

## **Alaska Update - March 2003**

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The Alaska legislature has passed an FY 2003 budget of \$2.4 billion that includes a small increase in education funding. To reach the FY 2003 budget, the legislators had to use a reserve fund from oil and gas royalties to close an \$859 million shortfall. The State expects to see a deficit of close to \$900 million for FY 2004.

## **Arizona Update - March 2003**

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In mid-February, Arizona set forth its guidelines for schools to comply with a new State law which restricts the use of bilingual education. The law requires that all non-English-speaking students be taught in English unless they receive a specific exception. Exceptions are supposed to be granted only to students whose English is satisfactory enough for them to benefit from bilingual education. However, there is evidence that some districts are giving waivers to students whose test scores suggest they are not satisfactorily fluent in English. The guidelines restricting this practice go into effect at the start of the 2003-04 school year.

## **Arkansas Update - March 2003**

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The Texas-based Just for Kids organization now includes data on how Arkansas schools performed on the State's primary benchmark exam administered at the fourth grade level. Similar to a coalition in Texas, the Just for Kids Arkansas website will be maintained by the Arkansas Business and Education Alliance.

There is considerable concern among the Arkansas business community that high school students in the State need to be better prepared for the job market. According to the State Chamber of Commerce, only 39 percent of Arkansas high schools offer the full 38.5 units of course offerings called for in the State minimum standards. The State Supreme Court, which recently ruled that the State's funding formula is inadequate, has given the legislature through the end of 2003 to develop an acceptable formula. The Chamber of Commerce is using this window to argue for stronger academic and technical standards.

## California Update - March 2003

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The California legislature has been addressing a number of education issues designed to reduce the State's budget deficit. In a January 30 special session, the State Senate passed a measure that would allow K-3 classes in the State to have as many as 22 students -- up from 20 -- as long as each district has an average of 20 or fewer students in each classroom. Although the Governor proposed a 3.6 percent across-the-board cut in the State's education budget, the legislature agreed instead to delay \$1 billion in expenditures until next school year. Further cuts of about \$1.2 billion are expected in the education budget.

California's legislature is also in the process of long-range planning for the State's schools. Among the key issues to be addressed by the plan are: (a) improving teacher qualifications by eliminating license waivers and emergency permits; (b) requiring that teacher training emphasize the needs of minority students; (c) establishing higher professional development requirements; (d) establishing a reward system for good teachers; and (e) setting higher standards for early childhood teachers. It is expected that the cost of implementing the plan could be as much as \$350 million over five years.

As part of the Governor's budget cutting proposal, community colleges would face a 10.5 percent cut -- more than \$500 million -- for the 2003-04 school year. Included in this cut would be reduction of \$28.4 million (more than a third of its program budget) for a program intended to integrate students with disabilities into community colleges. This cut follows a significant reduction last year.

## Connecticut Update - March 2003

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Governor John Rowland, re-elected this past November, has raised the spectre of large layoffs of State employees -- including Department of Education workers -- if significant wage and benefit concessions are not made. The Governor has accused unions representing State employees of misleading their members into believing such actions are not necessary. While the Governor made no specific reference to education, he indicated that drastic cuts will be required to address the State's \$2 billion deficit.

## **Delaware Update - March 2003**

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In December, Delaware was announced as the 20<sup>th</sup> state to receive funding under the Reading First program. A total of \$14.1 million will be allocated to the State over six years, with \$2.1 million available this year. Delaware expects to have a competition for subgrants in the late Spring with about ten schools in eligible districts receiving funds. The State Department of Education will also sponsor Reading First Institutes for all K-3 educators with a focus on instructional assessments.

## Florida Update - March 2003

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Following the recommendations of a task force appointed by Governor Bush which addressed accommodations and access for students with disabilities, a number of initiatives are underway which could provide opportunities for many TechMIS subscribers. These include:

- requiring expanded test accommodations available to students with disabilities when the FCAT is administered in March 2003;
- providing parents and others information on the Federal requirement that “students with disabilities who do not graduate with a standard diploma may remain in public school throughout the year until they turn 21 or graduate with a standard diploma, whichever occurs first”; and
- provide \$4.5 million in new Federal funds to districts to provide remediation for students with disabilities who have not passed one or both portions of the FCAT and are scheduled to graduate with a standard diploma.

