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MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 29, 2007
TO: TechMIS Subscribers
FROM: Charles Blaschke and Blair Curry
SUBJ: FY 2008 Appropriations Update, NCLB Reauthorization and State Profile Updates

Earlier this month, we emailed you the FY 2008 House Proposed Appropriations Update and have included in this issue the Senate Subcommittee Appropriations mark -- both would increase Title I and IDEA substantially. Also in another special report, we provided the final Title I allocations by state, which varied slightly from our estimates in the March 30th special report on state and district allocations. This TechMIS issue includes the following Washington Updates:

- **Page 1**
The recommended FY 2008 appropriations mark by the Senate subcommittee which would increase Title I and IDEA, but reduce Reading First by only 20 percent compared to the 60 percent cut proposed by the House;
- **Page 2**
The new report by the Center on Education Policy found that achievement scores have increased and gaps between groups of students have narrowed slightly since 2002 in states with comparable test data. However, despite disclaimers by CEP that such increases should not be attributed only to NCLB, the findings have generated enough interest to spur the momentum for NCLB reauthorization sooner than later;
- **Page 3**
Provisions in the Republican "State and Local Flexibility Improvement Act" would generally provide greater flexibility in the use of Federal funds; however, the real question is whether districts can or otherwise will take advantage of such flexibilities, if enacted;

- **Page 5**
USED plans to convene a forum on Response to Intervention in December which would give state officials an opportunity to share plans, while providing guidance and support to districts and to unveil the details of the new “Center on Response to Intervention” which is supposed to provide technical assistance to states;
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The Advisory Committee for Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities has submitted recommendations which would strengthen the “principles of effectiveness” provision requiring activities to be based on positive evidence and expand state activities to identify best practices;
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The National Governor’s Association reports that states can expect tighter budgets in 2008 due to declines in expected revenue;
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USED Institute of Education Sciences plans to create a Center on Instructional Technology to develop and evaluate media-rich applications, including gaming to improve academic performance of middle and high school students; ;
- **Page 9**
New report analyzes dropout/graduation rate problems differently from most prior reports and identifies possible new opportunities.

The state profile updates include (for some states) K-12 education funding for next year, changes in the number of districts and schools identified for improvement based upon most recent test scores, results of high school exit exams, state activity with respect to charter and online schools, and other issues.

The next special report will cover the USED Summit on Supplemental Educational Services (SES) which is being conducted at this writing, and a recent report by the Rand Corporation conducted for USED which found that SES has had some positive effects on student achievement in certain cities. USED is likely to announce policy changes which would increase opportunities for districts to provide SES before the parent transfer option and to provide districts identified for improvement greater flexibility to provide their own tutoring SES programs. In her June 27 statement, Secretary Spellings noted, “In addition, we’ll give districts more discretion in using Federal dollars to inform parents of their options and to run the program.”

Washington Update

Vol. 12, No. 7, June 29, 2007

FY 2008 Appropriations Update: Senate Subcommittee Mark Would Increase Title I and IDEA While Restoring Some of the Proposed Cuts in Reading First Made by House Subcommittee

On June 19th, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee headed by Chairman Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) released its proposed “mark” for Department of Education appropriations which would increase Title I by about \$1.5 billion, including school improvement grants, which is slightly less than the House subcommittee mark. The Senate would also increase IDEA funding by more than \$450 million over the FY 2007 level, which would be about \$275 million more than the House proposal. Unlike the House, which would cut Reading First by 60 percent, the Senate would reduce Reading First funding by about 22 percent (or \$230 million) to \$800 million for FY 2008. Some observers attribute the smaller proposed cut to numerous letters proclaiming significant increases in student reading scores sent to Senator Harkin. Others feel that the proposed House cut made by Congressman Chairman Obie was sheer retribution because the White House basically killed Obie’s pet program, the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Act of 1997. However, the Senate subcommittee press release states the Committee needs to be assured that the management problems with Reading First have been fixed before considering increases to the program in future years, which generally ensures no

increases beyond the proposed \$800 million cap will occur in the near future. Compared to the FY 2007 funding level, 21st Century Community Learning Centers assistive technology, which Senator Harkin supports, would receive a five percent increase and the TRIO and Gear-up programs would each receive slightly over a three percent increase. Advanced placement programs would be increased by about 14 percent, while Safe and Drug-free state grants would be reduced by a similar percentage. One big winner is State Data Systems, which would receive a 130 percent increase to almost \$60 million dollars, up from \$24 million in FY 2007.

The Committee press release also calls for the three departments (Education, Labor, HHS) to provide reports listing all grants and contracts awarded every quarter for amounts over \$100,000 if such contracts were not awarded competitively. Several billion dollars of contracts among the three agencies were awarded last year without competition which, some argue, has resulted in cozy relationships between the Department of Education and its contractors which tended to affect objectivity and has prompted allegations by the Office of Inspector General and the Government Accounting Office of conflicts of interest, as was the case in the Reading First initial years. And, while the Senate version reduces by 30 percent the amount of earmarks compared to the FY 2005 bill (which was the last to include earmarks), for each earmark the name of the grantee, the

amount, and sponsors are included. An attempt to include similar provisions in the House subcommittee “mark” created problems in the full House Committee, which has postponed final House deliberations until after the July 4th recess.

New Center on Education Policy (CEP) Report Finds Achievement Scores Have Increased and Gaps Between Groups of Students Have Narrowed Slightly Since 2002 in Most States with Comparable Test Data; However, Despite CEP Disclaimers Attributing Increases to NCLB Alone, the Attention Generated Has Heightened Momentum for NCLB Reauthorization Sooner Rather Than Later

Findings from the Center on Education Policy’s extensive study of achievement scores in math and reading since 2002 have generated national media attention. Even though the CEP concludes, “It is very difficult, if not impossible, to determine the extent to which these trends in test results have occurred *because* of NCLB.” Referring to the findings, Secretary Spellings in a statement proclaimed, “We know the law is working, so now is the time to reauthorize.” Chairman Dale Kildee (D-MI) and Chairman Ted Kennedy, whose committees have primary NCLB reauthorization responsibility, agreed that the CEP findings would help the reauthorization process.

Even though CEP carefully pointed out the measures and rules they used in determining whether states had comparable test scores over the three-year period, some critics such as Bruce Fuller, education professor at

University of California and a critic of NCLB, argued in a New York Times article that “the research has appeared to have eliminated testing periods in some states that showed predominately falling scores after 2002.”

