

## Alabama Update - June 2004

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Education Week reports that the per-teacher allocation of \$181 for classroom technology in the State's public schools has been eliminated. The funds are still available to schools or teachers but it need not be spent on technology. The Governor has proposed reinstating the earmark next year. Despite the constraints on technology, Alabama has underway a number of technology initiatives:

- the Alabama Virtual Library, a Statewide media database funded at \$1.5 million;
- teacher technology training with \$1.35 million in State funding;
- the Alabama Learning Exchange, an Internet portal that provides teachers with lesson plans aligned to State standards;
- the Alabama Mathematics, Science, and Technology Initiative serving 14 Alabama school districts, funded at \$237,000; and
- the Alabama Online High School, serving 500 students from 61 high schools.

The Alabama State Department of Education has purchased administrative software for all public schools in the State from Software Technology, Inc. (STI). Headquartered in Mobile, STI had already installed its software in 95 percent of the schools in Alabama. A Windows version of STI software will be implemented for Statewide special education administration and an Internet version is currently under development. Alabama is the second state to adopt STI record-keeping software. Kentucky did so in 2000.

## Alaska Update - June 2004

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The Alaska Distance Learning Partnership is a consortium serving 11,000 students in seven rural school districts. Teaming with local businesses, the Partnership has established a videoconferencing network offering online teacher training and student courses. As reported in Education Week, Alaska Online, another consortium consisting of nine districts, is developing online courses for high school students in its constituent districts. Alaska Online is developing for use in the 2004-05 school year, 12 full-year high school courses.

This is the first year high school seniors must pass all parts of the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam in order to receive a diploma. The Anchorage Daily News reports that more than 550 seniors failed at least one part of the exit exam. Some of these failing students may retake the test and some others -- particularly special education students -- may have received waivers.

The Anchorage Daily News reports, based upon the results of the State exit exam, that the gap exists between white and minority students. Starting in the Spring of tenth grade, students have five chances to pass the exam's three sections. A total of 428 high school seniors retook the reading exam this February (their last try); 343 were minorities, 232 of which were Native Alaskans. In writing, 178 seniors failed of which 124 were minority (77 were Native). And, 554 seniors failed their last try at the math exam; 389 were minority (230 Native). About 24 percent of the State's public school students are Native Alaskans.

## Arizona Update - June 2004

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Tom Horne, Arizona's Superintendent of Schools, has proposed that the three State universities use the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) to determine which Arizona high school graduates are entitled to free in-State tuition. Doubters are skeptical that the fairly new AIMS will be as good a predictor of college success as the traditional SAT or ACT exams.

Arizona continues to run in the forefront of the charter school movement. Currently, nearly ten percent of the States' students are taught in 491 charter schools. School Reform News reports on a study by the Goldwater Institute which shows that student performance varies by grade level. In the elementary grades, charter school students outperform traditional public school students; at the middle school level, achievement growth is about the same; and in high school, traditional high schools outperform charter schools. Most charter schools are given high marks by the parents of participating students and even the Arizona Education Association concedes that charter schools have done well.

School Reform News reports that, in 2003-04, Arizona's School Tuition Tax Credit has given more than 19,000 students the opportunity to attend the school of their choice, for surpassing the initial estimates, made last December. With a growth rate nearly twice that of the prior year, the program could prove to save the State more money than expected.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, public schools are the largest provider of afterschool programs in Arizona. Only about 12 percent of the State's K-12 students participate in afterschool programs, spending an average of nine hours per week.

As reported in Education Week, Arizona's \$9.5 billion budget for FY 2005 contains a 14.7 percent increase -- up to \$3.9 billion -- over last year for K-12 education. Among the initiatives included in the budget is \$25.5 million to phase in full-day kindergarten Statewide by 2010. The initial phase of this kindergarten program will take place in 150 of the poorest schools this Fall. The budget includes another \$24 million for early childcare, a priority of the Governor.

## California Update - June 2004

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Dropout rates reported for Los Angeles Unified School District increased by 50 percent in 2002-03. According to a recent State report, more than 16,000 district students dropped out last school year compared with fewer than 11,000 the prior year. District officials argue that the difference is largely the result of a new counting formula that was adopted to comply with NCLB. The district is implementing a \$105 million computer system, expected to be in place next year, which will provide more accurate dropout data. Even using a four-year average as a measure of dropout rates, Los Angeles' rate of 33.5 percent is nearly three times the State average of less than 13 percent.

The San Jose Mercury News reports that the California legislature is considering a bill that would require the State Department of Education to negotiate "reasonable prices" for new textbooks. Between 1990 and 2002, the average price of language arts/reading textbooks for grades K-8 more than tripled and the price of math textbooks increased by more than 150 percent. The bill also calls for an eight-year textbook adoption cycle (rather than the current six years) and would eliminate price adjustments for inflation. Textbook publishers are lobbying against the bill, arguing that textbooks would become obsolete and publishers would leave the California market. In particular, the industry opposed the requirement that publishers offer discounts on lost/stolen textbooks and on "classroom sets" which allow schools to provide textbooks to individual students.

In early May, the California Assembly approved legislation that would eliminate the law restricting to four hours the time kindergarten students can be kept in class. A number of districts and schools are exempt from the existing law. If enacted into law, the measure would give all local schools the flexibility to implement full-day kindergarten programs.

According to Education Week, Governor Schwarzenegger's proposed FY 2005 budget would eliminate nearly all education technology programs. Among the programs to be cut are a \$500,000 online Advanced Placement science curriculum and the Digital High School Program which had provided schools with \$300 per student in start-up funds and \$45 per student for

program operations. Projects to be continued are a pilot program to help 40 high schools to create online courses and technology assistance programs -- totaling \$14 million -- managed by the State's eleven regional education centers. California is currently allocating \$65 million in NCLB FY 2004 technology funds to districts through formula and competitive grants.

During the recent AERA meeting, as reported in Title I Report, California SEA officials indicated that the State plans to continue to use its growth-based accountability targets for state accountability purposes from which a composite index score is developed. Because this index score currently hasn't been approved as a measure for meeting AYP, they will use its index score as an "other indicator" required by NCLB. About 45 percent of schools made AYP in 2003-04, but two-thirds are expected to fail to meet AYP in 2004-05. Of the 1,200 schools currently in improvement, almost 600 were identified this year.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, public schools are the largest provider of afterschool programs in California, followed by YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs, cities/towns, and private schools. About 12 percent of the K-12 students in the State participate in afterschool programs, spending an average of nine hours per week in such programs.

During the NECC conference, California SEA officials indicated that the California Learning Resources Network (CLRN) is now reviewing software aimed at high school populations for adoption next year. The funding source for purchases will be Title II D/E2T2 funds. Observers believe that more than a billion dollars of unclaimed Microsoft settlement not claimed by the general public could be available. The State has prepared an RFP to which districts with approved technology plans can respond. It is not clear how much of the \$1 billion plus settlement amount will eventually be distributed to high poverty districts. While many of the California technology initiatives have received significant budget cuts over the last two years, the high-speed network project will receive an increase from \$7 million to \$21 million for this coming year.

The U.S. Department of Education has asked California to investigate whether or not the Fresno school district, when recommending supplemental education providers under the No Child Left

Behind Act, is promoting its own tutoring programs rather than more expensive, private tutoring program. Fresno has more than 17,000 students in 24 schools who are eligible for supplemental services for having failed to meet AYP for two consecutive years.

Education Daily reports that the California State Assembly has voted almost unanimously to urge the U.S. Congress to fully fund the mandates contained in the No Child Left behind Act. The State resolution also wants the U.S. Department of Education to recognize State teacher certification criteria as meeting the “highly qualified” standard of NCLB. It also wants the Congress to allow states to set their own standards for school progress.

