

Alabama Update – January 2002

In mid-December, the Alabama House of Representatives voted to use approximately \$250 million from a rainy day fund to prevent further K-12 budget cuts. The State legislature is also considering higher State income taxes and taxes on cellular phones in order to make up for a previous \$160 million cut in K-12 education.

A special meeting was called during the week of January 14 to allow school district officials to react to alternative proposals to meet the new ESEA mandate that all Title I assessment and accountability systems have until mid-March to get into compliance with 1994 Title I mandates. Alabama is one of three states which has not even negotiated a compliance agreement. Knowledgeable Alabama observers feel that the current norm-referenced tests will be dropped with increased reliance on high school graduation exams and other state assessments. For the second year in a row, the Alabama Department of Education has reported that students in grades tested (3rd through 11th grades) were at or above the national average on the SAT ninth edition. However, USED's peer review panel found that the SAT was not aligned with State content standards and that appropriate accommodations for special education and limited-English-proficient students have not been taken into account. The State Board has tentatively approved the use of criterion-referenced tests that are similar to end-of-course exams.

Alaska Update – January 2002

State officials in Alaska have designed a new exit exam for graduating seniors which emphasizes basic skills. The new test included fewer questions and deemphasizes geometry, algebra, and critical thinking skills. It is expected that approximately 80 percent of the students will pass the new test. Many educators in the State are concerned that this test will not challenge students or teachers to improve.

Arizona Update - January 2002

Just before the new year, Governor Hull signed into law a program aimed at helping students who have difficulty learning English. The Law emerged from the 1992 Flores vs. Arizona court case which ruled that the State was not providing enough staff or materials to teach non-English speaking children. In 2003, the program will spend about \$45 million for student tutoring, teacher training, and instructional materials. This represents a doubling of per-pupil instructional expenditures for these LEP students.

Arizona is planning to implement a proposal called Arizona LEARNS (Leading Education through the Accountability and Results Notification System) which would allow schools to be evaluated -- through measures of student achievement -- over a period of several years, rather than annually, before being identified as a "failing" school. In addition, the plan would require local officials to attest formally that they are implementing State academic standards and to submit to verification audits.

Arizona's Proposition 203, a one-year-old law which eliminates most of the State's bilingual education programs in favor of English immersion classes, is being tested in court by a Tucson family. The family's request to have their six-year-old remain in the bilingual program was rejected by the district despite recommendations from the child's teacher and principal. The law is being challenged on the grounds that school officials do not have to justify their decisions to the parents and that there is no opportunity for appeal.

Arkansas Update - January 2002

It is likely that K-12 programs will likely bear the impact of approximately 40 percent of overall funding cuts across the state.

As reported in the Arkansas News, a Federal judge has ruled the State must pay for day treatment and other services for a developmentally delayed student. State officials estimate that if this ruling holds under appeal, the State would have to increase funding by almost \$100 million to provide such services in all 75 counties. Advocates for disabled individuals expressed support for the ruling as the State's plan to cut \$5 million from these services is obviously put on hold. Currently, approximately 2,500 Arkansas students are treated for developmentally-delayed impairments such as motor skills and speech impediments at five Medicaid funded centers.

California Update - January 2002

Earlier this year, the California Board of Education banned the use of calculators and reading aids as “reasonable accommodations” to help certain types of students take the State’s new high school graduation exam. Per a recent decent decision by the Board, students with dyslexia and other learning problems, including the learning disabled, who use calculators, computers, and other aids in their regular classes will be allowed to use similar aids in taking the State exam. School districts will have to certify that learning disabled students who use calculators or readers have passed the exam and were actually doing high school level work. As highlighted in an earlier TechMIS California State Update, the Disability Rights Advocacy Group sued the State of Oregon in 1999 on behalf of parents of a dyslexic student for not allowing the student to take the State writing assessment and negotiated a settlement on February 1, 2000. the DRA had also threatened to sue the California Department of Education for initially banning the provision of accommodations through the use of technology.

Governor Davis recently vetoed -- for the second consecutive year -- a Bill to reform correctional education in California. Attributing his decision to the current economic climate in California, the Governor indicated his belief that the Bill would “impair the State’s ability to manage its resources” by weakening management control of educational programs and reducing the flexibility to redistribute funds appropriated for correctional education programs.

Florida Update - January 2002

In mid-December, the Florida cabinet and Governor Jeb Bush approved the new school grading system. Under the old grading system, the State allocated approximately \$75 million to reward schools with good grades. Under the new system, grades at the end of this school year will be based upon the following factors:

- third and tenth grade students meeting the State standards in reading, writing, and math;
- learning gains students make in reading and math from one year to the next; and
- improvement in reading scores among lower performing students.

In many respects, the St. Petersburg Times states, the Florida accountability system is much more rigorous than that passed by Congress recently under ESEA reauthorization.

