

Education TURNKEY Electronic Distribution, Inc.

256 North Washington Street
Falls Church, Virginia 22046-4549
(703) 536-2310
Fax (703) 536-3225

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 28, 2009
TO: TechMIS Subscribers
FROM: Charles Blaschke and Blair Curry
SUBJ: Preliminary District Title I Allocations; Stimulus Funding Guidance on Homeless and QZAB; and State Profile Updates

On April 9th, we sent TechMIS subscribers a Special Report on final Title I regulatory changes that Secretary Duncan said he would make, either through the waiver process initially and/or in revised formal regulatory changes. Perhaps the most important change would allow districts identified for improvement to operate their own SES programs which would provide increased opportunities for firms to partner with districts providing products and support services. Also, in the long run, it provides a funding stream to pay for after-school programs which were expanded during the year of stimulus funding.

In a separate report, we will include a list of districts receiving a \$400,000 or greater preliminary increased allocations of Title I funds and those receiving a 30 percent or greater increase for school year 2009-10. The amount of increased Title I funding which districts will receive after state adjustments and whether the district feels the increases are justified based on numbers, or whether the increases are unexpected most could have a major impact on how these districts will spend their Phase I and Phase II Title I stimulus funding.

Also included in this issue is a Stimulus Funding Alert which describes new guidance on almost \$70 million stimulus funding to serve homeless children. Districts must receive their portion of the stimulus funding by August 8th. Also included is additional guidance on the Qualified Zone Academy Bonding (QZAB) initiative under which districts with schools with 35 percent or more poverty, under certain conditions, can obtain multi-year, no-interest loans which can be used to replace schools' entire curricula. States are receiving a three- to four-fold increase over QZAB allocations for 2008.

Also included in this issue are several Washington Updates including:

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An updated report from the Sloan Consortium which confirms continued rapid

growth in K-12 online learning and identifies other trends that could provide opportunities for firms providing online programs/services. Use of online tutoring/remedial programs and courses for credit recovery are two such opportunities; another not addressed directly by the report is college remediation tutoring for enrolling veterans who can receive “vouchers” for up to \$1,200 for college remediation which will likely be delivered online.

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A recent report by the highly respected National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future calls for the creation of “learning teams” to stave off the largest teacher retirement wave in history. The “learning teams” concept fits very closely into the notion of “professional learning communities” (promoted by Candidate Obama) which can foster collaboration in turning around low-performing schools, one of the major “examples” of allowable uses of stimulus funding under several components.

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USED officials and recent research findings provide further hints as to what is likely to be included in the \$3+ billion School Improvement Grant (SIG) guidance to states, expected shortly.

Also included in this issue are State Profile Updates, many of which highlight tentative state plans of how officials would like to use economic stimulus stabilization funding (which has already been received by three states -- California, Illinois, and South Dakota). Other topics covered include state budget cuts (despite the stimulus package) and state education reform.

Stimulus Funding Alert: New Guidance on Homeless Children and Quality Zone Academy Bonding Guidance

A Technology Monitoring and Information Service (TechMIS)

SPECIAL STIMULUS FUNDING ALERT

Prepared by:

*Education TURNKEY Systems, Inc.
256 North Washington Street
Falls Church, Virginia 22046-4549
(703) 536-2310 / (703) 536-3225 FAX*

April 28, 2009

On April 10th, AARA guidance on McKinney-Vento Homeless Children and Youth Funds was published regarding how the almost \$70 million stimulus portion will be allocated, identifying allowable uses of such funds. These stimulus funds will be added to the FY 2009 appropriation of \$65 million; however, differing from the regular McKinney-Vento funds, that are competitive grants to districts, the stimulus funds can be allocated through grant competitions or through the use of a formula or some combination of the two. Districts must receive their portion by August 8th. In addition, “separate books” on how the money is spent must be kept, as with all AARA funds that supplement regular appropriations.

Some of the allowable uses of funds identified in the April 10th guidance include:

- SES, such as tutoring and enrichment programs;
- professional development for personnel working with homeless students;
- before and after-school mentoring and summer programs with education activities;
- cost of tracking systems which can be used to track, obtain, and transfer records of homeless children and youth, which is a major problem due to inter- and intra-district student mobility among schools;
- pupil services, such as violence prevention and counseling;
- purchase of supplies for use in non-school facilities, such as shelters, that are used to provide tutoring and other instructional programs; and
- purchase of systems and tools to administer programs effectively as long as costs are “reasonable and necessary.”

McKinney-Vento stimulus funding was released to states on April 10th and must be allocated to districts within 120 days or by August 8th. Such funds must be obligated by September 30, 2011.

Because of high rates of student mobility, because parents/guardians may move among housing projects/shelters in the same district or in contiguous districts, the types of

student tracking in instructional programs that are suited for migrant and other high-mobility student groups are appropriate. In addition to McKinney-Vento funds in situations where children become homeless as a result of disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, additional funding is usually made available to provide services to these students. A major problem confronting many districts is having appropriate student tracking and reporting systems which also capture how funds are used and what, if any, additional jobs are created or retained locally.

The decade-old Qualified Zone Academy Bonding (QZAB) Initiative has evolved into a program which provides no-interest loans to qualified districts and schools or “academic” programs which have poverty enrollments of 35% or more within a public school. Funds can be used to:

- rehabilitate or repair public school facilities;
- provide equipment;
- develop and purchase course materials (especially in “academics”); and
- train teachers and other school personnel.

Initially, the annual loan amounts, for which districts have to apply, totaled about \$400 million per year and were used to renovate or repair school facilities. Over time, in most states, they have been used to modernize school infrastructure (e.g., for broadband) and to replace entire curricula, especially in career and technical vocational schools and academies within schools. Local businesses or other related sources must provide a ten percent match which can include equipment, technical assistance in developing a curriculum to promote appropriate market-driven technology in classrooms, and other financial and in-kind contributions. In the past, many districts, unaware of QZAB, did not apply for such funds, resulting in states carrying over unused funds to the following year which constituted a significant amount of funds accumulated over time (e.g., 1/3 of the \$800 million available in 2006 and 2007). The amount of QZAB funding within the stimulus package is significant for many states such as California which received \$44 million in regular 2008 allocations and will receive an additional \$155 million in stimulus funding availability. Texas has received almost \$38 million in FY 2008 allocations and will receive an additional \$132 million in stimulus QZAB loan authority.

