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MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 31, 2011

TO: TechMIS Subscribers

FROM: Charles Blaschke and Blair Curry

SUBJ: SIG Guidance Update and State Profiles

As a reminder, on March 16th we sent subscribers a Special Report on Secretary Duncan's letter to Governors on current flexibilities on using Federal funds and eleven Washington Updates. This TechMIS issue has our analysis of "final" SIG Guidance for FY 2010 competitions and March state profile updates.

On February 23rd, USED published the most recent "final" School Improvement Grant Guidance Addendum based on publication of final regulations last October. In our November 12th TechMIS Special Report, we provided an analysis of the proposed guidance which addressed, to some degree, the types of allowable activities and uses of 2009 SIG funds during the pre-implementation phase through September 2011. The final guidance in the February 23rd, 100+-page document provides greater detail on these allowable uses of funds and incorporates these activities into the FY 2010 competitive grant process. Approximately $825 million of FY 2009 funds have been carried over to this year and added to about $550 million in FY 2010 SIG funding for the 2010 competition. As we noted in our November 12th report and detailed in a new Section J in the February 23rd final SIG Guidance document, there are a number of activities and allowable uses which many TechMIS subscribers should take advantage of immediately, ranging from remediation and enrichment to related professional development to services to help districts/Tier I and Tier II schools prepare for full implementation beginning in September. The enclosed Special Report identifies specific references in Section J and elsewhere which should be made available to appropriate sales and marketing staff depending on the nature of products and services which you can provide. The Guidance also includes some new "waiver" flexibilities allowed for districts/eligible schools which should be communicated with districts/school officials in the event they are not aware of these flexibilities. Please call me directly if you have any questions.

Also included are state profile updates which address a host of new state activities and/or policies, some of which have been finalized while others are in the courts or in their respective legislatures. These developments include: state budget and funding proposals, collective

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bargaining and related legislative changes (e.g., increasing student teacher class size limits), proposals to lift charter school caps and related items, particularly in about half the states which are now under Republican control either in the Governor's office and/or the legislature.

Special Report:
School Improvement Grant (SIG) Update: New Guidance for FY 2010 Applications and Competitions Released, Along with an Update of Demographics of Schools Currently Being Served

A Technology Monitoring and Information Service (TechMIS)
SPECIAL REPORT

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March 31, 2011

On February 23rd, USED released a set of "final" guidance on School Improvement Grants which is in effect for the FY 2010 SEA applications and district competitive grants for the second SIG phase in most states. Because of significant delays in USED FY 2009 SEA application approvals and allocations of funding, the February 23rd addendum includes a rewritten section of old guidance which affects "allowable uses of funds" during the "pre-implementation" phase between now and September 2011,when schools must be "fully implemented." Most of the important pre-implementation allowable uses of funds were included in earlier "proposed" guidance as reported in our November 12, 2010 TechMIS Special Report. The latest "final" SIG guidance codifies these allowable uses which should be of great interest to most TechMIS subscribers. These are highlighted below, along with new guidance "priorities" applicable to FY 2010 competitions that are receiving greater emphasis in most states for which USED has approved FY 2010 applications.

During the pre-implementation phase (now through September), SEAs will have approximately $825 million carried over from last year to this year, as well as an additional $550 million of regular SIG appropriations for FY 2010, for new competitive grant allocations to eligible schools not served during the first round, as well as some "newly-eligible" schools only recently identified by SEAs in most states. These funds are to be used for pre-implementation activities noted below <u>and</u> full-implementation activities for one year beginning in September 2011.

Some of the allowable activities and uses of SIG funds discussed in the new Section J include:

- providing for family and community engagement in selection of school intervention models and comprehensive instructional programs (J-2);
- providing behavioral and other wraparound support activities (J-2);
- providing a "rigorous review process" for selecting, not only charter schools, CMOs, or EMOs, but also "any external providers" to plan and implement intervention models (J-2, J-8, and H-19a);

- provide remediation and enrichment programs which have "evidence" of raising student achievement (J-2);
- purchasing instructional materials that are research-based and/or evidence-based (J-2);
- examining student assessment data and devising student formative assessments (not needs assessment for selecting models) (J-2 and J-12);
- training staff to implement new or revised instructional programs aligned with the comprehensive instructional plan and school's intervention model (J-2);
- consulting with outside experts (J-2);
- training of staff on new instructional evaluation systems (J-11); and
- developing and piloting data systems for monitoring progress and adopting interim assessments (J-2 and F-4).

In Section J-9, the guidance details the use of SIG funds to hire external providers to assist in planning for and carrying out activities necessary for full implementation of school intervention models beginning in September. SEAs should ensure "that all external providers with which it contracts are screened to ensure their quality" and enable an LEA "to ensure that a provider with which it contracts is qualified to assist the LEA in making meaningful changes and implementing comprehensive reform in Tier I and Tier II schools the LEA serves with SIG funds (see also H-19a, I-24a). Section J-10 describes examples of the allowable supplemental and remediation enrichment services during pre-implementation which include summer school for rising ninth-graders; preparing low-achieving students to participate successfully in advanced coursework, such as AP or IB courses; providing early-college high schools or dual enrollment in post-secondary credit-bearing courses; or providing afterschool tutoring for low-achieving students.

The addendum strongly encourages LEAs who have the capacity to serve Title I "targeted assistance schools" (TAS) that are eligible to become Tier I and Tier II schools receiving SIG funds to apply for a waiver which would allow the TAS school to operate as if it were a schoolwide program. In Section J-14, the addendum clarifies that an LEA may use SIG funds for minor remodeling of school facilities to enable the use of technology. The cost must be "reasonable and necessary." A rule of thumb used in Title I has been that such costs (e.g., wiring) could be as much as ten percent of the cost of purchasing a technology-based configuration.

The increasing emphasis on social-emotional and community-oriented services, parent engagement and community involvement in implementing wraparound services, and other activities associated with the new Promise Neighborhood Program is interspersed throughout the 100+ page guidance including: Section B-8 (implementing a turnaround model), Section D-1a (closing a persistently lowest-achieving school), Section E-10 (activities included under family and community engagement), Section H-4a (LEA consultation with parent and community groups), in addition to the portions of Section J noted above.

The guidance also clarifies that SIG funds can be used to pay a fee to a CMO or EMO to operate a restart model "to the extent the fee is reasonable and necessary" to implement the restart model (C-10). It also codifies that an SEA may renew an LEAs SIG grant if the school that currently receives SIG funds exits improvement status; this removes a disincentive for schools not to want to exit improvement in order to continue to receive SIG funding. This was a major problem

under the SIG Part A 4% SEA set-aside in the past and in the earlier treatment of such schools under the initial pre-ARRA SIG guidance.

