wisconsin are the only other Midwestern states that currently require welfare recipients to take drug tests. According to the Kansas Department of Children and Families, 5,541 adults were subject to that requirement from January through September 2015. Of the 260 people actually tested, 66 tested positive.

Since November 2015, Wisconsin tested 1,305 applicants in the Wisconsin Works and Transform Milwaukee Jobs programs, with 30 referred for drug screening. Of those, eight failed and were referred for treatment; two failed and refused treatment, according to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families.

Minnesota tops in voter turnout; Indiana sees jump in early voting

Indiana and Minnesota set various state records for voter registration and turnout in the Nov. 8 general election, according to their secretaries of state.

In Minnesota, 74.7 percent of the state’s nearly 4 million eligible voters cast a ballot — the top turnout rate in the country, according to the United States Election Project. A record 22.8 percent, or 678,336 Minnesotans, voted early by casting absentee ballots. (This was the first year of a presidential election in which no-fault absentee voting was allowed in Minnesota.)

The state also set an Election Day registration record: Almost 12 percent of all voters, 353,179, took advantage of the state’s same-day registration law.

Indiana’s overall voter turnout rate was 58 percent, the same as 2012, but a record number of Hoosiers voted early: 33 percent of total votes cast in the general election. That compares to 24 percent in 2008 and 22 percent in 2012.

According to the United States Election Project, voter turnout in the region’s nine other states was 69.4 percent in Wisconsin, 66.8 percent in Iowa, 65.6 percent in Michigan, 64.5 percent in Ohio, 67.1 percent in Nebraska, 60.1 percent in both Illinois and North Dakota, and 58.7 percent in South Dakota.

Iowa’s new Teacher Leadership program showing good results

Iowa’s Teacher Leadership and Compensation System is having a positive impact on classroom instruction and educators’ professional climate, but it’s still too soon to discern the program’s effects on student achievement, a new interim report says.

The result of legislation (HF 215) passed and signed into law in 2013, the system provides extra pay to teachers who accept leadership roles such as peer mentoring and curriculum development. The law also raised starting salaries for new teachers.

Each school district establishes a plan for implementing the system — for example, the process for putting teachers into leadership roles and providing help to new teachers. The state’s goal is to attract new teachers, retain effective ones, promote collaboration, and reward professional growth and collaboration.

The new system has been implemented over the last three school years. Teachers in the early-implementation schools reported more collaboration among colleagues and greater availability, frequency and quality of leadership roles.

The interim report was commissioned by the Iowa Department of Education and done by the American Institutes of Research.