Based on discussions with a number of school districts, one of our colleagues, Dr. Laurence Peters, who was the first director of the QZAB program, confirmed that many districts currently are not interested in “borrowing” programs -- even with no interest -- because of repayment requirements in 12-15 years; rather, they are currently more interested in Fiscal Stabilization and other funds which generally have fewer strings attached. On the other hand, given the political battles in most states concerning how Fiscal Stabilization funds are going to be used and how much of the SFSF funds will be used for restoration, partially due to last minute “baiting and switching” by state legislatures, if such funds end up not being available for school construction or modernization under SFSF, more and more districts may turn to QZAB bonding authority options. On the positive side, there seems to be an advantage for a district to apply for QZAB authority now since there is likely to be less competition. To learn more about QZAB, go to state office contacts or QZAB.org, a one-stop, information source with

which TURNKEY partners with longtime associate Dr. Peters.

While new guidance is planned for the immediate future, the initial guidance contact is the Office of Associate Chief Council Sandra Westin or Timothy Jones at (202) 622-3980.

Washington Update

Vol. 14, No. 5, April 28, 2009

Sloan Consortium Reports Confirms Continued Rapid Growth in K-12 Online Learning and Identifies Other Trends That Could Provide Opportunities for Firms Providing Online Programs/Services

In its 2009 report on the extent and nature of online learning in K-12 schools, the Sloan Consortium confirm the dramatic growth that other recent studies have found and has identified several trends which could provide opportunities for firms with appropriate products. Over the two-year period since 2005-06, Sloan found that 42,000 students enrolled in “fully online” courses and more than 23,000 enrolled in “blended courses” for a grand total of 66,000 -- a 47 percent increase over two years. The Sloan study extrapolated those numbers to slightly over one million students, or two percent of all public school students, enrolled in some type of online learning courses. In 2008, almost 70 percent of school districts reported that they had at least one student who took an online course. Moreover, districts predicted that, on average, the number of students taking online courses would grow by almost 23 percent over the next two years. Over 66 percent of district respondents felt their district’s enrollment in “fully online” courses would increase, while 61 percent expected growth in “blended” enrollments.

The Consortium found, as it did in its 2007 report, that online learning is being used to meet the needs of a wide spectrum of students and is not solely used for advanced

placement. In terms of the perceived importance of a number of uses of online and blended learning, the two most important uses, as perceived by respondents, was “offering courses not otherwise available at the school” and “meeting the needs of specific groups of students”... both with about 75 percent of the respondents. However, over the two-year period, the perceived importance of online learning for “permitting students who failed a course to take it again” (credit recovery) has increased from about 53 percent of respondents to 60 percent. Over the same time frame, the perceived importance of advanced placement has remained at about 67 percent.

The Consortium report also reiterated a major difference between online learning at colleges/universities compared to K-12 in terms of types of providers. Whereas colleges and universities have observed much faster growth in online instruction that has been developed and provided, for the most part by university faculty and other groups, in K-12, the report notes, “...school districts on the other hand approached online learning with caution. Rather than investing resources and developing their own delivery support structure, they typically depended on a number of outside learning providers....In most cases, K-12 school administrators tended to contract with multiple online providers to serve a variety of specific instructional needs.” Over the two-year period, the percentage of districts reporting four or more providers increased from 28 percent in 2006 to almost 39 percent in 2008. Also over the two-year

timeframe, nearly 47 percent of respondents indicated they used post-secondary institutions as online course providers for “fully online” courses. These, at least in part, reflect the growth of dual enrollment courses. For “blended” courses, only 27 percent of respondents reported using post-secondary institutions. A study by USED found that, in 2006-07, more than 5,000 colleges and universities (or approximately 12 percent of higher education institutions) provided distance learning services for K-12 school districts. Over that same time period, the percentage of respondents using independent vendors increased slightly from 32 percent to 34 percent for “fully online” courses, but declined from 26 percent to 17 percent for “blended” courses. The largest percentage gains among providers, however, occurred in the use of state virtual schools which increased from 34 to 41 percent for “fully online” courses, but which increased only three percentage points for “blended” courses. The largest increase in “blended” online courses was provided by “other schools in the district.”

One potential opportunity might be in the area of credit recovery, along with non-course remediation/tutoring, a factor that this survey does not totally capture. Numerous USED reports have found, over the last decade and a half, one of the earliest, fastest growing uses of online instruction in post-secondary institutions has been in college remediation courses. This continues to expand, especially as the new GI Bill begins to be implemented in August. Under the Bill, a returning veteran who enters college can receive \$100 per month over 12 months for tutoring/remediation to meet college admission requirements or otherwise take courses for credit. As reported in Inside Higher Education (April 6, 2009), a

national survey of community colleges by the Instructional Technology Council found that distance learning enrollments grew slightly over 11 percent between the Fall of 2006 and 2007. It also found that almost 20 percent of distance offerings were purchased from publishers or other content providers. In terms of services colleges plan to offer, one of the largest percentage increases was in “online tutoring assistance” which would increase 22 percent from 60 percent of colleges currently offering tutoring assistance. This large increase can be, at least partially, attributed to the new GI Bill tutoring reimbursement initiative. Online courses used for college remediation, as well as for credit recovery and test prep activities in K-12, offer important opportunities for providers of appropriate products and services.

The Sloan Consortium has publicly stated that it will no longer be conducting its online K-12 surveys. For a copy of the most recent report entitled “K-12 Online Learning: A 2008 Follow-up of the Survey of U.S. School District Administrators (January 2009), go to: www.sloan-c.org/publications/survey/pdf/k-12_online_learning_2008.pdf

National Commission Calls for the Creation of “Learning Teams” to Stave Off the Largest Teacher Retirement Wave in History

According to a recent report by the highly-respected National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF), K-12 education is about to be hit with the largest teacher retirement wave in history. The report notes, “In five years, two-thirds of the teachers we entrust our children to in

America's classrooms could be gone.” Moreover, based on Commission surveys, the report emphasizes, “In some school districts half of the new hires are replaced every five years. These schools in these districts struggle to close the achievement gap, because precious resources and time are consumed by constant efforts to rebuild their staff...High turnover is a central factor driving the inequitable distribution of quality teaching.” Solutions to “inequitable distribution of quality teaching” is one of the four pillars of the Obama/Duncan policy priorities reflected in the assurances/priorities that are built into SFSF stimulus funding, which is currently being allocated to Governors. In this recent survey, NCTAF found that only 60 percent of baby boomer teachers intend to work after retirement and that almost 75 percent reacted favorably to the idea of “cross-generational learning teams composed of novice educators, apprentices, interns, online educators, digital media designers, and adjunct content specialists to create 21st century learning organizations.”