Hawaii Update – January 2002

In an effort to boost the State's economy, the Governor plans to invest \$321 million in public school projects this school year; \$255 million would be used for school repair and maintenance. Next year, the Governor is planning to ask for another \$952 million in school construction funds.

A recent State audit criticized Hawaii's provision of Federally mandated service for students with special needs. In particular, the audit indicated that the State's education programs for students covered under the 1994 Felix consent decree included goals, objectives, and benchmarks that are vague and not useful in measuring progress.

Patricia Hamamoto, who has been serving as interim superintendent for the past three months, has been appointed Superintendent with a four-year contract. Ms. Hamamoto is a former high school principal who has been closely involved in Hawaii's compliance with a consent decree to improve special education in the State.

Idaho Update – January 2002

Governor Kempthorne announced that the most recent budget forecast strongly suggests a \$20 million revenue shortfall during the next six months and that he will have the legislature take money from the “rainy day” account to make up the difference. According to the Idaho Statesman, the Governor decided against a third round of small budget cuts because it would negatively affect public school operations. Reportedly, the Governor’s proposal is supported by the co-chairman of the State legislature’s budget committee. The legislature will meet in January to begin setting the 2003 budget. Noting that public schools have already had their budgets reduced by \$23 million this year as a result of “holdbacks,” the Governor is quoted as stating “I am not going to request schools to make any further reductions.”

To date, Idaho has used none of its tobacco settlement fund to public schools. The State is unlikely to touch the \$46 million currently in the fund, but pressure is increasing to utilize the \$20 million payment to the fund expected this Spring to make up for shortfalls in the education budget. Some legislators, however, believe that the 2002 payment should remain in the fund to ensure significant annual payments in future years.

Idaho is facing a budget crunch that some State legislators are likening to 1983 when the State faced an 18 percent (\$69 million) revenue shortfall. That year, the State raised the sales tax and ordered a 3.5 percent cut in public school funding. Back then, Idaho did not have a “rainy day fund.” This year, Governor Kempthorne has ordered a 2.5 percent mid-year reduction in public school funding and has available a \$53 million “budget stabilization account” as a cushion for bad years. Next year, however, the State projects a \$100 million revenue shortfall which will have an even more significant impact on school funding to 2002-03.

For next year, State Superintendent Marilyn Howard will propose an education budget of \$1 billion, a 13 percent increase over the current year. The additional funds are intended to increase teacher salaries and to support school efforts to meet statewide standards.

Maine Update – January 2002

Although the State faces a \$250 million budget shortfall, Maine is going ahead with its plan to give a laptop computer to every child beginning at the seventh grade. Through a \$37 million contract with Apple, nine demonstration schools will be receiving iBook Laptops in February. This spring, 2,000 teachers will get their laptops and by the fall, 241 schools will be part of the program. The plan calls for 33,000 seventh and eighth graders to have computers within two years, although some legislators suggest that the program should be abbreviated because of the budget crunch.

Massachusetts Update – January 2002

In mid-December, the Massachusetts State legislature restored approximately \$110 million which was originally cut in the supplemental budget passed earlier. Hence, funding for mental retardation, mental illness, and adult basic education funds have been restored according to the Boston Herald.

The Massachusetts Education Commissioner has proposed a plan that would require new vocational education teachers to pass a test of basic English skills before beginning classroom instruction. The plan would also require vocational education teachers to obtain applicable state- or industry-issued licenses before they can begin teaching. Higher academic standards are also part of the plan which would require students transferring to vocational education schools to have passed English and mathematics courses the prior year.

Michigan Update – January 2002

The State legislature in its final hour before adjourning passed a law which would toughen welfare rules by requiring welfare recipients to be forced to work full time to continue receiving benefits. Under the initial welfare reform Federal legislation, recipients could count as work hours a percentage of the time they spent enrolled in adult education, job-related training, and other education programs. This is likely to reduce the projected increases in enrollments at community colleges, particularly for welfare recipients.

Conducted by Standard & Poor's, a recent report on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program raised serious questions about the condition of Michigan's public schools. Although, over three years, the passing rate on the assessment increased by nearly seven percent, the participation dropped by nearly as much, suggesting that many low-performing students may not be taking the tests. The report also noted significant differences in performance among ethnic and socio-economic groups, with about 60 percent of white students passing, but only 31 percent of black students and 37 percent of Hispanic students.

Missouri Update – January 2002

As a result of budget shortfalls, the State Department of Education has postponed plans to test fifth grade students in fine arts this school year. It is likely that the \$200 million increase in State K-12 funding scheduled for next year may have to be re-assessed.

Governor Holden has proposed an accountability initiative which would required teachers and principals in schools whose students performance is low, to take tests in order to qualify for a raise under his school reform plan. The initiative would also withhold money from schools who don't demonstrate a willingness to improve student performance. As reported in the St. Louis Today News, failing schools would have to come up with a plan that would include solutions such as smaller class size, full-day kindergarten, extended learning, and other approaches. The proposal would have to be approved by the legislature.