Jack Jennings, President of CEP, confirmed one additional limitation which has not been reported in the national press -- namely, because of Federal regulatory changes -- which have altered the composition and size of subgroups -- and changes in tests administered, the national summary did not include achievement scores of students with disabilities or English language learners. Moreover, during Phase II and Phase III of the study, it is highly unlikely that comparable test scores over several years for these subgroups of students, if available, would meet the criteria of the study design to include them in subsequent analyses. The inability to include achievement scores of students in these two groups certainly attests to one final CEP conclusion: “Although NCLB emphasizes public reporting of state test data, the data necessary to reach definitive conclusions about achievement were sometimes hard to find or unavailable, or had holes or discrepancies. More attention should be given to the issues of quality and transparency of state test data.”

One can reasonably argue that limited English proficient students and students with disabilities are the groups of students most likely to be left behind as school districts, under the current AYP calculation process, have an incentive to focus more attention on students who are close to achieving proficiency. Indeed, in 2003-04, an analysis of the National Database of School AYP indicated that the subgroups that caused schools to miss AYP were special education

students (13%), followed by LEP students (4%) poor students (3%) and single racial ethnic groups (3%). The overall number one cause in 33% of the cases was failure of the entire group of students, which included special education and LEP students.

The state-by-state appendices compiled by CEP do include some achievement scores for students with disabilities or limited English proficient students; however, CEP cautions against the use of such data because of incompleteness.

For a copy of the report go to: www.cep-dc.org

The Framework and Likely Provisions of the Republican “State and Local Flexibility Improvement Act” Began to Surface on June 6 With the Release of a Fact Sheet Followed Shortly by a Press Release by Ranking Republican Buck McKeon and a Subsequent Dear Colleague Letter

The framework and likely provisions that are likely to be included in the “State and Local Flexibility Improvement Act” are beginning to surface, reflecting a moderate balance between the President’s proposed “Blueprint for NCLB Reauthorization” and the ultra-conservative “Academic Partnerships Lead Us to Success Act” proposed earlier by Representative Hoekstra (R-Michigan) and Senator DeMint (R-South Carolina). Co-sponsors will include Minority Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio), Chairman Mike Castle (R-Delaware) and other key Republican education leaders. Without questioning the intent underlying the proposed bill, the history of introducing

greater flexibility in Federal Aid to Education Programs suggests that bureaucratic hurdles, many created by USED policy, will have to be overcome if local districts are to take advantage of such flexibilities.

While the emphases vary among the several documents (co-sponsor letter, press releases, etc.), the following appear to be the key flexibility provisions. The Dear Colleague letter states that, while maintaining strong accountability standards, the measure would “allow states to waive certain statutory or regulatory requirements under law, consolidate Federal Education programs and use an alternative method for making allocations to local school districts instead of the current formula if their new proposal targets more funds effectively to those areas with high concentrations of low-income families.” The fact sheet notes that districts would have freedom to allocate funds where they are needed most --- “from higher teacher salaries to technology in the classroom.” In addition, similar to the President’s Blueprint, districts would be allowed to transfer as much as 100 percent -- up from 50 percent under current law -- of Federal funds within certain titles such as Safe and Drug-Free Schools into Title I programs. When such funds are reallocated into programs at the district level, these funds would have to be spent in compliance with Title I program requirements.

In at least three areas, reality checks have to be taken into account. One is that, under the current law which allows 50 percent of most titles to be transferred into Title I, districts in only a few states have recently taken advantage of such flexibility because USED policy stipulated that districts could not transfer funds under the 50 percent

flexibility rule until the state had a financial reporting system which essentially would allow two sets of books to be accounted for. Over the last several years, the State Education Technology Directors Association has surveyed SEA members on the degree to which funds have been transferred into or out of the Title II D State Technology Grants Program and found that less than \$10 million was transferred in with equal amounts being transferred out of the technology grants program. A second reality check is whether districts that have been identified for improvement would want to increase the amount of funds transferred into Title I to be subject to the 20 percent SES/Choice set-aside and the 10 percent staff development set-aside which has already reduced the total amount of Title I funds to serve regular district-operated Title I programs. A third reality check is that NCLB does not allow even the 50 percent of funds from other titles to be allocated to schools that have entered "corrective action" or "restructuring," a provision which indicates that the drafters of NCLB felt that these Title I schools are apparently "not worth saving."

The June 6 press release includes another major likely provision that would "expand the poverty threshold for schoolwide programs which frees local schools to consolidate all Federal funds to improve the quality of the entire school." Currently, for a school to be designated as a schoolwide program, the enrollment of students from low-income families must be 40 percent or more. The so-called "co-mingling" provision for schoolwide programs has been in the regulations for more than ten years and was codified in IDEA in 1997. In 2002, the co-mingling NCLB provision attempted to limit the amount of IDEA funds which

could be co-mingled and also precluded Reading First from being co-mingled into Title I schoolwide programs. Several studies conducted by the Government Accountability Office have found that state financial reporting requirements placed on districts were a major obstacle to co-mingling several years ago and more recently GAO recommended that the supplement-not-supplant requirements in Title I not be applied to schoolwide programs because, once funds are co-mingled, districts do not have to report how the money was actually spent. And, in 2006, USED issued non-regulatory guidance which further "encouraged" districts to designate eligible schools as schoolwide programs by requiring those schools which would not co-mingle all Federal funds into a single account to report on how much time a specific salaried staff person spent on activities related to each specific title -- a bookkeeping nightmare.

A 2001 TURNKEY survey of district officials found that about 70 percent of these officials were aware of the flexibility to co-mingle most Federal funds with Title I in Title I schoolwide programs; however, of those who were aware of the provision, only about a third actually took advantage of this flexibility. While about the same percentage of district officials are currently aware of the new guidance on co-mingling in Title I schoolwides, less than half apparently are taking advantage of the flexibility. In addition to local and state audit concerns, many Title I district officials feel that Title I and other Federal funds should be targeted to Title I eligible students, and should not be spread around to serve non-eligible Title I students in a schoolwide program. Another reason is that, in a schoolwide program, all teacher aides have to meet the "highly

qualified” requirements under NCLB while, in those Title I schools not designated as schoolwide programs, only the teacher aides used in Title I programs have to meet the requirements.

Currently slightly over 80 percent of the students that are counted as being served under Title I (about 15 million students) are enrolled in Title I schoolwide programs. The numbers of students “served” can increase even though overall Title I funding may be reduced largely because of the increasing numbers of schools designated as Title I schoolwide programs. The amount of Title I funds per student served has been reduced from about \$900 - \$1,000 per student to around \$550 per student, while in most districts the Title I allocation per Title I eligible students is between \$1,500 and \$2,000.

