

Alabama Update - May 2003

State funding for schools in Alabama is tied directly to tax revenues. Because of a \$200 revenue shortfall, local school districts are expected to lay off as many as 2,000 teachers and other staff.

In the Spring of 2002, the Alabama State Board of Education adopted a new technology education course of study including student standards for technology skills in grades K-8. This curriculum must be implemented by all school districts in the 2003-04 school year. The Board also adopted technology standards for teacher preparation programs. Teacher colleges and universities will require educators seeking advanced degrees to demonstrate the ability to use technology to enhance classroom instruction. During the 2002-03 school year, more than \$8 million in Title II D/Education Technology grants were distributed to Alabama school districts with the same amount expected next year. The Governor's budget for FY 2004 suggests only a small cut in per-teacher funding for instructional technology (about \$180 per teacher).

This Spring, according to the Southern Regional Education Board, Alabama is pilot testing an online version of the Alabama Alternate Assessment, as well as an online reading assessment for K-3 called DIBELS.

On June 11-12, 2003, there will be an Alabama Educational Technology Conference (AETC) in Birmingham. Information on AETC is available at <http://www.aetc.cc>.

Alaska Update - May 2003

The SEA has developed a custom e-learning solution designed to train paraprofessionals who assist students with special needs and a Learning Management System to manage the delivery of the e-learning courseware, track their progress, and provide customized reports for administrators. The overall goal is to ensure that the program provides ongoing and sustained training for paraprofessionals. The program consists of four modules representing six hours of e-learning, available 24 hours a day. The teacher aides have the option of receiving college credit for the course through Alaska Pacific University. E-learning modules on behavior management and reading and math instructional strategies are available this Spring. For more information go to: www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/sped/E-learning/E_Learning.htm.

Alaska has asked the U.S. Department of Education to approve the State's accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act even though it will -- because of its rural nature -- have great difficulty meeting the requirements of NCLB. The huge geographic size of many school districts and the small district enrollments mean Alaska has a large number of very small schools; 135 schools have fewer than 50 students. Measuring school level achievement in such cases is unreliable; one or two students can have a large impact on school scores. Similarly, providing school choice is difficult when some schools have only one or two teachers and distances between schools are large. USED is considering Alaska's position.

Alaska is strongly considering the use of computerized assessments as it accepts bids from firms seeking to oversee the State's testing programs.

Arizona Update - May 2003

Two years ago, the SEA (along with other groups) began to develop a professional development system that is planned, implemented, and evaluated in ways directly related to student achievement. One component will be the Arizona behavior initiative that was established to develop scientifically-based research to identify and promote promising practices to help schools implement student behavior policies that are conducive to a positive learning environment. Fourteen schools statewide will implement pilot programs. The overall staff development system is designed to be compatible with NCLB. For more information contact Miriam Podrazik at mpodraz@ade.az.gov.

Arkansas Update - May 2003

The SEA has initiated a new effort to increase exchange of information and collaboration between special education teachers and general education teachers called the Arkansas Collaborative Educators' Network (ACE), which currently has over 1,000 members. A major objective is to provide quick access to practical information that can be used to improve student achievement. Members receive information sheets on instructional strategies and exemplary instructional practices used in other states. The contact is Rose Merry Kirkpatrick (501/663-3835).

As part of its effort to comply with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, Arkansas is establishing a program at Northwest Arkansas Community College to train teachers' aides to work effectively with special needs students. Entitled "Teaching Exceptional Learners," the program, if approved for continuation, is expected to attract more people to the technical certificate program for teaching assistants.

In late April, the U.S. Department of Education has approved Arkansas' state accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act. Arkansas is the 14th state to be approved.

This school year, for the first time, all high school career and technical students in Arkansas are taking end-of-course exams online. Approximately 7,000 students are taking these online multiple choice tests using Question Mark software. The State estimates that this online testing saves about \$75,000 per year and gives students and teachers immediate feedback of results.

