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MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 31, 2012
TO: TechMIS Subscribers
FROM: Charles Blaschke, Blair Curry, and Suzanne Thouvenelle
SUBJ: Election Policy Changes Regarding Title I Waivers; Sequestration Updates; IRA Common Core Literacy Guidance; SETDA State Policy Database; College Placement Tests and Implications; Race to the Top New State Initiatives; and State Profile Updates

The Washington Update includes a number of possible education policy changes that depend upon the election and other items of interest to TechMIS subscribers including:

- **Page 1**
During the final presidential debate, President Obama stated that “sequestration is not going to happen,” if he is re-elected; some alternatives could be agreed upon during the lame duck session which could affect Title I and IDEA purchasing cycles for the remainder of this year.
- **Page 2**
On the surface, candidate Romney, if elected president, would support some current Obama policies and would expand others, such as choice, but would likely revoke or repeal some of the state waiver provisions which could have serious short- and long-term implications.
- **Page 4**
As an example, a Romney administration could create through the waiver process the opportunity for a GOP Congress and State legislatures to significantly reduce Title I funding over time and, at the least, could create a chaotic situation.

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The International Reading Association has developed guidance to help teachers implement Common Core literacy best practices, which is likely to be followed by most Title I programs in CCSS adoption states.
- **Page 8**
The State Education Technology Directors Association (SETDA) has launched a database with state policies and practices relating to a shift from textbooks to digital, which it recently advocated.
- **Page 9**
A USED Inspector General report confirms Title I and IDEA stimulus funds were used by more districts to purchase instructional materials, technology, and professional development than were other stimulus funds, which suggests specific opportunities if another Title I and IDEA stimulus initiative is undertaken.
- **Page 10**
Common Core Standards are increasingly being adopted by Catholic and some other private schools because of pressures from parents and other quarters.
- **Page 11**
The new USED-funded Center on Online Learning and Students with Disabilities has expressed concerns regarding student access to current online learning initiatives, which could have important implications for publishers and online providers.
- **Page 13**
A recent survey by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution predicts that more cheating scandals are inevitable as states cannot ensure test integrity under Common Core assessments, particularly as teacher pay is increasingly based on student performance.
- **Page 14**
An incentive-based “turnkey” approach appears to offer promise for transferring charter school best practices to low-performing schools.
- **Page 17**
The new 35 grantees under the Teacher Incentive Fund will allocate more than \$130 million for STEM-related activities, providing opportunities for firms providing STEM-related products and services.
- **Page 18**
Community colleges are exploring alternatives to traditional placement tests and remedial/developmental programs, offering opportunities for publishers and firms with innovative products and services which are effective.

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With only one-third of Race to the Top funding obligated or spent by the 12 Race to the Top states after two years, planned new initiatives could provide opportunities for TechMIS subscribers in some of these states.

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A number of miscellaneous items include:

- a) A new proposal would create a *Consumer Reports* on the efficacy of education technology products/modules.
- b) It is predicted that the SAT and ACT and remedial placement tests -- ACCUPLACER and COMPASS -- will compete with assessments developed by the two common core assessment consortia and will “win.”
- c) Recent USED Census data show a drop from 4.8 million to 4.1 million students enrolled in private schools over the last eight years.
- d) Microsoft’s new global initiative called YOUTH SPARK is the “biggest step we’ve taken in 37 years of the company,” according to Microsoft officials.
- e) Project Degree Completion is a new initiative to increase the number of baccalaureate degree holders by 3.8 million by 2025, in response to President’s Obama’s challenge.
- f) A new analysis of accountability plans of waiver-approved states indicate that eight states are using AMO targets for all students with AMO targets for different groups varying significantly in the remainder of the states.
- g) A new Teach Plus survey finds attitudes of both new and experienced teachers agree that more time to collaborate with peers is the best way to improve student outcomes, with extended school day rated the lowest.
- h) USED has awarded \$21 million to recipients to expand counseling programs.

The State profile updates cover a variety of issues including: state education funding, school accountability, prekindergarten issues, charter schools, and school turnaround developments.

Washington Update

Vol. 17, No. 10, October 31, 2012

During Final Presidential Debate, President Obama Stated “Sequestration is Not Going to Happen” in Response to Candidate Romney’s Claim that Sequestration Would Have a Major Impact on Federal Funding

Since early this summer, the Administration has held fast to the above position, with Office of Management and Budget officials claiming to be working on a proposed FY 2013 budget which would eliminate or reduce the impact of sequestration on January 2, 2013. Such a declaration, however, is likely based on the assumption that President Obama would be reelected and, during the lame duck session, Congressional election results would be more conducive to an environment in which an alternative to sequestration could be negotiated.

In mid-October, the ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee, Representative Norman Dicks (D-WA), sent a Dear Colleague letter to House members which estimated the impact of the 8.2 percent across-the-board sequestration on education programs:

- 12,000 fewer IDEA-funded teachers and aides;
- 16,000 Title I staff cuts;
- 20,000 fewer Head Start employees.

This letter was designed to “re-engage members during the November lame duck session to address entitlements and tax code structures, as reported in Education Daily (October 19th). House Appropriations

Committee Chairman Hal Rogers (R-KY) has endorsed a larger alternative addressing the above and other fiscal issues, referred to as a “grand bargain.” But Speaker John Boehner has expressed his opposition to such a “grand bargain” being addressed in the lame duck session. As Frank Wolfe, Education Daily reporter noted, if President Obama is re-elected, “The most viable short-term solution for legislators in a lame duck session is postponing the effective sequestration date for several months and establishing a bipartisan framework that would establish goals for the amounts of entitlement and discretionary cuts and revenue increases. The 113th Congress would then fill in the details starting in January.” Romney has previously stated that he would want the effective sequestration date be postponed, at least until March, when an FY 2013 budget proposal could be passed replacing the Continuing Resolution through March 27th.

In any event, as Joel Packer, Executive Director Committee for Education Funding has stated, “Sequestration, if it occurs, would not impact any education program until July with the exception of impact aid.” (See August 3rd TechMIS Alert)

Although not much movement on the sequestration issue appears on the surface, there are bipartisan groups of senators and representatives meeting behind closed doors to address sequestration, the FY 2013 budget, and alternative solutions before the end of the year. As we have predicted in previous reports, sequestration, as it is now

written in the Budget Control Act, is not likely to occur as a result of some action during the lame duck session. However, potential sequestration has already affected purchasing cycles for Title I and IDEA, among other education programs. Some funds are being put into Title I reserve at the district level or are being withheld to the tune of approximately eight to ten percent in many districts, creating market paralysis among many states (see September 27th TechMIS Report). We plan to continue to following developments in this area, providing periodic reports as soon as the smoke appears to be clearing.

Education Policies of Candidate Romney, if Elected President, Would Appear on the Surface, to Be Similar to Several Current Obama Policies, With a Number of Exceptions Relating to Expanded Choice, Rescinding Waivers and Most Significantly Reducing the Federal Role in Education Policy Actual Implementation, an Area in Which the “Devil Could Be in the Details”

To speculate on the education policy directions upon which a President Romney would embark is difficult for a number of reasons. First, the candidate’s positions on a variety of issues have changed from the primaries to the presidential debates, in interviews interspersed between the debates, and in speeches before very different “uncommitted” groups. Second, there are major issues confronting any president and Congress -- such as deficits, tax renewals, debt ceilings, and sequestration -- that are significantly larger requiring more immediate attention than education. Although education policy must be

formulated within the context of these larger more immediate issues requiring Presidential and/or Congressional action, education is unlikely to command center stage. And third, in light of candidate Romney’s changed positions on numerous policies, one can glean insights through an assessment of policy initiatives undertaken by him as Massachusetts governor several years ago with great caution due to unique contexts in Massachusetts. Education policy pundits and bloggers, media articles and interpretations of his official “education policy advisors” (many from the last Bush administration, NCLB supporters, and some from former Florida Governor Jeb Bush’s cadre of policy advisors) and other academic influencers and advisors are useful but often inconsistent or even conflicting. As one attempts to compile, synthesize, and analyze policy statements, innuendos, and interpretations, especially from advisors close to the candidate, a picture appears to emerge which TechMIS subscribers should monitor, pursue when appropriate prior to and possibly after the election. All this is said with the caveat that the “devil will be in the details,” not so much regarding the specific policy issues, but if and how a Romney Administration would address them as being appropriate to the current Federal role in education policy implementation.

Unlike other positions, candidate Romney has been consistent in advocating the underlying principles of educational choice, efficiency, and effectiveness. As Rick Hess has noted in Phi Delta Kappan (October 1st), on the surface he and President Obama appear to be in agreement on these issues but, on the issue of implementation and important details, they disagree on the Federal role. Romney has been fairly consistent in supporting increased Federal,

and particularly state support, for expansion of charter schools by the elimination of state caps on numbers and enrollments and quietly promoting more private sector, for-profit involvement under the assumption that efficiencies would be increased. As advisor Martin West stated in response to a question by Hess during the Education Enterprise Institute debate with Obama advisor Jonathon Schnur, Romney would support research, particularly programs like i³, if it would involve not only not-for-profit but also for-profit organizations and would probably support additional funds for similar research and experimentation that provides incentives to expand “what works.” In addition to promoting choice through expansion of charter schools, candidate Romney would also support Title I and IDEA programs (approximating \$25 million) by converting them to vouchers through which parents of Title I-eligible students and students with disabilities could decide what schools in which to enroll them. West also noted that even though the amount of Title I funds per student would be relatively small, these funds could be added to state programs currently underway such as the McKay Scholarships in Florida and the voucher program in Ohio. The vouchers would allow parents to send their eligible Title I or IDEA students to attend any district, charter, or private school, if the state permits, or for tutoring programs or digital courses. Hess notes that critics would argue the initiative would divert IDEA and Title I funds from “the poorest schools.” Currently, Title I funds are allocated to districts based on the Title I formula and funding for an eligible student in the district’s “attendance area” who attends a charter school or a private school are supposed to “follow the child.” Equitable levels of materials, equipment, and training

support, should follow the child to the new school in which the student enrolls. Sending Title I or IDEA vouchers directly to parents could not likely be done under the waiver process and would require a total rewrite of that Law (see related [Washington Update](#) item).

On the issue of waivers, as *Politics K-12* speculated, another Romney education policy advisor Phil Handy implied a President Romney would revoke the waivers and push for ESEA reauthorization, a position taken by former Secretary Margaret Spellings several months ago (see related [Washington Update](#) item). Martin West, Romney’s other key education policy advisor, said [Education Week’s](#) interpretation of Handy’s statement was incorrect, but did agree that waivers are a short-term solution and no substitute for ESEA reauthorization. Obama education advisor Jonathan Schnur stated that reversing waivers and returning to the NCLB accountability system in the absence of reauthorization “is not the way to go,” as reported in [Education Daily](#) (October 18th). Hess, who moderated the West-Schnur AEI debate, noted that the extensive use of the waiver process by Secretary Duncan has legitimized the power of the Secretary and could provide a precedent for a Romney Secretary of Education using the same waiver process to rescind some provisions while providing new waiver opportunities for states to implement the new administration’s preferences. As a side note, during a recent discussion with former Secretary Richard Riley, who served the Clinton Administration for eight years, I asked him if he ever thought the waiver process would be used as extensively as it has been, recalling during an SIIA conference that Secretary Riley’s Deputy

Secretary at that time, Mike Smith, told the group that the Administration did not get all it wanted in the 1994 ESEA reauthorization; however, it did get the Secretary's waiver authority provision. Dr. Smith was a key advisor during the early days of the Obama/Duncan Administration.