The Republican leadership particularly Representative Buck McKeon have offered a number of other proposed bills as changes to be integrated into NCLB reauthorization including:

- Allow states to enter into performance agreements with local districts, especially with large number of schools identified for improvement or restructuring
- To assist districts make AYP and narrow student achievement gaps as measured by well-designed growth models allowing districts which have identified schools to use a portion of the 15-20 percent set-aside to assist SES providers in outreach and programs
- Requiring districts to carry over unused portions of the 15-20 percent SES/parent choice set-aside over to

next year and add it to the 15-20 percent set-aside

- Allowing a school identified for improvement during the first year to provide SES along with the parent choice school transfer option

Several seasoned Washington observers of the Federal education legislation landscape feel some of the above proposals will be incorporated into the NCLB reauthorization in varying degrees. However, as with any piece of educational legislation, the “devil is in the details” and to that one might add that the “strings” that are attached to flexibility options reflected in USED regulations and non-regulatory guidance, which this Administration has used more than once to further its political priorities.

USED to Convene a Forum on Response-to-Intervention in December to Give State Officials Opportunities to Share Plans for Providing Guidance and Support to Districts and to Unveil the Details of the New Center on Response-to-Intervention, Which Will Provide Technical Assistance to States

USED plans to sponsor a forum in December to discuss RTI implementation barriers and solutions, according to Kara Arundel, independent analyst. An interview with Lewis Danielson, the forum will allow USED to share “details” of its new Center on Response-to-Intervention and to offer basic RTI implementation strategies, including tips on sources of support, as reported in the June 14, 2007 Education Daily. The contractor selected to operate the new center is supposed to be announced by USED in about a month according to

Danielson. Once the new center is created, three other centers funded by USED will have their functions transferred to the new RTI Center, including the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities which, along with the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, has been providing guidance on RTI implementation for both states and districts for several years.

Shortly after the publication of draft regulations on modified assessments (the 2% cap) for so-called “gap students,” high-level USED officials indicated that more than \$10 million would be used to provide technical assistance to states on development/adapting instruments for conducting these alternative assessments and for identifying interventions appropriate for use with “gap students”; moreover, the three regional Reading First Technical Assistance Centers (RFTAC) would be providing such support. Six investigative reports by the Office of Inspector General and continued Senate investigations and hearings have indicated that perhaps the most flagrant violations of disclosure and conflict-of-interest were among the RFTACs. It is, therefore, likely that the new Center on Response-to-Intervention will operate under more rigorous quality-control measures and procedures to minimize any allegations of favoritism and/or conflict-of-interest. In the above Education Daily article, Arundel quotes Danielson as not expecting “the Center to prescribe a single approach to RTI, although there are common characteristics of model RTI programs -- relating to the level of interventions and student progress monitoring -- that help schools make data-based instructional decisions.”

The envisioned December RTI forum is being planned by a team headed by Richard

Barbacane (past President of the National Association of Elementary School Principals), a former principal and special education teacher. Assisting in the effort is Bill East, Executive Director of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. The estimated number of by-invitation-only attendees is expected to be around 650, which will include state and district officials from both general and special education. Officials from associations that may support or otherwise participate in the December forum have at least two concerns: (a) that SEAs that are developing RTI policy guidance for districts might wait until the Center has been created and/or the December conference has been held which would slow down the overall implementation process; or (b) regardless of the early intervening services/RTI mandates and USED encouragement, without additional funds being provided to general education under NCLB, general education is unlikely to accept the primary responsibility for implementation. The Council for Exceptional Children has recommended that NCLB include an additional funding stream under Title I for EIS implementation, perhaps as a match to the IDEA reallocation amount. We will continue to monitor developments relating to the Center and the December forum.

Advisory Committee for Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Submits First Set of Recommendations Which Address “Principles of Effectiveness” and the Identification of Best Practices

Almost since the program’s creation a decade ago, there has been tension between the provision of the Safe and Drug-free Schools Act that requires practices to have

evidence on effectiveness -- the so-called “principles of effectiveness” -- and a lengthy list of “authorized activities” which districts and states are allowed to use. In many cases, such “authorized activities” have little research basis and sometimes even indicate negative effects of their use. The Advisory Committee, appointed a year ago by Secretary Spellings, concludes that there is no specific funding source which is dedicated for “rolling out effective programs” and which requires continuing monitoring to ensure “effective practices” are implemented as intended. The Committee recommends that recipients of Drug-Free Title VI grants must be required to collect effectiveness data and report on the results of their programs. It also recommends that the “principles of effectiveness” should “trump the authorized list of activities found in Section 4114 of NCLB” and that an ongoing working group involving the agencies funding school safety and alcohol and drug abuse prevention activities identify effective activities which can be subjected to testing and research involving partnerships between researchers and schools. One of the three recommendations related to data collection relates to the collection and dissemination of data on effective practices at both the state and Federal levels.

The report notes that the identification of “Persistently Dangerous Schools” was the greatest concern among its members; because of labeling and stigmatization, the report says the provision should be changed to “Unsafe School Choice Options.” While schools should ensure victims know their rights to remain in their current schools as well as their transfer options, schools should also consider moving “perpetrators,” where appropriate, to other schools or entities.

Moreover, as indicated by assessments, the offenders should receive counseling and appropriate interventions, such as school-based youth courts or mentoring. Schools should be encouraged to partner with local mental health providers for referrals of victimizers. Both districts and SEAs should examine possible funding streams for these efforts.

For several years, USED has tried to zero fund the Title VI Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program by based largely on evaluations conducted by the Office of Management and Budget. The recommendations of the Advisory Committee might signal a reversal in USED priorities, perhaps in the future expanding opportunities for firms with behavioral, mental health and other types of screening devices and interventions which have proven to be effective in, not only reducing alcohol and substance abuse, but helping student victims of bullying and more recently, traumatic experiences such as the school killings and Katrina.

For a copy of the Committee report entitled “Enhancing Achievement and Proficiency Through Safe and Drug-Free Schools” go to: www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/sdfscac/enhancing-achievement.doc

National Governors Association Reports States Can Expect Tighter Budgets in 2008

A report released on June 5 by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO) indicates that, this year, more than half of the States experienced higher-than-expected revenues. But the

report suggests that spending growth will drop by half next year because of a slower economy and higher costs, particularly health care costs.

Entitled “Fiscal Survey of the States,” the NGA/ASBO report provides state-by-state data on state revenues, expenditures, and year-end balances for FY 2006, FY 2007 (preliminary), and FY 2008 (projected based on Governor’s proposals).

All states combined will have spent \$616 billion during FY 2007 (which ended on June 30, 2007 in most states), a growth rate well in excess of the historical increase of 6.5 percent. Next year, however, state spending is expected to grow only 4.2 percent.