California Update - May 2003

A proposal by the Governor would cut state funding to local school districts by \$2.3 billion with additional cuts expected next fiscal year. These actions will almost certainly result in layoffs and other changes next school year.

Governor Gray Davis has also recommended, in his proposed FY 2004 budget, that more than 60 of California's education categorical programs be consolidated into a single block grant. State legislators are planning to reform the complex system of categorical programs, but have rejected the Governor's drastic move.

The Gates Foundation announced its intention to establish a number of English Early College High Schools (ECHSs) in California through a \$9 million grant. ECHSs are intended to be small, hybrid schools through which students can earn a high school diploma and an associate's degree with the option of entering a four-year college. The recipient of the grant is the California Community College system which plans to establish 15 ECHSs, each serving up to 400 students. Planning for the first five-seven programs will begin this Spring with operation to begin in the Fall of 2004. Additional programs will be planned and implemented over the next two years. The California ECHS program is part of a national initiative which will expand to 70 such campuses over the next five years. The national program is sponsored by the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and the Kellogg Foundation, as well as the Gates Foundation.

California has conducted a survey of the effect on technology use in small school districts of the State's budget crisis. Conducted in late March, the survey strongly suggests that the budget shortfall will have a significant impact on the districts' capability to use technology effectively for instruction. At least half of the survey's respondents indicate that they expect cuts in staff and increased workloads on remaining staff (a third have already frozen or reduced the hiring of technology staff). More than 35 percent of respondents expect to delay purchases of technology products and services, and 27 percent expect to cancel some purchases. Large proportions of responding districts think these technology reductions will have negative impacts on the teaching of computer skills as well as on special education and core curriculum instruction.

In an effort to comply with the “highly qualified teachers” provision of the No Child Left Behind Act, California is giving consideration to a credentialing plan that would require all incoming teachers to pass a test before they could receive their credential and be considered “highly qualified.” Currently, the State has 50,000 teachers who have received emergency credentials in areas where there are severe teacher shortages; these teachers, as well, may be required to pass the test or be considered unqualified.

According to the plan now in place, California high school students in the Class of 2004 will have to pass the State exit exam to graduate. An evaluation by the Human Resources Research Organization estimated that as many as 20 percent of these seniors will fail the test. Standards-based courses and remedial instruction have not been able to bring a satisfactory number of students to passing levels. As a consequence, the State Board of Education is likely to delay implementation of the exit exam requirement. The decision must be made by August 1.

Jack O’Connell, California’s Superintendent of Schools has asked the State Public Utilities Commission to charge lower rates to public schools. Recognizing that the State’s \$38 billion budget shortfall will bring major cuts to K-12 education, the State Superintendent estimated the lower utility rates could save schools across the State as much as \$200 million annually.

The School Board for the Los Angeles school district now has a four-person (out of seven members) majority favored by the local teachers’ union.

Colorado Update - May 2003

Colorado is about to join Florida as the only two states to offer statewide voucher programs. The State Senate has approved a pilot program in school districts with at least eight schools that have received low performance ratings on State assessments. The program will start with a maximum of 500 students in each district and will grow, over the next three years, to up to two percent, four percent, and then six percent of each district's enrollment. To qualify for the vouchers, students must meet poverty criteria (i.e., free/reduced price lunch) and have received low scores on the State test in at least one subject. Kindergarten students could receive vouchers worth 37.5 percent of their schools' per-pupil spending. Elementary and middle schoolers (grades 1-8) would get vouchers worth 75 percent of their per-pupil spending; high school students would receive 85 percent. The voucher program is, as expected, opposed by teachers and other anti-voucher groups.

In an effort to foster competition among the States' 28 public colleges, the Colorado House of Representatives is considering legislation that would eliminate its yearly subsidies of higher education. Rather, the State would provide \$4,000 vouchers to in-state students to be used toward tuition at any of the colleges.