During the Council of the Great City Schools Annual Legislative Conference in mid-March, USED officials provided an update on the demographics of schools that have been identified as eligible by the SEAs and those that have been awarded SIG grants. Based on reports from 49 states and the District of Columbia, 2,135 schools have been identified as meeting the USED eligibility criteria for lowest-achieving schools within districts. Currently, 831 Tier I and Tier II schools have been awarded grants as have 416 Tier III schools. Forty-nine percent of the schools are high schools, 20 percent are middle schools and 25 percent are elementary schools. Forty percent of the Tier I and Tier II schools have enrollments of 600 or more, 23 percent have enrollments between 400 and 600, and 24 percent have enrollments ranging from 200 to 400. Thirteen percent have fewer than 200 students enrolled. Seventy-four percent of the Tier I and Tier II schools are using the transformation model while 20 percent are implementing the turnaround model, with four percent and two percent using the restart and school closure models respectively. Earlier reports from USED did not have any information on the number of Tier III schools which have been awarded SIG Part G funds.

During a Q&A session after Secretary Duncan's speech, several comments and questions reflected district officials' desire to use a "fifth" intervention model developed locally which had produced positive results. Secretary Duncan noted that, prior to the new SIG legislation included in the ARRA, 89 percent of the districts in corrective action used the "other model" and, between 2005 and 2010, many of the lowest-achieving schools got even worse. While he said that he would be "happy to think about" an additional alternative, he also stated emphatically "using 'other' will not cut it." In fact, he said that many superintendents privately have asked him "not to back down" on the prescriptive models and "to hold the line" to provide political cover for these superintendents to initiate significant reforms, which can create significant political sensitivities.

There are several major takeaways from this update. First, during the pre-implementation phase through September, SIG funds are encouraged to be used for a variety of activities including: provision of enrichment and remediation programs, directly-related professional development, and planning for full implementation beginning in September for many Tier I and Tier II schools. Second, the stated SIG priority of serving high school dropout factories is being met with almost 70 percent of Tier I and Tier II schools being high schools and middle schools, some of which may be feeder schools into lowest-performing high schools. And last, while the Administration has touted the need for increased flexibility for Tier I and Tier II schools and possibly other lowest-performing schools, such flexibility beyond the use of the four prescribed models is currently very limited.

The February 23rd guidance is available at:
http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/sigguidance02232011.pdf

Alabama Update
March 2011

According to the *Ed Money Watch* blog from the New America Foundation, the Alabama legislature has approved a bill that would place a cap on future public school spending. The measure would, beginning in FY 2013, limit State spending from the Education Trust Fund based on the average percentage change in Trust Fund revenues over the previous 15 fiscal years. The bill is intended to constrain education spending during times of strong economic health and set aside funds for years when tax revenues are below expectations.

Alabama's distance learning program, known as Alabama Connecting Classrooms Educators and Students Statewide (ACCESS), provides online classes for every high school in the State. ACCESS provides more than 100 courses including 20 Advanced Placement classes. Statewide, more than 29,000 students are enrolled in online credit courses and more than 650 teachers are teaching at least one distance learning course. ACCESS offers classes in core subjects and electives as well as non-credit remedial courses. Students who fail a class or a section of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam can use ACCESS for credit recovery; 11,700 students are enrolled in non-credit ACCESS courses. ACCESS's Program Administrator is Earlene Patton.

As reported in Education Daily, Alabama has begun implementation of an online career planning system for students in grades 7-12. Known as Navigator, the program gives parents and teachers access to resources that can help students prepare for postsecondary education or the workplace. Included in the system (available at www.alcareerinfo.org) are: grade-specific content; connections between coursework and the real world, lifelong portfolio development, and guided exploration using interactive planning and timelines.

Baldwin County has become the first school district in Alabama to implement the eMINTS program originally developed in Missouri 14 years ago. The eMINTS (enhancing Missouri's Instructional Networked Teaching Strategies) approach focuses on "inquiry-based teaching that

engages students in real-world projects and research, higher order thinking skills, cooperative learning, and building a community of learners." Baldwin County currently has 33 eMINTS teachers trained in 20 schools. It is estimated to cost about $32,000 to equip an eMINTS classroom and train the teacher. Funded by the Federal Enhancing Education Through Technology (E^2T^2) program, Title I, and competitive State grants, each classroom receives laptop computers and associated presentation equipment, software, and wireless access. The eMINTS technology package is set up in the teachers' classrooms to allow appropriate training toward certification.

Arizona Update
March 2011

Back in January, Governor Jan Brewer proposed an $8.8 billion budget that included $690 in borrowing. The Arizona Senate has approved a budget that calls for $1.3 billion in cuts to avoid borrowing and to balance the FY 2011 and FY 2012 budgets. K-12 education would see reductions of about seven percent and higher education would lose 26 percent of their State funding. The biggest school cut would be to a fund that pays for equipment and supplies.

California Update
March 2011

The New America Foundation reports that, facing a $26 billion, two-year budget shortfall, California Governor Jerry Brown has put forth a budget proposal that protects school funding as demanded by the powerful State teachers' union. The Governor's concessions are apparently intended to avoid the battles with public employee unions that crippled the ability of previous governors to manage effectively the State's budget. Some believe the Governor's strategy forces the unions to support strongly the budget proposal. And, if the proposal fails, the Governor would be in position to force the union to accept cuts and reforms they have resisted.

A recent report by researchers at UCLA indicates that the last three years of cuts in State spending on K-12 education has had a disproportionately negative impact on poor schools and school districts. Entitled "Free Fall: Educational Opportunities in 2011," the study found that, for every dollar raised by low-income, high-income schools raise $20. In all schools, classes of 40 and more are more common, summer and after-school programs are being reduced, and outdated books and instructional materials are being used longer.

The Los Angeles Times reports that the California State Board of Education, including a majority of members appointed by Governor Brown, has chosen not to implement the new parent-trigger law which allows parents to force major reforms at low-performing schools. Instead, the Board set up a working group to explore the procedures by which the law would operate. Critics of the Board's action say it is a politically motivated attempt to subvert the law.

As required by State law, pink slips for thousands of California public school teachers went out on March 15. According to californiawatch.org, districts have until May 15 to rescind the layoffs. State law also allows for later layoffs if a district's general purpose funding does not increase by at least two percent over the previous school year. Governor Brown has called for a special election this summer to extend up to $12 billion in taxes, $4.5 billion of which would go for K-12 schools. But most districts are assuming the money will not be available and have gone

ahead with layoffs based on that assumption.

The Los Angeles school district has put forth what is called a "doomsday budget" that would include massive layoffs, larger class sizes, and sharp cuts in magnet and preschool programs. The Los Angeles Times reports that the budget plan would avoid layoffs at schools with high teacher turnover that have made academic progress. However, 45 new and low-performing schools could be exempted from the layoffs because of a recent legal settlement protecting schools from extreme teacher turnover. District officials have made it clear that the $5 billion budget plan is a worst-case scenario and that the district hopes the cuts will be unnecessary.