An initiative is also underway to explore the use of web-based assessment for FCAT through pilot programs beginning in 2003-04.

In a memorandum dated January 27, Secretary of Education Jim Horne, directed school districts and other education officials to provide reasonable accommodations for special education students where appropriate to ensure they have access to standard curriculum and adequately demonstrate mastery on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), and graduate with a standard high school diploma.

The Coalition for Independent Living Options in West Palm Beach has filed a complaint with USED Office of Civil Rights, arguing that the FCAT violates students with disabilities rights; most likely this resulted in the January 27 letter from Secretary Horne. The Coalition argued that the State’s policies violates Section 504 provisions in IDEA because high school students are intentionally denied equal protection of the law when they do not pass the FCAT and hence do not graduate with a high school diploma. Last year, 71 percent of tenth grade students with disabilities did not pass the FCAT compared to only 29 percent of students without disabilities. If the USED’s Office of Civil Rights rules that Florida violates several Federal laws, it could

force changes in FCAT policies regarding accommodations.

As noted in an earlier State Profile Update, more than 60 staff members recently were released from the Florida SEA, including high-level officials in the Title I office. Most Title I activities are now under the Coordinator of Federal Grants, Lou Marsh, who previously was the State Title I director. Several Florida district Title I coordinators with whom we have talked recently continue to be concerned about which of their instructional paraprofessionals or teacher aides will have to be released because they have not been able to pass the ETS “parapro” exam. Evidently, the cutoff points have yet to be determined. In light of the last-minute \$40 million “cut” in Title I funding across the State last summer, many Title I district coordinators are having to decide whether to reduce the number of schools served (particularly the new Title I schools selected last year), thereby increasing the amount of funding per child in the remaining schools. While the State department has not addressed the scientifically-based research provisions affecting Title I, and there is no guidance in this area from USED, most Title I directors are anticipating using criteria that are significantly different from those included in the Reading First regulations. At the same time, most Title I directors believe that, if they are not in compliance with all the provisions of the Law but are making a good faith effort to reach compliance, USED will extend the deadlines for compliance rather than reduce funding for next year. This is the message which has been communicated to them in meetings of Title I coordinators by consulting groups who claim to be in close touch with USED Title I staff.

State officials have heralded the McKay Scholarship Program, which is expected to double the number of participating students to 8,000 this year. A recent study by the People for the American Way Foundation, a civil rights group, has generated data which point out many of the failures of the McKay Program if it were to become a model for voucher provisions under IDEA. Pro-Choice and Pro-Voucher groups at the Federal level are recommending that McKay provisions be incorporated into the reauthorization of IDEA this year. The PFAW report entitled “Jeopardizing a Legacy: A Closer Look at IDEA and Florida’s Disability Voucher Program” states, “A closer examination of the McKay program reveals a program with virtually no standards. Florida grades its public schools based upon a strict set of standards and ties state funding to these grades. However, private schools receiving tax funds through McKay are not

graded, not obligated to hire certified staff and not required to test all special education students...Under McKay, private schools are not bound by IDEA or by the terms of a child's IEP." A school board attorney in Florida summarized the Office of Civil Rights findings this way: "The state pays the voucher money to the private school and the parents are on their own." Since it began as a pilot program in 1999, the McKay program has cost Florida taxpayers nearly \$50 million and this school year an estimated \$56 million would be diverted to nonpublic schools contributing to even larger school district revenue shortfalls. For a copy of the report go to [www.pfaw.org](http://www.pfaw.org).

Governor Jeb Bush is proposing to have another State vote on the issue of limiting class size. The proposition, passed on the November ballot last year, mandates that districts' average class size must be reduced by two by next Fall. Republicans who control the House and Senate have expressed opposition to another vote. Florida teacher unions are also opposed to another vote for obvious reasons. The cost of implementing the class size limits is estimated by some to be over \$1 billion that could likely be raised only through a tax increase.

Governor Jeb Bush has proposed using vouchers as a means of addressing the voter-passed mandate for smaller class sizes. The mandate passed last November required that, by 2010, class sizes must be no larger than: 18 in K-3; 22 in grades 4-8; and 25 in grades 9-12. The estimated cost for this change is \$3 billion for the first year. The Governor has suggested that local school districts should be given the authority to provide vouchers to public school students for use in less crowded private schools if they and their parents so choose. The Governor's proposal is strongly opposed by Democrats and some Republicans.