According to the Denver Post, the Denver school district is planning to implement an incentive plan for teachers who raise test scores in low-achieving schools. Under the plan, teachers will receive substantial bonuses as well as uncapped annual salaries.

Beginning this past Fall, the Colorado Online Learning program has provided help for homebound students or students looking for courses their schools do not offer, using e-mail and streaming audio and video.

Connecticut Update - May 2003

Budget cuts proposed by Governor Rowland could cause 30,000 citizens (including 7,000 children) to lose Medicaid and SCHIP insurance coverage beginning this Spring. Additional cuts may be made next year including a freeze on the number of children who will be covered.

Republican Governor Rowland has proposed allowing parents of children in failing schools to use \$3,000 in state funds to send their children to the school of their choice. The proposal is being opposed by the Connecticut Education Association and several other groups such as a school PTO which appeared during TV ads broadcast during *60 Minutes*, according to [School Reform News](#).

The Connecticut Board of Education has approved a program that uses technology to help in the tutoring of high school students with minimal direct contact with teachers. In response to a complaint by a local teachers association, the Board found the program to be “planned, ongoing, and systemic as required” and determined that adequate teacher oversight was present.

As part of his spending plan for FY 2004, Governor John Rowland has recommended an expenditure of \$5 million to expand the Connecticut Education Network, a high-capacity, fiber-optic linkage among public schools, colleges, and libraries. This is half of the funding allocated last year and far less than the \$34 million recommended by a task force in 2000. No new features would be added to the network but more districts (currently 30 out of 166 participate) will be added.

The State’s long-range technology plan calls for school districts to set aside a quarter of their technology budgets for technology-related training.

Delaware Update - May 2003

Delaware's State accountability plan for the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has been approved by the U.S. Department of Education, making it the tenth state gaining such approval. The U.S. Secretary of Education cited Delaware as "on the cutting edge of using valid data -- on student achievement and graduation rates -- to drive reform." The Delaware accountability plan incorporates the NCLB provisions requiring states to describe how they will close achievement gaps and ensure that all students -- including those with disabilities -- become academically proficient.

The State's Reading First initiative which is being coordinated with Special Education and Title I in a seamless manner, will likely be targeted on 6-10 schools among 11 eligible districts which will receive a sizable portion of the \$2 million Reading First allocation. For each Reading First school, a reading coach will be hired to support the classroom and other teachers. The staff development effort, conducted at county and state level workshops, will involve not only teachers, but also principals and will focus on the five "essential" components of reading identified by the National Reading Panel. Unlike other states, Reading First in Delaware places top priority on improving reading comprehension and allows districts to choose K-3 reading materials that have been proven to improve reading achievement of all students. Some of these unique features of Delaware's Reading First initiative could be attributed to the fact that the International Reading Association is located in Newark; IRA has been directly involved in planning this statewide initiative. As reported in the May issue of Counterpoint, Delaware's Reading First "is not focused solely on phonemic awareness and phonics."

According to the Southern Regional Education Board, last Fall Delaware pilot-tested online assessments in eighth grade reading and mathematics and fifth grade reading. The State has yet to determine whether it will expand online testing further.

Florida Update - May 2003

In its inaugural year, Florida's School Readiness Uniform Screening System or SRUSS, is being used with first-time kindergarten students which is intended to help teachers understand the abilities of children when they enter school in order to prescribe instruction. The SRUSS includes two screening instruments: (a) the Early Screening Inventory - Kindergarten (ESI-K), and (b) the Work Sampling System or Ready-for-School Behavior Screener. The classroom-based observation addresses: interactions with adults and peers; self-help skills; verbal communication skills; problem-solving skills; and other early learning skills to be developed. For more information contact Cathy Bishop at cathy.bishop@FLDOE.org.