As reported in Education Week, the new superintendent of the Los Angeles school district is establishing a new foundation intended to attract donations to help support district programs. Called the Los Angeles Fund for Public Education, the foundation will allow contributors to choose the programs they wish their donations to benefit. The new superintendent, John Deasy, is also working on creating a West Coast branch of New York City's Robin Hood Foundation to raise money for the Los Angeles district which is facing a $400 million shortfall in its $6 billion operating budget for next year.

Colorado Update
March 2011

Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper has proposed a FY 2011-12 budget that would cut public school funding by $375 million and reduce funds for colleges by $36 million. A member of the Colorado legislature has proposed a ballot initiative that would provide more money by raising State tax rates to 1999 levels. The proposal would raise the income tax rate from the current 4.63 percent to 5 percent and increase the sales tax rate from 2.9 percent to 3 percent. The initiative would last three years and would raise an estimated $1.63 billion. In order for the tax question to be placed on the November ballot, 85,000 signatures must be obtained before the April 8 deadline.

The Denver Post reports that the number of Colorado students in concurrent college/high school programs has grown from 1,750 in 2005 to 6,473 this past Fall. In Denver, 1,572 high school students were taking college classes in the Fall of 2010, up from 576 in 2008. Although most concurrently enrolled students attend community colleges, some are enrolled at four-year colleges. State data indicate that 28.6 percent of Colorado high school students attending in-State colleges in the Fall of 2010 required remediation. Although concurrent enrollment programs were not intended to help prepare high school students for college, they may be having that effect.

The Douglas County school district has approved a pilot program which will pay tuition for county students who attend private schools. Renewable annually, the plan would make 500 students eligible for $4,575 to attend a private school in the 2011-12 school year. According to The Denver Post, the district would pay out about $2.29 million vouchers plus another $300,000 in testing costs; but it would save an estimated $3 million by having 500 fewer students, giving a net saving of about $400,000. Among the plan's provisions are allowing students to opt out of religious classes at faith-based schools and a lottery system if more than 500 students apply.

Connecticut Update
March 2011

The Hartford Courant reports that the Connecticut legislature is considering a measure that would delay by two years the implementation of the State's plan to make its high school curriculum more rigorous. The original plan was adopted as part of the State's unsuccessful effort to get $175 million under the Federal Race to the Top competition. Some lawmakers argue that the State cannot afford the $25 million annual cost of implementing the new curriculum requirements by the 2014 deadline.

A new report by the Connecticut Department of Higher Education says that Connecticut's community college graduation rate ranks 47th in the nation. Only about ten percent of full-time students earn a degree in three years. Moreover, four out of every five students who enroll in community colleges have to take remedial classes in reading, English, or math. In an attempt to increase graduation rates, the colleges have implemented a number of interventions including more tutoring, career and transfer counseling, mentoring, and more careful tracking of student progress. With the State legislature considering major cuts to higher education funding, the report is expected to be used by lawmakers as they ask whether the State is using its money in the most effective manner.

The Connecticut Mirror reports that Governor Dan Malloy has outlined a plan to merge Connecticut's State university system, including community colleges, with the State's online college. With the University of Connecticut exempted, the Governor's plan would bring oversight of the State's four regional universities, 12 community colleges, and the Charter Oak State College (serving 100,000 students in total) under the existing State Department of Education. Traditionally, Connecticut universities have received fixed funding through block grants. But, a legislative panel has recommended that a portion of State funding be tied to student outcomes.

Delaware Update
March 2011

As reported in Education Daily, Delaware Governor Jack Markell has signed into law HB.1 which reforms the State's special education funding system. Under the new law, Delaware school districts will receive Federal IDEA funds based on individual student needs rather than on group classifications. Sponsors of the bill say it ensures that students with disabilities who are in regular classrooms will have access to the same resources as students in special education programs.

According to the *Digital Education* blog on EducationWeek.com, Delaware, in partnership with Wireless Generation, will implement a two-year, teacher data coaching plan using $8.2 million of the State's Federal Race to the Top award. Under the program, teachers at all grades in all core subjects will meet for at least 90 minutes per week to discuss how best to use educational data to improve instruction. Data coaches will facilitate group instructional planning and will provide feedback to individual teachers. Wireless Generation will supply 29 data coaches who will help build on the State's longitudinal data system and the new, computer-adaptive testing program.

As reported by delmarvanow.com, two Delaware schools will be receiving Federal School Improvement Grant funding to support their reform efforts. Mount Pleasant High School received $1.8 million for professional development and a new curriculum. Seaford Senior High will get $1.3 million for its New Tech Academy concept which incorporates technology into project-based lessons. Over the next four years, Seaford High will create three more academies: Seaford Military Academy, the Leadership/Dual Enrollment Academy, and the International Baccalaureate Academy. Because few Delaware SIG grants were awarded last year, $6 million is left over to go with $1.54 million for this year. The SIG money is available only to the State's lowest-performing schools that plan significant changes to improve test scores and graduation rates.

Florida Update
March 2011

As reported in The Miami Herald, Florida Governor Rick Scott has backed off his plan for universal school vouchers, but has expressed support for more charter schools, more students in virtual schools, expanded eligibility for existing voucher programs, and making it easier for districts to fire low-performing teachers. Currently, 155,000 of Florida's 2.6 million public school students attend charter schools, 71 percent of which received scores of A or B on the State's accountability scale (74 percent of all public schools got As or Bs).

In recent years, a number of unsuccessful efforts have been made to change mandatory class size limits put into place by a 2002 Constitutional amendment. The current limits are 18 students for preK-3, 22 students for grades 4-8, and 25 students in grades 9-12. As reported in the *State Ed Watch* blog on EducationWeek.com, the most recent legislation (Senate Bill 1466) would allow schools an exception to the limits when students enroll after the basic October count. The bill would also exclude from the definition of "core" courses such classes as foreign languages, honors classes, and classes not required for graduation. The number of "core" courses would drop from 849 to 288.

Effective implementation of the merit-pay structure will require the development of an evaluation system by 2014, as called for in Florida's RTTT application. The Orlando Sentinel reports that the State's $700 million RTTT award will defray some of the cost of developing the exams. The State teachers' union, however, has called the plan an "unfunded mandate," estimating that the evaluation system would cost more than $1 billion to implement. Their concern is well-founded with the State facing a $3.6 billion budget shortfall and with districts likely to see a reduction in school spending of between 7.7 and ten percent.

As reported in the St. Petersburg Times, Florida State education officials have unveiled a proposal that calls for all K-12 students in the State to use only "electronic materials" by 2015. Under the plan, digital materials -- delivered by such devices as Kindles or iPads -- would be

phased in, first in high schools and then lower grades for reading, language arts, math, science, and history. The proposal's timeline indicates that, by 2013, districts must use at least half of their yearly textbook allocations to buy digital or Internet-based materials. By 2014, all instructional materials purchases for grades 5-12 must be only in electronic formats. And, by 2015, all K-12 purchases must be digital.