Based on statements from the candidate and his two advisors West and Handy, a Romney presidency would push for the following:

- greater emphasis on teacher evaluation with teacher pay more heavily based on student performance, possibly relying on state standardized tests as under NCLB or the National Assessment of Education Progress, under which Massachusetts has been in the top 10 percentile, and increased transparency, especially for parents, which was promoted under NCLB;
- greater use of competitive grants such as a Teacher Incentive Fund and less reliance on formula programs and a block grant for Title II Teacher Quality;
- no Federal funding to support the Common Core Standards evaluations being developed by the two consortia or other aligned assessments developed by the states (see related [Washington Update](#) item); and
- revoking some Education Flexibility waiver provisions while adding others.

As Hess noted in his *Straight Up* blog about waivers (October 24th), the Obama Administration's use of waivers "...stands as a mouth-watering precedent and invitation for an administration eager to pursue its agenda without having to woo or

wait upon Congress." Hess also added, "Right now, Romney's education team is infused with old Bush hands and advisors with strong ties to former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush...Tensions between the Tea Party and the party's more proactive 'Republicans-for-School-Reform' wing would ultimately turn on who wins the game of musical chairs at the White House and Department of Education. In the end, Romney's plans would depend as much on who fills key positions as anything else."

Under a Romney Regime, Title I Cuts and Chaos Could Occur

Although Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney's education policy and funding positions have undergone significant redirections beginning with the October 3rd Presidential debate, most recent statements by him or his key education advisor, Phil Handy, could result in significant de facto cuts in Federal Title I funding and chaos, creating niche market paralysis at the least, and at the most, a significant reduction in Title I funding over time.

During the Denver October 3rd Presidential debate, Romney stated, "I'm not going to cut education funding. I don't have any plan to cut education funding -- and grants that go to people going to college...I don't want to cut our commitment to education. I want to make it more effective and efficient." As Michele McNeil's *Politics K-12* blog on [EducationWeek.org](#) noted, his running mate, Chairman of the House Budget Committee Paul Ryan, has pushed through Congress an austere budget "that would cut domestic discretionary funding, which includes education, by 20 percent." More recently,

Romney's education policy advisor Phil Handy reportedly stated that the crux of the funding crisis is over entitlement programs such as Social Security; "You can easily hold public education harmless without impacting the creation of more deficits." However, Handy did state that Romney would not invest more in education, which according to McNeil, "That includes in areas such as common core assessments to match the common core, or in early education."

During an earlier NBC "Education Nation" interview, candidate Romney said the following regarding Common Core Standards, "I don't subscribe to the idea of the federal government trying to push a Common Core on various states. In terms of implementing the Common Core...If you have chosen it, congratulations. Work on it and do it within the resources of your own state."

One interpretation is that a Romney White House, and possibly the larger GOP Congressional membership, will not provide Federal funds to implement, for example, the Common Core assessments; Handy stated as much in the October 15th debate, "You just can't keep adding to the deficit." But the state adoption of Common Core Standards or their equivalent and aligned assessments is a mandate under state waivers which 34 states have received and 11 more states stand in waiting. As reported by *Politics K-12* blogger McNeil (October 15th), "In the first substantive remarks from the Mitt Romney campaign on No Child Left Behind waivers, advisor Phil Handy indicated that the flexibility granted this year to 33 states (now 34) and the District of Columbia would be in serious jeopardy if the former Massachusetts governor wins the presidency." Handy didn't outright say

Romney would get rid of waivers, but he broadly hinted at it. Handy also reportedly said that the waivers would be reviewed under a Romney Administration and that Romney would push for reauthorizing NCLB, and "if that doesn't happen, then it would try to return to NCLB as written." Former Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings is quoted in Education Week (October 3rd) as saying, "The waivers were a mistake...What the president giveth, the president can taketh away."

If there is a Republican landslide increasing GOP members in both the House and Senate, then President Romney could keep his word of not proposing K-12 education funding cuts by delegating that function to both Congress and state legislators under the following scenario.

As we mentioned in our August TechMIS Special Report on supplement-not-supplant, regulatory changes under state waiver guidance say that, if a state passes a state law or regulation which is a mirror image of the Federal law or mandate (in which there are 11 areas in which states could receive waiver approval), then Federal funds, including Title I, could be used to pay for such activities, that would then be required by state law, without violating the supplement-not-supplant provisions of Title I. If a new Secretary of Education exercises his or her waiver authority as Secretary Duncan did and revokes the waivers, and if, as Mr. Handy recently stated the Romney administration "will try to return to NCLB as written," Title I funds would be subject to the prior supplement-not-supplant interpretations in the Law regarding activities "required by state law." Hence, Title I funds could not be used to pay for an activity "required by state law." Regarding

the more flexible August 3rd supplement-not-supplant interpretations in the waiver guidance, in his *Straight Up* blog, Rick Hess refers to the new guidance as only a “stop gap” and argues, “The much bigger and more interesting challenge, to which few states have yet given any thought, is how all this will play out with efforts to implement teacher evaluation and the Common Core.”

Since the “mirror image” state laws on teacher evaluations are dependent on use of Common Core aligned assessments, Candidate Romney and his advisors have said covering such implementation costs is a state, not a Federal, responsibility. A Republican-controlled Congress could legitimately question the need for more Federal Title I funding since Title I money could not be used to pay for such assessments. As a result, pressures to reduce Title I funding at the Federal level could emerge. At the same time, state legislatures would be under pressure to provide funding increases to cover the cost of implementing teacher evaluations and Common Core aligned assessments, which under tight budgetary situations is not likely. The only other alternative would be to rescind such newly-passed state laws. Opposition from advocacy groups supporting these waiver reforms would increase dramatically, creating a chaotic situation.

Another very controversial proposal by candidate Romney is to provide both Title I and IDEA funding totaling approximately \$25 billion directly to parents of Title I eligible students and students with disabilities in the form of vouchers to send their students to schools of their choice. This would create chaos, if not requiring a total rewrite of Title I which would further

add to a chaotic situation.

Further contributing to a chaotic situation could be a quick reauthorization of ESEA early during a Romney Administration. Most states had been approved for waivers and some have yet to even submit applications. If an interim measure were to rescind only partially some of the provisions in the current Ed Flex waiver guidance, then some states would be under one set of rules, others under another set of rules and all states be under a 12-18 months transition period until regulations for a reauthorized ESEA are promulgated. As Andrew Brownstein noted in the October 17th *TitleI-derland* blog, “If Romney becomes president -- for better or for worse -- it sounds like that’s likely to happen.”

The Influential International Reading Association (IRA) Has Developed Guidance to Clarify Issues and Help Teachers Implement Useful Common Core Literacy Practices

Representing a consensus among literacy leaders who support “thoughtful implementation” of the English Language Arts (ELA) Common Core State Standards, the intent of the guidance is “to support state and local leaders, teachers, university faculty, publishers, and planners and facilitators of professional development as they implement the ELA Common Core State Standards.” Below, are highlights of the key issues which have been confusing and challenging for many to implement and key recommendations with implications for some TechMIS subscribers.

Regarding the use of “challenging texts,” the guidance calls for a “nuanced and thoughtful

approach. Merely adding more challenging texts to the curriculum will not be a sufficient or effective response to this requirement.” IRA recommends, “Teachers need professional learning opportunities to be able to provide adequate scaffolding and support for student reading of complex texts in Grades 2-12 and listening to complex texts in Kindergarten and Grade 1.”

The IRA agrees with the CCSS requirement for teaching phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, and other foundational skills. Instruction in these skills should occur in concert with writing, speaking, listening, and language development instruction.

Related to comprehension, IRA notes that the CCSS focuses on reading outcomes and does not “explicitly address what students need to be taught to accomplish these goals.” The guidance recommends that research-proven reading comprehension strategies should be taught using gradual “release of responsibility approaches” (i.e., teacher models a strategy, then students use it with teacher guidance, and subsequently student uses strategy independently to understand and remember what they have read).

Teaching vocabulary should be included in instruction throughout the school day and across all subject areas and instruction should be provided “in word-solving strategies as well as teaching individual words.”

The CCSS writing standards emphasize that students need to learn to write about information that they find in text, which differs from current state writing standards, and will require that teachers undergo major

professional development efforts to know how to teach students to write about text. It will also require students to have easy access to online research resources and initial writing and editing tools. IRA guidance recommends that opportunities be provided for students to write in response to reading across the curriculum and that research opportunities are provided that involve reading both print and digital text that require writing in response to reading. Further, IRA suggests, “writing about reading requires more resources . . . and the standards emphasize the importance and value of digital tools in writing.” Access to online research resources and digital writing and editing tools are essential to support achieving this.

Acknowledging that CCSS establishes a common set of goals for all students, the guidelines recognize differences among children and “in what it will take to get them to achieve these goals.” The IRA argues that there must be a clear recognition about the resources and adjustments that will be needed to ensure that struggling learners, gifted students, and English language learners, among others, reach these goals. Hence, it recommends that the amounts and types of instruction vary based on student needs and that student learning be monitored with evaluative information providing adjustments and supplements.

It should be noted that in 2005-06, the IRA developed several sets of guidance for elementary, middle, and high schools on the implementation of response-to-intervention (RTI) approaches which were widely accepted and used in Title I and special education programs. In a recent discussion with Richard Long, Executive Director of the National Title I Association -- which is

associated with the IRA -- he felt that the guidance would be welcomed and, like the previous RTI guidance, used in Title I programs as the CCSS is implemented. He also believes that the new guidance fills a vacuum and can point interested parties to other resources which IRA has developed and which are available to assist in classroom instructional implementation. As the guidance notes, the CCSS represents qualitatively different outcomes for students which will require significant shifts in education practices with equally significant investments in knowledge and skills along with necessary material support such as text and technology.

For a copy of the report go to:
http://www.reading.org/Libraries/association-documents/ira_ccss_guidelines.pdf

The State Education Technology Directors Association (SETDA) Launches a Database of State Policies and Practices that Charts Education's Shift to Digital

The new State Education Policy Center (SEPC) recently announced it will provide up-to-date information on selected state technology-related policies and practices, which according to Doug Levin, SETDA's Executive Director, "will benefit state, federal and local policymakers, researchers private sector (corporate and philanthropic) investors and practitioners." The first selected topics concern policies and practices related to "broadband access," "online assessment" (both formative and summative), and "instructional materials" with an emphasis on digital and open content. We have reviewed the Texas SEPC "instructional materials" policy and practice

profile to determine how much of the detail provided would be useful to TechMIS subscribers to incorporate into marketing and sales strategies and promotional materials. We believe the information is useful at a general level, as highlighted below.

The Texas Instructional Materials Allotment (IMA) provided to each district can be used to purchase instructional materials including print or digital, adopted or non-adopted technology equipment and related services. LEAs can carryover funds from one year to the next and can apply funds to support adoption in subject areas other than those in the current adoption cycle, which initially over the last year has impacted purchasing cycles in each district. Unlike previous adoption procedures, districts own the materials once they are adopted.

Under Exemplary Practices, the database states that many districts in Texas are taking advantage of Open Education Resources (OER), even though the State has not adopted an OER policy. While there are no State guidelines related to the creation and use of teacher-created content, many districts are utilizing teacher created content as a resource. Some districts that have shifted to digital content have begun to share their collections on the Texas Education on iTunesU.

Under Adoption Policies, Senate Bill 6, recently passed by the Texas legislature, does not require a certain percentage of instructional materials in digital format, nor does the State provide any guidelines or recommendations that encourage LEAs to purchase digital content with State or Federal funds set aside for textbooks.

SEPC includes URLs for additional TEA legislation or regulations, as well as websites for other exemplary practices relating to the movement toward digital.