On April 15, a settlement was reached in a class action lawsuit against Microsoft Corporation that could benefit Florida's public schools starting in 2004. The settlement reflects compensation for what a Florida circuit court determined to be unfair trade practices used by Microsoft when it sold its software. Purchasers of Microsoft software over the past six years are entitled to vouchers for the purchase of computer hardware and software (from any manufacturer). Microsoft has agreed to donate half the value of any unclaimed vouchers to high-poverty Florida public schools (those in which at least half of the students qualify for free or reduced price lunch). Although there is no estimate for the amount of funds that will reach the schools, it has been suggested that nearly 700,000 students in more than 1,600 schools and 40 school districts will receive some funds or donated software.

In early April, the Florida House agreed to give diplomas to some special needs students even if they do not pass the State's mandated graduation test. According to the bill, disabled students who have failed to achieve a passing score on the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) in both the 10th and 11th grades, but who have satisfied other graduation requirements may be given diplomas if it is determined that the FCAT cannot fairly measure their level of achievement because of their disabilities. The bill also allows accommodations for such students in two-year institutions by receiving "reasonable substitutions" in career education programs. The State Senate is considering a similar bill.

Florida has begun implementing a number of programs designed to help students who fail the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Third grade students who fail the FCAT reading test now cannot be promoted to fourth grade. The State has established summer literacy camps which would allow third graders to move on. Aimed at high school seniors who do not pass the FCAT after six retests -- and who therefore cannot graduate with a regular diploma -- a second State-sponsored program provides a "fast track" route to a GED certificate that will allow students to enroll in a community college in the Fall after their class graduates.

While these new interventions for the two groups of students could help students meet the State's accountability requirements, they would not meet current accountability requirements in No Child Left Behind. For example, for those high students who fail the FCAT but who have credits in passing grades, could earn a GED and attend a community college in the Fall. However, for purposes of Title I reporting, students who earn a GED are counted as dropouts under the Federal AYP criteria. Also, USED has ruled in other states that students who use an alternative route such as a GED, do not qualify for student aid as part of the Pell Grant program. Third-grade students who failed the third grade FCAT would be reported by subgroup using the scores on the failed test not the alternative test.

Florida FCAT test scores for this year could mean that 12,000 students may not graduate with a high school diploma because they failed the exit exam and more than 20,000 third grade students may not be promoted to the fourth grade because they failed the FCAT reading test. A coalition headed by Donald Jones, law professor at University of Miami, is threatening to sue the State if it does not delay the effects of existing law on these and other students. The intent is to have the FCAT declared to be in violation of students' due process rights.

Concurrently, another coalition is threatening a boycott of the State's major industries. According to Education Daily (May 21), 3,000 interested parties attended a recent coalition meeting. In a recent discussion with one of the leading technology advocates in the State, the question was asked as to whether or not Florida would enforce the policies indicated in the January 27 directive from Secretary Horne to local special education directors regarding accommodations and notification to parents of special education students who did not graduate

with a regular high school diploma. She indicated that there had been a significant increase in the number of students who were provided “low-level technology” accommodations this March and, based upon a Governor-appointed commission, “text to speech” accommodations will likely be used where needed with special education students who take the FCAT reading or language arts exam. As noted in the previous Florida update, Secretary Horne also instructed local special education directors to remind parents that they have a right to have the school continue serving their special education student who failed the FCAT and did not receive a regular high school diploma until age 22. Very quietly, the State has unofficially told districts that if the members of the failing student’s IEP team can clearly justify that the student performed adequately on specific assignments in demonstration of their skills, the student could be counted as having received a regular high school diploma, which would in effect, nullify the Secretary’s initial directive.

Governor Bush opposed the class size reduction referendum which passed last November; he is now lobbying the Republican-controlled legislature to call a special session allowing Floridians to reconsider the amendment largely because it would cost \$28 billion which would require cuts elsewhere. Three quarters of the legislature must support the reconsideration proposal which is not likely. One way to reduce average class size by two students per year until goals are met would be to expand the school choice or “voucher” initiative in the State.