The number of California school districts facing financial insolvency has been growing markedly in recent years. Currently, the State has identified 45 districts in financial trouble, up from only 17 in 1996. As reported in the Los Angeles Times, nine of the 45 districts are projected to be unable to meet their financial obligations for this school year or the next one. The State is planning to overhaul the way it oversees the finances of troubled districts, hoping to avoid costly bailouts in future years.

## Colorado Update - June 2004

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Education Daily reports that legislative attempts to revive Colorado's voucher program have failed. Despite support from the Governor and approval from the House Education Committee, the legislation died on the House floor when one Republican legislator did not side with the majority. The bill would have revised the plan to provide vouchers (called scholarships) that would allow students from failing public schools to attend private schools.

In late June, the Colorado Supreme Court ruled that Colorado's school voucher program is unconstitutional. According to The Denver Post, the ruling says the program wrongly takes control of education away from local boards of education and allows tax money to be used to pay private school tuition. The State legislature will now try to redesign the program so as to overcome the court's objections.

According to the Rocky Mountain News, reading scores for Colorado's third-grade students did not improve over the past year leaving more than a quarter of them reading below grade level. The scores released by the State show the gap between white and Hispanic students has not been significantly narrowed.

Begun in January 2003, the Colorado Online Learning program is a three-year effort that offers online courses for high school students. Available to all of Colorado's public high schools, the Online Learning program is being expanded to provide online college courses, theatrical courses, and videoconferencing discussion groups. During the 2004-05 school year, according to Education Week, the Online Learning program will be pilot testing online mathematics courses for middle school students. The State legislature, has proposed that the Colorado Online Learning program assume administrative oversight of all 20 virtual high schools in Colorado as well as multidistrict online learning programs.

The Christian Science Monitor reports that the Colorado legislature has approved a college voucher plan that would be worth \$2,400 at public colleges in the State and \$1,200 at the three private colleges in the State. The first-in-the-nation plan has been praised for providing

incentives for Colorado high school graduates to attend in-State colleges. But, it has also been criticized for taking funds away from public universities.

A growing number of rural Colorado schools are shifting their schedules to a four-day week. According to USA Today, the four-day week began as an economy measure for small school districts more than 20 years ago. Since then, more than a quarter of the districts in the State - mostly rural ones - have adopted the schedule which extends the school day but gives students Friday off.



## **Connecticut Update - June 2004**

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As reported in Education Week, Connecticut is using \$3.5 million in Federal E-rate reimbursements to expand the Connecticut Education Network to every community in the State by the end of 2005. Currently about half complete, the Network links public schools, colleges, and libraries to the Internet through a fiber-optic infrastructure. In addition, a program called Connecticut Career Choices is budgeted for \$800,000 in FY 2005, a 20 percent reduction from the prior year. This program funds pilot programs in ten schools designed to prepare students for employment in the information technology field. Overall, technology programs in Connecticut have been consolidated under the aegis of the SEA's curriculum division.

## Delaware Update - June 2004

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Delaware has received approval from the U.S. Department of Education for its revised accountability plan under NCLB. As reported in Education Daily, the Delaware Student Testing Program exams are given in grades 2-10 in reading, writing, and mathematics, and in grades 4, 6, 8, and 11 in science and social studies. Last year, Delaware's plan was one of the first approved; it did not include some of flexibility some of the later states were given. The revised plan eliminates science and social studies scores for middle school students and replaces them with a "progress indicator" that gives schools credit for improving the reading and math scores of students who don't meet standards. The revised plan also calls for the use of statistical "confidence intervals" to improve the reliability of scores for small student subgroups. The States' tiered diploma structure has created controversy. Nearly 60 percent of Delaware's students -- and even larger percentages of poor and minority students -- would be getting the "basic" diploma this Spring.

Delaware has established a 50-question self-assessment for teachers called Levels of Technology Implementation (LoTi). Information from LoTi is used by the State to develop appropriate professional development programs for teachers. According to Education Week, approximately one-third of the public schools in Delaware have used the assessment in the last year; all schools are expected to be using LoTi within the next two years.

## **District of Columbia Update - June 2004**

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The District of Columbia is continuing a pilot program for adaptive online testing in 13 elementary schools. As reported in Education Week, the District is working with Apple Computer to develop the system and plans to have all of its schools eventually using adaptive online testing. The District also provides online professional development for elementary teachers and plans to provide such access for teachers in grades 7-12. The District has a contract with Teachscape to provide online teaching courses for 190 teachers in grades K-12 for the 2004-05 school year.

## Florida Update - June 2004

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The Miami Herald reports that standardized test scores for Florida's third-grade students improved markedly this year. Miami-Dade was the lowest scoring urban area with 29 percent of its third-graders scoring at the lowest level on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) -- down from 31 percent the prior year. More than 9,000 Miami-Dade third grade students could be required to repeat the grade.

Also reported by The Miami Herald, nearly 15,000 Florida high school seniors failed the FCAT's reading and mathematics sections and will not graduate with their class. These students can repeat the exam indefinitely and the State will offer them remedial assistance and other guidance.

Although a large number of Florida school districts have requested that the State submit a revised accountability plan which would increase the number of students in a subgroup size, some officials, including the Governor, appear to be adamant in not wanting to change that aspect of AYP. Even though the FCAT scores have not been finalized, most districts are counting on a large number of their schools being identified for improvement. As a result, as many as 80 percent of Title I schools are likely to be identified for improvement which will result in 10-15 percent of districts' Title I allocations being earmarked for staff development this summer or next year. Most of the districts plan to earmark the total 20 percent for transportation and/or supplemental services. However, in some districts the transportation offices have overridden the Title I office and have requested as much as 10-15 percent of Title I funds for transportation, assuming that the parents want to have their children transferred. In September-October, districts will get a feel for how many parents are going to opt for transportation and how much supplemental education services will be provided in lieu of transportation. If the demand is less than anticipated, some of the 20 percent earmark will be released for other purposes. In order to reduce the number of Title I schools which would likely fall under sanctions next year for failing to meet AYP for two consecutive years, some counties have dropped these schools from Title I services and have continued to provide Title I services in

schools that have a lesser overall need. This is one way to reduce the number of schools identified for improvement, which, of course, defeats the purpose of NCLB.

As reported in Education Week, the Florida Virtual School (FLVS) is funded differently than other public schools in the State; it receives per-pupil State aid only for students who pass its courses. The school's completion rate is more than 90 percent. Founded in 1997, the FLVS currently serves about 14,000 students, three times the enrollment just two years ago. The FLVS also operates a franchise program under which individual school districts can establish their own online franchise. The initial franchise fee of \$20,000 (\$15,000 in subsequent years) covers content, teacher training, and setting up computer systems.

In early June, Florida announced that 42 school districts will be receiving grants to hire reading coaches and train them in scientifically-based reading research. It is expected that the grants will benefit 125,000 students in 218 elementary schools and 31 high schools.

As reported in School Reform News, the Florida legislature is considering a bill that would give vouchers to children of military families. Under the measure, any child of a current or former member of the armed services would receive a \$3,600 voucher. A revised version would limit the benefits to children of active military members.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, public schools are the largest provider of afterschool programs in Florida, followed by YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs, private schools, and religious organizations. Seventeen percent of the K-12 students in the State participate in afterschool programs, averaging eleven hours per week.

The Miami Herald reports that nearly 90 percent of the schools in Miami-Dade County, as well as more than 80 percent of the schools in nearby Broward County, failed to make adequate yearly progress during the 2002-03 school year. If these schools fail again this year -- the results are due out in late June -- they will be required to offer their students transfers to other public schools. As many as 160,000 Dade County students from 180 schools and 60,000 Broward County students from 85 schools could be affected.