The report notes that the number of states with substantial end-of-year surpluses suggests budgetary troubles in the coming year. In FY 2006, all states combined had year-end balances of \$62.1 billion -- equal to 11 percent of their expenditures. For the current fiscal year, the end-of-year surplus is expected to be only \$50.4 billion -- eight percent of expenditures. And, for FY 2008, governors expect the surpluses to drop to \$39 billion (just in percent of expenditures).

This year (FY 2007), 27 states will have exceeded their budget projections, 14 states will match projections, and nine states -- California, Delaware, Florida, Maine, Maryland, Nevada, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Wyoming -- will have lower than expected balances.

Only three states -- Michigan, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin -- made mid-year budget cuts totaling \$170 million with \$131 million of the shortfall in Michigan alone. Overall,

this is a considerable improvement over five years ago, when 37 states made mid-year cuts totaling \$13 billion.

The NGA/NASBO report can be seen at: www.nasbo.org/Publications/PDFs/Fiscal%20Survey%20of%20the%20States%20June%202007.pdf

USED Institute of Education Sciences Plans to Establish the Center on Instructional Technology to Develop and Evaluate Media-Rich Applications to Improve Academic Performance of Middle and High School Students

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) is planning to create a Center on Instructional Technology which will focus on developing and evaluating “education technology tools” as part of IES’ research program in reading and writing, mathematics and science education, cognition and student learning, and education technology. The implications for some TechMIS subscribers are twofold: either the Center could provide opportunities for for-profit firms to partner with the researchers which in at least one area is encouraged, or the Center could develop education technology under government subsidies which could be classified as “unfair competition” with the private sector, thereby reducing incentives for privately-funded technology R&D. The application states, “In a recent evaluation of education technology reading and mathematic products, researchers did not find technology products to improve student learning in reading or mathematics (Dynarski et al., 2007) [referring to the recent Mathematica study reported in the April TechMIS [Washington Update](#)]

“Nonetheless, a number of researchers (e.g., Federation of American Scientists, 2006; Huffaker & Calvert, 2003; Wideman et al., 2007) have argued that we have not yet exploited the full potential of electronic media for educational purposes. In particular, there have been relatively few attempts to use advanced, high-resolution multimedia gaming environments as contexts for the instruction of academic skills.”

The instructional technology to be developed and evaluated must be designed to improve core academic skills for middle and high school students in reading, writing, mathematics and science. The instructional programs are “intended to replace or be used in conjunction with curriculum for students in any middle school or high school.” In its rationale for the rich multimedia environment, IES asked applicants to develop or modify an existing multimedia environment which is highly engaging, motivating and challenging for adolescents and may propose to “partner with a for-profit company that provides, for example, a game engine (perhaps an older version) that could serve as a foundation for the development of an instructional technology game. Including the company as a partner must not compromise the objectivity of the research.”

Other important requirements in the application that proposers should meet include:

- The measures of effectiveness could be multiple involving observational, survey, or qualitative studies.
- An iterative development process must be used in the design and development of the proposed products.

- Fidelity of implementation should be an important part of the research design, taking into account “moderating” and “intervening” variables.
- The research design should include randomized trials; however, where such are not possible, alternatives that “substantially minimize selection bias or allow it to be modeled may be employed.”

The IES released the application notice on May 15th with September 6th as the due date for letters of intent. The application deadline date is November 1st. Eligible entities include non-profit and for-profit organizations, as well as public and private agencies and institutions (e.g., colleges, universities). For a copy of the application go to: http://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/2008305_randd.pdf

New Report Analyzes Dropout/Graduation Rate Problems Differently From Most Prior Reports and Identifies Possible New Opportunities

The Education Week “Diplomas Count 2007” analyzes graduation rates using some new data in a different manner, identifying possible opportunities for firms with appropriate products and services. The Editorial Projects in Education Research Center (ERC) relied on its Fall 2006 survey of states with a particular focus on college and workforce readiness. It also developed the ERC “cumulative promotion index” (CPI) using USED’s Common Core of Data; for example, the report found states varied significantly in terms of how many students

dropout between the ninth and tenth grade levels from the “high school pipeline.” It found that fewer than five percent of the non-graduates in Utah drop out between the ninth and tenth grades, while over 50 percent of non-graduates do so in Delaware, Florida and Texas. In an additional ten states, 40-50 percent of non-graduates drop out between the ninth and tenth grades, including Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Massachusetts, District of Columbia, Rhode Island, and Hawaii. Nationally, 35 percent of all students lost from the high school pipeline failed to meet the transition between ninth grade and tenth grade.

Overall, the graduation rate is almost 70 percent with an estimated 1.23 million students failing to graduate in 2006-07.

The report also identified states which had in place 18 other characteristics which would fall under “defining readiness,” “high school completion credentials,” and “high school exit exams.” Among the issues being debated in the NCLB reauthorization is the emphasis that should be placed on college-readiness versus work-readiness, defining college readiness as “existence of a specific curriculum,” “competencies,” “content standards” and “test scores that should be mastered to be college-ready.” At least 11 states have defined college-readiness, while 14 other are in the process of doing so; 21 states have defined work-readiness with ten having identified specific skills; and in 19 states the work-readiness definition differs from college-readiness. While 24 states provide advanced recognition for students exceeding the regular standards requirements for graduation, 28 states have alternative credentials for students not meeting all of the regular state standards and

requirements. In 17 states, the basis for alternative credentials is whether it relates to students with disabilities; 38 states, however, offer different K-12 pathways that lead to industry-recognized certificates or licenses.

Primarily using data collected during the Fall 2006 state survey, the ERC reports that 22 states currently have exit exams that must be passed in order for students to receive a regular diploma, with three states planning to implement such exams in the very near future. Nine states have exit exams for English, math, science and history/social studies. The report indicates that only one state, North Carolina, has an exit exam requirement for technology literacy. Between 2002-2007, the number of states who based exit exams on standards for at least the tenth grade level increased from six to eighteen. The report claims that the number of states in which the states partially fund remediation for students who fail exit exams or portions thereof has increased to only 12 states. Since the ERC survey last fall, Georgia and Mississippi have implemented online, as well as onsite, remediation programs including tutoring for students who have failed exit exams or promotion exams. New York and Ohio also have state funds that are flexible enough to allow districts to use such funds for test prep and remediation for students who fail portions of their exit exams. The Center on Education Policy plans to publish its annual report on exit exam trends later this summer which we will analyze and share appropriate findings with TechMIS subscribers.