According to School Reform News, Florida TaxWatch, has called for expanding corporate income tax credits for donations for private scholarships, which could reduce class size in public schools and, according to TaxWatch, save taxpayers millions. The so-called McKay Scholarship Program has expanded from 4,000 to 8,000 students this year and has been presented as a “model” to follow in the reauthorization of IDEA which would allow parents of special education students to place them in non-public schools.

As part of Florida’s plan to reduce the average class size in the State by two students next school year, the State Senate passed a compromise bill that deleted two of the Governor’s more controversial components. One such program called for a \$3,500 voucher for kindergarten parents who send their child to a private school; it was hoped this would reduce kindergarten

class sizes. The other dropped program was the establishment of a K-8 virtual school through which private sector companies would receive \$4,800 for each student taught over the Internet; this would have reduced class sizes in elementary and middle schools. This compromise bill must still be approved by the House and the Governor.

On April 29, the U.S. Department of Education approved Florida's accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act. The 13th state plan to be approved, Florida's plan has incorporated writing assessments into their measures of academic achievement. The plan is posted at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/CFP/csas/index.html>.

As previously reported, the head of the Dade County Teacher's Union, Pat Tornillo, recently proposed to provide all high school students laptop computers which would allow conversion of computer labs to regular classrooms and therefore reduce the cost of constructing new buildings. Extreme budget pressures appear to have squeezed "creative juices" out of legislators and school officials this year.

Georgia Update - May 2003

On May 19, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Georgia has become the 20th state to have its accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act approved.

On May 13, the Technology Association of Georgia (TAG) announced a new technology portal for the State. Using Computer Associates' *CleverPath* portal software, the new portal will serve as the "hub" for communications among the education, government, industry and philanthropy communities.

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), headquartered in Atlanta, is planning to offer centralized online assistance for students wishing to enroll in Internet-based instruction. Focusing on approximately 350 colleges and universities in the South, the new service will help distance education students obtain enrollment assistance and academic support.

USED Secretary Paige has stated that 25 percent of the state's Title I administrative costs or about \$780,000 will be withheld because the state had violated its two year compliance agreement to start end-of-course testing this Spring. The State Board of Education voted in March to delay the administration of the exam which, however, according to new State Superintendent Cathy Cox, would not meet the NCLB requirements. Two days earlier USED approved the Georgia accountability plan submitted in January. While Georgia officials have stated they would appeal the decision, this is the first public position by USED to threaten to enforce compliance with state agreements under ESEA. If USED does, in fact, withhold the Title I Administrative set-aside portion, it could re-negotiate the agreement and provide Georgia with a 75 percent "grant-back" for the money initially withheld.

Idaho Update - May 2003

In late March, the Idaho legislature passed a measure that transfers responsibility for all Federal education funds coming into the State from the State Department of Education to the Idaho Board of Education. Seven of the eight members of the Board have been appointed by Republican Governor Dirk Kempthorne. The elected head of the SEA, Marilyn Howard, is a Democrat.

Idaho has adopted a series of subscription websites from ABC-CLIO Schools as supplemental curricula for social studies programs in all State high schools. These include: American Government, American History, State Geography, World Geography, and World Government. These websites incorporate thousands of source documents, guided lesson plans, and daily updates.

In early May, the Idaho legislature approved a 1.3 percent increase in K-12 education spending. The increase was funded by a one-cent increase -- to six percent -- in the State's sales tax and a substantial hike in the cigarette tax. Total State K-12 education funding will be \$999 million for the next fiscal year.

Indiana Update - May 2003

Indiana has approved a State accountability plan to meet the requirements of NCLB despite many concerns expressed by State and local education officials. The Indiana plan would raise the AYP requirements gradually over the next 12 years.