Citing numerous recent studies, the Commission identifies the benefits of the creation and use of learning teams, including:

- Learning teams can be cost effective -- a 2007 analysis of six traditional classrooms, one using six stand-alone teachers and the other a cross-generational team of 17 individuals, found the cost of serving 150 students to be the same.
- The use of teams provides leverage to obtain additional resources through the use of “millennial age” teachers and “digital age” students to deliver knowledge, skills and tools to develop 21st century competencies.

- Teaming also brings service to schools by leveraging external resources such as AmeriCorps, and the new Source American Act, and other volunteer programs.

The Commission concludes that one of the most promising and beneficial uses of learning teams is in low-performing schools, stating, “In every story about high performing schools that are bucking the odds to improve student achievement, a strong collaborative teaching culture is at the heart of the effort. No single teacher can -- or should be expected to -- meet these myriad challenges alone.” Arguing that prevailing conventional approaches involving recruitment and hiring incentives to attract highly-qualified individuals to low-performing schools will encourage them to stay is wrong, the Commission says, “It is time to change the conditions that make these schools so hard to staff in the first place.”

For the last five years, the Commission has argued that a range of technology applications can be used to improve working conditions; more recently it has promoted the argument that technology can also be used to facilitate the creation, implementation of learning teams. During the campaign and subsequently President Obama has more than once called for creation of “professional learning communities” which can foster collaboration in turning around low-performing schools, which is one of the examples of allowable uses of stimulus funding under IDEA, Title I, and the State Fiscal Stabilization (SFSF) components. The Commission’s findings parallel very closely the research findings recently reported to the National State Title I Directors Conference by Dr. Joseph

Johnson, which are summarized in a related [Washington Update](#) item.

For a copy of the NCTAF Commission report entitled “Learning Teams: Creating What’s Next” go to: www.nctaf.org/resources/research_and_reports/nctaf_research_reports/documents/NCTAF_LearningTeams408REG2-09.pdf

USED Officials and Recent Research Findings Provide Further Hints as to What Is Likely to Be Included in the \$3+ Billion School Improvement Grant (SIG) Guidance to States, Expected Shortly

Recent statements by USED officials, as well as important research findings, provide hints as to what may be included in School Improvement Grant guidance to SEAs which, in turn, will be reflected in guidance and priorities in their solicitation of proposals from districts with schools in corrective action and restructuring. These schools (between 4,000-6,000) will receive six-fold or greater increases in School Improvement Grants in a few months. Some of these likely areas of guidance could determine what types of products or services are likely to be considered priority uses of such funds by districts/schools. They could also help firms “position” such products, particularly those which could be considered tool applications which can be used for data-drive decision-making, tracking student progress, and related purposes to implement research-based “effective practices,” as suggested below.

After discussions with USED officials, such as Zollie Stevenson Jr. who directs the USED Office of Student Achievement and

School Accountability (which administers Title I), Sarah Sparks in the March 24th edition of [Education Daily](#) stated, “ED is in the process of changing its application for the grants to focus less on state systems of support and more on identifying and replicating programs that improve classroom instruction and help schools exit school improvement status.” In the same article, Bill McGrady, former State Director of Special Education and later Title I in North Carolina’s Office of Public Instruction and now USED’s School Improvement Specialist, noted that states and districts must take care “not to simply buy a product or program to improve a given subject; they must structure school and district improvement plans that address the gamut of reasons students may be struggling.” McGrady then advised districts to consider “mirroring” the school improvement process in Virginia which pairs individual low-performing schools with similarly-situated high-performing schools in which mutual collaboration occurs.

During the February National Association of State Title I Directors Annual Conference, Dr. Joseph Johnson, Executive Director of the National Center for Urban School Transformation, indicated five general strategies being used by schools that have “thrived” and exited from school improvement sanctions versus those schools that are “trapped in” improvement. There are “subtle but significant differences” in how each of the strategies being implemented were emphasized. Dr. Johnson was selected, during the early days of the Bush Administration, to direct The National Title I program based on his research on effective practices used to turn around low-performing Texas schools. Within several months after taking the job and being made

aware of official policy emanating from the Secretary and other high-level officials, he resigned due to significant policy differences. However, both he and his research have a preeminent status within the Title I community. His most current research findings are likely to impact both USED, and most importantly state guidance, regarding the use of SIG and directly-related stimulus and regular funding. His presentation before the February conference -- entitled "Trapped in School Improvement vs. Thriving in Continuous Improvement" -- can be downloaded at <http://www.ncust.org/dnn/Resources/tabid/59/Default.aspx>.

His research on thriving schools which are in a continuous improvement status and have exited from sanctions versus similarly-situated schools that are "trapped in" improvement found that both focus on "improvement;" however, "thriving" schools focus on changing student lives and pursuing excellence for all subgroups of students, while schools that are "trapped" emphasize meeting state and Federal criteria and usually focus their attention only on the most "failing" demographic subgroup. The Center on Education Policy, in a study of more than 40 schools that have successfully exited from restriction, also found that most of these schools did not focus only on the specific subgroups which had the highest percentage of students failing to meet AYP, but rather focused on all students in the schools.

While the two groups of schools use data for decision making, the "thriving" schools used "fresh data to help teachers know if students have learned what they attempted to teach" and used data to identify exciting growth opportunities. "Trapped" schools used data

more than two weeks old and data "which were difficult to act on because of their age."

Another subtle difference was teaching to high-quality standards. "Thriving" schools promoted in-depth mastery of key standards that were related to fundamental concepts and skills in order to understand a subject. Teachers at such schools constantly sought evidence that students were learning the standards they were trying to teach. "Trapped" schools focused "almost exclusively on tested subjects."

Perhaps the most subtle differences in the two groups of schools is related to professional development. In "thriving" schools, professional development focused, over time, on one or two important opportunities for instructional improvement and used systems to ensure that professional development leads to changes in classroom instruction. On the other hand, "trapped" schools had no systems to ensure professional development leads to changes in actual teaching. Also, in "thriving" schools administrators attended teacher training sessions and observed in classrooms, reinforcing key concepts daily, while in "trapped" schools administrators engaged minimally in teacher professional development.

Engagement of teachers also differs in "thriving" schools compared with "trapped" schools. The former promoted shared opportunities which are part of "powerful teams that support each other in improving student learning," while teachers in "trapped" schools were treated like independent contractors who "fly solo bearing individual responsibility for student learning." Teacher collaboration was used

extensively in “thriving” schools to maximize changes while, in “trapped” schools, teacher collaboration did not lead to any such changes. Engagement of students is also different in that “thriving” schools enticed students by making learning relevant, interesting and fun and by creating new ways for students to see themselves as competent, intelligent learners. On the other hand, “trapped” schools engaged students by demanding effort to meet high expectations and hoped that “unmotivated” students will leave so “motivated” students can prevail.