As reported in Education Week, a new Florida State law, approved on a Republican-dominated, party-line vote, will phase out teacher tenure and implement a merit pay system for teachers and principals. Specifically, the law:

- requires that 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation must be based on student test scores (this requirement is consistent with Florida's winning $700 million Race to the Top application);
- eliminates "reverse seniority" as a basis for teacher layoffs;
- allows districts to extend annual contracts only to teachers with good evaluations.

The law is very similar to a bill that was vetoed last year by then-Governor Charlie Crist.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has awarded a $2 million grant to the Florida Virtual School to develop four college readiness courses -- ninth-grade English, ninth-grade math, 12th-grade English, and 12th-grade math. As reported in the *Digital Education* blog on EducationWeek.com, beta forms of the English courses are expected to be released in January 2012 with the math courses available a year later. The courses will focus on authentic skill development, critical thinking, research, and real-world experiences. The Florida Virtual School plans to partner with other vendors for the design of some of the more technological elements of the courses.

Data from the Florida Department of Education show that Florida children who participated in the State's pre-kindergarten program did better later in school than those without preschool. Last year the Florida Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program (VPK) served 160,000 students -- 67 percent of those eligible. Free to all four-year-olds, the program is, for the most part, contracted out to private schools and child care facilities. Nearly 75 percent of the students who completed

VPK last year were considered "ready" for kindergarten, compared with only 52 percent of students who did not attend pre-K. Moreover, the first graduates of VPK performed better on key third-grade exams than did students who did not have preschool.

According to the Miami Herald, Governor Scott has proposed, among other cuts in State spending, reductions in pensions for teachers and other State employees. It is reported that State lawmakers are considering moving from the current "defined benefit" system to a "defined contribution" -- 401(k)-type -- plan.

The *State Ed Watch* blog on EducationWeek.com reports that Florida's commissioner of education, Eric Smith, has announced his resignation. During his tenure, Florida won $700 million in the Federal Race to the Top competition. Since last Fall's election of Governor Scott, Mr. Smith's status has been the subject of much speculation.

Georgia Update
March 2011

As reported in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Georgia is in the process of phasing out the State's 16-year-old high school graduation test required of all public high school students. Over the past three years, more than 3,000 students failed the exam multiple times and had to petition the State to get their diplomas. Starting with next year's entering ninth-graders, students will have to pass eight end-of-course exams. Technically, in order to graduate, students will have to pass all eight courses with the end-of-course tests counting for 20 percent of their course grade. Implementation of the new testing requirements must be approved by the State Board as well as by the U.S. Department of Education.

Idaho Update
March 2011

According to the Idaho Statesman, Idaho Governor Butch Otter has signed into law two education reform bills. One measure would restrict collective bargaining agreements to salaries and benefits and would eliminate tenure for new teachers and those who have not yet obtained a continuing contract. Instead, teachers would be offered one- or two-year contracts after a probationary period. The second piece of legislation would call for a merit pay system for teachers including bonuses for teachers who fill hard-to-staff positions. A third bill, which is the main component of the State's education reform plan, remains under consideration by the legislature. Among its features are:

- increasing classroom technology and providing high school students with laptop computers over an 18-month period;
- requiring students to take four online courses before they graduate; and
- providing a small increase in teacher salaries.

The State's plan calls for paying for education reforms through larger class sizes.

As reported in the Idaho Statesman, 278 of the State's 711 public schools are currently in school improvement status; 43 schools have been in improvement for at least three years. Also failing to make adequate yearly progress for three years is the Idaho Virtual Academy. Although the Academy has met its overall goals on the Idaho Standards Achievement test, it missed AYP in five subcategories: language arts and math for economically disadvantaged students and reading, language arts, and math for students with disabilities.

As reported in Education Week, rural schools in Idaho have become leaders in the use of online education, much of it through the Idaho Digital Learning Academy. State-funded since 2003, the IDLA offers 130 courses and has a staff of part-time teachers who provide a range of online course options. Some rural Idaho districts have begun requiring all high school students, starting with this year's freshmen, to take at least one online course before they graduate.

Illinois Update
March 2011

Illinois, whose $400 million application under the Federal Race to the Top competition was unsuccessful, is seeking to implement some of the elements contained in its RTTT application. Among these efforts is improving college preparation programs for teachers and principals, particularly those who will work in high-need schools. The State has $2 million in pledges from the Chicago Community Trust and Teach for America. Another proposed RTTT component is a kindergarten-readiness assessment for which the State is providing $1.5 million and the McCormick Foundation is adding $50,000. The State is also hoping to implement its Learning Performance Measurement System, a new Statewide data system that would provide timely data to teachers for tailoring instruction to individual student needs. The system is expected to cost at least $45 million.

Having been unsuccessful in its application under the Federal Race to the Top competition, Illinois has looked to raise money to support education reforms from private sources. According to the Chicago Tribune, State education officials are hoping to get $80 million in private donations and grants over the next four years to support such reforms as including student performance as part of teacher evaluations, preparing principals to work in low-performing schools, implementing virtual hubs for science and technology. The Illinois legislature enacted five reform bills in support of the State's RTTT bid. The State's public schools have received $2.8 billion in Federal stimulus money over the past two years and expect to get another $831 million before the law expires.

Governor Pat Quinn has proposed to consolidate 869 of current school districts to no more than 300 which, as reported in Education Week, would save $100 million in administrative salaries. Public hearings would be conducted through 2012 and if the proposal is adopted students would enroll in consolidated districts in 2013.

Indiana Update
March 2011

According to the Indianapolis Star, the Indiana State School Board has approved a proposal that would require all third-graders in the State to pass a new Statewide reading exam in order to be promoted to fourth grade. The plan to end "social promotion" of third-graders would take effect for students finishing third-grade in the Spring of 2013. Under the proposal, students who continually fail the reading test could be held back for up to two years. After a third failure, they would move on to the next grade. Local school districts have been given no additional funds to implement the plan (which has been estimated to cost $49 million per year) and State officials have said schools will have to adopt improved curricula and teaching strategies and perhaps shift some resources to primary grades and summer reading programs.

Kentucky Update
March 2011

As reported in Education Week, a Kentucky Governor's task force has issued 35 recommended changes to Kentucky's education system. The Governor's Task Force on Transforming Education in Kentucky also recommended development of a new model of secondary and technical education with a focus on career technology programs. Among the Task Force's more specific recommendations are:

- raising the dropout age to 18;
- better coordination among preschool programs;
- more money for recruiting better teachers;
- using State money to pay for programs to help students at risk of dropping out;
- using more technology to improve teaching and learning;
- improving transitions between preschool and K-12; and
- enhancing parent and community involvement.

As reported in *Schools and the Stimulus* blog on EducationWeek.com, Kentucky is committed to a revamping of the State's assessment and accountability system which was the cornerstone of the State's unsuccessful $175 million Race to the Top application. To pay part of this year's cost -- $40 million -- for the assessment system, the State has used $2.6 million that was to be used for professional development by the State's 174 school districts.