Of all special education students who graduated in 2001-2002 school year, almost 80 percent received a diploma with the remainder receiving a "certificate of completion." Two percent received Academic Honors which is the highest level of diploma given. However, to further reduce the number of students who are still failing, team teaching, differentiated instruction, and alternative remediation practices are being encouraged by the SEA. For more information contact Joe Bear at the SEA, 317/234-2130.

The Indiana State legislature has approved a biennium budget for FYs 2004 and 2005 that returns district school aid funding to its level of March 2002 when \$119 million was cut. Every district in the State will get a one percent increase in general State operating funds next year. The basic increase -- from \$5,182 per pupil to \$5,218 -- will be supplemented by special funds based on increased enrollments or participation in State programs.

Iowa Update - May 2003

The SEA, with a variety of other state agencies, has launched a literacy effort aimed at children 3-5 years old, referred to as Iowa's Every Child Reads. The overall plan calls for community engagement, public awareness, and training of research-based strategies to enhance development of language, reading and writing skills of young children. More than 135 librarians have been trained to use the literacy strategies with both young children and families. For more information contact Laura Belle Sherman-Proehl at 515/242-6018.

Iowa has adopted a number of certification requirements for aides who have to demonstrate specific competencies. Under Level 1-Generalist, 90 hours of instruction must be provided on behavior management, exceptional child and at-risk behavior, collaboration and interpersonal skills, child and youth development, technology, and ethical responsibilities and behavior. An aide who has been certified as a Level 1-Generalist can receive a Level 2-Areas of Concentration certification after taking an additional 45 hours of study in several concentration areas, including special education and LEP proficiency. With an additional 62 hours of instruction at a university or college, a candidate can be certified as Level 2-Advanced, when he or she completes an additional 100 clock hours of supervised practicum with children. The instruction can be provided through distance learning or at six community colleges throughout the State. For more information contact ssimon@kirkwood.cc.ia.us.

Kansas Update - May 2003

In early April, Kansas became the 28th state to receive its Reading First grant. The State will receive a total of more than \$41 million over the next years, with \$6.4 million to be allocated the first year. Kansas expects to conduct a subgrant competition in May; it plans to fund schools in 15 eligible school districts. Each year, the State will hold Intensive Reading Academies for teachers including four levels of training ranging from a basic understanding of scientifically-based reading research to advanced implementation of scientifically-based reading instruction and assessment.

In order to comply with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, Kansas has decided that all 680 paraprofessionals who work in Title I schools must pass a State-administered test. These aides will need a score of 455 points or higher to pass the “parapro” test created by the Educational Testing Service. It is expected that 90 percent of the aides that take the test will pass. Paraprofessionals have until January 2006 to achieve a passing grade.

The U.S. Department of Education has approved Kansas’ State Accountability Plan under the No Child Left Behind Act. This makes Kansas the eighth state to gain approval.

Kentucky Update - May 2003

In 2000, the State created the Kentucky Institute for Family Literacy to coordinate all services and funding for family literacy programs. The Institute has developed a funding formula which allocates funds to counties based upon the number of adults at the lowest two literacy levels. Using an additional \$4 million from the Department of Adult Education, the State was able to increase the number of State-funded literacy programs from 48 in 2000 to 84 in 2001 to all 120 counties by July 2002.

Confronted with a \$400 million budget shortfall, the legislature recently proposed to eliminate the entire correctional education program; however, the Governor and others were able to restore about \$3 million -- half of the previous year's budget. On April 1, the Kentucky Community and Technical College System was closed thereby releasing almost 100 full-time teachers. Several hundred students taking the GED program will likely not be prepared to pass the GED test.

In late April, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Kentucky will be the 32nd state to be approved for its Reading First grant. The State will receive \$89.2 million over the grant's six-year duration with \$13.7 million allocated in the first year. Kentucky will conduct a subgrant competition in January 2004 and expects to fund approximately 70 schools in eligible districts. The State will also conduct a series of five-day Reading Institutes for all of the State's K-3 teachers, as well as its K-12 special education teachers. These Institutes will focus on classroom reading instruction based on scientific research.