As we have noted over the last several months, opportunities for firms with appropriate products and services that can tap into School Improvement Grant (SIG) stimulus funding, along with other directly-related funding designed to turn around the lowest performing schools (e.g., the SEA 4% set-aside), appear to be great because: (a) the number of schools that will receive most of the six- to eight-fold increases in Title I funding are small -- somewhere between 4,000 and 6,000; (b) the percentage of 4% set-aside funding, which is the most analogous to the School Improvement Grant purposes, spent 60-70% on professional development and instructional materials with only limited funds being spent on staff salaries; and (c) the number of schools in corrective action and restructuring is likely to increase over the next couple of years, before the “exit” rate exceeds the “entering” rate.

Please call me if you have any questions.

Arizona Update

May 2009

The U.S. Supreme Court has heard arguments in the longstanding legal case involving Arizona's spending for the instruction of English language learners. As reported in Education Daily, a Court of Appeals has ruled that Arizona is not complying with Federal laws requiring states to "take appropriate action to overcome language barriers" in its instructional programs. The State has argued that, by complying with the Federal No Child Left Behind Act, it has satisfied the Equal Educational Opportunities Act requirement. Moreover, the State says the Appellate Court has improperly taken away state discretion to determine education funding. The Supreme Court's decision, expected this summer, could have national implications by redefining states' rights versus Federal authority.

Arkansas Update

May 2009

It is estimated that the 245 local school districts in Arkansas will receive a total of as much as \$570 million from the Federal education stimulus package. Of the State's total allocation, \$111 million will be available to improve academic performance and to reduce achievement gaps and another \$117 million will go to services to students with disabilities. State officials have indicated that the remaining amount -- \$341 million -- could be used for school construction and renovation.

Arkansas has indicated that, because it has not made cuts in education spending in recent years, it will not have to use Federal stimulus stabilization funds to replenish the education budget. The State will, therefore, use its stabilization money for modernization and for renovation -- in both K-12 and higher education -- that has been delayed for some time.

The Northwest Arkansas Times reports that Arkansas has implemented a new component of the State's School Performance Report Card. Called the "Gains Rating," the new measure is intended to show the growth of a school's students. The system's five-point rating scale is as follows:

- Level 1 -- schools in need of immediate improvement
- Level 2 -- schools on alert
- Level 3 -- schools meeting improvement standards
- Level 4 -- schools exceeding improvement standards
- Level 5 -- schools of excellence for improvement.

The terms are similar to the ones used to determine whether a school meets adequate yearly progress (AYP) benchmarks, but they are used in different contexts.

The Arkansas legislature is debating how many students should be allowed to enroll in the State's virtual charter school. In early April, the Joint Budget Committee recommended increasing the cap on enrollment in the Arkansas Virtual Academy from 500 to 1,000. Shortly

thereafter a bill was introduced to return the cap to 500 on the grounds that more information is needed on student performance.

California Update

May 2009

According to The Mercury News, (April 9, 2009) California's new budget has changed the structure of such "categorical" programs as regional occupational centers, high school counseling, and gifted-and-talented programs. Categorical programs fall into three tiers. Tier I programs -- including child development, child nutrition, K-3 class size reduction, after-school programs, and special education -- will receive no funding cuts but will have no flexibility as to how funds are used. Tier II includes Charter School Facilities grants, foster youth, State testing and the English Language Acquisition program will receive a 15 percent funding cut this year and will have no program flexibility. Tier III consolidates more than 40 into a single unit requiring a 15 percent funding reduction this year (and for four additional years) and giving schools the flexibility to use the funds as they wish.

In mid-April, approximately \$4 billion of stimulus funds, allocated through the initial plan for stabilization funds, was approved after pressure from George Miller, Chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee who is from California. It appears that the Governor will be allocating such funds for restoration purposes directly to districts. While the Governor does have some influence as to how stabilization funds are likely to be used, the use of stimulus funding for Title I and special education appears to be in accordance with existing guidelines and allowable uses, as is occurring in virtually all other states that began receiving such funds at the beginning of April. In California, there exists one major potential "fly in the ointment" in that the voters must approve many of the line items in the current state budget in an election on May 19th. If any one of the major State budget line items for K-12 is not approved, it is likely that the entire state budget that was agreed upon a month and a half ago is up in the air and will have to be redone. If some of the State funds are further reduced, especially in light of a potential \$8 billion additional shortfall for next year, then there may be additional pressures to use more of the state fiscal stabilization funds for K-12 restoration. As in many other states, at the current time, the best prospects for K-12 purchases appear to be through both stimulus and regular Federal funding for Title I and IDEA.

An analysis by Education Legislative Services in AEP ONLINE has described the process used in California to allocate and spend the State's share of the Federal education stimulus package. In March, California sent preliminary layoff notices to 26,000 school staff. May 15 is the deadline for final layoff notifications but districts are hoping that the stabilization portion of the stimulus package will avert many of the layoffs. Like many states, California requires the State legislature to reappropriate the Federal funds to State and local agencies. Also involved is the Legislative Analyst's Office which has said that the Federal stabilization funds could be used for general fund savings. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has declared, however, that Federal stimulus money earmarked for education would go to the schools.

California (along with Illinois and South Dakota) was one of the first three states to be approved for funding under the State Stabilization component of the Federal stimulus package. The State's initial stabilization availability is nearly \$4 billion; California can apply for another \$2 billion this Fall. Earlier, California received nearly \$1.3 billion in other stimulus components, the largest being Title I (\$562 million) and IDEA/Special Education (\$660 million).

A study by researchers in the California State University system has found that freshmen entering California State University, Sacramento are better prepared than they were five years ago. The study found a six percentage point reduction in the number of freshmen needing remedial English and a four-point drop in the number needing remedial math. The researchers attribute much of the improvement to the five-year-old Early Assessment Program which has provided high school juniors with information about their college readiness in English and mathematics.

Because of the financial difficulties faced by the State and the school district, Los Angeles plans to terminate its highly praised dropout prevention program known as the Diploma Project. Operational for three years, the \$10 million Diploma Project assigns counselors to 49 high schools and 31 middle schools, according to the Los Angeles Times. Although the success of the Diploma Projects is hard to define, the district's official graduation rate has increased slightly to

more than 67 percent. District officials have said the program will be replaced by a more effective one.