Alabama Update

July 2007

Alabama has approved the largest school construction bond issue in the State's history -- \$1.07 billion. As reported in Education Week, the bond issue will provide construction funds to every school district in the State, as well as to all public institutions of higher education. A total of \$13 million will go to school systems that have lost buildings to catastrophes in recent years and \$15 million will be provided to districts in the State's economically depressed "Black Belt." The largest recipient will be Mobile County -- \$51.5 million.

Arizona Update

July 2007

The Arizona Republic reports that Arizona recently conducted a survey of every educator in the State's schools; more than half -- 32,000 teachers, principals, and librarians -- responded.

Among the survey's findings are:

- most teachers spend five to ten hours a week working beyond the regular school day;
- most believe class sizes are too large;
- only 60 percent feel they have adequate teaching materials and technology;
- most teachers want better training, particularly for teaching students with disabilities and English language learners; and
- teachers want more time to learn about technology and how to use it in their classrooms.

Also according to The Arizona Republic, a Superior Court judge in Phoenix has ruled that Arizona's new voucher programs for disabled students are constitutional. These programs provide approximately \$5 million a year in state funds for tuition at a public or private school. Although the decision is likely to be appealed, it is considered a meaningful victory for proponents of school vouchers.

Arkansas Update

July 2007

For the past 15 years, the Arkansas Supreme Court has been addressing the constitutionality of the State's system for financing public education. In 2002, the Court declared the funding system to be unconstitutional; in 2004, the legislature increased school funding by \$400 million and, in 2006, added \$132 million more. Finally, in May, the court found the system constitutional. And, this year, the legislature increased minimum State aid by \$121 million and allocated about half of the State's budget surplus -- \$456 million -- for the overhaul of the State's deteriorating buildings and equipment.

California Update

July 2007

California has created a new set of recommendations for the reauthorization of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), particularly with respect to limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. As reported in Education Daily, the State recommends that Congress:

- provide more funding for NCLB implementation including state test development;
- allow states and districts to design targeted interventions for identified schools based on specific subgroups that missed AYP;
- allow districts to suspend sanctions if schools are implementing effective reforms.
- allow students with disabilities who take modified tests to count toward the 95 percent participation rate;
- allow schools discretion as to when they offer supplemental educational services or school choice;
- require SES providers to serve special education students and English language learners; and
- keep any student who has ever been designated as LEP in the category indefinitely.

The efforts of Mayor Antonio Villaracgosa to take control of the Los Angeles school district have ended. A State appeals court ruled against a law that would give the Mayor control. However, two of the Mayor's political allies were elected to districts' Board of Education giving the Mayor a majority of the seven-member Board.

Education Week reports that the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), which operates 52 mostly charter middle schools has had questions raised about its attrition rates, particularly in schools in the San Francisco Bay area. Less than half of the fifth-graders who entered three new KIPP middle schools in 2003 are still enrolled (they should be completing eighth grade). Some experts say that high attrition rates are to be expected because of mobility among low-income, urban families.

Connecticut Update

July 2007

As reported in the Hartford Courant, the Connecticut legislature is considering a bill that would cut down on the large number of out-of-school suspensions handed down by the schools. In the 2005-06 school year, Connecticut schools issued more than 77,000 out-of-school suspensions to students in all grades, pre-K to high school. The new bill would require schools to provide alternative in-school suspension programs, with out-of-school suspensions limited to students who are too dangerous or disruptive to attend school.

The Connecticut legislature approved a bill that makes illegal immigrants who graduate from Connecticut high schools eligible for in-State tuition at the State's public colleges and universities. In-State tuition is typically only about 40 percent of the out-of-State rate. In late June, however, the Governor vetoed the bill. As reported in The New York Times, ten other states allow illegal immigrants to pay in-State rates.

Delaware Update

July 2007

Begun in 1997, Delaware's Alternative Routes to Certification (ARTC) program enrolls about 50 new teachers each year, 85 percent of whom usually complete the program. About half of ARTC teachers are in math and science, areas of extreme shortage in Delaware (and the rest of the nation as well). Other subjects in which there is a shortage of teachers are business, English, foreign languages, music and technology. In 2004-05, nearly half of the State's physics and earth science teachers and 25 percent of its technology education teachers came from the ARTC program. ARTC teachers must first have been hired by a public or charter secondary school before entering the program.

Florida Update

July 2007

The Miami Herald reports that Florida's saga of erroneous scoring on the Florida Comprehension Assessment Test (FCAT) continues. The State has said that it will rescore last year's third-grade reading FCAT but has been unable to determine what human errors caused the problem. The rescoring is expected to delay the release of this year's school grades (usually available in mid-June) and, therefore, push back until October the date at which parents are notified of their school choice or tutoring options (usually before the start of school). These delays could hold up the delivery of tutoring to students in need of such services.

The Orlando Sentinel reports that the Florida Department of Education is addressing the controversy over the questionable scores on the 2006 third-grade FCAT by allowing elementary schools to calculate their grades both with and without their 2006 third-grade scores and using the rating most beneficial to them. In most schools, excluding the erroneously high scores will be best because it would help the school show improvement. School grades are expected to have been released by early July. The State is also expected to suspend a provision in the school grading algorithm that penalizes high-performing schools if their lowest-performing students fail to show adequate improvement.

Four Florida school districts are the recipients of five-year grants totaling \$81.5 million from the Federal Teacher Incentive Fund. The grants are intended "to reward teachers and principals for making progress in challenging school environments. The grantees are:

- Lake County -- Schools Under Performance Pay Offer Remarkable Teaching (SUPPORT) program (\$1.2 million next year/\$20.5 million over five years);
- Orange County -- Recognizing Excellence in Achievement and Professionalism (REAP) program (\$6.6 million next year/\$27.3 million over five years);
- Hillsborough County -- Performance Optimized with Effective Rewards (POWER) program (\$3.1 million/\$15.4 million);
- Miami-Dade County -- Rewards and Incentives for School Educators (RISE) program

(\$2.7 million/\$18.3 million).

A Miami Herald review of the tutoring program in Broward County found that the district allocated \$20 million to tutor as many as 16,000 needy students this past school year under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. About 9,400 parents signed their children up for the tutoring, but only 3,300 actually received services. Among the problems were:

- The district didn't announce the availability of the tutoring until a month after school started.
- Private tutoring firms under contract to the district had bad contact information for families and lacked the capacity to serve the number of student in need of tutoring.
- The district did not adequately consider the travel requirements placed on families -- many of who did not own cars -- to reach tutoring locations.

Georgia Update

July 2007

Georgia's K-12 education budget for FY 2008 will be \$7.8 billion, up by 8.6 percent over the current budget. As reported in Education Week, the budget includes \$2 million for charter school facilities and \$44 million for the State's graduation coach program (including expansion to middle schools). Governor Sonny Perdue has also approved the Georgia Charter Systems Act that allows entire school districts to convert to charter status. In the first year, five districts will be permitted to convert as part of a pilot project.