The Kentucky legislature has passed a budget for K-12 education in the 2004 fiscal year -- \$3 billion -- that represents a two percent increase over the current year. The biggest beneficiary will be formula grants to districts that will increase by 3.6 percent. On the other hand, a number of programs have been cut or delayed. The budget eliminates a \$21 million pool to provide bonuses to high-achieving schools, cuts \$4 million from the State's regional service centers to help operate the school improvement program, and delays for a year \$22 million in mathematics textbook purchasing.

As reported by the Southern Regional Education Board, Kentucky is piloting online testing for some students with disabilities. Specifically, the State is using an online version of the Kentucky Core Content Test which provides text readers.

Louisiana Update - May 2003

In mid-April, Louisiana's State Accountability Plan for the No Child Left Behind Act was approved by the U.S. Department of Education. As the eleventh state to have its plan approved, Louisiana highlighted in its plan its work in assessment and its history of educational reform.

Republican Governor Foster has introduced the voucher program which would allow low-income students in academically failing schools to use publicly-funded vouchers for payment of tuition at private schools. The amount would be equal to the per-pupil state allocation to the district which in New Orleans Parish would be about \$3,200. The proposal calls for a four-year pilot program starting in 2004-05, which would be evaluated using state assessments. According to School Reform News (May), the Orleans Archdiocese found that almost 90 percent of black respondents and 84 percent of white respondents favor proposed vouchers. However, respondents were opposed to using the state assessment; rather they favored using whatever test the nonpublic schools use for the non-voucher students. Teachers' unions in Louisiana, and particularly Orleans Parish, obviously oppose the proposal.

As reported by the Southern Regional Education Board, Louisiana's Tuition Exemption and Stipend Program for Teacher Aides and Paraprofessionals helps paraprofessionals who are employed full-time to get a four-year education degree from an instate institution. The program will pay tuition and some fees at a public university (and a commensurate amount at a private university) as long as the aide remains employed full time while pursuing the degree and agrees to teach in a public school for at least two years.

Maine Update - May 2003

According to eSchool News, a progress report prepared at midyear by the Maine Education Policy Research Institute suggests that Maine's program to give laptop computers to all of the State's seventh grade students is successful. The attitudes of both teachers and students toward the computers has been positive. Students say class work is more fun for them and teachers believe the computers expand learning opportunities. This report, after only a few months of the program, is believed to have spared the program significant budget cuts.

Maryland Update - May 2003

Last year, Maryland extended its Maryland Teacher Scholarship program to allow part-time students. Paraprofessionals are now eligible and may participate either full- or part-time. Based upon the type of institution and enrollment status, participants can receive between \$1,000 and \$5,000 per year, but must agree to serve in a school for at least one year for every year of scholarship assistance.

Montgomery County school officials identified ten elementary schools which must allow choice options for parents to have their child transferred to matched high-performing schools. Of the 6,000 students eligible for transfer this year in Montgomery County, less than 100 actually did transfer to other schools. The schools identified for improvement are Broad Acres, Burnt Mills, Gaithersburg, Harmony Hills, Highland, Kemp Mill, Rosemont, Summit Hall, Weller Road, and Wheaton Woods.

Beginning in the 2002-03 school year, Maryland students have been able to take the Maryland Functional Tests -- requirements for high school graduation -- online. In prior years, students could only take the tests at stand-alone computers.

Massachusetts Update - May 2003

A Massachusetts court has ruled that Massachusetts schools can use the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) as a high school graduation requirement for the class of 2003. This temporary ruling was in response to a lawsuit by six students claiming the MCAS violates the rights of minority, disabled, and limited-English-proficient students. Nearly half of minority and disabled had failed to pass the test at the time the complaint was filed (September 2002); but recent evidence suggests that the MCAS gap between special needs students and other students has narrowed over the past school year.