Colorado Update

May 2009

Colorado, according to The Denver Post, is hoping to win an additional \$500 million in Federal stimulus funds as part of the \$4.35 billion “Race to the Top” program. This stimulus portion is intended to provide states with Federal support for dramatic overhauls of public school systems and to provide models for other states. Colorado believes it has a shot at the money based on its current level of education reforms, including new reading and writing standards, autonomy for principals, and a pending bill that would allow the State to track teacher performance. If successful in being one of the “Race to the Top” states, Colorado plans to partner with one or more other Western states in the development of reform strategies. The Colorado legislature is considering a number of bills that could attract this Federal stimulus money. House Bill 1319 would allow high school students to earn college credits while still in high school. House Bill 1065 would improve teacher evaluation by assigning each teacher an identification number to help track where effective teachers were trained and where they teach, as well as to determine which teachers need additional help. Senate Bill 163 would align Federal, State, and local education standards.

Connecticut Update

May 2009

The Education Commission of the States reports that Connecticut has proposed a number of budget cuts for FY 2010 including elimination of grants supporting Best Practices, the Connecticut Science Center, K-3 mental health programs, and the Connecticut Pre-Engineering Program.

According to the Hartford Courant, a total of approximately 933 teaching positions are expected to be eliminated Statewide for the 2009-10 school year. The number of expected teacher cuts is based on a new survey of district superintendents.

The Hartford Courant also reports that the subject area in which there was the greatest shortage of teachers in Connecticut is foreign languages. Other areas in which there are the highest percentages of teaching vacancies this school year are speech/language pathologists, comprehensive special education teachers, math, science, and bilingual teachers. Large urban districts have the highest vacancy rates (about 10 percent) compared to 4.5 percent Statewide.

Delaware Update

May 2009

A State task force has proposed a replacement assessment for the 11-year old Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP) to be used beginning in the 2010-11 school year. The new exam -- to be called the Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System -- will be computer-adaptive and growth-model compatible; it will bring quicker results, earlier teacher intervention, and greater student motivation. Currently the DSTP is given in March each year for reading, writing, and math. Its critics say it takes up too much instructional time and results are usually not available until the term is almost over. The new test is expected to provide almost immediate student feedback and diagnostic reports for teachers. The State is seeking bids from testing firms to determine the cost of the new assessment; the final decision is planned for July.

District of Columbia Update

May 2009

Education Daily reports that an evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program -- the first Federally funded voucher program in the U.S. -- has found significant gains in reading among participating students but no gains in math. The U.S. Congress has, for FY 2009, eliminated funding for the program unless it is reauthorized. The Obama Administration has, however, said it will fund the program for FY 2010 and that students in the program will continue to receive support.

Florida Update

May 2009

As reported in The Miami Herald, in 2002, Florida voters approved a ballot measure that capped class sizes at 18 students in grades K-3, 22 students in 4-8, and 25 students in high school -- to be fully implemented in 2010-11. This year, the legislature is considering a ballot proposal for 2010 that would loosen somewhat the class-size restrictions. HFR191 would retain the class-size requirements but allow them to be calculated on a school-average basis as long as individual classes do not exceed the averages by more than three students in K-3 and by five students in higher grades. The measure is supported by Republicans who say it will give local administrators needed flexibility, while Democrats argue it weakens the 2002 class-size amendment. If approved by the full legislature, the ballot measure would then have to be approved by 60 percent of the voters.

As part of Florida's class-size reduction efforts, the fast-growing Florida Virtual School has, in recent years, received as much as 15 percent of its budget in class-size reduction funds. This year, the Virtual School -- with 88,000 online students -- got nearly \$14 million from that source. The State's \$3 billion budget shortfall has caused legislators to look at the class-size reduction money going to a school without classrooms as a way to save. Officials at the Virtual School say the funds are a critical part of its budget and that, without the money, the student-to-teacher ratio would increase from 170:1 to 200:1.

Georgia Update

May 2009

Education Week's annual "Technology Counts" report rated Georgia the highest in the nation in terms of classroom use of technology and building capacity for technology use. Among the State's technology initiatives are:

- Georgia Virtual School provides students with on-line access to rigorous classes, including core subjects, foreign languages, and Advanced Placement courses. The Virtual School serves 4,000 students this year in 121 courses. The Georgia Virtual School also has allowed more than 40,000 students to take classes for credit recovery.
- Starting July 1, the State will double the bandwidth available to local school districts.
- The State is increasing access to digital content to help teachers in the classroom (www.geogiastandards.org).

School Reform News reports that a bill (SB 90) intended to provide universal school vouchers throughout Georgia was defeated in the State legislature. The measure would have allowed State funds to be used at any public or private school in Georgia and would have expanded the State's special needs voucher program. Although the voucher plan is considered dead for this legislative session, supporters say they will bring it up again next year.

A State auditing agency has determined that the Georgia Department of Education has not been adequately monitoring the State's 113 charter schools to ensure they meet Georgia academic standards. The State's audit has found that the State's charter school agency does not fully comply with a 1998 Georgia law which requires charter school oversight.

Illinois Update

May 2009

The State Journal-Register reports that the Illinois legislature, seeking to create distance between the Governor's Office and the State Board of Education, has approved a plan that would change the way Board members are appointed. Under the proposed system, a nominating panel -- composed of two former superintendents and two former State legislators -- would choose three finalists for each Board vacancy. The Governor would then select from these finalists.

In a letter to the State's local school districts

(www.isbe.net/board/archivemessages/2009/specialmessage_040309.pdf), the Illinois School Board outlined information concerning the State's share of the Federal education stimulus package. The stimulus package could provide as much as \$3 billion for education in Illinois, including \$420 million for Title I, \$506 million for IDEA/Special Education, \$27 million for educational technology (Title IID), and more than \$2 billion in fiscal stabilization funds. The State's seven-page letter details the deadlines by which districts must apply for the various pots of money and the dates by which the money must be expended.

According to data from the U.S. Department of Education (USED), Illinois has already received nearly \$500 million under the Federal economic stimulus package, most of it for Title I (\$210 million) and IDEA/Special Education (\$270 million). Also, as of April 20, USED has approved the State's application for \$1.4 billion in stabilization funds, 82 percent of which will be allocated to public schools and higher education institutions. Illinois will be eligible to apply for \$678 more in stabilization money this Fall.

Louisiana Update

May 2009

According to a report by the Washington-based Education Trust, the gap in student performance between Black and White students in Louisiana has narrowed but still lags behind most other states. The Education Trust analyzed test scores in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math and found that the gap between Louisiana's Black and White students narrowed by 12 percentage points in fourth-grade reading and by 11 percentage points in eighth-grade math.

The University of Louisiana System has released a study which shows an \$8 return on every State dollar invested in its colleges and universities. The study is in response to recommendations from Governor Bobby Jindal that the UL System will receive \$67 million in cuts in the next budget. According to the study, the UL System results in \$3.4 billion spent in the State each year. The study is available at: www.ulsystem.edu/impactstudy.