A new State law eliminates social promotions for third grade students. Children who score at the lowest level on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) may not go on to the fourth grade. Teachers no longer have the discretion to make such promotions. The law applies equally to special education students who must meet the same FCAT requirements as other students. It is estimated that as many as 25 percent of the third graders in Broward County and a third of the third graders in Miami-Dade may be required to repeat third grade.

## **Georgia Update - March 2003**

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The Georgia State University system's 15 teacher colleges have begun a program of guaranteeing that their graduates will be high-quality teachers. A school district, should it determine that a newly-hired teacher does not meet its standards, may send the teacher back to college for more training. This plan covers the first two years of a teacher's employment and is done at no cost to the school district or the teacher.

## **Illinois Update - March 2003**

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Illinois has established a mentoring program designed to improve retention rates for new teachers. Nearly a third of the State's certified teachers leave within their first three years. Funded at \$8.1 million, the program provides as much as \$1,500 for each participating new teacher. The program focuses on teachers in high-need areas including mathematics, science, technology, and special education.

Illinois education officials have approved an accountability plan which defers the requirement for most improvement for four years. Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), all schools must show progress toward total proficiency in reading and mathematics and must reach proficiency by 2012. The State set the initial passing threshold at 40 percent for the 2002-03 school year, with the passing rate increasing to 42 percent, 45 percent, 50 percent, and 56 percent over the next four years. Seven percent improvements would be required from 2007 through 2011, with smaller improvements in 2012.

## **Louisiana Update - March 2003**

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On March 18, Louisiana was announced as the 27<sup>th</sup> state to receive funding under the Reading First program. The State will get a total of \$124.7 million over the next six years, with \$19.2 million allocated during the first year. Louisiana will hold a competition for eligible districts this Spring with the expectation of support for about 75 schools in these eligible districts. The State will also conduct Reading Teacher Institutes on scientifically-based teaching strategies for K-3 teachers and will sponsor a Reading Leadership Academy for principals and other district staff.

Governor Mike Foster has proposed a plan by which students in failing schools could receive vouchers to attend private schools. Most of the failing schools are in Orleans Parish (New Orleans). Private schools that participate in the plan would have to abide by requirements of the State's accountability plan, including administration of the Louisiana testing program and publication of test scores. Under the voucher plan -- modeled after the Cleveland program -- parents of students in failing schools would receive \$3,000 to be used toward tuition at another public or private school or to obtain tutoring at their child's current school.

## Maine Update - March 2003

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The Maine program to provide laptop computers to all seventh grade students in the State this school year is, according to a mid-year survey, showing many positive effects. The report, prepared by the Maine Education Policy Research Institute, indicates that teachers believe the laptops are improving instruction by giving students access to a broader array of information. And students say the laptops have made classwork more fun. More than 80 percent of the seventh graders felt that the computers improved the quality of their schoolwork. Last year, only ten percent of the seventh grade students reported using computers at least five hours per week; this year, under the laptop program, nearly two-thirds do so. Prospective funding cuts stemming from the State's budget crisis had put the program at risk; however, the interim report has caused budget cutters to spare the program.

## Maryland Update - March 2003

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The Maryland Department of Education has initiated an Alternative Routes to Certification initiative which provides mid-career professionals and recent college graduates with a way to gain teacher certification. Initially, forty candidates began taking online courses through a partnership with the University of Maryland/University College, and University of Maryland/Baltimore County. The first graduates of the program are scheduled to teach in Prince George's County and will be certified for one year to remain in the school system. After this pilot test, State Superintendent Nancy Grasmick noted, the program will be expanded statewide.

As reported in eSchool News Online (March 25), a new virtual forum, called Ask Us Now, has been established allowing students to talk with libraries about research questions in real time via the Internet. The online research service guides students and others to preselected websites, data bases, and other digital resources. According to Joe Thompson, Project Director for Ask Us Now, it is more of a reference service than a tutoring service. It began as a joint project between the Baltimore County Public Library and Hartford County Public Library under a \$70,000 grant from the Maryland Department of Education. It has now been expanded to all counties in the State under a \$155,000 grant from the Federal Institute for Museum and Library Services.