To access the SEPC, go to: <http://sepc.setda.org>

New USED Office of Inspector General Report Confirms that Title I and IDEA ARRA Funds Were Used by More Districts to Purchase Non-Personnel Items, Such as Instructional Materials and Technology, and Professional Development than Were Other Stimulus Funds Used

A new report from the USED Office of Inspector General entitled “School Districts’ Use of Recovery Act and Education Jobs Funds” has found that more districts used Title I and IDEA ARRA funds to purchase instructional materials, professional development, technology, extended learning activities and products than other stimulus funds. These ARRA expenditures directly benefited at-risk students and students with disabilities. Use of the Title I and IDEA funds also resulted in more district reform initiatives. Although not a representative sample, findings from the 22 districts studied corroborates most of the findings, which we have reported, based on surveys by the Center on Education Policy and other recent studies. Because of the OIG’s findings that Title I and IDEA ARRA funds supported education reforms -- and directly benefitted at risk students -- more so than did other recovery funds, such as Education Stabilization Funds or EduJobs, many future stimulus appropriations proposed by the Obama Administration are likely to have a

similar focus on Title I and IDEA. Some of the past uses of Title I and IDEA ARRA funds could point to the types and nature of future expenditures if new stimulus funding is appropriated.

The report found that about half of Title I and IDEA ARRA expenditures were classified as “non-personnel” which included services, products and activities that focused on student academic achievement, teacher performance, or parent support. Districts generally used the majority of their Title I and IDEA ARRA funds (70 percent and 59 percent, respectively) to expand existing services and activities and/or offer new ones. The types of non-personnel expenditures are highlighted below:

- about half of the districts said they used Title I and IDEA ARRA funds to purchase instructional or assistive technology to address student needs;
- more than half reported purchasing or planned to purchase interactive whiteboards;
- more than half of the districts reported purchasing or planning to purchase assistive technology for students with disabilities;
- officials from all districts said they used Title I or IDEA ARRA funds to purchase instructional programs or classroom materials to improve student achievement, including intervention materials, adaptive and instructional software, and direct instruction and math interventions combining print and technology components;
- two-thirds of the districts reported using or planning to use Title I funds for extended learning opportunities,

including tutoring, after-school programs, and summer school programs; six of the 22 districts said they plan to use IDEA ARRA funds for these purposes.

Five of the 22 districts used Title I ARRA funds to expand Title I programs to additional schools (e.g., in Clark County (Nevada), 76 additional schools in 2009-10 and 68 schools the next year). Title I guidance allowed newly purchased materials and equipment to remain in such schools once the ARRA funds ran out. The report also found that all 22 districts reported that they spent or plan to spend Title I and IDEA funds on professional development that focused on improving teaching skills, using new tools or equipment, and identifying student special needs. Most of the 22 districts said they used Title I and IDEA ARRA funds for data systems and materials to monitor student progress and assess the eligibility and needs of students with disabilities. Officials in about two-thirds of the districts said they used Title I ARRA funds for parent resource centers, parent outreach, and a third used such funds for family literacy activities in after-school and summer school environments.

As expected, the report found that the vast majority of Education Stabilization Funding and EduJobs stimulus funding was used on personnel activities; however, in about half of the 22 districts, officials reported using Title I and IDEA ARRA funds to pay for teacher duties outside regular work hours, such as hiring instructional coaches, hiring substitutes for teachers who attend training, and some of the other activities that were expanded or created such as extended learning programs and summer school. This suggests that, while “personnel costs”

consumed about 50 percent of ARRA spending across all programs, a significant portion was considered to be “reasonable and necessary” for the implementation of technology and related products and services highlighted above.

For a copy of the report go to: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oig/auditreports/fy2012/a0910006com.pdf>

Common Core Standards Increasingly Being Adopted by Catholic and Other Private Schools

As reported in Education Week (October 8th), a recent survey by the National Catholic Educational Association found that more than 100 Roman Catholic dioceses have decided to adopt the Common Core Standards as pressures appear to be coming from a number of quarters as all but four states adopted Common Core Standards:

- a desire to become competitive with public schools which are adopting Common Core Standards so that parents can make educated choices;
- revisions by textbook and test publishers to align with Common Core Standards which many private schools will be pressured to adopt;
- increased alignment of teacher preparation programs with Common Core Standards and most likely assessments.

As reported in Education Week, Sister Dale McDonald, Director of Public Policy and Research at the National Catholic Educational Association has undertaken the Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative which involves NCEA, Catholic

universities, and others to develop and share guidelines for schools to integrate Catholic identity -- including values, beliefs, and social teachings -- into curriculum and instruction based on the Common Core Standards.

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles, for example, which oversees 270 Catholic schools are focusing first on the English/language arts section, while the archdiocese of Louisville which oversees 47 schools, is implementing math standards now and likely to adopt ELA standards soon thereafter. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia is in the second year of implementation of Common Core Standards in 144 schools.

One reason that it was not reported in the article could be district pressure on private schools which enroll eligible Title I students to continue receiving Federal Title I supported teachers, equipment or technology, instructional materials, etc. from the district to provide services which will ensure such students meet college and career-readiness Common Core Standards. "Equitable treatment" of private schools participating in the Title I program will likely grow as a "bone of contention" in Title I allocation negotiations in the future.

The article also reports on various positions from other private school associations, including:

- The American Association of Christian Schools whose 800 members are "leery of embracing what they see as national standards," according to Executive Director Jeffrey Walton.
- The National Association of Independent Schools which according to Patrick Bassett,

Executive Director, which supports independence and local control by individual schools and doesn't expect many NAS members to adopt Common Core;

- The Christian Schools International whose executive Director Jeff Blamer expects most of the 400 U.S. member schools to move toward widespread adoption.

According to Chester Finn, President of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute which supports Common Core Standards, concluded that parents may come to expect some alignment with Common Core Standards if they take hold in public education over time and "will increasingly touch private schools."

The New Center on Online Learning and Students With Disabilities Has Expressed Concerns About Current Participation of Students with Disabilities in Online Learning, Which Could Have Important Implications for Publishers and Online Providers

An October 3, 2012 letter -- signed by Bill East (National Association of State Directors of Special Education), Don Deshler (Center for Research on Learning), David Rose (CAST), and Diana Greer (Center for Research on Learning), co-principal investigators of the new Center whose research "has barely begun" -- is directed at the entire education community "from producers to consumers." Several concerns have direct implications for publishers and providers.

Pointing to the issue of Accessibility and Universal Design, the letter states,

“Preliminary inspection of widely adopted online environments reveals major gaps in basic accessibility for students with disabilities. Equally concerning is the general lack of instructional design and the specific lack of universal design for learning options.” As some states have begun to include online learning as a graduation requirement, this poses a significant civil rights issue.” As Mark Sherman, who covers IDEA/special education for Education Daily noted (October 9th), NASDE has conducted a number of projects through its “Project Forum” on the pluses and minuses of online instruction for students with disabilities. David Rose, who heads CAST, which has been a major advocate for incorporation of universal design principles into all instructional materials, has been instrumental in incorporating UDL principles as requirements in recent Federal statutes and legislative proposals. In the article, Sherman quotes Larry Wexler, Director Research to Practice Division within USED/OSEP, who said the Center does not speak for OSEP; however, acknowledging the letter, Wexler reportedly said “We’re not drawing any conclusions based on some preliminary findings by one of our grantees...the concerns they’ve raised are concerns that we would have also.” Evidently, USED is drafting a *Dear Colleague* letter on the subject.

It should be noted that the National Center for Response-to-Intervention, funded by USED several years ago, has been very instrumental in promoting response-to-intervention and, in more than one instance, has acted as a “surrogate” spokesperson for at least some of USED’s high-level special education officials on RTI. As the October 3rd letter from the new Center states, “...we

are hopeful that our Center can serve as a hub where researchers can share the most current research, can find useful tools, guidelines and technologies for research, can find collaborators and data sources, etc...In addition, we have created an online reference and associated white paper that identifies an array of elementary and secondary instructional software products and digital materials with respect to Section 508 standards for physical and sensory access.” The new Center appears to parallel closely the evolution of the National RTI Center which, along with leadership in the National RTI Network, has recommended that response-to-intervention definitions and procedures be included in future legislation to ensure quality implementation. According to Diana Greer, University of Kansas professor, the Center does have a list of resources, including online education vendors who have completed the Voluntary Product Accessibility Template which indicates whether their products comply with Section 508 to ensure materials are available in alternative formats for individuals with limited vision, hearing, or motor control, among other requirements.

Related to accessibility, the letter also identifies preparation for teaching online courses as another concern which is often “minimal,” even for regular education teachers. The special preparation in the unique competencies required to provide online instruction to students with disabilities is “often totally absent.” Another concern, upon which David Rose expanded in a subsequent interview, relates to how online service providers address the non-academic and social/emotional aspects of special education and online learning. Here, the growth of online learning brings to the forefront the question of least restrictive

environment, about which Rose reportedly said, “Schools, districts -- even parents may prefer them [the students] to be in an online environment, but not necessarily for the right reasons, and that is something that the center really wants to get a better handle on.” However, several officials from advocacy groups such as CEC and the National Center for Learning Disabilities argued that the “least restrictive environment” is not a “cut and dried issue”; as Laura Kaloi, Public Policy Director for the National Center for Learning Disabilities stated, “Much like any educational option for students, there are pluses and minuses in virtual schools/learning with respect to students with LD.” In the October 3rd letter, the co-principal investigators suggested the need for balanced perspective: “...we want to emphasize that we entered this field because we believe that new technologies, including online learning technologies, have enormous promise for students with disabilities. Like any other tool or resource, however, these new learning environments will need to be carefully designed and knowledgeably implemented in order to be effective.”

Information about the Center is available on their website at: <http://centeronlinelearning.org/>

Based on a Recent Survey and Interviews With State Officials, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution Predicts “More Cheating Scandals Inevitable, as States Can’t Ensure Tests Integrity”

Following its investigative reporting on the Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (AJC) has

conducted a survey of 50 SEAs which found many states do not use basic test security measures designed to stop cheating on tests. Their survey also “reveals other wildly inconsistent practices around the country: Some states require outside investigations of cheating in school districts, but most states permit districts to investigate themselves; some states look for unusual increases in test scores, but most don’t; about half send out independent monitors for over C testing, about half do not.” The AJC argues that USED has “no national strategy to ensure the tests’ integrity.” Although more than 34 states have been granted waivers to get out from under NCLB school sanctions mandates, states will continue to be required to administer tests, and, “In fact many states and school districts are developing plans to tie teacher pay and evaluations to student test scores.” Testing expert Scott Marion is quoted as saying that “tests are still largely trustworthy, but cheating is a threat to the validity of scores...If you think there’s cheating now under school accountability, wait until what you see under teacher accountability.”

Because education officials often ignore “what no one wants to see,” among the 46 responding states, the AJC survey found:

- 24 states did not conduct an analysis looking for improbable test improvement in 2012;
- 21 states did not look for an improbable number of changes from wrong to right answers in 2012;
- 34 states did not screen for unusually similar answers that would suggest that students copied from one another or that a teacher filled in answers on multiple tests;

- 41 states allow teachers to proctor tests for their own students; and
- 37 states allow school districts to conduct cheating investigations of their own employees and do not use independent agency investigators.