Maine Update

May 2009

According to the Portland Press Herald, Maine's plan to expand the State's extensive laptop program to high schools has hit some snags in the form requirements placed on local school districts. Although a State funding increase is not necessary, local officials say school districts will need more staff to manage the new computers. Moreover, it is argued that teachers who designed their curricula around the laptops they received two years ago could lose them if their districts were to opt out of the expansion. Currently, the State allocates \$275 per high school student for technology; the laptop expansion would replace that subsidy. The Kennebec Journal reports that 47 percent of Maine's high schools expect to participate in the expansion of the Maine Learning Technology Initiative and another 42 percent are still considering their options. Local school districts may be able to use part of the Federal education stimulus package to defray the costs of hiring additional technology staff and administering the program. The legislature must approve the initiative's expansion as part of the budget for the 2010-11 biennium before the State can agree with Apple on a four-year, \$75 million contract.

Maryland Update

May 2009

A number of officials and early childhood advocates have indicated that Maryland is at the vanguard of the integration of early childhood learning programs and K-12 education. Legislation, passed in 2005, centralized policy making for pre-K education and unified the State's early care programs within the Maryland Department of Education. A recent report indicates that 74 percent of children in the State were fully prepared for kindergarten compared with only 50 percent in 2001.

Massachusetts Update

May 2009

Under a plan proposed by Governor Deval Patrick, the influx of stimulus money to Massachusetts will help minimize teacher layoffs, school closings, and program cuts. The exact mechanism by which the money will be allocated will be determined cooperatively by the Governor and the legislature. The Governor's proposal does not address funding for higher education next year which is expected to be \$142 million lower than the current year. Some stimulus funding may be used to reduce the shortfall.

The Boston Globe also reports that Massachusetts is beginning to use a new student tracking system that analyzes the performance of individual students or classes of students over several years. The State's current system measures a school's success based upon student scores on the MCAS, comparing one class of students to the students from the year before. The new tool will expand the performance measurement to individual students starting in the third-grade.

Massachusetts plans to raise the State's graduation rate standard from last year's 60 percent to 65 percent. As reported in the Boston Globe, the Statewide average last year was 81 percent with only 15 percent of all high schools in the State failing to meet the 60 percent standard. However, four-year graduation rates for some student subgroups were far lower than the State average: Hispanics -- 58.3 percent; limited-English-proficient students -- 55.8 percent; and special education students -- 64.1 percent.

In an interview with Education Daily, Boston superintendent Carol R. Johnson discussed her plans for using the funds her district will receive from the Federal stimulus package. She indicated that she would be seeking investments that would help improve student proficiency, raise graduation rates, close achievement gaps, and make the district's graduates college-ready. She specifically referred to: creating a more inclusive environment for special education students; supporting English language learners (particularly older students); and improving the district's data systems for tracking students from an early age.

According to the Boston Globe, for the first time, Latino students have become largest segment of the enrollment in the Boston school district. For the current school year, Latinos comprised 38.1 percent of all students compared with 37.9 percent for African-Americans. The growth in the Latino enrollment will cause the district to expand the Boston International High School and open another program for bilingual instruction. This year, the district opened a Newcomers Academy for students with limited English proficiency and who lag behind their age peers in the classroom.

Again reported in the Boston Globe, six years ago, Massachusetts began requiring school districts to teach English language learners in English for all subjects. A new report from the University of Massachusetts at Boston and the Center for Collaborative Education has found that, since the change, the high school dropout rate for ELLs in Boston has nearly doubled. The district has acknowledged the problems facing its non-native English speakers (who comprise 38 percent of the district's enrollment) and has said it will expand programs for ELLs, provide better information to parents, and overhaul the testing structure.

Michigan Update

May 2009

The Detroit News reports that the Michigan Department of Education, concerned about low test scores Statewide, are redoing the writing portion of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) and, starting next year, administering it only to fourth- and seventh-graders. The MEAP is used to determine if schools meet the goals of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act.

The Detroit Free Press reports that the Michigan legislature is considering proposals that would have the State take over the lowest-performing high schools if they do not meet rigorous goals within five years. The bills, which are supported by the Governor, would focus on schools that have failed to make adequate yearly progress for at least four consecutive years and that have less than 35 percent of their students rated proficient on State assessment. A “turnaround czar” would be appointed to negotiate specific improvement goals for each school.

The Detroit News reports that the district’s declining enrollment and shaky financial situation has caused Detroit Public Schools’ emergency financial manager to plan on layoffs of 600 teachers and the closing of 23 schools, resulting in the transfer of 7,500 students. The layoffs and closings are intended to address a \$306 million budget deficit. At the same time, the district plans to invest \$200 million into existing buildings in the form of enhanced security and structural and other improvements.

As reported in the Detroit Free Press, the Detroit school district is planning to use \$52 million in leftover, end-of-year Federal funds to operate an extensive summer program. Called the Emergency Student Achievement Summer School Academies, the program would provide classes for students across all grades including both struggling students and those taking Advanced Placement courses. The summer program will also include professional development for staff, workshops for parents, programs for children entering preschool, and college entrance exam preparation. The plan, which must be approved by the State, would take place between

June 15 and July 24 at 85 schools. Participation would be optional and transportation would be provided.

Mississippi Update

May 2009

As reported in the Hattiesburg American, Mississippi has approved a new rating system to measure schools in terms of academic achievement and growth. Under the new system, schools will be rated on a seven-category scale: star school, high-performing, successful, academic watch, low-performing, at-risk of failing, and failing. The system will factor in a high school's graduation rate by awarding 300 points for students earning a regular diploma, 150 points for those earning occupational diplomas or certificates of attendance, and minus 300 points for dropouts.

Nebraska Update

May 2009

The Lincoln Journal Star reports that, starting in mid-April, the State will implement in a pilot test in which 140,000 Nebraska students in grades 3-8 and 11 will take a Statewide reading test on computer. The pilot test will not count for students but is intended to help State officials develop the State's new reading assessment scheduled to be rolled out in the Spring of 2010. New math and science assessments are slated for 2011 and 2012, respectively. The new Statewide assessments replace the STARS system which allowed school districts to develop their own assessments. State officials say 94 Nebraska school districts already do their local testing on line.

Nevada Update

May 2009

The Las Vegas Review-Journal reports that the Nevada legislature is considering a 66-page education reform bill that includes improved student tracking, more coordination with higher education, performance-based pay for teachers, and an overhaul of the State Board of Education. The measure seeks to increase starting teacher pay to an average of \$40,000 (as opposed to the current \$33,000), but increase accountability to weed out low-performing teachers. Teacher assessments would be based half on student performance and half on teacher training and feedback from administrators and parents.