## Massachusetts Update - March 2003

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Ninety percent of Massachusetts' 61,000 high school seniors have passed the State test required for high school graduation. However, results on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) show that failure rates are higher for minority, disabled, and limited-English-proficient students. Students in the Class of 2003, the first class required to pass the test for graduation, will have one more opportunity to take the test. There is pending a class-action lawsuit which seeks to eliminate the MCAS as a graduation requirement on the grounds that it has a disproportionately negative impact on poor, minority, and disabled students.

According to the Governor, the State's FY 2004 budget includes \$50 million in funds for MCAS remediation, as well as another \$3 million to community colleges to develop academic structures to help students who are unable to pass the MCAS by the end of their senior year.

The State Department of Education has decided to use funds from its allocation of IDEA state grants to reimburse local school districts that send special needs students to private schools. Historically, Massachusetts has paid half of the cost of private education for special needs students who are unable to receive appropriate services in their public schools. It is expected that the State's decision will allow between \$70 million and \$85 million to flow to school districts. Payments will be made at the end of the State's fiscal year in June.

As of March 26, 2003, a total of 459 students -- out of nearly 1,000 requests -- have been exempted from taking the State's high school exit exam; 342 of these have been for math, 117 for reading. The State has deliberately made these waivers difficult to get. To be exempted, a student must have taken the MCAS at least three times, had a score on at least one occasion nearly passed, had excellent attendance, and made use of school-based academic support.

## Minnesota Update - March 2003

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A settlement has been reached between Minnesota and NCS Pearson (formerly National Computer Systems), which gave incorrect scores to about 47,000 students on the State's exit exams taken in February and April 2000. Prior to the settlement, NCS gave college tuition vouchers and checks to more than 70 students. The details of the pending settlement have not been released. The County District Court Judge only indicated that "The two sides have agreed to general terms."

The newly-elected Governor's Minnesota Academic Standards Committee, scheduled to convene for the first time in late February, has less than six weeks to develop and submit to the legislature a replacement for the State's current academic standards. The Governor is urging the use of more clear, rigorous, and useful standards. Other educators argue that the State's development of standards over the last ten years should not be discarded in favor of standards developed in other states. The movement toward new more rigorous standards is being spearheaded by the State's new Education Commissioner, Cheri Pierson Yecke, formerly in charge of the teacher preparation and school choice programs at the U.S. Department of Education and one-time Superintendent of Education in Virginia (which has developed rigorous Standards of Learning).

A recent poll by the St. Paul Pioneer Press and Minnesota Public Radio showed that nearly two-thirds of respondents are in favor of repealing the State's Profiles of Learning standards. The new Republican leadership in the State has cited the poll as clear evidence that public sentiment favors elimination of the Profiles of Learning and a return to "basics."

The poll provides support for the Republicans in the State legislature who voted to eliminate the Profiles of Learning. New draft standards for reading and mathematics were presented to the legislature on March 10 with a revised version -- based on a series of town meetings -- due on March 31. The final standards will be reached during the Spring. Standards for science and social studies will be initially developed this summer.

## **Mississippi Update - March 2003**

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In mid-February, Governor Ronnie Musgrove signed into law two new education bills totaling \$236 million for FY 2004, including \$142 million for K-12 education. The funds would make up for two years of education spending cuts and will enhance the State's school improvement program. The new laws give teachers a six percent pay raise and will increase district funding to poorer districts through the Mississippi Adequate Education Program.

## Nebraska Update - March 2003

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In late March, Secretary Paige paid a site visit to Nebraska to discuss “how the powerful law (NCLB) will help children in Nebraska and throughout the nation.” Meetings were held with Senator Chuck Hagel, Governor Mike Johanns, several Nebraska Congressmen, State Education Commissioner Doug Christensen, and members of the State Board, to emphasize, not only the new law, but how much Federal money -- nearly \$274 million or \$47 million more than two years ago -- the State would receive next year. During the CCSSO meeting in Washington several days earlier, knowledgeable officials indicated that the purpose of the meeting was to have Secretary Paige use the “bully pulpit” of Federal funding to ensure that Nebraska does not decide to abandon many of the provisions in No Child Left Behind. Commissioner Christensen has, on more than one occasion, made veiled threats not to participate in the new Federal programs and, thereby, forego receiving much of the \$274 million of Federal funding. Many of the State’s education code and laws are in conflict with the assessment, accountability, and other provisions in NCLB. Some Nebraska officials feel that the cost to the State of implementing the letter of the law would not be offset by the increased Federal implementation funding.