The [AJC](#) article quotes a number of high-level officials from testing firms and state officials who argue that a set of “best practices” could be useful and standard procedures could limit cheating opportunities. The article also quotes Secretary Duncan who said test security is best left to state and local officials; he said, “I don’t think anyone wants a national testing police.” During the Council of the Great City Schools legislative conference last March, Secretary Duncan addressed the Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal, indicating his deepening concern that high stakes testing could lead to teachers cheating on student test scores. As the September 30th [AJC](#) article notes, a 2009 report from the Government Accountability Office pointed to inadequate state testing security policies that could affect the test reliability and validity and noted that testing companies and SEAs were to publish a book on “best practices for testing” which USED should use to examine state security protocols. However, as the article further notes, only five pages when the book was published addressed test security and cheating and best practices are described only in vague terms.

As the Center on Education Policy reported (see September TechMIS [Washington Update](#)), most of the states with high school exit exams plan to replace them with career- and college-readiness tests aligned with Common Core State Standards being developed by the two testing consortia --

PARCC and Smarter Balanced -- with many of the remaining states likely to also do so. And, as a result of state waivers, states are also using assessment scores, along with other measures, to evaluate teachers and to determine some degree of “pay for performance” for individual teachers. Under NCLB, schools and districts were identified for improvement based solely on test scores in which educators had an incentive to do what they could to show school improvement. With individual teacher evaluations, and to some degree payment, based on multiple measures including high stakes test scores, test security and integrity will likely become a growing issue. According to the [AJC](#) article, the Smarter Balanced Consortium “has not yet discussed how testing data will be used to identify testing irregularities and instigate investigations or what kind of security measures will be employed.” While USED did hold a recent symposium on testing integrity, the article notes that a summary of experts’ advice “will not contain a description of best practices.” Rather, according to USED, it will note what experts have said “and then advise the states and school districts that may use the information as they see fit.”

Incentive-Based “Turnkey” Approach Offers Promise for Using Charter Schools’ Best Practices to Leverage Reform in Low-Performing Schools

In a recent proposal, Harvard University economics professor Roland Fryer has proposed an incentive-based “turnkey” approach for leveraging five key successful practices from effective charter schools into low-performing traditional district schools. As Sean Cavanagh’s *Charters & Choice*

blog on EducationWeek.org noted, “Those who believe that charter schools have the potential to boost educational opportunities for large numbers of students across the United States also acknowledge a simple truth: that charters today occupy a relatively small slice of public school market, and at their current rate of growth it would take many years for them to reach a substantial portion of the population.” As Cavanaugh says, “Roland Fryer addresses this limitation and points to a way around it: exporting best practices from charters into regular public school systems, particularly struggling ones.”

Based on his prior experience as Chief Equality Officer New York City Public Schools where beginning in 2010, he implemented teacher pay-for-performance concepts, incentive approaches, and subsequent research on effective charter schools. Dr. Fryer began conducting experiments/evaluations in Houston and Denver Public Schools to transfer effective charter school practices into low-performing schools. He notes that student test score increases have been “strikingly similar to that seen among the best charters” in closing achievement gaps. The five educational practices that he found most effective, based on evidence from New York City charter schools, were:

- focusing on human capital;
- using student data to drive instruction;
- providing high-dosage tutoring;
- extending time on task; and
- establishing a culture of high expectations.

His analysis found, “Together, these five practices explain roughly half the difference

in effectiveness between charter schools.” The purpose of the Houston and Denver experiments was to implement the above charter school practices in traditional schools to determine whether they could lead to an alternative pathway for public school reform without necessarily conversion to charter schools. And, based on promising preliminary evidence from Houston and Denver, he argues that, “...these practices can be transferred from charters to public schools.”

While he notes that successful turnkey adoption of the five factors requires some degree of customization and context, the article expands on the lessons learned from Houston’s case studies, which included nine middle and high schools and eleven elementary schools’ that used: (a) student data to drive instruction; (b) involved the creation of individual school goals; (c) assessed students every six weeks and used benchmark assessments; and (d) teacher meeting one-on-one with students to set goals for official end-of-year assessments. According to his approach, important to the implementation of these factors is the need for administrators to equip schools with necessary technology, such as scanners and software, to quickly and easily input student test data into a central database which is available to teachers and administrators.

Providing high dosages of tutoring which target curricula to the level of each student is important. Tutoring curriculum should be broken into units, he argues, and all students should take beginning assessments so they can be matched with tutors and peers who are most conducive to their learning. In Houston, students received hour-long, two-on-one tutoring in math with tutors having received two weeks of training before school

began. The position was full-time with an annual salary of \$20,000; bonus payments up to \$8,000 were offered based on student achievement. Each school hired a site coordinator who oversees tutoring activities. In addition to Fryer's experience in New York City and experiments with performance-based teacher incentives, he also conducted evaluations in Chicago on the use of incentives to motivate students. Generally, for administrators to select the best tutors, he recommends that tutors have a bachelor's degree, but they also should be assessed in their subject expertise. While some students should receive intensive tutoring, all should receive some tutoring which helps remove the potentially negative stigma attached to tutoring.

In order to increase the time for tutoring and to extend "time on task," the length of the school day and number of days in the school year should be extended, particularly for tutoring in specific subject areas.

He argues that in order to increase the focus on human capital, teachers should be given various tools to succeed, including feedback from administrators based on class observation, as well as professional development which targets common problems such as classroom management and instructional rigor. Weekly professional development sessions should be held for all teachers. Further, Fryer noted that the Houston case study found slightly over half of the teachers and all of the principals were replaced for a variety of reasons.

To establish a culture of high expectations, each school must set its own requirements. Every teacher, student, and other staff must identify personal goals and specify how they are to achieve them. A culture of high

expectations includes visual evidence of a college-going culture. In the article, published by the Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institute, Fryer estimated the marginal \$1,800 per-pupil cost based on an analysis of the cost of reforms in Houston; this included:

- \$700 for tutoring (average, not high-intensity tutoring);
- \$200 related to technology and use of data;
- \$550 for extended learning time;
- \$250 for human capital; and
- \$100 for administrative costs.

High-intensity tutoring required by some students in specific grades may increase cost to \$2,200 per student.

It is interesting to note that, in November 2007, during a Council of Chief State School Officers meeting where Fryer spoke on his incentive-based experimentation in New York City Public Schools and Harvard Education Lab Research, I mentioned several projects in which TURNKEY was involved during the 1970s. These projects used teacher incentives or private firms' performance contracts to experiment with different approaches and then turnkey effective practices into schools/districts as a low-cost means of experimentation and possible reform. The approach he used in Houston and Denver has many parallels. If his proposal is taken seriously and is implemented on a large-scale basis, firms that have products used in charter schools that can be incorporated into or otherwise facilitate the use by districts of any of the above five effective practices, could create sales opportunities.

For a copy of the Discussion Paper 2012-06 from the Brookings Institute, go to:

http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2012/9/27%20charter%20schools/thp_fryer_charters_discpaper.pdf

New 35 Teacher Incentive Fund Grant is to Allocate More Than \$130 Million for STEM-Related Activities

USED recently announced that the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant program provided \$290 million in awards to 35 new grantees, including six under a separate STEM competition. Since its creation in 2006, the TIF program, which continues to have bipartisan support, has undergone a number of changes and as Steven Sawchuk, *Teacher Beat* blogger for *Education Week*, noted, has recently had “more makeovers than Madonna,” including:

- career ladders which allow teachers to get additional responsibilities, not just increased pay based on student performance;
- requirements for grantees to obtain greater support and commitments from teachers’ unions in order to receive grants (e.g., three districts had to return \$46 million recently because of the lack of such agreements); and
- most recently, the addition of a special competition focusing on STEM areas and activities.

As Sawchuk reports, “Overall, the Obama Administration has attempted to move the program from one focused mostly on pay to a broader strategy for improving teaching that puts evaluation systems at its core (It echoes the approaches taken in the Race to the Top program and the ESEA Flexibility waivers).” Some TIF grantees have also

used a portion of their funds to support statewide turnaround efforts such as the creation of a new statewide district to accept responsibility for certain Priority Schools in Michigan. As Clare McCann in *Ed Money Watch* notes, “In spite of extra funding and muscle the White House has exercised to broaden the use of teacher compensation systems like those supported by the Teacher Incentive Fund, questions persist about their effectiveness...Still, pay-for-performance has been a central tenet of the Obama administration’s focus on improving student achievement and opportunities...”

Among the 29 successful grantees in the general TIF competition were an increased number of charter schools such as College-Ready Public Schools, Aspire Public Schools, Green Dot Public Schools, and Ohio Breakthrough Charter Schools, among others. Green Dot, for example, will implement an optional feature by providing performance-based compensation for school counselors. As McCann notes, despite its having to return funds from a 2010 TIF award, New York City won another grant totaling \$53 million over five years and Los Angeles was awarded \$49 million, among other activities, to provide \$20,000 recruitment bonuses for up to 80 effective or highly effective STEM and special education teachers who agree to teach at high-need schools in the district. Under its \$18 million five-year grant, the Tennessee Department of Education would also provide rewards for teachers receiving advanced degrees in math and science.

In addition, six TIF awardees will receive more than \$130 million over the five-year period under the set-aside competitions for STEM. These include the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching; Orange County

(Florida) Public Schools; Calcasieu Parish (Louisiana); the South Carolina Department of Education; Washoe County (Nevada); and the Houston Independent School District.

For more information go to: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/teacherincentive/index.html>

Community Colleges Are Exploring Alternatives to Traditional Placement Tests and Remediation Which Could Create Opportunities for Publishers and Other Firms

In the October 17th Education Week, *Beyond School* blogger Caralee Adams reports on a number of community colleges and related entities which are designing/implementing alternatives to traditional placement tests to ensure a higher percentage of entering college freshmen actually graduate. According to research by the Community College Research Center, Columbia University, almost two-thirds of recent high school graduates enrolled in two-year colleges have taken developmental education courses for which students do not receive credit, and only about a quarter of students taking developmental courses graduate. As the article states, “Concerns over the placement process are rising as new research challenges its predictive value and student success continues to lag.” The alternatives addressed in the article range from greater use on high school grades or grade point averages, to use of different and improved placement assessments to supplementing developmental courses. Most commonly used community college placement tests are ACT’s COMPASS, and College Board’s ACCUPLACER, both of

which, according to their respective officials, are being modified to be aligned with state’s Common Core Standards and used in competition with the assessments being developed by the Smarter Balanced and PARCC assessment consortia (see related Washington Update). Some of the alternative models being designed/implemented include:

- Based on a recent research project Long Beach City College in California has begun using grade point averages as an alternative placement method for some math and English courses which were found to be better predictors of college performance than traditional placement tests.
- Baltimore County Community College uses the Accelerated Learning Program which places English students in a developmental/extended hour course which is credit bearing and students, most of whom are over 25 years of age, receive extra counseling on finance, work life, and other types of support.
- Most California community colleges use the state’s Early Assessment Program for placement which is designed to ensure students use their senior year in high school in a more productive manner.
- Florida requires high school students to take the Postsecondary Education Readiness Test in which students are assessed in math, reading, and writing to determine if they are ready for college entry level.

The article also points to North Carolina and Virginia who are “changing the delivery of

developmental education along with placement tests.” Entering students take a diagnostic test which prescribes specific developmental modules to address weaknesses.

The Center for Community College Student Engagement recently conducted a survey that found that only 28 percent of students surveyed prepared for a placement test with materials provided by the college. Of the 187 colleges surveyed, 44 percent indicated they offered some kind of test prep, but only 13 percent made it mandatory for first-time incoming students.

The heightened increase in improving the predictive capability of placement tests or other alternatives and variations on developmental/remedial activities has to be viewed in a larger context of some other rather revolutionary reforms that are being proposed. For example, the Western Governors University has entered into a contract whereby vendors of college materials are paid in part based on the number of students who meet certain performance levels. Numerous states have pilots or proposals to tie state funding for colleges not only to enrollment, but also completion rates. Other experiments would provide developmental/remedial courses/support on a subscription basis to allow individuals to exit and reenter in such a way to reduce costs paying for only that time students are provided online instruction. These and other models were discussed in an extensive 2011 TechMIS report which is available to new TechMIS subscribers at no cost.