As reported in the St. Petersburg Times, since the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) became a requirement in 2003, the number of students taking the GED has jumped from 12,000 to 21,000, a 78 percent increase. It is expected that the trend will continue as many of the 27,000 high school seniors who failed the FCAT will take the GED.

As reported in Education Daily, the Florida Department of Education is investigating 159 schools across the State that have transferred more than five percent of their students just prior to the administration of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The principal target of the investigation is Polk County in which were located ten of the twelve regular schools that had transfer rates of ten percent or more. Determination of whether the schools were trying to circumvent the State's school grading process will be presented at the August meeting of the State Board of Education.

According to School Reform News, an audit of the Miami-Dade County school district has uncovered more than \$100 million in losses due to corruption and mismanagement. The April 28 report recommends the appointment of a special prosecutor and the assignment of a grand jury to investigate problems in the district's Facilities Construction Department.

## Georgia Update - June 2004

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As reported in Education Week, there have been a number of cuts in technology programs in recent years, most recommended by the Governor. Among the programs affected are Georgia's 13 technology training centers which will be cut by \$800,000 in FY 2005 from \$3.4 million the prior year. Although the State is planning to extend its online professional development activities for teachers, the lack of available State funding means districts may have to pick more of the cost. On the other hand, the e-learning initiative is continuing with 39 core academic and Advanced Placement courses offered this Spring. During the next year, the State's technology division will be working to align the Georgia Learning Connections website -- providing teacher resources -- with the State's new curriculum.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, public schools are the largest providers of afterschool programs in Georgia. Other important providers are religious organizations, private schools, YMCAs, and Boys & Girls Clubs. Only about 16 percent of the State's K-12 students participate in afterschool programs, spending an average of 10 hours per week.

An investigation by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution has found that Atlanta Public Schools has misspent \$73 million in Federal E-rate funding. The investigation charges that the district has spent E-rate funds extravagantly on unjustified school technology infrastructure. Moreover, the procurements, according to the report, did not require best price and were not well-supervised by district officials or the school board. In 2002, the district requested an additional \$81 million in E-rate funding but was refused. Without more Federal funds, the district is paying the \$14 million annual cost of operating and maintaining the system.

Education Technology News reports that the University of Georgia is using a three-year, \$1.1 million Federal Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to Use Technology (PT3) grant to establish a program called E-TEACH -- Evidenced-based Technology Enhanced Alternative Curriculum in Higher Education. E-TEACH is designed to improve the instruction provided by University faculty so that prospective teachers will be better able to integrate technology into their classroom instruction. Among the courses that will be influenced by E-TEACH are educational

psychology, educational foundations, instructional technology, special education, chemistry, psychology, mathematics, biology, and English.



## Idaho Update - June 2004

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Nearly all of the 650 schools in Idaho administered online standardized tests at the beginning of the current school year. According to Education Week, high school students must score at the “proficient” level on the language arts, reading, and mathematics exams in order to graduate.

The Idaho Student Information Management System is expected to be operational by the beginning of the 2006-07 school year. Through the system, software for the State’s 114 school districts will be standardized and parents will be able to track their children’s performance on the Internet. Start-up funding for the system is coming from a \$35 million Albertson Foundation contribution covering the next five-seven years, after which the State will assume the estimated \$7 million annual cost.

Education Week also reports that the Idaho Digital Learning Academy, a State-supported virtual school enrolled 1,500 students last year.

Beginning in 2002-03 school year all students in grades two through ten took reading and math state assessments on computers. Tests are administered in both the Fall and the Spring.

## Illinois Update - June 2004

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Funding for educational technology in Illinois school districts has decreased over the past year from approximately \$49 million to about \$11.5 million. The State's 15 learning technology centers, providing rural school districts with teacher training and technical support, are feeling the significant effects of the cutbacks.

As reported in Education Week, next year Illinois will be pilot testing a series of online practice tests in grades 3-8. The use of computer-based exams is intended to conform with the No Child Left Behind Act and the State's Student Information System being built over the next four years at a cost of nearly \$6 million.

The State is also studying the feasibility of building a central, computer-based repository of such data as attendance records, dropout rates, test scores, and financial data.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, YMCAs are the largest provider of afterschool programs in Illinois. Public schools, private schools, religious organizations, and Boys & Girls Clubs are other important providers. Only about 10 percent of the State's K-12 students participate in afterschool programs, spending an average of eight hours per week in afterschool programs.

According to Education Technology News, Illinois has a new system for administering its grants to local school districts. Called the E-Grant Management System (eGMS), the system is expected to simplify the process by which the State allocates Federal No Child Left Behind funds. Developed at a cost of \$2.5 million, eGMS will eventually be used to dispense funds -- both formula and competitive grants - to all of the State's 888 school districts, as well as other grant recipients.

As reported by the Chicago Sun-Times, a study of the progress of Chicago students who have changed schools under the "choice" provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act shows that transferred students averaging significantly better gains in reading and math than students who did not transfer. Moreover, the influx of low-performing students into better-performing schools

had no negative effect on the students in those schools, contrary to some expectations. In 2002, the first year of the choice option, 120,000 Chicago students attended low-performing schools, of which 26,000 were eligible to transfer because of their low scores; however, only 2,500 transfer slots were available. Some students who won transfer seats never used them and only about 750 students who transferred stayed in their new schools the following year.

As reported in The Chicago Tribune, Chicago Public Schools have developed a restructuring plan that will result in more than 100 new schools in the next six years. The impetus for the restructuring comes from the number of large schools that are not performing well. Many of these will be broken up into smaller specialized units offering alternatives to families. Under the plan, about a third of the 100 new schools will be independent charter schools and a third will be operated by the school district. The remaining third will be contract schools operated by outside entities -- possible private firms.

## Indiana Update - June 2004

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The Indianapolis Star reports that only about 60 percent of the State's students passed the first year of the fifth-grade Science ISTEP-Plus exam. The results for urban districts were particularly disappointing to State officials. Only 32 percent of the fifth-graders in Indianapolis Public Schools passed the test. District officials attribute the poor showing to the urban districts' high rates of poverty and transience.

As reported in Education Week, Indiana schools that require end-of-course assessments in Algebra I and 11<sup>th</sup> grade English have been allowed to use online exams this Spring. Last year, 674 schools participated in a pilot project through which 70,000 students took computer-based tests in the two subjects. This year, 783 schools and 109,000 students participated in the online testing. The State had planned to require online exams for all 12 of its Core courses by 2008. But a lack of implementation funding -- only \$7.1 million in total for school technology in the 2003-04 school year -- has eliminated that goal.

As reported in The New York Times, Indiana has become the first state to make a computer-scored writing exam part of its Statewide assessment. The State uses customized online essay-grading software designed by the Educational Testing Service. Currently, 18 states require a writing test for high school graduation and, beginning next year, the SAT and ACT college admission exams will include writing components.

## Iowa Update - June 2004

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Over the past three years, Iowa's funding for technology for K-12 education has virtually disappeared. In FY 2001, the State budgeted \$30 million for school technology, an amount that was reduced to \$10 million in FY 2002 and to zero the following year with no increases expected. Iowa schools are now primarily reliant on Federal funds to support its technology programs. As reported in Education Week, the State is in the second year of a \$10.5 million program to provide Federal grants to districts for professional development in reading and math instruction. Another Federal grant is being used to monitor the State's professional development program. In the Fall of 2004, Iowa's new school data collection system goes into operation. Called Project Easier, the system -- supported by \$500,000 per year in Federal and State funds -- will track students in compliance with the No Child Left Behind Act.

## **Kansas Update - June 2004**

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The Kansas City Star reports that Republican legislators have introduced an amendment to the State constitution that would abolish Kansas' elected school board and replace it with a Secretary of Education appointed by the Governor. It is believed that the measure is supported by the current Governor, Democrat Kathleen Sebelius. The change will be effective on July 1, 2005, if it is approved by a two-thirds vote of both legislative houses and passes a public referendum in November 2004.