The *Digital Education* blog on EducationWeek.com reports that the Kentucky Learning Depot -- which is an online State repository of K-12 and post-secondary educational content -- will be aligned with the Common Core State Standards for English/language arts and mathematics. The Learning Depot was created in collaboration with the Florida Distance Learning Consortium with funding provided, in part, by a Federal grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. The Depot gives teachers access to digital materials ranging from multimedia presentations to audio documents. It is not expected that the Learning Depot will allow nationwide access although it has been sharing content and support with other states who

are members of the Southern Regional Education Board.

Louisiana Update
March 2011

According to the *Schools and the Stimulus* blog on EducationWeek.com, the U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation (i^3) program has awarded a $28 million grant to the nonprofit group, New Schools for New Orleans. The New Schools organization has become a symbol for educational reform in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and has focused its efforts around charter schools. The i^3 grant will provide New Orleans with the resources to hire expert managers to oversee an infrastructure that would close low-performing schools and reopen them as charters. Outside observers have noted that the New Schools i^3 program could represent an opportunity to expand a "drastic, proven model" nationwide.

Maine Update
March 2011

A decade ago, Maine became the first state to establish a laptop computer program for its students. Even today, the State is the only state with a Statewide laptop program. Currently, 60 percent of Maine high school students have State-paid laptops. That is a total of 72,000 laptops at an annual cost of about $7 million -- $242 per student -- which includes technical support and repair. Students do not get to keep the computers which remain the property of the schools.

Massachusetts Update
March 2011

According to The Journal of New England Technology, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick has announced a $350,000 grant program to plan 26 potential "innovation schools." About $300,000 of the money comes from the State's Federal Race to the Top award. The remainder of the funding will be provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation through its Next Generation Models program.

Michigan Update
March 2011

The Kalamazoo Gazette reports that Michigan Governor, Rick Snyder, has proposed a budget plan that would cut almost $960 million -- 5.3 percent -- from the State's K-12 budget. School districts would also see substantial increases in their contributions to the employee retirement system. The total impact has been estimated at $715 per student. Proponents of the Governor's plan argue that, even with the cuts, Michigan's per-pupil K-12 expenditures are still above the national average. Staff benefits are a major factor in the higher costs to districts. About 25 percent of all K-12 operations costs go for staff health care and pensions. In fact, the total cost to the State for public school employee benefits was $4.4 billion in 2008-09.

An analysis by the Michigan Department of Education has found that, at more than half of Michigan high schools, fewer than ten percent of the students who graduated this Spring were considered college ready. As reported in the Detroit Free Press, the MDE analysis used as its measurement standard those developed by the ACT in reading, English, math, and science. ACT requires the following scores for a student to be considered college ready: reading-21, English-18, math-22, and science-24.

According to the website, mlive.com, the Michigan legislature is considering a bill that would deny tenure to new teachers in the last year of probation unless they receive a performance rating of "effective" according to the district's assessment system. Moreover, tenured teachers rated "ineffective" for two consecutive years could be placed on probation and lose tenure protections. Michigan's unsuccessful application under the Federal Race to the Top competition included a requirement that school districts have a system to assess teacher performance, 50 percent of which must be student growth. House Bill 4142 is intended to ensure that ineffective teachers do not get tenure and provide an expedited process for removing ineffective tenured teachers from the classroom.

A study of teacher turnover by researchers from Michigan State University and Northwestern

University has found that teachers hired after the start of a school year are much more likely to leave their schools within a year than are teachers hired to start at the beginning of the school year. As reported in Education Week, the study included 9,306 core academic teachers hired at more than 5,000 Michigan schools between the 2003-04 and 2007-08 school years. Among the 12 percent of teachers who were late hires, 22.5 percent left their schools the following year compared with 13.4 percent of teachers hired on time. More than 35 percent of late-hired first-year teachers left after one year versus only 20 percent of first-year teachers who were hired on time. It has been estimated that turnover costs a school between $5,000 and $18,000 per teacher, so it is likely that late hiring of teachers is having an effect on school staffing costs.

According to Education Week, the Detroit school district has been given approval by the State of Michigan to implement a plan to eliminate the district's $327 million deficit. It is estimated that the district's enrollment will drop from the current 74,000 students to fewer than 60,000 by 2014. The plan calls for increasing some class sizes to as many as 60 students as well as the closing of 40 schools in FY 2012 and another 30 schools the following year. In the past two years, the district has already closed 60 of its schools.

According to the Detroit Free Press, the Detroit school district is planning to convert 41 of its low-performing schools into charter schools. The Renaissance Plan 2012 is modeled after a similar plan in post-Katrina New Orleans. Currently, 36 percent of Detroit students attend charter schools; if all 41 Renaissance schools become charters, the percentage would go up to 47 percent. The new charters, which would begin operation this Fall, would lease buildings from the district and would be required to meet special education needs. It is estimated that the Detroit district, facing a $327 budget deficit, would save $75 million to $99 million through the charter conversions.

Minnesota Update
March 2011

The Alexandria Echo Press reports that ten rural Minnesota school districts -- as part of the Central Minnesota Educational Technology System (CMETS) -- will receive a Distance Learning grant intended to connect the districts with video conferencing technology. Under the grant, four Alexandria-area high schools will share $333,000 in Federal money to upgrade interactive video technology equipment. The updated technology will allow the participating districts to offer such online programs as gifted-and-talented classes, special education updates, staff development, virtual field trips, and homebound services.

Nevada Update
March 2011

According to the Review-Journal, Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval has proposed major reforms for the State's public school system as well as the establishment of a new retirement system for State employees. These are part of a draft bill that would limit general fund spending for the 2011-13 biennium to $5.8 billion, a 6.4 percent decrease from the previous two-year period. The Governor's education reform package has three principal components:

- an accountability bill that would eliminate teacher tenure as well as the "last in, first out" priority for teacher layoffs;
- ending social promotion and implementing a system for evaluating schools using letter grades; and
- a Constitutional amendment that would provide vouchers for parents to send their children to private schools.

New Jersey Update
March 2011

The new budget proposal submitted by Governor Chris Christie would restore a portion of the State aid to New Jersey schools cut last year. Overall, the proposal would provide $250 million in new school funding after $820 million in cuts last year. Most districts would receive about 20 percent of the State aid cut last year. An additional $149 million will be available in transitional aid for struggling municipalities.

Education Week reports that a New Jersey Superior Court judge has ruled that Governor Christie's cuts of $1 billion from school funding are unconstitutional. The Court said that the reductions left the State unable to provide all students with a "thorough and efficient" education and that they hit high-risk districts the hardest. The two sides are expected to provide responses to the Court's ruling by April 14.

The Wall Street Journal reports that Governor Christie has proposed a system for grading teachers that includes student test scores, personal observation, and schoolwide performance. Under the Governor's proposal, half of each teacher's evaluation would be based on elements of student achievement -- growth on the State assessment, schoolwide performance, and other student performance measures. The other half of the evaluation would include a classroom observation tool and other measures of teacher practice. The Governor's proposal stems, in part, from a task force report that also suggested methods for rating principals, including such factors as student test scores and their ability to retain good teachers.