In order to qualify for \$325 million in stabilization funds from the Federal stimulus package, Nevada must allocate at least as much State money for both K-12 and higher education as it did in 2006. As reported in the Las Vegas Sun, State officials say they meet the standard for K-12 education but not for higher education. The State has asked USED for a waiver from the higher education requirement; if the waiver is denied, all stabilization funds -- including K-12 -- could be lost. The Clark County school district, in particular, would be hard hit. Although it would still receive Title I and IDEA stimulus funds, the district is relying on the stabilization money to avoid even more program cuts. It has already dropped \$133 million in programs and services and expects another reduction in operating expenses of \$120 million for the next biennium.

New York Update

May 2009

New York State's share of the education component of the Federal stimulus package is expected to be \$2.078 billion. The largest shares will go to Title I (\$940 million), IDEA/Special Education (\$760 million), Pell Grant increase (\$180 million), and Head Start/Early Head Start (\$130 million). The State will also get \$2.5 billion for education restoration from the stimulus' Stabilization portion.

The Albany Times-Union reports that New York State is considering a plan to count students who take five or more years to complete high school when calculating graduation rates. The Statewide four-year graduation rate for the Class of 2007 was 69 percent; it could have been as much as six percent higher if a fifth year were allowed. The reporting of graduation rates nationally has been notoriously inaccurate because of inconsistencies in states' counting methodologies.

North Carolina Update

May 2009

The Charlotte Observer reports that the State education department has sent a memo to all 115 of North Carolina's school districts asking them to freeze all new purchases, hiring, and promotions using State funds. The freeze is intended to help the State to address serious cash flow problems and to save \$159 million to meet payroll and pay bills over the next few weeks. Many districts are scrambling to cancel contracts.

The News & Observer reports that the rollout of the requirement that high school students complete a project in order to graduate has become a district-by-district matter. The State board has delayed the requirement -- known as The Graduation Project -- until the Class of 2011 (this year's tenth-graders), but State officials have encouraged North Carolina school districts to keep the project requirement in place. In Johnston County, seniors in the Class of 2010 must complete projects, while Wake County is expected to make them optional. Charlotte-Mecklenburg has not decided on how it will handle the issue.

North Dakota Update

May 2009

As reported in the Argus Leader, the North Dakota legislature is considering a bill that would loosen the restrictions on home schooling. Current State law requires parents who are providing unsupervised home-schooling for their children to have at least a bachelor's degree. The new bill would give the same right to parents with regular high school diplomas or GEDs. Parents without a high school diploma may still home-school their children but must agree to outside supervision.

Ohio Update

May 2009

According to School Reform News, Governor Ted Strickland's proposed budget for next year includes level funding for the State's Educational Choice Scholarship Program (EdChoice).

Begun in the 2006-07 school year, EdChoice provides scholarships (vouchers) to students from chronically underperforming schools. As many as 14,000 EdChoice scholarships are available each year; this year, 9,712 of the scholarships are being used. They are worth up to \$4,500 for students in grades K-8 and \$5,300 for high school students.

Oklahoma Update

May 2009

According to data from the Oklahoma Department of Education, more than 5,200 Oklahoma students dropped out of high school during the 2007-08 school year. State officials are hoping to establish dropout intervention teams in every district. The approach emerged from the recommendations of the State Superintendent's Student Advisory Council which said students need smaller, more hands-on classes, as well as knowledgeable and engaging teachers. It is expected that dropout prevention activities should begin as early as the sixth grade.

The Oklahoma State Board of Education has approved a change in the way high school students can complete graduation requirements. Under the revised plan, students who cannot pass end-of-instruction exams can take alternative tests or demonstrate mastery through end-of-course projects. Starting with this year's freshmen, students are required to pass end-of-instruction tests in English II and Algebra I, as well as in two of the following: English II, Algebra II, Geometry, Biology I, or U.S. History. The first time students fail an exam they can retake it or pass an alternative such as an appropriate section of the ACT. Students who fail an end-of-instruction test a second time can retake the exam again, take an alternative test, or complete a project that demonstrates mastery of the subject area.

The Joplin Globe reports that the Oklahoma House has passed legislation that would allow up to 20 percent of the State's public schools to operate as charter schools. Called the School District Empowerment Program, the measure would give local school administrators more control over implementation of State mandates and spending of education resources. Slated to be implemented over the next seven years, the program is supported by the Oklahoma School Boards Association which has argued that such State mandates as class-size limits have burdened local schools. The bill is opposed by the State's largest teachers union which says it would roll back advances, approved by lawmakers almost 20 years ago, such as class-size limits, teacher preparation time, and graduation requirements.

Oregon Update

May 2009

According to State data, Oregon's high school dropout rate fell last year to an all-time low -- to 3.7 percent in 2007-08 from 4.2 percent the year before. Individual district dropout rates ranged from 8.4 percent in Portland to less than one percent in some smaller districts. State officials attribute the better reported dropout rates, in part, to stronger efforts by schools to offer better options for at-risk students. Some of the change is also attributed to better tracking of students by the State.

According to The Oregonian, a new State report addresses what happens to special education students after they leave high school. The survey found that 38 percent are employed full- or part-time, 13 percent are in college or receiving job training, 22 percent are working and enrolled in post-secondary education, and 27 percent have not held a paying job or enrolled in college or job training.

Pennsylvania Update

May 2009

The Philadelphia Inquirer reports that State data, to be released this summer, will show a sharp increase in the number of schools making adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. Last year, 72 percent of Pennsylvania schools made AYP based on reading and math scores in grades 3-8 and 11 on the PSSA tests. State projections indicate that approximately 250 additional schools will make AYP during the current school year. The change cannot, however, be attributed to academic improvement but rather the new statistical methods for calculating test results.

A recent study by researchers at Johns Hopkins University has found that district-operated schools in the Philadelphia school district have outperformed schools operated by outside managers. The study looked at test scores for students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades at 88 schools from 1997 to 2006. Other recent studies have shown that students attending for-profit schools in Philadelphia did better in math than those in district run schools.

Rhode Island Update

May 2009

The Providence Journal reports that Rhode Island's new education commissioner will be Deborah Gist who was education commissioner for the District of Columbia. Gist succeeds Peter McWalters who will step down on June 30 after 17 ½ years in office. Gist began as an elementary school teacher in Fort Worth, Texas and Hillsborough County, Florida.