Indiana Update

July 2007

About 75 Indiana high schools are participating in the program known as Indiana's Affordable Classroom Computers for Every Secondary Student (inACCESS) that uses inexpensive, but state-of-the-art, technology and open-source software to teach English and language arts. As reported in [eSchoolNews](#), some participating schools are including math, science, and social studies as part of inACCESS. Currently, about 100,000 high school students use the Linux operating system in inACCESS classrooms with hardware that costs no more than \$299 per unit.

As reported in [Education Week](#), Ball State University had been planning to establish two new online charter schools next year -- the first in the State. Funding for the schools, however, was eliminated from the State budget bill and the plan has been abandoned. Opponents of virtual schools -- in particular, the Indiana State Teachers Association -- had argued against the schools on the grounds that the funds should be used for other priorities like full-day kindergarten.

Maryland Update

July 2007

As reported in the Washington Post, Maryland has received a Federal grant in the amount of \$18.2 million to expand the State's charter school program. The State plans to create up to 30 new charter schools over the next three years. Currently, Maryland has 23 charter schools.

The Baltimore Sun reports that test scores in Baltimore County (the Northern suburbs of Baltimore City) show a narrowing of the achievement gap between white and minority students. Based on this Spring's Maryland School Assessments, 89 percent of white students, for example, passed the third-grade math test compared with 71 percent of black students and 78 percent of Hispanic students. This compares favorably with 2003 pass rates of 77 percent for white students, 49 percent for black students and 57 percent for Hispanic students. The white/minority gaps have shrunk in middle schools but not as rapidly as in the district's elementary schools.

Massachusetts Update

July 2007

A recent report from Achieve, Inc. (a national non-profit organization) and Jobs for the Future (a Boston-based non-profit) argues that Massachusetts schools should be able to raise academic standards as well as improve graduation rates. Specifically, the report recommended opening new schools designed “to improve college-ready graduation rates for low-income and struggling students.” One school cited in the report, TechBoston Academy in Dorchester, has a technology-based curriculum and a strong jobs component that shows students how their academic work is relevant to the workplace.

As reported in The Christian Science Monitor, ten Massachusetts schools are participating in a pilot study of expanded school days. Competitive grants of \$1,300 per student have been given to schools that add between 25 and 30 percent more school time, including extra instruction in reading and math, enrichment classes, and professional development for teachers. In a typical pilot school, students have a total of 90 minutes of math each day (two more hours a week than last year) and 120 minutes of English/language arts (one more hour than last year). More than 80 other Massachusetts schools are exploring plans to lengthen their school day and the State expects to double its grant budget to \$13 million for next year.

Minnesota Update

July 2007

The Twin Cities Pioneer Press reports that Governor Tim Pawlenty has signed into law a \$13.8 billion biennial spending bill for preschool through 12th grade -- a \$794 million increase over the next two years. The new budget includes:

- \$244 million increase in general State aid (a two percent increase next year and one percent increase the following year);
- \$326 million in new funding for special education;
- \$91 million to schools for textbooks, technology, and teacher training; and
- \$32.5 million to expand full-day kindergarten Statewide.

As an example, the St. Paul school district will receive State funding of \$461.5 million next year, a \$24 million increase (\$11 million of which is for special education).

The New York Times reports that Minnesota's \$86 million merit pay plan has shown remarkable success in large part due to the strong support of local teachers' unions, traditional foes of such plans. In Minneapolis, the teachers' union is cooperating with the State's Republican governor on a plan by which teachers work with mentors to improve their instructional skills and receive bonuses for raising the achievement of their students. Many other states are experimenting with plans that compensate teachers and/or principals at least in part based on classroom performance.

A recent report by the Center for Teaching Quality cited the Minneapolis teacher incentive plan as an example of effective ways by which urban districts can reward teachers for their performance. The Minneapolis plan allows teachers to earn faster salary increases based on mastering new skills and taking leadership roles. Pending State approval, the amount of funding available for the plan would increase from \$130 to \$260 per student.

Mississippi Update

July 2007

According to Education Week, the Mississippi legislature has approved a total budget for K-12 education of \$2.5 billion, a 9.2 percent increase over the previous year. Approximately \$2.2 billion of this budget will go to the Mississippi Adequate Education Program, intended to equalize school spending Statewide. The increase includes a three-percent salary increase for all teachers and a \$500 raise for teachers' aides.

According to the Jackson Clarion-Ledger, new State legislation, consistent with the Federal No Child Left Behind Act, requires that schools test high-school-aged special education students in two subjects -- English II and Algebra I -- that they may not have studied. Heretofore, students with disabilities were not required to take the exams. As a result some Mississippi high schools are at risk of failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under NCLB. Because test results have not yet been reported, the State does not know how many special education students were tested under the new guidelines.

Nebraska Update

July 2007

Education Daily reports that Nebraska will establish uniform, Statewide reading and math assessments to supplement the State's existing district-based exams known as STARS. Nebraska is the only state that does not currently use a statewide assessment to address NCLB accountability standards. The new tests will allow State officials to make district-by-district student achievement comparisons, but it is uncertain whether the new exams will be used for adequate yearly progress (AYP) reporting under NCLB. The new Statewide assessments are expected to begin in the 2009-10 school year for reading and in 2010-11 for mathematics.

New Jersey Update

July 2007

Education Daily reports that 28 New Jersey school districts and public school providers of special education services will receive a total of \$9 million in grants to expand programs for students with disabilities. A total of 186 applications were submitted for the grants that will range from \$115,000 to \$500,000. Half of the funds come from Federal IDEA money; the other half, for planning and start-up cost, will be FY 2007 State funds.

New York Update

July 2007

As reported in The New York Times, the New York City school district plans to allocate \$80 million over the next five years to expand the standardized testing program for the city's 1.1 million public school students. Students in third through eighth grade will be tested in reading and math five times a year (instead of the current three). And high school students will be tested in reading and math four times a year with the program expanding to science and social studies over the next few years. To be provided by CTB/McGraw-Hill, the new tests will be given either online (with results immediately available) or by pencil and paper (with results in five days) within a typical 45-minute class period. School officials say the exams will help teachers identify students with specific learning needs. Critics have argued against the growing reliance on standardized tests called for by the No Child Left Behind Act.