The *State Ed Watch* blog on EducationWeek.com reports that Democrats in the New Jersey legislature have put forth a plan that calls for cuts in State workers' (including teachers') pensions. Sponsors of the plan say their proposal is fairer than the more severe cut proposed by Governor Christie.

New Mexico Update
March 2011

Under Governor Susana Martinez's proposed educational reforms, every school would be assigned a letter grade -- A to F -- based on student achievement and such other factors as high school graduation rates. According to the Santa Fe New Mexican, the bill containing the Governor's reforms is being considered by the State legislature. If a school is rated F for two years, its students would be able to transfer to a better public school or an online "cyber academy." Proponents of the measure say it will provide more meaningful information to parents and offers rewards for high performing schools. The State has said that that money -- $10-12 million per year -- will continue to be available to schools in need of improvement.

Also reported in the Santa Fe New Mexican, Governor Martinez's plan for improving New Mexico's public schools includes a measure (HB21) that would end social promotion for third-graders who lack basic reading skills. Beginning with the 2012-13 school year, third-graders who score at the lowest performance level on State reading tests must be held back. The bill eliminates the existing parental veto provision by which parents can overrule a school that wants to retain a student in grade. The legislation provides exceptions for some students including those with disabilities and English language learners who are proficient in their native langue. Modeled after education initiatives in Florida, the bill also requires schools to provide special instruction to improve the performance of these students. Some State legislators have questioned whether schools can afford programs for students who are held back, although others argue Federal funds could be used for such programs.

New York Update
March 2011

Education Week reports that New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has proposed a budget plan that calls for a 7.3 percent cut in school aid. The budget, which began April 1, would require up to 9,800 layoffs. The Governor says the new budget is $3.7 billion less than the current 2010-11 budget which included billions in Federal stimulus money. Overall, the budget means a 2.9 percent cut in State aid to school districts. Specifically, the Governor's proposal would cut $918.4 million in State aid to New York City, more than half of which is school aid.

As reported in The New York Times, New York Governor Cuomo has introduced legislation that would limit the salaries of school superintendents across the State. The Governor's proposal would tie superintendent's pay to the size of their district with the largest districts having superintendents' salaries capped at $175,000 and smaller districts capped at $125,000. New York City, where the Chancellor earns $250,000, would be exempted from the plan. Currently, about a third of New York's superintendents earn more than $175,000. Stating his pay cap proposal would save districts $15 million; the Governor cited administrative compensation as one area where districts could save money as they face his proposed $1.5 billion reduction in State school aid. To be phased in as superintendents' contracts expire, the bill includes an opt-out provision for local communities.

As reported in Education Week, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's budget plan calls for the elimination of more than 6,000 public school teaching positions through attrition and layoffs. According to Education Week, the City has already cut close to 5,000 teachers by attrition over the last two years. The Mayor has said that the City has increased its education funding by $2 billion since June, but argues that the staffing cuts are necessary because of reductions in Federal and State education funding. The City's teachers' union has sharply criticized the Mayor's plan saying that class sizes are "skyrocketing."

North Carolina Update
March 2011

The *Ed Money Watch* blog from the New America Foundation reports that Republicans in the North Carolina legislature have proposed cutting $760 million from the State's FY 2012 K-12 education budget. Under the worst case scenario, totals of 6,062 teaching positions and 17,741 teacher assistant positions could be cut. Democrats argue that, instead of K-12 budget cuts, the legislature should extend increases in State sales and income tax rates that are scheduled to expire at the end of FY 2012.

Ohio Update
March 2011

According to The Columbus Dispatch, Governor John Kasich's $55.5 billion spending plan includes a $1.3 billion cut in K-12 education, as well as a number of other changes. Among these changes are merit-based pay for teachers, high pension costs for teachers, and the end of teacher tenure. The Governor's proposal calls for teacher bonuses of $50 for every student who shows more than a year's improvement based on State value-added measurements. Ohio's teachers have agreed that changes are needed in the State's educational system but question the Governor's approach.

Governor Kasich's plan for improving education in Ohio includes a large increase in State-funded vouchers as well as more charter schools. The Governor's plan calls for 28,000 tuition vouchers this year and 56,000 in 2013, according to The Columbus Dispatch. They would be available to students in the 200 schools that are ranked in "academic watch" or "academic emergency." Students in grades K-8 would be eligible for up to $4,250 and high school students could get $5,000. Last year, 94,000 Ohio students -- about five percent of the total public school enrollment -- attended 323 Ohio charter schools. These charters received $520 million in State aid.

According to the Dayton Daily News, the Ohio legislature is considering a number of proposed changes to the State's teachers' retirement system. If the changes are enacted, more than 180,000 Ohio teachers would have to "work longer, pay more toward their retirement and then eventually receive smaller pension checks."

The *State Ed Watch* blog on EducationWeek.com reports that Ohio's State Superintendent, Deborah Delisle, has submitted her resignation after 2 ½ years in office, under pressure from Republican Governor Kasich. Delisle was appointed during the tenure of Democratic Governor Ted Strickland. During his campaign, the new Governor vowed to dismantle Strickland's school funding system and to reduce teachers' collective bargaining rights. Delisle will be leaving

office just as the State begins implementing its reforms under Ohio's winning Race to the Top application.

Oklahoma Update
March 2011

Oklahoma's new State superintendent, Janet Barresi, has announced a "3R Agenda" to restructure the State's public education system. Among the 3R goals are improving literacy, ensuring high school graduates are ready for college and careers, and improving the curriculum for science, technology, engineering and math. The State also expects to promote a Statewide literacy initiative and to provide more professional development and other resources for teachers. A new nonprofit group, called the 3R Initiative, has been formed to support the superintendent's new reform agenda.

The Oklahoma Senate has approved a bill that would make it easier for school districts to fire poor-performing teachers. The Republican-backed plan would end a process called trial de novo by which fired teachers could call for a hearing before a State judge. Under the pending bill, teachers would receive a full due process hearing before the school board. Proponents argue that, because each trial de novo could cost between $80,000 and $100,000, districts are reluctant to fire poor teachers.

As reported in the *On Special Education* blog on EducationWeek.com, a Federal audit has raised questions about how Oklahoma has spent some of its Federal stimulus money. The auditors believe the State took too long to distribute money -- intended to save and create jobs -- to local school districts. And, six months after the money had been sent to districts, only about $19.6 million -- 25 percent -- of the stimulus money for special education had actually been spent. In July 2010, the State returned $10.6 million in unspent IDEA stimulus money to the U.S. Department of Education.