According to The Kansas City Star, on May 11, a district court judge ruled that the State's school finance law is unconstitutional and ordered all public schools to close as of June 30. The ruling freezes spending on education not only by the State, but also by local school districts. It is expected that the Kansas Supreme Court will overturn the ruling.

Since the 2002-03 school year, Kansas has greatly expanded its online testing program. As reported in Education Week, the pilot program covered only the seventh grade mathematics exam. Currently, reading and math students in grades 4, 5, 7, 10 and 11 can take their tests online. The State's Technology Rich Classrooms and Student Technology Leadership programs, both supported with Federal funds, focus on putting new technology in the classroom, improving the use of school technology, and documenting the effect of technology on student performance.

The Kansas Department of Education is pilot-testing an online assessment program for students and plans to implement the system fully in 2005-2006.

## Kentucky Update - June 2004

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According to Education Week, Kentucky is planning to expand its school technology programs, despite facing one of the worst budget crunches in the nation. The plans to increase the number of desktop, laptop, and handheld computers, eventually reaching a one-to-one ratio of students to computers, as well as to increase the number of classrooms with Internet access. Since adopting its original school technology plan in 1992, Kentucky has spent \$620 million on school technology, including \$18 million in the current fiscal year.

According to the Bowling Green Daily News, Kentucky has shown better-than-expected State revenues for the first half of this year and has decided to allocate \$10 million above the original education budget to preschool programs and educational technology. Although the exact amounts to be distributed have yet to be determined, most of the money will go to preschools, allocated on a per-pupil basis. Districts, however, will have some flexibility to apply the funds to other programs. The average district allocation is expected to be about \$57,000.

## **Louisiana Update - June 2004**

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As reported in Education Reform News, at least three voucher bills are expected to be introduced in the Louisiana legislature during the 2004 session. All three bills are receiving considerable support from the Archdiocese of New Orleans. The first piece of legislation, SB 220, brings the State's current voucher program for preschoolers under State law. This program, which serves 1,500 of the State's four-year-olds, receives \$8.5 million from this year's proposed budget. The second of the three bills, SB 50, extends benefits of the SB 200 voucher program, allowing preschoolers to receive vouchers through the third grade. The third bill, HB 36, establishes a four-year pilot voucher program which would allow students from 14 failing New Orleans public schools to attend private schools.

As reported in The Times-Picayune, Governor Kathleen Blanco has signed into law a bill that transfers significant administrative powers in Orleans Parish from the School Board to the Superintendent. Deleted from the bill were controversial amendments that would have given the Board more monitoring authority. As passed, the bill allows the Board to veto a contract proposed by the Superintendent only if five of the seven Board members agree.



## **Maine Update - June 2004**

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A number of school superintendents in Maine have expressed concern about the Governor's plan to expand the State's middle school laptop program into the high school grades. Because the legislature has authorized no funding for the program expansion, the Governor's office is negotiating a plan by which local school districts can rent laptops from Apple at low rates. However, critics argue that, if at least \$8 million from the education renovation fund is not made available to establish the wireless infrastructure in the high schools, the program cannot succeed.

Maine is hoping to expand its middle school laptop computer program to the high school level. In the last four years, the program has given Apple laptops to 30,000 seventh and eighth grade students in all of the State's 241 public middle schools. Maine's Education Commissioner, Susan Gendron, is meeting with local district superintendents to determine their interest in an expansion of the laptop program into the high schools. The high school program would carry the same pricing as the middle school program -- \$300 per computer per year, including training and support.

## Maryland Update - June 2004

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According to Education Week, Maryland is seeking a technology-based high school assessment for students who cannot be effectively measured using traditional paper-and-pencil tests. Currently, the State is considering making it a graduation requirement that all students pass tenth grade assessments in English, government, biology, and algebra/data analysis. However, a number of students with disabilities are unable to take the tests even with accommodations. A task force appointed by the State Superintendents will be studying the feasibility of such an assessment.

As reported in the Baltimore Sun, the Baltimore City school district is planning to reduce its \$58 million budget deficit by cutting 250 teaching positions and consequently increasing the districts' average class size by two students. The district will also be severely decreasing the summer school program making it harder for struggling students to make up classes or prepare for exams. The district will also, next year, be paying back approximately \$34 million of the \$42 million it borrowed from the City of Baltimore last year in order to maintain operations. On the other hand, Baltimore City Schools expects to have approximately \$50 million in new Thornton plan funds to be used to offset some of the cuts, as well as for pre-K and kindergarten aides (\$6 million), new text books (\$3 million), and additional staff and materials in certain low-performing schools (\$5.2 million).

Maryland has been awarded a three-year Federal grant to develop high-quality charter schools. The competitive grant -- including \$3.8 million for the first year -- is part of the Charter School Program component of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The Baltimore Sun reports that, in mid-June, the Maryland Board of Education officially made passing four tests a requirement to receive a high school diploma in the State. Under the plan, which becomes effective for the Class of 2009, students must receive a passing consolidated score on the English, algebra, biology, and government tests in order to graduate. A student could fail one of the tests and still graduate. The four exams are end-of-course tests that students

take as early as the ninth grade. Students are given three chances to pass each of the tests. Maryland is the 25<sup>th</sup> state to make tests a graduation requirement.

Despite tough budget times, the Maryland legislature has passed a \$3.6 billion budget for K-12 education, a nine percent increase over the prior year. According to Education Week, nearly all of the funding increase will go to districts in the form of higher State aid.

As reported in The Baltimore Sun, Baltimore City has, for the first time, allowed high school seniors who had failed a class to re-take their final exams and, if they pass, to graduate with their class. Many district and school officials believe the practice is an improvement over rules that punish students for failures. Some teachers, however, see the new philosophy as a means of infiltrating graduation rates.

## Massachusetts Update - June 2004

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The Massachusetts legislature has approved a measure that could provide free prekindergarten programs for thousands of three- and four-year-olds in the State. The bill would establish two panels to determine how the preschool program should be staffed, operated, and administered. Intending to reduce the inequities between wealthy and poor school districts, the State-operated program would, by July 2005, create a new department consolidating activities relating to early education and care. The initial cost of the two panels will be about \$90,000. Estimates of the cost to implement such an initiative go as high as \$1.2 billion per year.

In late April, a Superior court recommended that Massachusetts should spend more on special education, preschool for poor children, and poorer schools. The estimated cost of providing preschool for three- and four-year-olds from low-income families is \$455 million. The State legislature are considering ways to increase funds for poorer districts without additional taxes or diverting funds from other State agencies. It is likely that money will be shifted from richer to poorer school districts.

The State Board of Education has proposed a plan that would allow the State to take over “underperforming” schools almost immediately rather than waiting two or more years as called for by the No Child Left Behind Act. Among the proposed options are replacing the superintendent and/or other district leaders and appointing a university or other organization as a “turnaround partner.” Organizations representing superintendents and school boards have expressed vocal opposition to the proposal.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, public schools are the largest provider of afterschool programs in Massachusetts, followed by YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs, religious organizations, and private schools. Only about 11 percent of K-12 students in the State participate in afterschool programs, each spending an average of nine hours per week in the program.

The State appropriations legislation being considered by the legislature must deal with significant budget cuts. As reported in Education Daily, the proposed appropriation reduces

funds for remediation to help students pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) graduation tests from \$50 million to less than \$15 million. Many legislators oppose the cut, arguing that the remediation has been proven effective and are seeking to have at least a portion of the funds reinstated. Proponents of the cut believe local school districts should bear a greater share of the financial burden for MCAS remediation.