Starting this Fall, according to The New York Times, New York City is planning to allocate \$53 million to provide cash incentives to influence behavior and reduce poverty. The city school district will pilot test the program this Fall with 9,000 students in 40 schools. The incentives include:

- Fourth-graders will receive up to \$25 for a perfect score on each of ten standardized tests. They will get \$5 just for taking each of the tests.
- Seventh-graders can earn \$50 per test for perfect scores and \$10 each for showing up for the tests.
- Families will receive up to \$50 per month per child for high attendance rates and \$25 for attending parent-teacher conferences.

The program is intended to improve the performance of minority students.

The New York Times reports that more than 65 percent of New York City's students performed at or above grade level in math, a significant increase over last years 57 percent, particularly because this year's scores were measured by more rigorous math tests. The City attributes the

improvement to: (a) the State's new math curriculum that gives students more challenging instruction in the early grades; (b) special training for math teachers; and (c) teachers spending more time helping struggling students. The weakest performance occurred in the eighth grade where only 45.6 percent of eighth-graders were proficient in math.

Also reported in The New York Times, a cutback in Federal funding for after-school programs has put at risk 118 after-school programs serving 20,000 students in New York City. The State Department of Education apparently made funding commitments based on optimistic estimates of Federal funding and has failed to renew 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants that, have been available for nearly five years. The State has allocated \$7.5 million in stop-gap funds, but the structure of the State's funding of after-school programs must be reevaluated.

As reported by the Associated Press, New York State is investigating possible test fraud in the Uniondale school district. This year's mathematics scores on the State assessments fell significantly this year after the district increased oversight of test staffers; most Long Island school districts showed higher math scores. These discrepancies, covering grades 3 through 12 suggest improprieties last year and have caused the State to invalidate last year's scores for the district. State officials believe test staffers altered student answer sheets in order to inflate scores; no students have been implicated. The district will provide tutoring this summer for students whose math skills are not as good as last year's scores indicated.

North Carolina Update

July 2007

According to The Raleigh News & Observer, high school students in North Carolina, in order to graduate, will have to complete a senior project (starting with the Class of 2010) and take four years of mathematics instead of three (starting with the Class of 2013). Currently, students must take three years of math (including Algebra I). Under the new plan, students will be required to take Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and one other math course (statistics, calculus, vocational math).

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district has received a \$1.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to establish a pay-for-performance salary structure for principals and teachers. Next school year, the system will be pilot tested in six schools and expanded to ten additional schools in subsequent year. The Federal grant will cover the program's first year; the district plans to apply for additional Federal funding for expansion in the following years.

Ohio Update

July 2007

As reported in The Cincinnati Enquirer, the Class of 2007 is the first to be required to pass the tenth-grade-level Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) in order to graduate. Approximately seven percent of Ohio's seniors failed at least one section of the five-part OGT when they took the exam in March and will not receive their diplomas in June. Some school districts will give the test again in July and students who pass will graduate in a summer ceremony. The new, more rigorous, graduation test has had significant effect on district graduation rates. In Cincinnati, for example, less than two percent of seniors in 2006 failed the old, ninth-grade-level graduation exam compared with 5.9 percent for the district's Class of 2007. As reported in the Cleveland Plain Dealer, 43 percent of the high school seniors in Cleveland failed to graduate this June because they failed the Ohio Graduation Test. District officials expected the pass rate to increase as students become more familiar with the exam.

Oklahoma Update

July 2007

As reported in Education Week, Oklahoma's FY 2008 budget of \$7.4 billion includes \$2.5 billion for K-12 education, up 8.7 percent from the current year. Also approved by the legislature was a measure that allows charter schools in districts with large enrollments (more than 5,000 students) to apply to colleges or universities for sponsorship; heretofore, only local school districts could approve charter schools.

Oklahoma has approved a law that requires the State's public schools to provide mandated financial literacy instruction to students in grades 7-12. The instruction -- in such areas as checkbook balancing, credit card debt, income taxes, banking, insurance, and retirement planning -- can be delivered in a separate financial literacy course or incorporated into an existing course. The curriculum of the instruction, yet to be developed, is expected to be in place by the 2008-09 school year. The new law provides no funding to implement the financial literacy mandates.

The Oklahoma Supreme Court has a petition initiative that would have required 65 percent of school operational funds to be spent in the classroom. Called the "65-percent solution," the national initiative was challenged by the Oklahoma State School Boards Association on the grounds that the approach would harm other student services like transportation, health care, and free lunch. As reported by the Associated Press, the Court struck down the initiative because the statement on the petition's signature pages was misleading and not sufficient to inform voters. It also failed to define adequately such terms as "operational expenditures."

The Associated Press reports that Oklahoma's Superintendent, Sandy Garrett, has called for an extension of the school day and school year for the State's public school students. She says the school day should increase from six hours to seven hours and the school year should increase from Oklahoma's typical 175 days to 180 days. The Superintendent also called for more after-school tutoring programs.

Oregon Update

July 2007

Oregon's total K-12 education budget -- \$6.2 billion in State funds and \$2.8 billion in local tax revenues -- represents an estimated increase of 14 percent over the previous year. It includes \$260 million for a school improvement fund that cannot be used for administrative or support services. Schools will be required to use their share of the fund for one of four purposes: reducing class size, increasing instructional time, full-day kindergarten, or tutoring.

Pennsylvania Update

July 2007

As reported in [The Patriot-News](#), a number of Pennsylvania educators are lobbying the State legislature on behalf of Governor Ed Rendell's \$101 million classroom technology initiative. The initiative would expand technology in 254 high schools and provide training to more than 12,000 teachers on integrating technology into their instruction. Many Republicans are skeptical about earmarking funds for technology, citing mixed reviews for similar laptop initiatives in other states. They argue districts should determine how to use the funds.

The Pennsylvania legislature is debating a bill that would change the way the State's 11 online charter schools are to be funded. According to [Education Week](#), the bill would require the State to pay directly for charter cyber schools, rather than diverting per-pupil allocations from local districts. The measure would give the charters between \$3,000 and \$5,000 per student depending on enrollment, an amount charter operators consider unreasonably low. The State school boards association and teachers' union are supporting the legislation, arguing that cyber schools cost less to run than traditional schools. The debate is expected to continue throughout the Summer.

A newly released State report on financial management in the Philadelphia school district has criticized the district for overspending its budget for the past four years and for failing to adhere to sound financial management practices. As reported by the [Philadelphia Inquirer](#), the report also credited the district for making substantial academic improvement and argued for more funding to continue the district's progress. The State has given Philadelphia about a seven percent funding increase each year for the past five, considerably more than the State average. The district's new budget anticipates \$9 million more from City funds and \$55 million more from the State (which has not been finalized in the State budget).