Oregon Update
March 2011

According to The Oregonian, Governor John Kitzhaber has proposed improving Oregon's school funding system by the creation of an Oregon Education Investment Board that would oversee education for children from birth through college. The new Investment Board would replace the State Board of Education (which administers public schools and community colleges) and the State Board of Higher Education (which governs the State's seven universities). The Governor's other proposals include making the State superintendent -- currently an elected position -- an appointed post and consolidating funding for early childhood education (now $380 million per year) into a single fund.

According to THE Journal, the Portland school district, Oregon's largest, will adopt, starting this Fall, Microsoft's *Live@edu*, a cloud-based communication service, for its 8,500 staff and at least some of its 47,000 students. Incorporating Internet-based programs for e-mail, word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, and file storage, *Live@edu* would save the district the expense of local hosting and would provide anytime/anywhere access to office applications. The district chose the Microsoft Web-based suite over others, including *Google's Apps for Education*, because of *Live@edu's* support, security, and synthesis.

Pennsylvania Update
March 2011

The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reports that Governor Tom Corbett's proposed 2011-12 budget -- without Federal stimulus money -- will be more than $1 billion less than the current year's spending. In 2009 when the stimulus funds first became available, the Pennsylvania legislature used $654.7 million in stimulus money either to increase the State education subsidy for districts or to backfill where State funds had been cut. This year the State education subsidy included another $654 million in stimulus money. Among the cost-cutting features of the Governor's proposal are:

- reducing support for the 14 State-owned universities from $503 million this year to $233 million in 2011-12;
- asking all school employees to take a one-year pay freeze (an estimated $400 million in savings);

cutting $550 million in basic State aid; and reducing by $259 million in block grants which finance school district programs such as all-day kindergarten.

According to the Philadelphia Inquirer, a Pennsylvania legislative committee has put forth a controversial proposal that would allow school vouchers in the State. The bill would phase in a school voucher program for low-income students over a three-year period. The bill would also expand -- from $75 million to $100 million -- the State's popular Educational Improvement Tax Credit program by which low- and middle-income students can receive scholarships paid for by businesses that receive tax credits for their donations.

The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reports that, for the first time, Pennsylvania has made available online information on how public school districts and schools scored on State tests and how their students are performing in reading and math. As required by a new State law, the State has posted the results of the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS), available at www.pvaas.sas.com. Student achievement results for each school are available at www.paayp.emetric.net.

With the support of Washington, D.C.-based Freedom Works, a suburban Philadelphia group called The Kitchen Table Patriots is urging the Pennsylvania State legislature to enact taxpayer-funded tuition vouchers that would allow low-income students to transfer out of poor-performing schools. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reports that, under Senate Bill 1, now in the legislature, poor parents of students in the State's 144 "failing" schools could use State-funded vouchers to send their children to private or charter schools outside their home district. The measure would provide "opportunity scholarships" equal in value to the amount of per-pupil aid the State gives to local school districts -- in some cases $12,000 or more. The State currently has a ten-year-old tax credit program that offers $75 million in tax credits for businesses that offer private scholarships.

As reported in the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Philadelphia school district plans to restructure 18 of its lowest-performing schools starting in September. Despite a pending $400 million budget deficit, the district will operate ten of the restructured schools, with the other eight going to charter operators. The schools are located across the City and cover all grades, although ten of the schools are struggling neighborhood high schools. Known as Renaissance Schools, the restructured schools will include:

- district-operated Promise Academies (seven schools) with new principals and up to 50 percent new staff;
- Promise Innovation schools where the principal stays and can formulate his own staff;
- Renaissance match schools (6 schools) to be run by charter operators; and
- Promise Neighborhood Partnership schools (2 schools) operated by Universal Companies with district input. These schools will be benefited by a $500,000 planning grant and will be modeled after the successful Harlem Children's Zone.

South Carolina Update
March 2011

As reported in The Augusta Chronicle, the South Carolina House has approved a bill intended to increase the number of charter schools in the State. Strongly supported by Republicans, the measure would provide more money to charter schools organized under the Statewide district; these schools receive Federal and State money but no local funds. Advocates argue that the 11 Statewide charters do not have enough money to operate and some face closure. The Statewide district was created in 2005 to ease the charter approval process for operators who believed local district were hostile to charters. A legislative committee has also approved allocating up to $25 million on schools with Statewide charters.

Tennessee Update
March 2011

According to Education Week, Tennessee's Republican Governor Bill Haslam has said he plans to push through his education plans despite strong opposition from Democrats in the legislature. Among the Governor's reforms is an extension by two years -- from three to five -- of the probationary period before teachers can receive tenure and requires them to be in the top two levels of a five-tiered evaluation system that includes student performance and other measures. Other Republicans -- with the Governor remaining neutral -- have proposed eliminating the rights of teachers unions to collectively bargain with local school districts. The Governor has also proposed eliminating the 90-school cap on charter schools and allowing districts to offer charter enrollment to any student. At-risk students would be given priority in charter schools that have more applications than student slots.

The Tennessean reports that Governor Haslam has also announced a new $40 million State fund that will be used to create more charter schools across the State. Half of the Charter School Growth Fund will be used to recruit and train school leaders to open new charters. The other half of the Fund will be invested in successful charter school management organizations such as KIPP Academy and LEAD academy. The Fund was begun with about $15 million from Tennessee's Federal Race to the Top award and another $20 million or more has come from private donations. The approach is consistent with the State's raising the cap on the number of charter schools from 50 to 90 in 2009 and the Governor's preference for eliminating the cap altogether.

Also reported in The Tennessean, Tennessee is using $19 million of its Federal Race to the Top grant to implement a system that will allow all high school teachers in the State to access their students' grade, course, and discipline histories as well as generate an early warning system for students at risk of dropping out. The system is expected to be available this Fall with comparable middle school data available in the Fall of 2012 and elementary data the year after that. Known as First to the Top, Tennessee's education reform package has solicited proposals

for the design of elements of the State's data warehouse which will also link preschool and college program data for long-term student tracking.

A new study by researchers at Vanderbilt University has found that Tennessee children who attended public prekindergarten gained significantly more in early literacy and math skills than those who did not participate in preschool. Measurements at the beginning and end of the pre-K year showed that pre-K children had a 98 percent greater gain in literacy skills than those not attending, a 145 percent greater gain in vocabulary, and a 109 percent greater gain in comprehension. The pre-K children also showed more moderate gains in math skills. It is expected that the Vanderbilt study will influence discussions among Tennessee policymakers about the States $85 million, voluntary pre-K program that currently serves more than 18,000 children.

Tennessee's new Commissioner of Education will be former Teach for America executive Kevin Huffman. Huffman is a TFA alumnus and has worked as a first- and second-grade bilingual teacher. He will be responsible for implementing the State's $500 million Race to the Top program including the new teacher evaluation system.
The *District Dossier* blog on EducationWeek.com reports that Memphis voters have approved the merger of the 105,000-student Memphis school district with the neighboring Shelby County district which would create a district of 150,000 students. Consummation of the merger is expected to take some time. Under a new State law, any district consolidation must include a comprehensive transition plan and can occur no sooner than three years after the vote is certified.