As reported in Education Technology News, a Superior Court judge has ruled that students in low-income schools do not receive “sufficient funds” to get an appropriate education. The ruling came in a suit by 19 poor school districts who charged that their students were not receiving equal education as required by the State’s Education Reform Law. It is expected that the ruling may be overturned by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.

Education Daily reports that the Massachusetts legislature has agreed to increase FY 2005 spending for K-12 education by 2.5 percent, partially offsetting a 4.6 percent cut last year. For FY 2005, total K-12 spending will be \$3.18 billion, still below the total in FY 2003. The legislature has also agreed to remove pre-school programs from the Department of Education and move them to the new Department of Early Education and Care.

The United Way of Massachusetts, partnered with Houghton Mifflin and more than 20 life sciences firms, has founded the Math, Science, and Technology Afterschool Initiative. The first phase of this multi-pronged effort, scheduled to begin next Fall, will focus on middle school students in the Cambridge and Somerville school districts. The afterschool programs are expected to provide students with the opportunity to learn about science, technology, and mathematics and to interact with the life sciences industry in the Boston metropolitan area.

Ninety-six percent of the high school Class of 2004 Statewide passed the MCAs test required for graduation. Students in this year’s senior class have had as many as five opportunities to pass the exam beginning in the tenth grade. The performance has led State Education Commissioner David Driscoll to suggest that the passing grade on the exam should be raised from 220 (on a 200- to 280- point scale) to 230. Test results also showed that minority students were closing the gap with white students. Two years ago, only 39 percent of black students passed the MCAS;

this year 88 percent did so. Similarly, the Hispanic student pass rate improved from 35 percent two years ago to 85 percent this year.

Boston Public Schools is considering a major overhaul of the traditional four-year high school structure. The proposed plan would allow students to work toward graduation at their own pace. Currently, underclassmen who fail certain courses could be required to repeat an entire grade. Under the proposed plan, they would only be required to repeat the courses they fail. Advanced students could graduate in three years if they meet all graduation requirements and struggling students could take up to five years.

## Michigan Update - June 2004

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A proposed Michigan law deals with the issue of lost test data. According to Phi Delta Kappan, the bill affirms that no penalties may be assessed when answer sheets are lost and schools so affected are exempt from school accreditation requirements. Such schools are not, however, exempt from the requirement to make adequate yearly progress under NCLB.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, public schools are the largest provider of afterschool programs in Michigan, followed by YMCAs, religious organizations, private schools, and Boys & Girls Clubs. Only about eight percent of the K-12 students in the State participate in afterschool programs, averaging approximately seven hours per week.

According to the Detroit Free Press, research by a professor of pediatrics at Wayne State University shows that preschool students from poor families learn better and are better prepared for school if they have access to technology and age-appropriate software. Dr. Xiaoming Li's research is based upon study of 122 Head Start students who had varying levels of technology access.

## Minnesota Update - June 2004

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In mid-May, the Minnesota Senate voted to end the tenure of State Education Commissioner, Cheri Yecke. On a straight party-line vote, the rejection of the Republican Commissioner suggested that her strong support for the No Child Left Behind Act would not be accepted by the Democratic legislature. Commissioner Yecke had come under heavy attack from Democratic opponents of Republican Governor Tom Pawlenty. She created considerable controversy with her call for higher standards and more testing, alienating many teachers.

In late May, a district court ruled that State funds could continue to be provided to a virtual school located in southeastern Minnesota, but which draws students from across the State. In denying the suit by the State teachers union, the judge noted that, although actual instruction is supervised by parents not certified teachers, the online curriculum was assembled by licensed teachers. The Minnesota Virtual Academy, a public charter school established in 2003, currently enrolls 380 online students and expects to double its enrollment next year.

Minneapolis and other Minnesota public school districts are concerned that, over the past five years, they have been losing students to private, charter, alternative, and homeschool programs. As reported in School Reform News, Minneapolis has lost as many as 5,500 students and expects to lose even more. Currently, approximately 18 percent of the students in the State attend some kind of school other than regular public schools.



## **Missouri Update - June 2004**

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The improved budget structure in Missouri has resulted in the legislature approving an additional \$106 million for public schools and \$20 for higher education. State aid to public schools will increase next year to a total of \$2.18 billion. The additional funds for elementary and secondary education will go a long way toward offsetting the \$152 million cut in State aid last year.

## **Nevada Update - June 2004**

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According to the Afterschool Alliance, public schools are the larger provider of afterschool programs in Nevada. However, only about 13 percent of the State's K-12 students participate in afterschool programs, spending an average of ten hours a week in such programs.

As reported in Education Daily, as a result of petitions by education supporters, the ballot this November will contain two referenda on Constitutional amendments calling for higher State spending on Education. The "Education First" initiative would require legislators to fund education before other parts of the budget. The "National Average" effort is an attempt to increase Nevada's per-pupil spending to at least match the National average. Even if one or both of these initiatives are passed by the voters in November, they will not become effective until they pass a second consecutive election in November 2005.

Nevada has received a grant under the No Child Left Behind Act's Advanced Placement Incentives program to provide low-income students with greater access to advanced courses. Funded at \$585,000 over two years, the grant will allow the State to make subgrants to local school districts that have at least 40 percent of their enrollments from low-income families. The districts will use the funds to develop and align pre-Advanced Placement and Advanced Placement programs for middle and high school students, to provide appropriate professional development for teachers, and to support before-school, afterschool, and summer classes.

## **New Jersey Update - June 2004**

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The U.S. Department of Education has given New Jersey the authority to ease some of the rules concerning the performance of special education students. Among the important changes is the exemption from NCLB requirements of schools with fewer than 35 (as opposed to 20 prior) special education students. State officials estimate that this change will significantly reduce the number of failing schools this year. In another change, the requirement that 95 percent students (broken out by race, income, etc.) take State exams will apply only to schools with at least 40 (rather than the previous 20) students in a category.

As reported in the Philadelphia Inquirer, Governor James McGreevey has proposed a plan to establish State-sponsored after-school programs as early as next Fall. Called NJAfter3, Inc., the non-profit program is expected to provide educational and recreational afterschool activities for as many as 20,000 of New Jersey's public school children. The Governor indicated that the \$15 million he is asking the legislature to approve, would be supplemented by support from the business community.

The Afterschool Alliance reports that public schools are the largest provider of afterschool programs in New Jersey, following in order by YMCAs, private schools, religious organizations, and Boys & Girls Clubs. About 12 percent of the K-12 students in the State participate in afterschool programs for an average of 9 hours per week.

## **New York Update - June 2004**

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According to the Afterschool Alliance, public schools are the largest provider of afterschool programs in New York, followed by YMCAs, religious organizations, and Boys and Girls Clubs. About 15 percent of the K-12 students in the State participate in afterschool programs, each spending an average of nine hours per week.

New York City Mayor, Michael Bloomberg, has largely succeeded in eliminating social promotion in the third grade by requiring that students pass a standardized test before they can go on to the fourth grade. In order to ensure that children are taught in their early years, the Mayor has proposed full-day kindergartens for four-year-olds and half-day pre-K programs for three-year-olds as soon as funding is available. The New York Post also reports that the Mayor has proposed a new literacy campaign for early learners, including supplying books and libraries to the City's 345 public-housing projects.

On April 20, New York City schools administered the third-grade exam required for promotion to fourth grade. Students absent on that day were scheduled to take a make-up exam later in the week. The make-ups were halted, however, when opponents of high-stakes testing showed parts of the exam at a news conference aired by local television stations. Make-up exams will be rescheduled when an alternative form of the test can be given. According to The New York Times, school officials and the test publisher, Harcourt Assessment, are considering legal action against the advocacy group and the television stations.