Scheduled “To Do” Implementation Activities in Race to the Top States Could Provide Opportunities for Firms With Appropriate Products and Services

In her most recent progress report, Michele McNeil, Education Week (September 19th) provides a “snapshot progress report” on the 12 Race to the Top winners after two years of the four-year grants to implement their Race to the Top plans. As the 12 states begin implementing new programs and school improvement efforts at the classroom level, the article identifies activities that have been delayed and those scheduled to be initiated shortly which she notes will be included in USED’s second annual Race to the Top Annual Performance Report to be published in December with more details. As of August 31st, of the \$4 billion awarded, \$3 billion remains for states to spend, although a portion of such funds have been obligated or otherwise committed. While many of the challenges which have created delays relate to principal/teacher evaluations and adoption/transitioning to Common Core Standards, the summary does highlight some possible opportunities in the various states which are highlighted below:

- District of Columbia, increasing teacher effectiveness in the 25 percent of schools in which poverty and high-minority enrollments are correlated to low achievement;
- Delaware, aligning and evaluating district curriculum to Common Core Standards;
- Florida, developing a centralized data portal and developing growth measures in arts and non-tested subjects;

- Georgia implementing a professional development strategy for all pre-kindergarten teachers;
- Hawaii, creating alternative assessments in STEM subjects;
- Maryland, providing assistance to four “restart” charter schools;
- Massachusetts, developing critical curriculum maps for new standards;
- New York, implementing English and math curriculum models based on Common Core Standards;
- North Carolina, implementing new blended learning courses in STEM related fields and implementing professional development component of state’s new Instructional Improvement System;
- Ohio, implementing a statewide Kindergarten read readiness test;
- Rhode Island, training turnaround leaders including principals in how to use data; and
- Tennessee training principals to analyze teacher survey results to improve working conditions.

More details should be included in the USED 2nd Annual Performance Report scheduled for publication in December.

Miscellaneous (a)

During a September forum hosted by the Brookings Institution, two university professors have proposed “a *Consumer Reports* for education technology to address the lack of independent evidence available in such products’ efficacy” according to Education Week (October 17th). The two economists -- Aaron Chatterji (Duke University) and Benjamin Jones

(Northwestern University) -- have proposed to create a web-based system to conduct randomized trials in a short time frame among students on the efficacy of education technology products. The Edu Star trials, as described in the article, would provide more rapid evidence than U.S. Food and Drug Administration trial studies in that the firms would provide products to be tested and schools would agree to participate in testing the products. Participating students would take a pre- and post-test on the skill which would be tied to the Common Core Standards. Students would be assigned exercises to teach the skill using the product or a placebo product; results would be reported on the EduStar website.

The two professors argue that barriers to entry are reduced because the companies can enter the market in an expensive manner. The article quotes officials from several other groups providing a similar service such as Ed Search, Power My Learning, among others that were skeptical. One skeptic Mark Edwards, now superintendent of Mooresville, North Carolina and formally the technology innovator while at Henrico County, Virginia, reportedly said the Edu Star proposal takes a “limited view of what’s required to evaluate products and that factors such as professional development, long-term academic performance, and ease of implementation are also important to purchasing decisions.” One of the proposal authors, Professor Jones, acknowledged that “there is still a lot to figure out, including how to provide incentives for participation for entrepreneurs and schools and how to navigate family education rights privacy act.”

Evidently, EduStar would be a not-for-profit organization and is seeking approximately

\$5 million in funding from foundations. According to the article, Power My Learning developed by Computers for Youth, a New York City non-profit which also rates free digital education content based on teacher reviews, is reportedly talking about a potential partnership with EduStar. CFY has received prior grants totaling \$7 million from the Gates and other foundations.

Miscellaneous (b)

In her *Ed Money Watch* blog, Anne Hyslop predicts that the SAT and ACT, and their remedial placements tests, ACCUPLACER and COMPASS, will continue to be accepted and used by college and university admissions as the defacto “performance” standard for college admissions. Under the Common Core State Standards, these tests would be in direct competition with Common Core assessments being developed by PARCC and SMARTERBalanced for implementation in 2015. She argues that the ACT and College Board assessments “are already accepted within higher education, for better or worse, while the Common Core will be greeted with scrutiny and suspicion at many institutions.” Moreover, ACT and College Board, according to her blog, are positioning themselves to “compete with the Common Core -- and win.” The College Board plans to transform the SAT “from an aptitude test intended to control for varying levels of school quality, to a knowledge test aligned with Common Core,” according to David Coleman, the College Board’s new President, who was a key architect of Common Core. Hyslop also argues that COMPASS and ACCUPLACER will likely be modified to align with the Common Core, which she argues will further build the case

for higher education to continue with ACT and College Board exams. In order for the high quality CCSS assessments of PARCC and SMARTERBalanced to compete, especially in the remedial area, they must focus more of their attention on college readiness definitions determined by postsecondary admission and placement policies, which are now dominated by College Board and ACT.

Miscellaneous (c)

The latest U.S. Census Bureau survey reports that the number of students enrolled in private elementary and high schools dropped from 4.8 million in 2004 to 4.1 million in 2011. As Sarah Sparks’ *Inside School Research* blog on EducationWeek.org notes, “This has in part been attributed to the growth of charter schools, which some families see as a free alternative to the local district schools...There may be a broader demographic issue at play here, too. America’s fertility rate is dropping, and by 2050 residents over age 65 are expected to outnumber school-age kids nationwide.” The new Census report, based on the American Community Survey data, also found that, during the 2010 fiscal year, U.S. public school systems spent \$602 billion on elementary and secondary education, for which 52.7 percent or \$317.8 billion was for instruction and 29.7 percent or \$179 billion was spent on support services.

Miscellaneous (d)

As reported in the [Seattle Times](http://SeattleTimes.com), Microsoft is undertaking a new global initiative to combat the “opportunity gap” for young

people called YOUTH SPARK which is “the biggest step we’ve taken in the 37 years of the company,” according to Microsoft General Counsel Brad Smith. While some of the \$500 million in the initiative will be reallocated from other charitable areas in which the company is involved worldwide, some of the money will be new and will be focused on creating opportunities such as education, employment, and entrepreneurship for about 300 million youths in 100 countries during the next three years of which about 50 million youth in the U.S. will be affected. The YOUTH SPARK initiative includes “YOUTH SPARK Hub,” an online place where people can find out more about programs and resources, and Innovate for Good, which will be a social online community toward connecting youth with each other. As part of the initiative, Microsoft products include Office 365 for Education, free technical tools for teachers and students, and SKYPE in the classroom according to the article.

Miscellaneous (e)

Serving about three-quarters of all four-year college students, nearly 500 public four-year colleges have signed on to “Project Degree Completion” to increase the number of baccalaureate degree holders by 3.8 million by 2025. To achieve the goal, which parallels President Obama’s goal of helping 60 percent of adults earn a college degree by 2025, the colleges have pledged to increase undergraduate degree recipients by three percent each year to about 1.6 million per year. According to the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities President Peter McPherson, whose group is co-chairing the effort with the American Association of State Colleges and

Universities, the effort is not a binding commitment, but he is hoping that the press and public “will hold us accountable and we will work together all these universities to get this done,” as quoted in Education Week. McPherson also noted that the growing diversity of the undergraduate student body, including more low-income and first-generation students, will heighten the challenge. As reported in The Chronicle of Higher Education, Project Degree Completion hopes to build upon some emerging strategies to increase the number of degree holders, including:

- reaching out to former students who took courses at the college, but who did not complete their degree;
- collaborating more closely with elementary and secondary schools and community colleges;
- limiting the number of credits needed for certain majors; and
- providing more intensive academic advising.

According to The Chronicle, colleges are asking for more government support in the form of either reduced regulations or increased appropriations as state per-enrollee spending has fallen to a 25-year low and enrollment has increased.

An online discussion called the “Innovation Exchange” is being created to share promising new approaches and practices, such as what the President of Kentucky State University described as a 24-7 tutoring service. Eastern Connecticut State University has also revamped its remedial course to embed it in other classes rather than offer stand-alone classes that often prove a big obstacle to students, as reported in Education Week.

Contributing to the impetus for Project Degree Completion has been a recent report from the Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce, which found that the number of students receiving certificates -- as opposed to two or four-year degrees -- has increased dramatically over the last decade and that earnings for certain types of certificate holders have been significantly higher than those with two or four-year degrees, as we reported in our June 2012 TechMIS issue.

Miscellaneous (f)

An analysis of the accountability plans of each of the 34 waiver-approved states indicates that eight states -- Arizona, Colorado, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, South Carolina, and Oregon -- are using the same AMO targets for all students. According to an Education Week article (October 15th), "...a vast majority of the states that received federal waivers are setting different expectations for different subgroups of students...That marks a dramatic shift in policy and philosophy from the original law." In order for a state to receive a waiver, it had three options, which included: reducing achievement gaps between subgroups by 50 percent within six years; all subgroups of students achieve 100 percent proficiency by 2020; or an alternative state-designated rigorous method. Eleven states chose the first option. Arizona set its goal at 100 percent proficiency by 2020 and the remainder used the "other option" which has raised the most questions thus far regarding the waiver process, particularly among civil rights and other advocacy groups. The state that made the most national news was Virginia which proposed different subgroup AMOs. The

NAACP argued this created low expectations for racial minority students. The Romney campaign and former Secretary Spellings have also been critical of the state waiver initiative for this reason. The article has a link to the individual state accountability plans and provides a summary of the subgroup proficiency levels under state-developed accountability plans for Delaware, District of Columbia, Georgia, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Utah. States can continue to submit proposed amendments for approval by USED for continuing changes in this area (see Michigan State Profile Update).

Miscellaneous (g)

A new survey from Teach Plus finds attitudes of teachers (fewer than ten years), when compared to older, more experienced teachers, points to differences as well as agreements -- such as both groups agreed that more time to collaborate with peers is the best way to improve student outcomes and a longer school day was rated lowest. The online survey of more than 1,000 teachers which were self-selected and not a random sample found that the newer majority teachers with fewer than ten years of experience believed that student growth should be part of evaluations; supported changing teacher compensation and tenure systems; and wanted higher salaries rather than relying on pensions. According to the *Teacher Beat* blog on EducationWeek.org (October 23rd), neither the new majority or veteran teacher groups "were very excited about the proposal to free-up cash to increase salaries by raising class size, an idea that has emerged recently; just four percent of the new majority and six percent of veteran teachers supported that strategy."

A 2010 similar survey conducted by Learning Point Associates found that younger teachers felt pay-for-performance was the least important policy option for improving teacher effectiveness and retention and that receiving meaningful learning opportunities, reducing class size, increasing parent involvement, and raising salaries across the board ranked much higher. The Teacher Plus study also found that “all teachers desire meaningful collaboration with their colleagues, not just the younger ones.”

Miscellaneous (h)

USED has awarded \$21 million to 60 recipients across the country to expand counseling programs, particularly to aid school districts in hiring qualified mental health professionals with the goal of expanding the range, availability and quantity, and quality of counseling services, according to its press release. Parents would have input in the design and implementation of the services. As the press release states,

research shows that “adequate counseling services can help reduce the number of disciplinary referrals in schools, improve student attendance and academic performance and enhance development of social skills.” As reported in the new *Rules for Engagement* blog on Education Week, grantees have to meet four criteria, including use of developmental and preventative approaches, in-service training, and parent and community group involvement. An underlying intent is to increase the amount of “data-based decision making” which, according to *Rules of Engagement*, “means tracking whether their programs actually improve instructional practices, policies, and student outcomes in early learning, elementary, or secondary schools, or increase postsecondary enrollment or career success.” The districts, most of which received between \$300,000 and \$400,000 each, are listed in the USED press release.