As reported in The Tennessean, it has been mandated that all 46 schools in Sumter County will have to have their technology updated over the next few years. Getting the schools technologically in line with the Common Core State Standards before the 2014-15 deadline is expected to cost millions of dollars. Just upgrading the County's infrastructure is estimated to cost $7 million, with the costs for hardware and software even higher. How the district plans to pay for the upgrades has not been determined.

Texas Update
March 2011

The Austin American-Statesman reports that preliminary legislative State budget plans call for new mandatory exams but little or no funding for language arts and science textbooks. Based on 2009 curriculum changes, 12 new, more rigorous high school exams -- known as State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) -- will be phased in over the next four years. Indeed, State officials have warned the legislature that new, high-stakes testing without instructional materials could give students legal grounds to sue the State or school districts.

As reported in Education Week, neither of the two houses in the Texas legislature has included in their base budgets any money for updating textbooks because of a projected shortfall in state funding of between $15 and $25 billion over the next two years. Science textbooks are 12-years-old and could present problems for students having to take tougher end-of-course exams aligned with new college readiness standards. TEA Commissioner Robert Scott has requested $520 million to update instructional materials beginning in September, while the State Board is requesting $60 million for online supplemental science materials.

Because of some provisions in the Federal EduJobs Bill which were designed to prevent the Governor from "misusing" Texas' $830 million under EduJobs, Republican Governor Rick Perry said he would have to break state law in order to ensure "maintenance of effort" in the state budget, a requirement sponsored by Austin Congressman Lloyd Doggett, an arch-enemy of the Governor. Austin has declared a "financial emergency" which will allow it to lay off more than 1,000 teachers. San Antonio has reduced staff travel budgets by 15 percent and cut in half the budget for furniture and computers. Dallas could eliminate as many as 4,000 teaching jobs and increase high school class sizes to 35 students. Dallas officials have said that, even if its share ($50 million) of the Federal stimulus money becomes available, it would not be nearly enough to offset the district's $423 million shortfall.

The *Curriculum Matters* blog on EducationWeek.com reports that there is bipartisan (but

Republican-led) pressure in the Texas legislature to reconsider the recently-approved, controversial State social studies standards. Critics of the standards argue that the Texas Board of Education considered nearly 200 last-minute amendments before its final vote. These critics have also cited comments from such organizations as the Fordham Institute which called the standards "a politicized distortion of history" and "an unwieldy tangle of social studies categories."

According to the Houston Chronicle, an independent audit has found that the Houston school district's special education program varies across schools and does not adequately mainstream students with disabilities. Among the audit's findings:

- About 8.2 percent of Houston's 200,000 students receive special education services, compared with 11.2 percent nationwide.
- Black middle school students are four times more likely than non-Black middle-schoolers to have an emotional disturbance.
- Fewer than one percent of Houston students are diagnosed with dyslexia, compared with five percent nationwide.

According to Education Week, the Windham School District, which serves inmates at 90 State prisons, is at risk of being replaced by online programs. Operating at a cost of $128 million in State funds, the Windham district, with 1,300 employees, allows inmates to earn GED and vocational certificates. State lawmakers have suggested that money could be saved by substituting online instruction as part of rehabilitation programs in the Department of Criminal Justice.

Utah Update
March 2011

According to The Main Street Journal, the Utah legislature is considering Senate Bill 65 which would establish a Statewide Online Education Program. The legislation would allow all students to earn high school graduation credits from publicly funded online services with multiple course providers. Under the measure, the State money would follow the student to the course provider, but full payment would be predicated on successful course completion by the student.

Virginia Update
March 2011

As published in Hampton Roads.com, Virginia has made a number of changes in its policy recommendations for how teachers should communicate electronically with students. The original proposal in November said teachers should use only accounts provided by their school districts and avoid online gaming and social-networking sites. In January, the State urged teachers to decline invitations from students to interact through texting and social-networking. Then in late March, the State issued a proposal that said district policies "should ensure that electronic and online communications between employees, volunteers, and individual students are transparent, accessible to supervisors and parents, and professional in content and tone."

Washington Update
March 2011

The Seattle Times reports that a privately funded, nonprofit organization, Washington STEM has announced 15 grants in the State of Washington -- totaling $2.4 million -- intended to increase the quality of education in science, technology, engineering, and math. With funding support from Microsoft, Boeing, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Washington STEMS's grant awards include:

- $628,700 in services to help the Bellevue School District to develop a STEM-focused curriculum that could be adapted Statewide;
- $5,718 to help struggling middle-school students in Neah Bay;
- $475,000 to bring Teach for America to the Puget Sound area;
- $593,259 to Washington State NLESA for such activities as expanding its "Ninth Grade Bridge" program which provides math mentoring and tutoring for eighth- and ninth-graders; and
- $600,000 to Technology Access Foundation to enable new instructional approaches at the TAF Academy in Federal Way and to support a second TAF academy in Renton in 2012.

The Seattle Times also reports that a bill under consideration in the Washington State legislature would change substantially the way teacher layoffs are handled. Senate Bill 5399 would require school districts facing layoffs to lay off first those teachers who received the lowest average evaluation ratings, based on a formula that gives a 60 percent weight to the most recent evaluation and a 40 percent weight to the previous evaluation. Currently, most teacher contracts make seniority the primary factor in determining who gets laid off first. Research from the University of Washington, based on value-added analysis, has found that student achievement after seniority-based layoffs would go down by an estimated 2.5 to 3.5 months of learning per student when compared with laying off the least effective teachers.

West Virginia Update
March 2011

As reported in The Intelligencer, West Virginia education officials are urging policies intended to create 16,000 additional West Virginians with college degrees or professional certifications by 2015. The percentage of West Virginians who complete college degrees is 28 percent compared with 41 percent nationally. The presidents of the State's ten community colleges have signed a "completion agreement" that would encourage college completion. In addition, the presidents of West Virginia Northern Community College and West Liberty University signed an "articulation agreement" that permits WVNCC graduates to transfer to WLU.

According to the Charleston Daily Mail, West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin has signed a measure that would require public and private insurer to cover autism treatment beginning July 1, 2011. Under the law, insurers must cover therapy for children with autism as young as 18 months. Benefits would be capped at $30,000 a year for the first three years and then $2,000 annually until the child turns 18.

Wisconsin Update
March 2011

As reported in Education Week, Governor Scott Walker has sought to justify his anti-collective bargaining legislation with a budget analysis that shows the law would save Wisconsin school districts about $489 million. Local district officials, however, question the Governor's analysis saying his proposed cuts in State aid and reduced school district revenue limits will severely harm local schools. Some also argue that the budget bill overstates the savings to districts of requiring employees to pay more of their pension and health insurance costs. An example given is the La Crosse school district; the Governor's analysis shows the district will benefit by $1.77 million even after the proposed cut in State aid while district's numbers indicate it will come up $1.2 million short.