The New York City Department of Education has come under criticism for awarding a five-year, \$12.5 million contract to a North Carolina non-profit organization without going through the normal competitive bidding process. As reported in The New York Times, the contractor, All Kinds of Minds, will provide teacher training in the "demystification" of learning disabilities. School officials say the contract did not require competitive bids because no other organization could offer comparable services. Operated by pediatrician Mel Levine, All Kinds of Minds, has set up a New York office for its teacher training contract and for private evaluation services (at \$3,000 per student).

As reported in The New York Times, summer school slots for remedial high school instruction have been drastically cut in New York City. Last year, 127,000 high school students attended summer school; only 90,000 will be able to attend this summer. Summer school resources are being shifted toward a new program for second and third grade students in danger of not advancing to the next grade. The high school summer program will give preference to: (a) older students; (b) students only one or two credits from advancing to the next grade level; and (c) students who have passed their Statewide Regents exams. Other students are being urged to use private, tuition-charging summer school programs.

According to The New York Times, New York City Schools will change their schedule for the third time in three years. Instead of lengthening Tuesday's schedule by 50 minutes (as was the case during the 2003-04 school year), each day will be extended by ten minutes. The long Tuesday schedule had been opposed by the teachers' union and by parents for whom it created afterschool and child care complications.

New York City has seen an enormous increase in the number of students who are enrolled in GED classes this year, according to The New York Post. The 37,000 students enrolled for the past school year represents a 40 percent increase over the prior year. The No Child Left Behind law does not recognize GED recipients as high school graduates. The State is concerned about the high transfer rate of students from high schools to GED programs. New York City had 10,446 such transfers last year compared with barely 6,000 for the rest of the State combined.

## North Carolina Update - June 2004

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In order to ease the State's teacher shortage, the North Carolina Board of Education issued a one-year moratorium on the requirement that out-of-State teacher recruits must pass the State's subject-area exams to obtain a teaching license. Because nearly a third of 10,000 new teachers hired in North Carolina each year come from other states, the subject-area exams could cause some teacher applicants to look to other states. Governor Mike Easley is opposed to the change arguing the moratorium will lower the quality of incoming teachers.

North Carolina is planning to make it easier for schools to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act by requesting a series of changes in the way scores are calculated. These changes include: (a) allowing schools to measure their progress using two methods and to use the method that is most advantageous; (b) counting as passing the scores of some students with disabilities who were counted as failing last year; and (c) using a two-year average to determine if a school meets the 95 percent test participation rate requirement. It is estimated that about 300 additional North Carolina schools could meet NCLB requirements as a result of the changes.

North Carolina has allocated \$25 million to help the State's poorer districts to recruit and retain teachers. As reported in Education Week, teachers taking positions in the State's lowest performing schools will receive bonuses of \$1,500 a year for three years up to \$6,500 after seven years.

## North Dakota Update - June 2004

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Governor Hoeven has proposed a \$75 million increase in K-12 spending over the next four years, most of which would be allocated to the State's poorest districts.

North Dakota has awarded a contract to CTB/McGraw-Hill to provide reading, language arts, math, and science assessments for the 2004-07 North Dakota State Assessment Program. Under the 3½ year contract CTB will develop and score an augmented norm-referenced test for grades 3-8 and reading/language arts and mathematics tests for grade 11 beginning in the 2004-05 school year. In 2006-07, a science assessment for grades 4, 8, and 11 will be added.

The Bismarck Tribune reports that the State is working with the Bureau of Indian Affairs on a plan that would let BIA schools use North Dakota state resources to measure student performance. Under the proposed plan, BIA schools in North Dakota would use the State's assessment and standards and the State would score BIA tests. BIA schools would then apply their own guidelines to identify schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress.

## Ohio Update - June 2004

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The higher standards and assessments required under the No Child Left Behind Act have caused much of Ohio's first grade curriculum to be pushed down to kindergarten. As a result more and more school districts -- including two more in the Cincinnati area -- are going to all-day kindergarten.

Phi Delta Kappan reports that a new law in Ohio has created an Educator Standards Board and establishes a State office to support it. The Board will establish professional development standards which will be used by all school districts. Ohio's new law also restricts district spending for supplemental education service and for transportation under school choice to a total of 20 percent of the districts' Title I funds. The Ohio law requires that districts with graduation rates below 75 percent must administer practice versions of the Ohio Graduation Tests to ninth grade students. Also, implementation of the eighth grade social studies achievement exam will be moved up one year to the 2006-07 school year.

According to Title I Report, Ohio SEA officials reported during the recent American Education Research Association meeting that its state accountability system will be based upon a growth or value-added model. However, because USED rules don't allow for growth models, the system being developed will allow the SEA to analyze certain other data for determining whether a district or school meets AYP.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, public schools are the largest provider of afterschool programs in Ohio, followed in order by YMCAs, religious organizations, and private schools. Only seven percent of the K-12 students in Ohio participate in afterschool programs, averaging six hours per week in such programs.

According to the Dayton Daily News, the Ohio Department of Education is making its standardized tests more rigorous to meet new State and Federal requirements. In order to graduate in 2007, this year's tenth graders must pass all five subjects in the new Ohio Graduation Test. The new test raises the required achievement level; last year, 75 percent of the sophomores



failed a sample version. As a result of the revisions, thousands of Ohio students may not get their high school diplomas.

According to Education Daily, Ohio Education Association has sued the State's charter school system claiming that the State is violating the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution. The suit claims that charter school students in Ohio receive an average of more than \$6,300 per pupil, as opposed to \$3,200 for traditional school students. The argument is countered by an analysis conducted by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, a sponsor of charter schools in Dayton.

As reported in eSchool News, in an effort to stem the flow of students to charter schools, the Columbus school district is in the process of developing an online high school that would provide the same services as the Internet-based charter schools which have drawn off more than 1,000 of the district's students. Currently, there are 16 online charter schools in Ohio enrolling about 10,000 charter school students are receiving more than \$50 million in State funds. The Columbus online high school will begin by serving 125 students in September and will incorporate four community centers to provide Internet access for students who have no access at home or who need in person tutorial assistance. Charter school students carry with them about \$5,000 in State aid, a significant loss of funding for many schools.

Ohio is developing a charter college to train teachers in high-demand content areas such as mathematics, science, and special education. As reported in the Cleveland Plain Dealer, using \$800,000 in Federal startup funds the State will eventually have two or three such charter teachers' colleges. The colleges will represent an expansion of the Ohio network of 179 charter elementary, middle, and high schools. The State is entertaining proposals to operate the charter colleges which were due on June 14. The schedule for opening the colleges has not yet been established.

The Cleveland Plain Dealer reports that there are a total of 41 cyberschools in Ohio. Through the 2003-04 school year, more than 12,000 Ohio students received taxpayer-supported education online. The number of cyberschool students is expected to increase significantly as a number of private firms and public school districts apply for certifications. Starting in September, the

Western Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School -- with 3,000 students -- will be establishing an online school in East Liverpool on the Eastern border of Ohio.

## **Oregon Update - June 2004**

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The Associated Press reports that Oregon has changed the way it measures school performance likely resulting in fewer schools being identified as “failing.” The change requires schools to be labeled as needing improvement only if they fail to show gains in the same areas for two years in a row. Last year, nearly 30 percent of Oregon schools were told they were in need of improvement.

## Pennsylvania Update - June 2004

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In mid-March, a plan to implement a voucher program for special needs students was introduced in the Pennsylvania legislature. According to [School Reform News](#), the bill would not require participating private schools to comply with the accountability provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The Philadelphia School District has established a computerized grading system -- pilot tested last year in the primary grades -- for all schools that allows teachers to input student grades during the final two weeks of the school year. In past years, teachers reported end-of-year grades in May and, as a result, student attendance and attention dropped off making the last month of little instructional value. Under the new system, teachers will enter grades between May 28 and June 11 -- the school year ends on June 15.