Alabama Update

October 2012

The Press-Register reports that, according to school board officials, a \$292K donation from the Erie Hall Myer Foundation will fund MacBook laptops primarily for fourth-through sixth-grade students at Orange Beach Elementary in the Baldwin County school district. These funds will provide 273 computers with 65 going to seventh grade students at Gulf Shores Middle School. Last January, the Board of Education agreed to spend \$2 million for MacBooks for all Baldwin County high school students as part of *Digital Renaissance*, which provides laptops with Wi-Fi Internet access to replace textbooks. The Gulf Shores City Council agreed to contribute \$988,688 over the next four years to support purchase of MacBook laptops for fourth through sixth graders in Gulf Shores Elementary and for eighth grade students in Gulf Shores Middle and some in-class laptops for seventh grade.

Arizona Update

October 2012

As noted in Education Week, the November ballot in Arizona will include Proposition 204, the Quality Education and Jobs Act. If approved, the measure would provide at least an additional \$625 million for K-12 education in the first year. It would also prevent State legislators from making cuts to public school funding.

California Update

October 2012

The California AfterSchool Network STEM, an out-of-school time initiative to advance high-quality, high school STEM opportunities, has been launched. The Bechtel and Noyce Foundations have provided more than \$200,000 to partnerships involving the Alameda County Office of Education, the Orange County STEM Initiative, and the Sacramento County Office of Education which is expected to influence school and out-of-school STEM instruction throughout the state, according to Education Week's *Beyond School* blog (September 24th). According to the California AfterSchool Network's press releases, the initiative will leverage "over 4,500 statewide after-school programs to engage students in high quality STEM learning opportunities that will increase knowledge and interest in STEM, and address gaps in the employment market." Information about afterschool STEM-related activities, resources, and funding are available at the California AfterSchool Network website: <http://STEM.afterschoolnetwork.org>

According to the Los Angeles Times, California Governor Jerry Brown has signed into law a measure -- SB 1458 -- that would lessen the effect of students' standardized test scores on the Academic Performance Index (API) used to rate schools. Currently, the 1,000 point API is based entirely on student test scores. Under the new law, test scores must count for at least 60 percent of the API for elementary and middle schools. The revised API will include such factors as student readiness for college or technical training and will increase the emphasis on science and social studies.

The Chronicle of Higher Education notes that Governor Brown also approved two measures -- SB 1052 and SB 1053 -- that will establish a faculty council that will identify classes for which open-source digital textbooks should be developed and oversee development of the textbooks. The new laws are designed to provide California college students with access to free online textbooks for 50 undergraduate courses.

The November election in California will include Proposition 30 which would increase personal income taxes on annual earnings over \$250,000 for seven years. Education Week has quoted Governor Brown as saying severe mid-year cuts to K-12 education would occur if the measure is defeated.

A November 2011 report from WestEd found that most of California's elementary school students were not receiving high-quality science instruction. Education Week notes that basketball legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar will serve as California's After-School STEM Ambassador. Abdul-Jabbar has, for a number of years, worked to promote STEM education. In 2009, he founded the Skyhook Foundation which promotes the importance of STEM education and STEM-related careers.

Ending a state adoption moratorium on instructional materials, as reported in Education Week (October 24th), a new textbook law allows districts to spend State aid on instructional materials that are not on the State-approved list. Districts can select instructional materials not on the approved list if the selection process involves the majority of the teachers in a district and the materials incorporate a significant alignment with the Common Core Standards. A State panel has been created to draft curriculum guidance for districts using the Common Core Standards. Dr. Mike Kirst, President of the California State Board of Education, referred to the legislation as "a big change," lessening the State Board's authority, while specifying a process districts must implement in order to spend State textbook funds on instructional materials not on the list, a provision welcomed by the California School Boards Association. The late legislation should "bring down prices and bring up alternatives," according to California SBA official Teri Burns. Jay Diskey, Executive Director of the Association of American Publishers' Schools Division called the textbook measure the "first sign of life" and is helping the State transition to Common Core; however, he noted that publishers must now pay for the State reviews, a provision to which AAP was opposed, but was willing to accept in order to get the measure passed. Under separate legislation passed last year, the State is expected to provide the State Board with an approved list of supplemental materials to "bridge the gap" between existing instructional resources and

Common Core Standards. This will not represent an adoption, but “simply a set of state-recommended materials,” according to Education Week.

In separate legislation, to help clarify State expectations about Algebra 1 and its alignment with the Common Core State Standards in the eighth grade, Dr. Kirst issued the following statement: “This bill will not, as some critics claim, eliminate Algebra 1 as an option in grade 8...Placement of students in math courses based on their readiness is still a local decision and should remain as such.” He also noted that the State provides two viable pathways at that grade level -- one for students ready for Algebra 1 at grade 8 and another for those who take it a year later.

Colorado Update

October 2012

An article in The Denver Post reports that 18 Colorado districts have switched to four-day school weeks, about a 30 percent increase since the 2007 recession, based on approved state waivers to shift from the traditional 160-day calendar school year. While most of the districts justified their decision on cost-saving arguments, the article quotes Michael Griffith, Senior Policy Analyst for the Education Commission of the States as saying, “The savings, though, are less than you might think. A 20 percent reduction in school days seldom nets more than 2.5 percent slashed from the overall budget...The vast majority of school spending goes to educator pay and benefits. None of the districts surveyed reduced those because instructional staff was required to work the same number of hours across the school year.” Previous studies on the effects of a four-day week have found similar dynamics, including an initial backlash, partly because of daycare challenges, which eventually dissolve into widespread community support.

The Denver Post reports that the investment firm Janus is giving Denver Public Schools \$2.1 million to link teachers, students and software in blended learning which offers a way to combine face-to-face time with personalized computer curriculum experiences. Superintendent, Tom Boasberg sees “...tremendous potential for technology to be such an important and useful tool for teachers. The key element is a student can tell you where they are and what some of their needs are. If we can empower some students with that knowledge, we can see initiative for them to master their own learning.” Denver will use the grant money to hire a director of blended learning, train teachers in the technique, and purchase software and hardware. The district will focus the grant in six pilot schools including West Generation Academy, one of two new schools that opened last month in the West High School building. Janus intends to track the success of different software and teaching methods, and the district will expand the best of them to schools across Denver, and perhaps beyond.

The A+ Denver Citizens for Denver Schools second annual report on turnaround schools’

success has made several recommendations to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) as well as to other districts in the State. The report recommends that the State “should withdraw federal grant money when there are no signs of progress after two years, investing instead where it’s more likely to make a difference...CDE can also have a role here, by providing ratings of such providers [outside organization], and publishing costs to taxpayers.” The report advises other districts in the State to pay attention to successful strategies in Denver. Critical elements in Denver’s successful strategies include community buy-in and continuing engagement, development of district capacity, and use of a robust measure of school culture, among others. The School Improvement Grant initiative in Denver use many external partners, including: West Ed, RMC, Linda Mood Bell, Center for Data Driven Reform, Evans Newton, National Center on Time and Learning, University of Virginia, McRel, Global Partnership Schools, among others. The second annual A+ report is available at: www.aplusdenver.org

Florida Update

October 2012

The Florida State Board of Education has requested a \$643 million -- 4.4 percent -- spending increase for K-12 and higher education next year. K-12 funding would receive a 3.3 percent increase to \$9.8 billion, following last year's approval of a \$1 billion increase for K-12.

According to [The Miami Herald](#) (October 9th), K-12 technology would receive \$442 million, while \$64 million would be appropriated for charter school capital outlays. The Board would also provide greater flexibility to charter schools and allow transfer of new school district facilities to them. According to the [The Miami-Herald](#), "Board members also expressed support for a legislative proposal...to end state approval of textbooks and other teaching materials."

As reported in the [Bradenton Herald](#), Governor Rick Scott will be proposing to the legislature early next year to hold per-pupil K-12 spending "at least steady" next year, creating new options such as expanded charter schools for students and providing greater flexibility in buying textbooks and classroom materials. A draft summary entitled "College and Careers 1st," says that barriers to choice options in low-performing areas would be removed, allowing districts to operate their own "charter innovation schools." After cutting education by \$1.3 billion in 2011, the Governor calls for a \$1 billion restoration in current year's budget. He has also called for less testing and greater use of digital learning to replace the "1950s style textbooks" in classrooms.

[Education Week](#) reports that Florida's new Pre-K test has drawn concerns from educators across the nation. Florida requires a new standardized assessment to measure how nearly 184,000 four-year-olds in Florida's voluntary prekindergarten program are doing in early literacy, numeracy, and language development. Some early education providers say that key social skills will be discounted as evidence of how well they are preparing pupils for kindergarten. Early childhood advocates across the country are concerned that the state's pre-K providers, under pressure to demonstrate children's progress on academic indicators, will focus only on developing those

skills, and ignoring equally important domains of development such as social-emotional interactions, and approaches to learning. According to Kyle Snow of the Center for Applied Research at the National Association for the Education of Young Children, roughly half the states use some form of kindergarten-entry or readiness- assessment, but there are huge variations in the ways skills and knowledge are measured and how states use the results to make policy and instructional decisions. The Florida assessment, developed by researchers at Florida State University in Tallahassee, was mandated by a State law specifying that a child's knowledge and skills in early literacy, math, and language be measured and used to judge how well a provider was performing. According to State officials, the assessment, given at the beginning of the school year and again at the end, is designed to give providers clear guidance on how to improve. The assessment is based on Florida standards for four-year-olds and is geared toward those early literacy and numeracy skills that are predictive of how well a child is going to do in school.

The University of Florida has received a five-year \$25 million USED grant to create a new Center for Collaboration for Educator Development and Accountability and Reform (CEDAR). CEDAR will work with 20 states to improve professional standards, reforms, and certification programs for both special education and general education teachers, as well as other school leaders, to work with students with disabilities. Initially, CEDAR will help states to revise teacher evaluation systems in reforming and aligning research-based state systems for developing and supporting students with unique needs using research-proven practices. The Center's partners in this effort include, among others, the American Institutes for Research and the University of Kansas, both of whom operate centers/programs addressing response-to-intervention approaches, developments, and dissemination of best practices.

According to the [Orlando Sentinel](#), Florida education officials would like to double the number of students in charter schools over the next six years. Currently, more than 61,000 students are on charter school waiting lists. Under the State's strategy, by the 2017-18 school year, 17 percent of Florida K-12 students would be attending charter schools or using State-funded

vouchers to attend private schools. This year, the number was nine percent. More specifically, the plan hopes charter school enrollment will grow from 180,000 students in 518 schools to 360,000 students in 829 schools. Similarly, the State's Tax Credit program for low-income families will grow from 49,000 students to more than 100,000. And, in six years, the McKay voucher program for students with disabilities will serve 31,000 students -- up from 24,000 this year.

Hawaii Update

October 2012

This year for the first time, Hawaii high school students will be taking end-of-year standardized tests in expository writing, biology, U.S. History, and Algebra. End-of-year exams for Algebra II were first required in the 2009-10 school year. As noted in the [Honolulu Star-Advertiser](#), these exams could eventually replace course final exams.

As we have reported frequently over the past year, Hawaii's Race to the Top grant is in jeopardy because the ongoing contract dispute between the State and the teachers' union has prevented the creation of a new educator evaluation system. According to [Education Week's Teacher Beat](#) blog, the union has walked away from a Federal mediation session, leading some to believe a strike is possible.