Rhode Island Update

July 2007

Rhode Island has made available to teachers a new web-based archive of lesson plans, student work, and videos of effective teaching aligned to the State's academic standards. Development of this system began two years ago as an outgrowth of legislation calling for a voluntary State curriculum. The curriculum is available to all at: www.ride.ri.gov/instruction/curriculum

The Providence Journal reports that 85 percent of Rhode Island's 250 elementary and middle schools are showing gains on the State's new standardized tests. A total of 171 schools were rated as "high performing" (compared with 156 last year); only 27 schools were categorized as "insufficient progress" (compared with 37 last year). Schools with low percentages of students working at grade level can still be rated "moderately performing" if they improve their test scores by ten percent over the year before. Because standards will rise next year, State officials expect the number of high-performing schools to decrease. The full list of school classifications is available at: www.ride.ri.gov under "2007 School Performance Classifications."

South Carolina Update

July 2007

The South Carolina legislature is considering an open enrollment bill that would allow students to enroll in public schools outside their designated attendance area. However, legislators rejected an amendment that would have given \$2,500 private school tuition vouchers to students in low-performing schools. In a related development, Governor Mark Sanford signed a bill that allows students to take more online classes.

South Carolina is planning to expand its State-supported virtual pilot program into a complete State online school. As reported by Education Week, the expansion will begin at the high school level, but will eventually include all K-12 grades. The legislation authorizing the expansion created controversy over whether private school and home-schooled students should have full access to the online school and whether they should be charged fees.

A recent report indicates that converting South Carolina's pencil-and-paper standardized tests to a digital format could cost the State as much as \$58 million. Conducted by the Data Recognition Corporation, the report considered the feasibility of changing all State assessments -- including the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests for grades 3-8 and high school end-of-course exams. The report suggested a phased implementation of the online tests starting with seventh-grade science in the first year and incorporating all language arts and math exams by the fourth year. It is estimated that, to accomplish the conversion, the State would have to purchase 32,500 additional computers and upgrade at least 30 percent of the State's existing classroom computers.

South Dakota Update

July 2007

The South Dakota legislature has increased State formula aid to schools in FY 2008 by \$23.7 million -- up 3.8 percent over the current fiscal year. However, the actual increase will be lower because, as reported in Education Week, the legislature did not renew the “one-time,” \$6.5 million money given to school districts last year. Among the features of the new budget is the establishment of a State virtual school that will offer more than 60 classes starting next Fall.

As reported in Education Daily, South Dakota has reached an agreement with Partnership for 21st Century Skills to teach business and analytical skills as part of the State’s traditional instruction. South Dakota joins four other states -- Massachusetts, North Carolina, West Virginia, and Wisconsin -- who have signed agreements with the non-profit Partnership whose approach emphasizes critical thinking, understanding global issues, and using new media technology. The Partnership includes such organizations as the National Education Association, the American Association of School Librarians, Microsoft, Intel, and Cisco.

Tennessee Update

July 2007

The Tennessee Department of Education is considering the possibility of making a personal finance course part of the required school curriculum. Some districts already teach the subject but not as a separate course. Memphis City Schools incorporates a financial literacy section into social studies in 29 of the district's schools (through a State grant). Shelby County will, this Fall, begin a pilot course on personal finance. The curriculum for the course has been in development since October and certified economics instructors will be trained this Summer to teach the class.

The Associated Press reports that, largely due to State-funded scholarships for dual credit courses, many more high school students are taking college courses. During the Fall 2006 semester, the State reported that more than 5,000 Tennessee high school students are in dual enrollment classes, a 48 percent increase over the previous year. Lottery scholarships provide students with up to \$300 per semester for such courses.

Texas Update

July 2007

Texas education officials, in the wake of the State's cheating scandal on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), are considering the possibility of administering exams online. As reported in The Dallas Morning News, the State believes not having a physical answer sheet would make it more difficult for students to copy answers from others and for teachers to alter student scores or to give away questions in advance. However, because there are not enough computers to test all students at one time, other possibilities for cheating on online exams must be addressed. State officials believe that some exams -- but probably not the TAKS -- could be administered completely online within two years.

As another means of identifying cheating on the TAKS, the State plans to establish and pilot test during the 2008-09 school year a statistical system that would flag anomalies on answer sheets. As reported in the Houston Chronicle, the system would detect unusual answer patterns, analyze erasures, and investigate cases where large numbers of students were absent on test days or claimed illness during the exam.

Education Week reports that two bills that would have allowed the State to close more than 20 low-performing charter schools have died in the Texas legislature. Texas currently has 438 State-approved charter schools that serve 70,000 students -- about 1.6 percent of the State's public K-12 enrollment. The State has revoked or failed to renew 12 charters in the past nine years and another 46 have returned their charters. But, under State law, it is difficult to close a charter school even after years of poor performance and financial mismanagement.

The Houston Chronicle reports that dyslexic students in Texas are not being effectively identified and served by Texas school districts. The State has legislation mandating special education services for students identified with dyslexia -- an estimated five to nine percent of all children. It appears that less than one percent of school-aged children (only 256 out of a total enrollment of 200,000 in Houston, for example) are diagnosed and enrolled in dyslexia

programs. Moreover, a disproportionately low percentage of minority students are diagnosed with dyslexia. Again in Houston, for example, only about eight percent of the enrollment is white while 40 percent of the identified dyslexic students are white.

Utah Update

July 2007

The Salt Lake Tribune reports that more than 25 percent of this year's high school seniors -- 9,500 students -- failed to pass at least one section of the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test (UBSCT) and either will not graduate or will graduate with conditional diplomas. More than 22 percent did not pass the math portion of the UBSCT; 20 percent failed writing; and 16 percent failed reading. Students have five chances to pass the exam starting in the tenth grade. Last year, only ten percent of seniors failed the UBSCT. The large apparent increase is due to the State's new tracking system that includes dropouts and absentees. Last year's results counted only students who took the test and failed.

Washington Update

July 2007

As reported by the Associated Press, the Washington State legislature has approved a procedure by which teachers can get \$5,000 stipends if they go through a rigorous evaluation of their skills. Teachers who receive certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards would be eligible for the \$5,000 in State money if they teach in low-income schools. Last year, the incentive was \$3,500 no matter where the teachers worked. Applications for the certification program have increased from 500 to 1,200 in the past year.

Wisconsin Update

July 2007

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reports that less than 40 percent of tenth-graders in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) rated as proficient or higher in any of the five subjects tested. In fact, more than 80 percent of MPS students who enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee required at least one remedial class. Moreover, the gap between white and black students has widened in recent years. Three years ago, the reading gap between white and black students was 33 percentage points; this year it is 35 points. Similarly, in math, the gap was 36 points three years ago versus 42 points this year. The State website known as WINSS contains comparable data for all school districts in the State.