As reported in the [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#), starting in the 2005-06 school year, all 501 school districts in Pennsylvania will be required to participate in the State's "Value-added Assessment" program which has been pilot-tested for the past two years. More than 300 school districts in 21 states currently conduct value-added assessments.

According to the [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#), state officials are considering easing attendance and graduation requirements for schools for the 2003-04 school year, thus allowing more schools to meet the standards of the No Child Left Behind Act. Under the new requirements, elementary and middle schools are required to have 90 percent attendance rates (rather than 95 percent previously) and high schools must have 80 percent graduation rates (rather than 95 percent). The U.S. Department of Education has given preliminary approval for the changes.

The work of Edison Schools, Inc., operating 20 of Philadelphia's poorest-performing schools, has received considerable praise from district officials. Recent standardized test results show that Edison schools showed greater improvement than the schools operated by four of the five other outside school managers, although the improvement is lower than the district as a whole.

District officials indicate they are pleased with Edison's academic approach and Edison's willingness to address problems promptly.

## **South Carolina Update - June 2004**

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Last year, nearly 80 percent of the schools in South Carolina failed to make adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act. That included more than 400 Title I schools which, if they fail to meet AYP again next year, will be required to offer school choice options to their students. High schools performed particularly poorly; only nine of 188 schools met NCLB standards.

## **South Dakota Update - June 2004**

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As reported in Phi Delta Kappan, the South Dakota legislature is considering a bill that would require the State Board of Education to establish curriculum requirements for all public and private high school programs. The requirements would cover the basic high school program (which must be aligned with State academic content standards) and a recommended program that contains more rigorous mathematics and science classes. Students entering the ninth grade during the 2006-07 school year would be required to complete the recommended program unless a parent and school official agree otherwise. The online assessment system in South Dakota is no longer mandatory but is used as an option for diagnosis to measure students' understanding of state standards.

## Tennessee Update - June 2004

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A large portion of the Tennessee Title II D program has been provided to approximately 25 districts to hire technology coaches whose responsibility is to ensure that technology products and services are used more effectively to increase student performance. Over a three-year period, an evaluation will be conducted comparing the 25 treatment districts to 25 randomly-selected control districts who do not receive competitive grants to hire technology coaches. The evaluation is being funded under a \$1.5 million USED grant. This project is one of ten funded by USED over a year ago to determine the impact of technology on learning.

There is concern on the part of some Tennessee educators that, when the State's Gateway exams for high school graduation become effective starting with the Class of 2005, graduation rates will drop significantly. Others cite a national study that indicates no relationship between exit exam requirements and graduation rates.

Tennessee plans to have all Statewide mandatory exams taken using a computer by 2010 with most administered online. Among the tests to be administered by computer are: (a) regular testing in grades 3-8 in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies; (b) end-of-course high school tests; and (c) Gateway (high school graduation requirement) exams in English II, Algebra I, and biology. The State is planning to pilot test some online end-of-course exams in ten school districts next school year and to phase in other districts, as well as other exams, in future years. The pilot districts have yet to be selected. Pilot tests will include only districts which already have infrastructure because no funds will be available to upgrade connectivity.



## Texas Update - June 2004

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Since 1999, Texas has been developing the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). According to The Dallas Morning News, a small portion of the State finance bill approved by the House would eliminate the high school TAKS and replace it with a series of 13 course-specific exams. The State Senate is considering the bill and all its implications.

School Reform News reports that Governor Rick Perry is not opposed to a pilot voucher program as part of public school financial legislation.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, YMCAs are the largest provider of afterschool programs in Texas, followed by public schools, religious organizations, private schools, and Boys & Girls Clubs. About ten percent of the K-12 students in the State participate in afterschool programs, each student spending an average of eight hours per week.

The Dallas News reports that, in late April, eleventh-graders across Texas took the TAKS exam. In order to graduate next year, students must pass all four components of the TAKS. Based upon last year's results (when passing was not mandatory for graduation) more than 100,000 juniors Statewide will fail at least one of the tests. Only half of the students passed all four tests; 90 percent passed social studies, but only about two-thirds passed English/language arts, mathematics, and science. Students who fail will have multiple opportunities to retake the exams, but it is likely that many thousands of students will not pass all four tests in time to graduate next Spring.

The Houston Chronicle reports that the change in Texas State law that was expected to raise \$75 million for textbooks during the 2004-05 biennium will generate only about \$8 million. The TEA had hoped to augment its \$585 million textbook budget and were very critical of the Texas Department of Transportation for its faulty assumptions and miscalculations that led to the shortfall. TEA officials are hoping the Governor will cover the shortfall with other revenues. Otherwise, there will be cuts in purchases of textbooks for non-English-speaking elementary students and high school biology students.

The Houston Chronicle reports that the Texas State textbook depository was closed last summer. Traditionally, the depository has bought textbooks -- as many as 400,000 volumes -- and made them available to school districts. However, the State is running a \$67 million deficit in its textbook budget and made the decision to save more than \$750,000 by closing the depository. Many local school districts, that have counted on the depository's barter system to get the books they needed, are now faced with the need to buy new textbooks without adequate funds.

The Houston Chronicle reports that the State legislature and the Governor have worked together on a plan that would allow the Texas Education Agency to transfer funds from a number of different accounts into the purchase of biology, bilingual, and other textbooks needed in the schools when school starts in the Fall. The \$63 million transfer will allow the textbooks to be delivered on time.

The Texas Education Agency has initiated its Technology Immersion Project (TIP) through which nearly 7,500 students in 13 schools will receive wireless laptop computers to be used in school and at home. Beginning next school year, the participating schools will be given wireless computers (Apple or Dell), along with: educational software; online educational resources in language arts, math, science, and social studies; online assessments; teacher training; and outside support. Using Federal funds, the Texas Center for Educational Research will evaluate TIP's impact; collecting baseline data this Fall. TIP is itself supported by \$1.2 million in Federal Title II D funds. The 13 schools have received a total of \$3.7 million in Federal grants, ranging from \$200,000 to \$800,000 per school. The grant recipients are:

Clarksville ISD (969 students)  
Clarksville Elementary  
Clarksville Middle  
Clarksville High School

Irving ISD (3,885 students)  
Lively Elementary  
DeZavala Middle  
Irving High School

Ysleta ISD (657 students)  
Hillcrest Middle

Brady ISD (291 students)  
Brady Middle

Bryan ISD (940 students)  
Stephen F. Austin Middle

Morton ISD (120 students)  
Morton Junior High

Rivieria ISD (129 students)  
DeLaPaz Middle

Floydada ISD (234 students)  
Floydada Junior High

Fruitvale ISD (120 students)  
Fruitvale Middle

A new round of grants -- for middle schools only -- are now up for application. These grants will be for \$750,000 for schools with more than 600 students, \$600,000 for schools with 351 to 600 students, and \$350,000 for schools with 350 or fewer students.

The Houston Chronicle reports that, as scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) have increased over the last decade, scores of high school seniors on the SATs and ACTs have dropped slightly. Between 1996 and 2002, the percentage of tenth-grade students passing the TAAS increased from 61 percent to 86 percent. Yet half of the students enrolled in Texas' public colleges required remedial classes, costing the Texas taxpayers \$183 million. In Aldine ISD, for example, all of the district's five high schools were rated "exemplary" or "recognized." But the district saw a constant drop on SAT scores and two-thirds of the districts' graduates going into public colleges required remedial coursework.

During the ISTE leadership symposium at the annual NECC conference, Anita Givens (who has been reinstated as Director of the Office of Technology within the TEA) reviewed the major turnaround from almost total dismantlement a year ago of the state's technology funding and

initiatives to a recent resurgence as the result of an effort by a taskforce of key businessmen created in November 2003. The first initiative recommended by the group is the Technology Immersion Project described above. The business group has recommended that technology funding be increased to as much as \$300 per student. Over the last decade, the State technology initiative has been funded at about \$30 per student. Also, information technology literacy will likely receive some additional funding because the requirement for teacher and student certification as being technology literate is included in existing State law. Ms. Givens also indicated that almost 100 technology plans from districts have been updated and the states e-learning plan for the year 2010 is being developed.