South Dakota Update

May 2009

South Dakota has received nearly \$38 million in Federal education stimulus funds, most of which is in Title I (\$17.3 million) and IDEA/Special Education (\$17.6 million), about half of the total amount the State will eventually receive under these stimulus components. In addition, South Dakota is one of the first three states (along with California and Illinois) to have applications approved by the U.S. Department of Education under the stabilization component of the education stimulus package. The State now has another \$85.4 million available, 82 percent of which will be reallocated to public schools and colleges. This Fall, South Dakota will be eligible to apply for an additional \$42 million in stabilization money.

The Rapid City Journal reports that the South Dakota legislature is, for the second time in two years, considering a measure that would permit charter schools in the State. Proponents believe charter schools would provide an alternative to overcrowded public schools and integrate more cultural diversity into the curriculum.

Tennessee Update

May 2009

As reported in The Tennessean, Nashville-area school districts expect to receive a total of nearly \$69 million from the Federal education stimulus package. Federal and State officials are urging districts to use the money for school innovation but local administrators plan to use some of the funds to save jobs. Metro Nashville Schools, for example, slated to get \$43.3 million in Title I and IDEA stimulus funds, plans to cut 209 positions next year, including 130 teachers. However, it hopes to spend \$8 million of the new money for 56 new special education teachers, middle school literacy coaches, and the district's school reform initiative.

Texas Update

May 2009

The Austin American-Statesman reports that the Texas legislature is battling over a bill that would remove most of the authority to set public school curriculum standards and select textbooks from the State Board of Education. Under Senate Bill 2275, the State's education commissioner -- appointed by the Governor -- would be given the power to approve curriculum standards and textbooks based on the recommendations of a group of educators. Supporters of the bill say it will minimize political interference in the establishment of the curriculum. The Board could override the commissioner's decision with a four-fifths vote.

In addition, as reported in THE Journal, two Texas lawmakers have introduced a bill that would:

- allow the State textbook fund to be used to purchase technology equipment;
- create a list of electronic learning resources that would bypass the politics of the Texas State Board of Education;
- require that school districts purchase a set of State-adopted textbooks for each subject and grade level in the State curriculum.

Known as HB 4294, the bill could provide opportunities for technology firms. If districts use State textbook funds to purchase electronic textbooks, etc., then local funds could be freed up to purchase technology. The bill still has a long way to go, needing approval by both houses of the Texas legislature and sign off by the Governor.

The Texas legislature is debating a bill that would limit the current college admission rule that gives automatic admission to the University of Texas to any student who graduates in the top ten percent of his/her class. Last year, 81 percent of the entering freshmen at UT's main campus in Austin were admitted under the 10% rule. Under the proposed measure, universities could limit admissions under the 10% rule to 60 percent of an incoming freshman class. In 2007, a similar bill failed in the legislature.

Many Texas school districts are expected to take advantage of a low-interest bond program,

embedded in the Federal stimulus package that would permit new school construction or modernization. As reported in The Dallas Morning News, nearly half of the bonding authority will be set aside for the 100 largest school districts in the nation, 18 of which are in Texas. A total of \$465.9 million will be available this year to these large districts; \$538.6 million in bonding authority could be used by other Texas districts.

As reported in the Houston Chronicle, the Houston school district will be a test site for a program that would pay teachers extra if they agree to work in low-performing schools. Known as the Talent Transfer Initiative, the program will select the highest-ranked English and math teachers in grades 4-8 for \$20,000 bonuses if they are willing to work for at least two years in struggling schools. Similarly, the Dallas school district plans to increase -- from \$6,000 to \$10,000 -- the incentives it will offer to teach in low-performing schools.

Utah Update

May 2009

According to the Deseret News, the Utah State Board of Education has given school districts permission to save money by eliminating school days. Districts will be able to cut up to five regular school days during the 2009-10 school year, but must first eliminate three Quality Teaching (professional development) days. It was determined, however, that the Quality Teaching days can be reinstated by shifting money from other areas.

The Salt Lake Tribune reports that Utah's new proposed health curriculum is expected to include lessons dealing with "the dangers and inappropriate use of current technology," including the Internet and cell phones. A draft of the revised curriculum has been sent out for public hearings in the next few months.

Virginia Update

May 2009

As reported in the Richmond Times-Dispatch, Virginia is ahead of most states when it comes to online testing. State officials estimate that, this Spring, 1.7 million Standards of Learning (SOL) tests will be administered online -- up from 1.4 million last Spring. Currently, all SOL tests, except English writing, are available online. Because most end-of-course exams in high school are now given online, the State is considering a new policy under which traditional paper-and-pencil versions of tests would be available only as an accommodation.

As reported in School Reform News, in February, the Virginia State Senate rejected a proposal that would have established a tax credit scholarship (voucher) program. Proponents of the bill, which is targeted for low-income and middle-income families, say they will continue their efforts.

Washington Update

May 2009

As reported in The Seattle Times, Washington State expects to make larger cuts in its K-12 education budget. Originally projected at 11 percent, the budget cuts are expected to be reduced to 2.5-3.5 percent because of the State's share of the Federal stimulus package. Eliminated will be cost-of-living raises for teachers; and funding under Initiative 728 which provides money to reduce class sizes will be cut by 93 percent. Overall, districts will likely lose about \$258 million in State funds for the 2009-10 school year -- the equivalent of 3,000 teaching positions.

The Washington State legislature is in the process of approving a bill that would greatly expand the number of State-funded education programs. As reported in The Seattle Times, the measure (as passed by the State Senate) would:

- Add 80 hours of instruction time each year to what the State currently funds;
- Expand State-funded kindergarten from half-day to full-day;
- Add preschools for high-risk students.

The bill is supported by the governor, the State Superintendent, the State PTA, and the chairwoman of the State Board of Education. The State's largest teachers union, however, says the bill distracts focus from the education funding cuts expected over the next two years -- as much as \$877 million.

Wisconsin Update

May 2009

Wisconsin's new State Superintendent is Tony Evers who has served as deputy superintendent for the past eight years. Mr. Evers won in a Statewide election over Rose Fernandez, a parent advocate, with the backing and \$700,000 contribution of the State's largest teachers union and its affiliates.

A recent report by the Washington, D.C.-based Education Trust indicates that Wisconsin is making less progress than the nation as a whole in closing the achievement gaps between student-subgroups. Comparisons of reading scores for fourth-graders between 1998 and 2007 show that the average score for White students nationwide improved seven points versus one point for Wisconsin fourth-graders. Similarly, nationwide, Black fourth-graders improved 11 points over the nine-year period compared with four points in Wisconsin. And, nationally, low-income students gained ten points compared with only four points for Wisconsin students. The State says it is planning to overhaul its standards for reading, language arts, and math, particularly in high-poverty districts.