## **Nevada Update - March 2003**

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Although Nevada faces a \$700 million budget shortfall, Governor Kenny Guinn has proposed a \$311 million increase in funding for K-12 education over the next biennium. Among the features of the Governor's proposed two-year spending plan are: (a) \$3,000 bonuses for teachers of ESL, math, and special education classes; (b) \$2,000 bonuses for teachers who work in low-performing schools; (c) continuation of \$2,000 signing bonuses for new teachers; and (d) \$37.8 million for textbooks and classroom materials. The Governor expects to raise revenues by increasing taxes on tobacco products and alcohol as well as increasing property taxes by 15 percent.

## **New Jersey Update - March 2003**

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The Governor's proposed budget for FY 2004, includes \$200 million more for education, half of which will be used to make debt payments for new school construction. Significantly, the budget includes no increase in the State's \$926 million funding for special education. By failing to increase funds for special education, the Governor's budget proposal appears to be in conflict with a State law that requires the State to pay for excess costs associated with educating special needs students. It is estimated that an additional \$35 million will be needed to meet the legal requirement; the Governor's proposal includes only \$15 million for this purpose.

The State Department of Education is attempting to organize an electronic "Network of Schols" as a means of disseminating information to school districts across New Jersey. Specifically, the network will provide information on best practices in the areas of student achievement, special education reform, and small schools. The State hopes to include on the network new instructional models as well as means of reducing costs. Information on the network can be found at [www.state.nj.ed.us/education](http://www.state.nj.ed.us/education).

## **New York Update - March 2003**

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A class action lawsuit has been filed by parents who claim that school districts are not allowing their children enrolled in failing schools to transfer to other schools or to receive supplemental afterschool tutoring services. While less than ten parents had joined the class action lawsuit as of the end of January, the number can be expected to increase. As noted in the last TechMIS report, a recent survey of parents with children in failing schools in New York City, found that many were not aware of their parent choice option. However, after being informed of the new No Child Left Behind requirements, the vast majority indicated their desire to accept the choice options of transferring their child to another school and receiving supplemental services.

The State Department of Education is in the process of developing a Virtual Learning Space (VLS) which will contain information on learning standards (including performance measures), State assessments, curriculum resource guides, professional development opportunities, and library/museum resources. To monitor development of the VLS, go to <http://usny.nysed.gov/vls.html>.

The Buffalo school district has established a school choice program to begin operation in the Fall. Initially, school choice will be available only to parents of 4,500 children who are entering kindergarten or first grade. Long-term plans call for such choice to be made available to parents of all Buffalo students. The district's current attendance zone structure, based upon a history of court-ordered desegregation, often have children taking long bus rides every day. The new plan is expected to present parents with far more flexibility.

## **North Carolina Update - March 2003**

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Faced with an \$800 million shortfall for FY 2004, the Governor has promised to increase funding for K-12 education. Among his proposals are expansion of the State's effort to reduce class sizes in K-3 to 18 within two years, salary increases and bonuses for teachers, and expansion of the preschool program for poor early learners. The proposed FY 2004 budget includes \$6 billion for K-12 education -- \$170 million more than the prior year. The Governor also repeated his call for a State lottery that, he claims, will raise more than \$200 million for North Carolina's schools. Over the past decade, the State legislature has rejected the lottery concept on a number of occasions.

## Ohio Update - March 2003

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Governor Robert Taft recently announced a cut of \$100 million for K-12 education. This cut can be expected to have significant effects, particularly on poorer districts that rely on State funds for a large portion of their budgets. Many of these districts will probably have to reduce the hiring of new teachers and go with larger class sizes. Cleveland, for example, faced with a loss of \$4 million in State funding, has ordered a ten percent across-the-board cut for all programs and instituted a hiring freeze, as well as canceling summer session classes. Canton is freezing nearly all purchases and is preparing to reduce staff.