Education Week reports that more than half of the new teachers hired last year in Texas did not go through traditional teacher preparation channels. Nearly 55 percent of these teachers went through alternative certification programs or took postgraduate teacher education classes. In 2000, only 30 percent of new teachers entered the profession through alternative certification means.

In mid-April, the Dallas Independent School District announced that the district has received \$123 million in E-rate funds. Matched by \$13.4 million in local funds, the E-rate money will be used in 188 district schools for a variety of technological improvements. These will include: (1) 55,000 network jacks and additional fiber optic cabling; (2) upgraded network infrastructures and wireless networks; (3) upgraded e-mail; (4) more and upgraded network servers; and (5) video conferencing terminals.

## Utah Update - June 2004

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The Utah Board of Education has established standards for teacher aides that are in compliance with NCLB.

A proposed State law gives the State School Board the authority to award grants to school districts (as well as charter schools) for the purpose of delivering tests online. Phi Delta Kappan reports that the Utah Performance Assessment System for Students (U-PASS) will be the delivery framework.

Utah has a Statewide program which requires students to meet standard levels of computer certification. The Utah SEA, in partnership with Certiport, a corporation specializing in administering standardized tests, is attempting to bring Utah students up to global standards. The tests students will take are intended to measure Internet proficiency and skills relating to Microsoft Office, including Excel, Word, PowerPoint, Outlook, Access, and Project. All high school graduates, starting with the Class of 2006, will be required to pass the computer literacy certification exam. Certification classes will be offered, but students can “test out” of the classes passing Certiport’s Internet and Computing Core Certification (IC<sub>3</sub>) exam.

In late March, Governor Olene Walker vetoed a bill to provide scholarships for as many as 56,000 disabled students to attend private schools. HB 15, called the Carson Smith Special Needs Scholarships, would have provided vouchers of up to \$5,400 according to School Reform News. Seven of Governor Walker’s opponents in the upcoming primary have lobbied for the State legislature to override the veto.

A recent study by Utah State University indicates that the State will need nearly 1,200 more new teachers than are currently produced each year to replace retiring teachers and accommodate population growth. The study reports that Utah loses eleven percent (close to 2,800) of its teachers each year. Only about a quarter of these losses are due to retirement. Over the next 20 years, the State will need to fill 80,000 teaching positions, 68,000 of which will be vacant due to

attrition and 12,000 to accommodate enrollment growth. The study highlights the difficulty Utah faces in training and retaining enough teachers.

Riverside Publishing has been awarded a five-year contract by the Utah Board of Education to administer standardized tests in all Utah public schools. Beginning next school year, Riverside will administer its tests in the third, fifth, eighth, and eleventh grades to measure student achievement in and critical thinking skills in reading, language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. The tests to be used are the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), the Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED), and Logramos (for Spanish-speaking students).

## Vermont Update - June 2004

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Education Week reports that the Vermont legislature has approved a \$1.1 billion education budget for FY 2005, the first year the State will be operating under a restructured education financing structure. Effective July 1, the new plan raises the State's portion of K-12 education to 90 percent (up from 60 percent under the previous structure). The FY 2005 budget includes a 6.5 percent increase in special education funding to districts.

## Virginia Update - June 2004

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According to the Afterschool Alliance, public schools are the largest provider of afterschool programs in Virginia, followed by religious organizations, YMCAs, private schools, and Boys & Girls Clubs. About nine percent of the K-12 students in the State participate in afterschool programs for an average of eight hours per week.

Virginia has created the Virginia Virtual Advanced Placement School as part of the State's Education for a Lifetime initiative. With classes beginning in September 2004, the new online school will offer 13 AP courses from satellite and Internet sources. Qualified high school students across the State could earn as much as a full semester of college credit by the end of their senior year. The AP courses available this Fall include English, Government, Calculus, Statistics, U.S. History, Chemistry, Biology, Spanish, Human Geography, Macroeconomics, Microeconomics, Psychology, and Physics. The State will reimburse school districts for tuition and fees of students taking online AP classes through the virtual school.



## Washington Update - June 2004

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In March, the State legislature passed, and Governor Gary Locke signed into law, a charter school program that allows the creation of as many as 45 new charter schools over the next six years. Strong opposition is, however, continuing from Washington's largest teachers union. The Washington Education Association is attempting to collect the 100,000 signatures needed to place on the November ballot on initiative to overturn the charter school legislation.

In mid-May, the Academic Achievement and Accountability Commission, a blue-ribbon panel of educators, approved changes in the passing scores for many WASL exams. As reported in The Seattle times, effective this year, the scores required to pass fourth and seventh grade reading and math tests will be lowered. The passing scores for tenth grade reading will be lowered next year pending legislative review. If the changes had been effective last year, the passing rate for seventh-graders would have been 7-8 percent higher and 3-4 percent higher for fourth graders.

State officials expect over 400 schools to be identified for improvement next year. This year 42 percent of districts and 22 percent of schools failed to make AYP last school year. The percentage of high schools not making AYP is higher than elementary or middle school percentages.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, public schools are the largest provider of afterschool programs in Washington, followed in order of student use by YMCA's, Boys & Girls Clubs, cities/towns, and religious organizations. Only about eight percent of the K-12 students in the State participate in afterschool programs, spending an average of seven hours per week.

The State of Washington has awarded to Pearson Educational Measurement a five-year contract to implement the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). Over the next two years, Pearson will be responsible for test development, psychometric services, software development, printing/packaging, distribution, scoring, and data management for grades 3, 5, 6, and 8 to be first administered in the Spring of 2006. Pearson will continue, under an existing contract, to implement tests for grades 4, 7, and 10.

As reported in Education Technology News, Washington is working in partnership with Microsoft Corporation -- through its foundation, U.S. Partners in Learning -- to develop model uses of technology in education. The program has two components: (1) development of a technology-rich plan to improve student achievement and graduation ranks among the at-risk student population; and (2) provide teachers and administrators with access to teaching methods that will facilitate development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills by their students. The Washington program is intended to be the blueprint for a nationwide effort to create education models with a total expenditure by U.S. Partners in Learning of \$35 million over five years.

## West Virginia Update - June 2004

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In order to comply more fully with the No Child Left Behind Act, the West Virginia legislature has proposed H.B. 4111 which requires the State School Board to adopt specific measures of student, school, and district performance. These measures include graduation rate, dropout rate, attendance, student performance, and percent of graduates enrolling in college or other certification programs. As reported in Phi Delta Kappan, the bill establishes a system of student performance audits, requires technical assistance for underperforming schools, establishes rewards for exemplary practices, and calls for sanctions for failing schools and school districts.

During the recent ISTE leadership symposium officials from the West Virginia Department of Education confirmed that the state's alternative test for special education which is a new version of the state's regular assessment (WEST) had been approved by the USED.

## Wisconsin Update - June 2004

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In the first three weeks of February, Wisconsin's open enrollment period, three Statewide virtual charter schools have spent considerable money as part of a marketing blitz to attract new students. The three schools -- Wisconsin Connections Academy, Wisconsin Virtual Academy, and iQ Academies at Wisconsin -- are hoping to attract hundreds of students and many thousands of public dollars represented by these students.

In mid-March, the Governor signed into law a bill that provides the SEA with far greater Authority over school voucher programs. The new law requires that schools receiving vouchers to provide evidence they are being managed in a sound fiscal manner. [School Reform News](#) reports the law also requires that schools seeking to participate in the voucher program must demonstrate their financial viability.