A recent Court of Appeals ruling held that Missouri school districts can be held to stricter standards for special education students, as called for in Missouri law, rather than to Federal standards. Local school districts are greatly concerned about the implications of the ruling, contending the expense of special education could double for some students. A battle looms in the legislature in 2002 as districts hope to modify the State law and parents fight to retain the existing wording.

New Jersey Update – January 2002

In a recent meeting with many of the New Jersey school district superintendents, Governor McGreevey indicated that State aid would not likely increase funding for the 570 school districts that are not covered under the State Supreme Court mandate for funding increases to the thirty poorest school districts (Abbot districts). The Governor estimated that there will be a \$1.9 billion budget shortfall by June 30, 2002. Currently \$7.5 billion is allocated in school aid with the Abbott districts receiving slightly over \$3 billion. The Governor did reiterate his commitment, however, to a \$40 million initiative to provide reading mentors in elementary schools for at-risk students.

The incoming Governor has placed a great emphasis on literacy for the State's youngest children. He has proposed that every elementary school in which at least one-third of the students are below grade level in reading (about half of the State's elementary schools) have special reading coaches. It is estimated that this initiative would cost \$45 million, most of it in urban districts.

Oregon Update – January 2002

Faced with a \$710 million budget deficit, Oregon legislators are considering a number of revenue raising and cost saving measures. Revenue options include raising taxes on cigarettes and alcohol, as well as spending more than \$80 million from the State's tobacco settlement and delaying a planned tax cut. Options that could affect education in Oregon include expending principal from the State's Common School Fund and taking money from the \$175 million Education Endowment fund.

Pennsylvania Update – January 2002

On December 22, 2001, the State of Pennsylvania took over Philadelphia's academically and financially failing schools. Governor Schweiker established a "school reform commission" which will exercise control over the City's 264 schools. The State is expected to add about \$120 million annually to the district's budget, including new books, increased teacher training, additional pay for teachers, bonuses for principals, and improved curricula. Up to 500 teaching positions may be lost, primarily through attrition. Now being determined is the status of Edison Schools within the district. Edison has pending a \$101 million contract to operate/consult with the district's 45 most underperforming schools. Edison can expect to face significant opposition from the union which opposes school operation by profit-making firms and questions Edison's track record in other districts. Congressman Chaka Fattah, who represents Philadelphia, has called for a Federal investigation of Edison Schools, citing "inconsistencies between independent studies and those commissioned by the for-profit companies themselves."

Recently, nearly a third of Pennsylvania's 115,000 teachers took state-mandated assessments in reading and mathematics. The results are expected to be available next month. The tests are keyed to the State's student assessments in grades 5,8, and 11. Over the next four years, all of Pennsylvania's teachers are expected to take the assessments, which are expected to cost the State about \$7.5 million. The assessments have come under heavy criticism from union officials who see the tests as having no educational purpose and consider them purely political.

Tennessee Update – January 2002

Although it ranks near the bottom of states with respect to per-pupil education spending, the Tennessee SEA cut \$15 million out of the State's \$2.5 billion education budget in August. None of these funds came from the basic State aid program. Legislators expect there to be further cuts for the 2002-03 school year.

The State education funding cut of \$15 million includes a reduction of 50 percent in funds allocated for low-performing schools and test development. Some districts, such as Memphis, have cut education technology funding.

Parents of students labeled as "gifted" in three Tennessee counties have organized to fight a plan in the State legislature to remove gifted students from the special education umbrella. The legislative plan, which would eliminate much of the funding for special classes for gifted students, died in the State legislature last year but is expected to be revived in 2002.

Tennessee has instituted an online higher education program which will begin its second semester of classes on January 22, 2002. Approximately 2,800 students -- out of a total of 3,5000 slots -- have registered in 65 classes. Last semester, officials expected an enrollment of about 7,500 online students, but ended up with nearly 2,000.

Virginia Update – January 2002

Newly-elected Governor Mark Warner has appointed Belle Wheelan to become the State's Secretary of Education. Ms. Wheelan, who for the past three years has been President of North Virginia Community College, will have responsibilities for education in Virginia but will not have substantial direct involvement in K-12 decision-making.

In his State of the State address, Governor Warner has called for a three percent across-the-board cut in state spending this year and a seven percent cut during the next fiscal year. He also proposed that some of the \$460 million in the State's rainy day fund be used to balance the budget. On the revenue-raising side, however, he emphasized that Virginia did not take advantage of Medicaid, particularly the Child Health Insurance Program, to collect appropriate reimbursement amounting to over \$50 million this last year. These funds can be used to provide reimbursement for related services provided to special education students. He called for the appropriate use of technology government-wide and for some changes in the Standards of Learning. During a discussion with him in December, he expressed some interest in expanded use of technology in the assessment area and alternative forms of accountability. He also reiterated his priority concern that not enough of post-secondary education is devoted to training a skilled workforce that doesn't have to have four-year college degrees.