Ohio is anticipating a \$720 million budget shortfall for FY 2003 largely due to lower revenues and higher-than-expected Medicaid expenditures. Governor Robert Taft, in order to avoid major K-12 education cuts, has proposed using reserve funds and raising cigarette and alcohol taxes. Still, K-12 education in the State can expect a cut of about \$21 million out of its total budget of \$7.3 billion; the cut is likely to decrease funding for professional development.

## Oklahoma Update - March 2003

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During FY 2003, K-12 education in Oklahoma experienced a 9.2 percent reduction in \$2.03 billion budget. State officials estimate that the FY 2004 education budget will be ten percent less than FY 2003.

In early February, Oklahoma received its Reading First grant projected to be \$82 million over the next six years, including \$12.5 million for this school year. The State will hold a competition among eligible school districts this Spring. It is expected that approximately 50 schools will be recipients of Reading First subgrants. The State is also planning to develop Reading Academies for principals, regular K-3 teachers, K-12 special education teachers, early childhood teachers, teacher aides, and parents. These academies will provide intensive training in scientifically-based reading instructional practices.

Many Oklahoma education officials are concerned that the Reading First grant will undermine the State's five-year professional development effort in reading. A Federal panel has indicated that Oklahoma's training program is not aligned with current research in the field. Having invested \$15 million in the training of 14,000 teachers in the essential components of reading instruction, the State is in the midst of an internal conflict over the way to deal with the Federal ruling. One State officials stated that "there is very little science regarding professional development models" and decried the "rubber ruler" being applied to professional development.

## Oregon Update - March 2003

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The Oregon Student Assistance Commission has voted to reduce the amount of Oregon Opportunity Grants for 2002-03 in order that more low-income students can receive at least some funding for college enrollment. The group plans to lobby the legislature for \$80 million more for the grant program over the next six years.

In mid-January, the Oregon State Board of Education approved a proposed State accountability system which would set lower “rate of progress” standards in terms of for students with disabilities, minority students, low-income students, and students with limited English proficiency, in terms of meeting the State’s adequate yearly progress criteria over time. Individual schools would be rated on the basis of progress being made by individual subgroups of students toward the proficiency level by 2012. As reported in Education Daily (January 28), an Oregon SEA official noted that special education students have the lowest achievement levels on the State math assessment and that strict adherence to USED AYP guidance would result in 97-100 percent of all schools be identified for improvement next year. The new plan will grant schools a passing grade, even if students do not meet standards, as long as progress is evident.

The Oregon approach, which may or may not be approved by USED, recognizes the fact that the achievement gap between special education and non-special education students could be narrowed but never disappear for the simple reason that when special education students exit the program because their reading scores, for example, are above average, they are replaced by lower-achieving students. The gap could be narrowed, however, if the district could be allowed to report achievement gains of above-average performing special education students who exit from the program until the students graduate for Title I reporting purposes. This would require, however, a dual accounting system. The decision by the Board opens the State up to potential class action lawsuits by parents from groups such as the Disability Rights Advocates that achievement expectations for special education and LEP students are less than for other students.

In his State-of-the-State Address in February, Democratic Governor Theodore Kulongoski was able to provide only small encouragement for the K-12 education community. The proposed K-

12 budget for the next biennium is \$6.2 billion, an increase of \$400 million from the prior budget period. School districts in Oregon can still expect to see severe budget shortfalls next school year.

In late January, voters in Oregon rejected a plan to increase State income taxes by \$313 million, \$95 million of which would have gone to K-12 schools. As a result, school districts across the state are exploring means of cutting costs, including shortening their school years by a few days or even weeks, laying off teachers, and raising class sizes. The Portland school district, for example, may have to cut as many as 24 days from its school calendar.

## **Pennsylvania Update - March 2003**

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In his address on Pennsylvania's FY 2004 budget, Democratic Governor Edward Rendell proposed an overall \$21 billion budget that included a ten percent across-the-board cut for all agencies as well as other more specific cuts. Although no funds were included in the budget, the Governor reiterated his campaign promise to spend more State funds on education and to reduce local property taxes. He said all school districts will receive the same funding in FY 2004 that they had this year and he hoped to cut property taxes by 30 percent. Among the education programs that will feel the effect of the budget cuts in FY 2004 are the State performance-incentive grants for schools with improved attendance or test scores.