Idaho Update

October 2012

Idaho's request for a ESEA flexibility waiver has been approved by USED, increasing the total number of states to 34 and the District of Columbia. Idaho's request came in the second round and has been subject to negotiations since the summer. As Education Week's *Politics K-12* blog notes, it is not clear what changes Idaho had to make in order to receive the waiver as a result of negotiations. Six states have not yet requested waivers, including Montana, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Texas, Vermont, and Wyoming. Texas has said it would request a waiver, but reduce the number of strings and overturn the long-term Title I policy of Title I funds being allocated to districts based on poverty criteria; rather the TEA would fold all Title I and Federal funds into a common pool and decide how to distribute such funds to districts. California submitted a waiver request with a similar reduction in the number of strings attached; however, its preliminary waiver has been under negotiations with USED since June.

Illinois Update

October 2012

After a contentious and highly public teachers' strike, the Chicago Teachers Union has ratified a new contract with the Chicago school district with a 79 percent approval vote. As reported in Education Week's *Teacher Beat* blog, key elements of the approved agreement include:

- Teachers will receive a three-percent raise in the first year and two-percent salary increases in each of years two and three.
- A joint district-union committee will be established to explore differentiated-pay options.
- Measures of student academic growth will comprise no more than 30 percent of a teacher's evaluation.
- An additional \$500,000 is provided to investigate classroom overcrowding.
- The school day will be extended by 75 minutes for elementary school students and by 30 minutes for high school students.
- The school year will be extended by ten days for a total of 175 full days and six half days.

Iowa Update

October 2012

Under the leadership of the Governor's STEM Advisory Council (a public/private partnership), more than 800 Iowa schools and communities will offer new programs to provide more access and increase interest in STEM, according to Lieutenant Governor Kim Reynolds, as reported in *Iowa Politics*. Students participating in the new programs will have their progress monitored. No mention of the amount of funding or funding sources was included in the [Des Moines Register](#) October 8th blog posting.

Kansas Update

October 2012

Kansas Governor Sam Brownback has appointed a task force to implement the State's policy goal that at least 65 percent of the money made available by the State to districts be spent "in the classroom for instruction." Because there is no standard definition of a classroom expense and "in the classroom" is open to interpretation, the task force is attempting to come up with such definitions to implement the policy and to study ways of making schools more efficient.

Kentucky Update

October 2012

As reported in Education Week's *The Early Years* blog (September 27th), Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky is donating \$115,000 to United Way of Kentucky for ten “Born Learning Academies” which provide opportunities for parents to learn “how to better prepare their kids for preschool and kindergarten.” Toyota plans to invest \$450,000 more to create four additional academies over the next five years. According to officials in the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood, the academies will target families with children who do not attend organized childcare or preschool.

Louisiana Update

October 2012

Louisiana has asked the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for approval to use \$20 million in hurricane recovery funds to fill in budget gaps in the State's free pre-kindergarten program for at-risk students. According to [The Times Picayune](#), the money will offset shortfalls in the \$75 million annual budget of the Cecil J. Picard LA₄ Early Childhood Program. The shortfalls arise because of the disappearance of Federal stimulus funding that had supported the program.

The *Charters & Choice* blog on [EducationWeek.org](#) reports that Louisiana has approved new voucher rules for private and parochial schools in the State. Rather than State certification, schools' eligibility will be determined by outside organizations. Schools accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools would get a five-year approval. Those approved by other third-party groups would be eligible for public funding for one year. Currently, 117 of Louisiana's non-public schools participate in the voucher program; a total of 376 are eligible for public funding.

This Fall, a new State policy prohibited four universities -- LSU, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, the University of New Orleans, and Louisiana Tech -- from offering remedial courses to incoming freshmen who are not ready for college work. The change will become effective for other four-year colleges in 2014. The more rigorous university admissions standards -- called the "Access to Success" model -- corresponds with an expansion of Louisiana's community colleges which are designed to serve students in need of remedial courses. The new requirements for admission to a four-year school call for one extra social studies class and one additional math or science class. And grade-point averages are calculated using only core classes (English, math, science, and social studies).

Michigan Update

October 2012

According to Education Week (October 15th), the Michigan Department of Education has proposed allowing students who fail the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) to be classified as proficient if they show significant improvement. Students who take the MEAP are currently considered advanced, proficient, partially proficient, or not proficient. Those students who are partially proficient or not proficient could be counted as passing if they are on track for becoming proficient within four years. Currently, those on track to become proficient in three years are counted as proficient. Michigan was one of eight states which originally proposed to set the same targets for all students. According to Joseph Martineau, Director of Assessment and Accountability in the MDE, the change is needed because of the difficulty in helping students who are the furthest behind and giving credit for students making progress.

According to the Huffington Post, Michigan's Statewide school district -- known as the Educational Achievement Authority -- now composed of 15 low-performing schools, is expected to grow to 60 schools over the next five years. The EAA has received a five-year, \$35 million grant from the Federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) program to transform teaching and learning in Michigan's lowest-performing schools including "a computer-focused learning environment with individual lesson plans." All current EAA schools are in Detroit, but, according to the TIF application, additional EAA schools are expected to be identified in Kalamazoo, Flint, Lansing, Saginaw, Battle Creek, Grand Rapids, Pontiac, Port Huron, and Southfield. There are a total of 146 schools -- located in 49 districts -- in Michigan's lowest-performing five percent of schools.

Missouri Update

October 2012

This summer, the U.S. Department of Education gave Missouri a waiver from provisions of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. Specifically, the waiver eliminates the adequate yearly progress component of school report cards and the requirement that districts offer transfers to students from low-performing schools. Missouri's public schools will now be held to a single, State-established standard rather than NCLB benchmarks.

In November, Missouri voters will consider Proposition B that would allow the State to tax different tobacco products at different rates and use the revenues to fund K-12 and higher education. According to Education Week, the additional revenues would be between \$283 million and \$423 million per year.

New Hampshire Update

October 2012

Last month, we reported on New Hampshire's moratorium on new, State-authorized charter schools. Education Week now reports that parents and elected officials in the State have created an angry backlash against the State Board of Education. There are currently 17 State-approved charter schools, and 15 others in some stage of the approval process. State legislators hope to reach an agreement with the State Board to lift the moratorium but the Board has raised continuing questions about the State's longer-term plans for funding charter school growth.

New York Update

October 2012

The *Early Years* blog on Education Week (October 5th) reports that New York City will add 4,000 new full-day pre-kindergarten seats in high-need areas. It will also open an Educare school under a public/private partnership which will hold a leadership institute to train early childhood directors on the most effective approaches and best practices. The addition of the 4,000 new full-day pre-K seats during the 2013-14 school year will continue the increase the City's enrollment in universal pre-K which was 58,200 in 2012.

Education Week's *Charters & Choice* blog reports that the seven-year-old charter school in New York City operated by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) is in danger of losing its charter. Intended to show that charter schools could operate within a collective bargaining framework, the UFT school has struggled academically to the point that the State authorizer may not renew it. A report by the *Gotham Schools* blog says the UFT school is performing worse than other nearby schools. Among the options open to the authorizer are turning the school over to a different operator or reconstituting the school by reducing the number of grades it serves.

North Carolina Update

October 2012

North Carolina Governor Beverly Perdue plans to allocate \$20 million to allow an additional 6,300 four-year-olds to participate in the State's prekindergarten academic enrichment program. Using an executive order, the Governor, in essence, implemented an appeals court ruling that overturned Republican-backed changes to preschool, including a 20-percent funding cut. Republicans wanted the money to be used to plug gaps in rising Medicaid costs. The added funds for North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten (formerly known as More at Four) will be distributed to county districts this year to support expanded enrollment during the current school year.

North Carolina is one of ten states requiring all students to take the ACT as part of a move toward a new school rating system. (Many college-bound students also take the SAT, but it is not required.) The ACT is often used to identify students who would benefit from developmental college courses. High school student ACT scores show only one in eight of last year's juniors -- 12.8 percent -- met the benchmark scores considered a predictor of college student success in English, math, reading and science. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) students fared slightly better than other North Carolina districts with 14.8 percent meeting all four benchmarks. Nine CMS high schools and two charters had fewer than five percent clearing that bar. It appears that the science portion of the post-secondary readiness exam was the biggest hurdle for students with just over 16 percent hitting the score considered a predictor of success. Reading scores were 33.8 percent and math 30.4 percent of benchmarks, respectively. North Carolina is using the common core approach to teaching reading and math this year.

As reported in the *Beyond School* blog on [Education Week](#) (October 4th), \$55 million is being pledged by a coalition of foundations to be used to lengthen the school year at nine schools in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area. Project Leadership and Investment for Transformation (LIFT) is intended to improve high school graduation rates in one high school and in eight feeder schools. As reported in the [Charlotte Observer](#), the district school board has to approve the plan in

December which is designed to increase graduation rates up to 90 percent by 2017. Families and faculty also must support the initiative. New State legislation does not authorize the State to pay for salaries, transportation, and other costs of the extended school year, which is a justification for the \$55 million donation. The participating schools will be West Charlotte High School and feeder schools of Allenbrook, Ashley Park, Bruns, Druid Hills, Ranson, Statesville Road, Thomasboro, and Westerly Hills.

Ohio Update

October 2012

In Southwest Ohio, graduation rates have plunged due to the new way the State is calculating rates. For the first time, the Ohio Department of Education is using an “on-time” or “four-year” graduation rate which includes only the percent of high school students who graduate in four years. It is supposed to be more accurate than in previous years where rates were based on estimates and may have included students who took more than four years to graduate. This change was required under a 2008 Federal education law change intended to make rates more standardized, accurate, and comparable from state to state. Under the new calculation graduation rates fell in 44 of Southwest Ohio’s 49 school districts. Cincinnati Public Schools, with a graduation rate of 63.9 percent was among the districts that failed to meet the State goal of 90 percent.

Urban Educator reports that the Cincinnati school district is in the process of implementing Capstone Projects, a project-based learning tool for students in grades 4-5. Capstone Projects use technology that enables students to demonstrate content mastery in core subjects such as English language arts and math.

Oregon Update

October 2012

The Oregonian reports that 16 Oregon schools are pilot testing an assessment system by which entering kindergarten students will be screened on letter names and sounds, basic counting and addition, and such behaviors as paying attention and trying hard. State officials and education researchers decided on a system that includes three components: (1) the *easyCBM* series of four timed tests of reading skills developed at the University of Oregon; (2) a math-skill test from *easyCBM*; and (3) a 17-question checklist on student behavior. Starting next school year, all Oregon kindergartners will take the assessment at a cost of about \$1 per child. It should be noted that *easyCBM* has been acquired by Riverside Publishing.

Education Week notes that Oregon's November ballot includes Measure 85 that would allocate the State's corporate income tax and excise tax revenue rebate specifically to K-12 education. Traditionally, if these tax revenues exceed estimates by more than two percent, the additional revenue (the "kicker") is returned to the private sector. The ballot initiative would redirect the money to education.

Pennsylvania Update

October 2012

According to Education Week, Pennsylvania students scored slightly lower on State assessments last school year, at least in part because of State adjustments made due to alleged cheating in some school districts. Results showed that the percentages of students scoring at or above grade level were 72 percent in reading, 73 percent in writing, 76 percent in math, and 61 percent in science. Complaints have been filed against more than 100 teachers and principals for tampering with student score sheets. Investigations are pending in nine districts.