The Philadelphia School District has begun a major reform of its high schools. Funded at \$150 million over five years, the District's "Secondary Education Movement" is intended to reduce the size of schools and classes and to broaden the availability of course offerings. The current roster of 45 high schools with enrollments of between 1,000 and 2,000 students each will expand to as many as 100 neighborhood schools with enrollments of 250 to 800. It is expected that the school overhaul will result in more career and technical education programs, as well as increased availability of advanced placement courses. As part of the District's \$1.5 billion capital improvement plan, a number of new high schools will be built and some existing middle schools will be converted to high schools.

## South Carolina Update - March 2003

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In late January, the State's Supreme Court provided greater flexibility in the requirement that charter schools must have similar racial compositions to neighboring school districts. Initially, the State law required similar racial compositions defined as being within 10 percent of that of a surrounding school district. The legislature recently amended the law increasing the limit to 20 percent. Currently, 13 charter schools exist in the State and four more have been approved by the State Department of Education.

On February 11, for the second time this fiscal year, South Carolina cut the State budget -- this time by 3.7 percent -- to offset continued drops in State revenues. The \$170 million cut includes \$68.7 for K-12 education which is expected to be imposed on local school districts. Districts have indicated that the cuts will force them to freeze or eliminate teacher positions and/or cancel summer school and afterschool tutorial programs.

Expecting a \$1 billion budget shortfall for FY 2004, the South Carolina legislature is likely to make major cuts in K-12 education, as well as other State programs. In his first State of the State Address, Governor Mark Sanford proposed to improve education across the State by limiting the size of schools to 900 students in high schools, 700 in middle schools, and 500 in elementary schools.

## **South Dakota Update - March 2003**

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Despite an anticipated revenue shortfall of \$54 million in FY 2004, Governor Mike Rounds proposed a \$15 million funding increase -- to \$323 million -- for K-12 education. Half of this total is intended to make up for last year's inflation and lower-than-expected returns from the new education trust fund. The Governor has proposed a new program to provide more professional development in mathematics for schools identified as needing improving; the program would be similar to an existing program for reading in grades 1-3. The Governor has also emphasized his desire for South Dakota to remain a leader in the use of educational technology.

## Texas Update - March 2003

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In late February, Texas schools began administering the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) to students in the fourth, seventh, ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades. The TAKS replaces the 12-year-old Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Before the end of the Spring term, all third graders through eleventh graders will take some form of the test. Starting with the Class of 2004, students will be required to pass the eleventh grade form (including English, mathematics, social studies, and science) in order to graduate. In future years, these tests will be used to determine promotion for fifth and eighth graders. There is great concern, based upon practice test results, that at least half of next year's seniors may fail to pass at least one of the four subjects included on the TAKS.

The current budget crisis in Texas -- expected to be nearly \$10 billion over the next 2½ years -- has resulted in a 12½ percent across-the-board cut for all State agencies. This cut is likely to cause the Texas Education Agency to reduce its aid to local school districts from \$18 billion to \$16.4 billion. A number of approaches have been considered for dealing with these shortfalls in education funds. One such plan, currently being considered by the State legislature, would allow the purchase of new textbooks only for subjects that are part of the new TAKS.

Democrat Ron Wilson has introduced legislation that would create a pilot voucher program in Houston. In the past, Republicans have supported the vouchers concept. The proposed bill would provide vouchers to Houston students who: (a) are low-income; (b) are entering kindergarten or first grade; or (c) have failed State tests. Under the plan, voucher students would be required to take the TAKS like all other students.

## Washington Update - March 2003

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The State of Washington is looking at a budget deficit of \$2.4 billion for the 2004/2005 biennium. Among the measures proposed by Governor Gary Locke to address the shortfalls is a delay until the 2005-06 school year, additional funds for reducing class sizes scheduled for 2004-05. Instead, the program's current funding level of about \$200 million per year will be maintained.

## Wisconsin Update - March 2003

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During the State Technology Leadership Institute, several officials from Wisconsin noted that the extreme budget pressures on K-12 are likely to grow requiring additional cuts in the future. Thus far, three rounds of K-12 budget reductions have already occurred beginning in the 2002 -- and now 2003 -- budgets. These cuts were for five percent, then three percent, and most recently six percent.