Based on their most recent survey, the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officers and the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators estimate that rural districts in the State have eliminated or left unfilled approximately 18,360 positions over the last year. The survey also showed some improvement in the economic situation over the last year as follows:

- 51 percent of responding districts said they increased class size compared to 70 percent last year;
- 40 percent indicated they would delay textbook purchases compared to 41 percent last year;
- 32 percent of the districts said they would decrease tutoring by 32 percent this year compared to 35 percent last year; and
- 21 percent indicated they would eliminate summer school compared to 19 percent last year.

According to *State Ed Watch* blog on Education Week (October 2nd), the two groups attributed the decline in State test scores over the last year to cumulative draconian cuts in the prior two years.

According to pennlive.com, former Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell, in light of the Statewide decline in student test scores, criticized current Governor Tom Corbett and the Republican-controlled legislature for putting much of the State's surplus into a "rainy day" fund and not

putting it toward K-12 education which was cut almost \$1 billion last year. Rendell did credit Republican legislators for insisting on level funding for post-secondary and K-12 funding this year.

The Philadelphia Inquirer reports that changes to the Pennsylvania's proposed charter school law has caused the measure to be tabled until later in the Fall, along with the long-awaited overhaul of the State's special education funding system. Among the controversial changes to the charter school bill are the creation of a State board that could approve charter applications and the exclusion of charter school operators' records from the State's Right to Know Law. The current special education law gives school districts a set amount of money for each learning-disabled student regardless of his/her actual disability; the new law would base payments for severely impaired students on actual costs. Democratic legislators say the special-education bill "is being held hostage" to changes in the charter school law. Republican lawmakers deny this.

According to Education Week, public school officials in Pennsylvania have criticized the State's Education Secretary for changing the rules for student testing in charter schools. Some school officials have argued that the changes have made it easier for charter schools to meet State benchmarks for student achievement under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Education has said that the State "acted prematurely" when it changed the rules. The State counters that the new rules treat charter schools the same as school districts in terms of performance measurement because both serve multiple-grade populations. In 2012, 49 percent of Pennsylvania charters made adequate yearly progress in NCLB, compared with 51 percent of all schools Statewide.

South Carolina Update

October 2012

USED has been withholding \$36 million in IDEA funds from South Carolina for the last three years because of the State's failure to maintain effort in its special education programs. USED recently decided to carry out the maintenance-of-effort penalty and will be reducing the State's IDEA allocation by \$36 million -- about a nine percent deduction from South Carolina's special education budget for next year, according to the *On Special Education* blog on EducationWeek.org (October 18th). The \$36 million penalty will also be assessed in future years unless a court decision is made on November 26th to override the USED penalty. Aside from a much smaller \$2 million cut in Kansas as a penalty for failing to meet maintenance-of-effort requirements, the South Carolina penalty was one of the first ever in the MOE area. The article notes that several states including Alabama, Iowa, Kansas, New Jersey, Oregon, and West Virginia, have requested and been granted waivers from the MOE requirement.

Under her goal of increasing specialization and less generalization in South Carolina colleges and universities, Governor Nikki Haley is proposing to base State funding on factors such as how many students get jobs after they graduate, the percentage of student body from in-State, and other factors which she hopes to develop with higher education leaders and business leaders. The topic was addressed during the recent Governor's Public Higher Education Conference in Columbia. According to AP, the merit-based approach is being considered by university officials, who argued more money will be needed to implement the State portion of funding for public universities which has been reduced from 16 to 11 percent in the past 12 years.

Texas Update

October 2012

The Houston-based advocacy organization, Children at Risk, and a coalition of nonprofit foundations recently released their initial findings about how Texas public schools coped with the \$5.4 billion state budget cut in 2011. According to The Texas Tribune, there are two clear messages related to budget-cutting impacts: (1) districts absorbed the cuts in diverse ways; and (2) many were unable to absorb cuts without laying-off teachers. Despite an average increase of 83,000 students Statewide in each of the last four years, districts eliminated more than 10,000 teaching positions last year. Lay-offs came about even though a third of districts dipped into their emergency fund balances in the 2011-2012 to compensate for State shortfalls. The report examined the cost-cutting strategies districts employed to help cushion the impact of the cuts. Common tactics included increased collaboration among districts, diversified revenue streams, low administrative overhead, and achieving economies of scale where possible. Despite these efforts, even the most creative districts were able to achieve only small savings with regard to total operating budgets. Several recurring district concerns included losses in one-on-one time with students, money for remediation, planning periods, elective courses, and off-site learning opportunities for students such as field trips.

The Associated Press reports that the number of Texas students taking advanced placement tests increased by four percent last year and, according to the new TEA Commissioner Michael Williams, performance has increased for all students by 9.1 percent, with African-Americans gaining 12 percent and Hispanics nearly 14 percent. Of the 350,000 AP exams taken, English language was the most taken Statewide, followed by U.S. history and world history. Since 2009, the number of AP tests taken by students in Texas schools has increased 30 percent.

A study conducted by Jobs for the Future has found that dual enrollment students were more than twice as likely to enroll in a Texas two- or four-year college and nearly twice as likely to earn a degree. More than 32,000 students in the study graduated from high schools in Texas in 2004.

The study found that 47 percent of dual enrollment graduates earned a bachelor's degree compared to 30 percent of the non-dual enrollment graduates. The study recommended that policymakers support early college high schools that target minority and low-income students. The State's dual-enrollment population has grown from nearly 18,000 in 2004 to more than 90,000 in 2010 -- more than a 400 percent increase, as reported in *Fritzwire* (October 18th).

As part of the higher education initiatives which he will propose for the upcoming legislative session in January, Texas Governor Rick Perry has called for a tuition freeze for four-year incoming freshmen at four-year colleges. He has also proposed to link ten percent of a school's State funding to graduation rates and other performance measures. His proposal would "challenge" colleges and universities to offer bachelor degrees for no more than \$10,000 for all four years including academic and book charges. The charges would rise if a student takes longer than four years to graduate. Last year, the legislature cut nearly \$1 billion from higher education. Nine institutions offer or have announced plans to offer the \$10,000 degrees, according to the Governor's office. An Austin [American-Statesman](#) investigation has found that few colleges include books in the \$10,000 price and that most depend on financial aid subsidies and a substantial number of community college credits.

Utah Update

October 2012

Education Week reports that Utah, having decided not to adopt the Common Core State Standards in math, is supporting educators who are in the process of developing a series of e-textbooks for high school math that will be made available at no cost. Because Utah has adopted an “integrated” high school math model, traditional textbooks are not suitable. Parts of the first e-textbook -- for ninth grade math -- is already online and is being used by a quarter of the State’s school districts. The math e-book project is part of a State strategy to promote greater use of online, “open source” materials in many areas. In fact, the State plans to support open textbooks in high school math, English/language arts, and science. The University of Utah, with State support, is developing an e-textbook for middle school math. Brigham Young University plans to conduct research on such questions as whether the math e-textbook project is accessible to students and encourages student discourse.

Virginia Update

October 2012

As noted in the October 10th Education Week, 68 percent of Virginia's public schools have met annual measurable objectives (AMOs) by reducing proficiency gaps between low- and high-performing schools and 26 percent of the State's districts also met all annual benchmarks. The cutoff point was that 85 percent of students overall were required to pass standardized reading tests for a school to be considered proficient in 2011-12. In math, the cutoff was 61 percent. About 485 schools, or 26 percent, are required to develop and implement improvement plans for raising achievement levels for subgroups; 36 schools have been designated as Priority Schools, while another 72 have been identified as Focus Schools. The Priority Schools have to work with State-approved partners to implement reform designs; Focus Schools must employ a State-approved coach to develop and monitor implementation of intervention strategies. Last year, slightly over 60 percent of Virginia's schools and 97 percent of the districts failed to meet Federal AMO benchmarks; this is likely to change because Virginia's request for a waiver to get out from under NCLB sanctions was approved earlier this year. Eight of the 36 Priority Schools are in Richmond, with Petersburg and Norfolk each having four. The names of the Priority and Focus Schools have been posted on the Virginia website at:

www.doe.virginia.gov/news/news_releases/2012/oct10.shtml

According to The Washington Post (October 1st), Virginia is one of the first states to publish a database on the amount of earnings for graduates from specific college programs when they enter the job market, as well as enrollment costs for the respective student graduates. This “groundbreaking” database is similar to a bill introduced in Congress which would link detailed higher education and labor market data and report it to the public. The Post reports that similar efforts are underway in Tennessee, Arkansas, Colorado, Nevada, and Texas. In 2012, the Virginia State legislature passed a law requiring annual publication of wage and degree data which would be linked to a longitudinal data system that would trace individual students from elementary school through college. As former head of the National Center on Education

Statistics, Mark Schneider, Vice President of the American Institutes for Research recently told Congress, “Students and their families should have this information at their fingertips so they can make better-informed decisions about where to enroll, what to major in and how much debt they might comfortably take on relative to their likely earnings.”

Washington Update

October 2012

In Washington State, the November ballot will include Initiative 1240 that would allow either local school boards or a new State-level commission to approve charter schools in the State. Democrats, including the outgoing Governor and the Democratic candidate to replace her, oppose charters. The Republican candidate supports them.

Wisconsin Update

October 2012

Education Week notes that report cards for Wisconsin public schools show that most are meeting or exceeding new, more rigorous performance standards. Under the ranking system, 68 schools (3.2%) “significantly exceed expectations,” 637 (30.1%) “exceed expectations,” 906 (42.8%) “meet expectations,” 190 (9.0%) “meet few expectations,” and 76 schools (3.6%) “fail to meet expectations.” There are 241 schools (11.4%) that are new or do not have enough information to be ranked. It is expected that the school report cards will change in future years, particularly in 2014 when new tests (possibly the ACT) will replace the current assessment, the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination.

Under Wisconsin’s approved State waiver, the Milwaukee school board has restructured its supplemental educational services (SES) program to provide at least 40 hours of tutoring which connects with the after-school program currently underway. Approximately \$2,000 for each qualifying student will be made available according to *Journal Interactive* (September 29th). Fourteen tutoring service agencies approved by the State, would provide tutoring at \$35 per hour with companies providing highly-qualified teachers working with no more than five students at a time. Rather than companies providing their own content materials, the tutoring would be aligned to each school’s curriculum on an integrated basis. Tutoring can be provided at school, online, in the community, or in the home. The so-called T4U program will serve 24 of the State’s 44 Focus Schools, of which 23 are K-8 schools, with tutoring to begin in late October. Last year, 15,000 students were eligible. A local community group known as Common Ground has advocated for the program which, in the past, has cost about \$5 million.

According to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, ten Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) are targeted to receive \$20.4 million in GE Foundation Funds to increase student achievement in the largest corporate grant the district has received to date. The ten schools include Browning School, Clemens School, Curtin School, 53rd Street School, Fratney School, Kagel School, Milwaukee

Sign Language School, 95th Street School, Pierce Street School, and Victory School for the Gifted and Talented. The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association (MTEA) has partnered with the district and GE on the demonstration plan which includes at least 75 percent of teaching staff supporting the development of innovative ways to integrate new national curriculum standards into daily practice. Initially the five-year grant was targeted to support overhaul of the district's math and science programs, purchasing new textbooks, training teachers and streamlining central office. Now, the Common Core State Standards have become central to the demonstration schools plans. Each demonstration school will receive a full-time literacy coach and a full-time math coach, and two extra full-time teacher leaders will rotate among the schools to help implement teaching concepts emphasizing cultural awareness in schools that are largely made up of African-American students, according to Bob Peterson, President of the MTEA. Darienne Driver, Chief innovation officer for MPS indicated that about \$3 million from the grant has been budgeted for the 2012-13 school year to support the demonstration schools as well as some district-wide training.