On April 28, 400 Massachusetts high school seniors were given waivers from the requirement that they pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test in order to graduate. Through the end of April, more than 900 appeals have been approved. In order to receive a waiver, a student must have come close to passing on multiple tries at the MCAS, must have had near-perfect attendance, and must have availed themselves of tutorial assistance and/or test prep programs.

On May 6, the Massachusetts House voted to allow students with disabilities to graduate from high school even if they do not pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), the State's high school exit exam. This year's seniors were supposed to represent the first class that would be required to pass the English and math portions of the MCAS to graduate. About 12 percent of the State's 61,000 seniors are students with disabilities. According to State officials, more than 70 percent of twelfth grade students with disabilities have passed the MCAS portions, a significant increase over the 30 percent just two years ago.

Michigan Update - May 2003

The Michigan SEA has finally identified 216 schools needing improvement under NCLB. Almost a year ago, Michigan identified more than 1,500 schools that were low-performing according to Michigan criteria used at that time, which is more rigorous, officials argue, than the AYP requirement in NCLB. The Michigan accountability and assessment plan submitted by the end of January has yet to be formally approved. Of the 216 identified schools, 96 were in Detroit, 18 in Flint, and 15 in Grand Rapids. The State's accountability system also uses test scores in four subject areas, unlike NCLB which only considers math and reading test scores in measuring how many students are proficient in meeting the AYP criteria. Ninety-five schools have been failing according to NCLB criteria for four consecutive years and thereby will be receiving corrective action such as replacing staff and curriculum. Democratic Governor Granholm has a plan which includes additional social services, more funding for early reading initiatives and parent education, and distance learning expansion for training and instruction..

Minnesota Update - May 2003

In response to NCLB, Minnesota has developed guidelines and instructional materials which train teachers to supervise paraprofessionals. Teri Wallace, researcher at the University of Minnesota, has identified seven competencies which are critical for supervising teachers, including:

- communicating with teacher aides;
- managing the work of the teacher aides;
- modeling for teacher aides;
- planning and scheduling;
- providing instructional support;
- carrying out public relations on behalf of aides;
- training aides.

Under NCLB not only must newly-hired aides meet the mandated high quality standards (e.g., pass a state or local test, or have at least two years of college), but they also can provide instructional support only under the direct supervision of qualified teachers. For more information go to the Minnesota Statewide Paraprofessional Consortium at <http://ici2.umn.edu/para/>.

Cuts in State funding for summer school programs are expected to reduce from 20,000 to 6,000 the number of Minneapolis students who will be able to participate in the district's summer enrichment and other classes. Minneapolis educators believe the summer programs have had a significant effect on the ability of students to pass the State's basic skills test. The cutback could endanger the graduation of some students in the Class of 2004. The Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board has established the Step Up Initiative designed to help students find summer jobs and internships in the private sector. Minneapolis' sister city, St. Paul, anticipates maintaining its summer school programs at an enrollment of 12,000 students.

Slightly over 400 Minnesota schools have been identified for improvement under the State's new accountability and assessment system, according to Commissioner Cheri Pierson Yecke. Officials in these schools will attend summer training to implement appropriate provisions affecting them. Commissioner Yecke, prior to moving back to Minnesota, was in charge of Title II/Teacher Quality programs at USED and will likely encourage districts that have schools that have been failing for two consecutive years to focus on extensive staff development beyond the 15 percent minimum budget allocation.

Minnesota's Profile of Learning have been replaced with a set of academic guidelines that focuses on stronger content knowledge. The new standards include grade-specific requirements in each of language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and the arts. The standards are subject to renewal every four years. The language arts and math standards become effective at beginning of next school year. Science and social studies standards will be considered for the following year. Districts will have the flexibility to develop their own standards in the arts.

Mississippi Update - May 2003

The Mississippi legislature has increased K-12 funding by \$142 million to a total of \$2 billion. An additional \$96 million will go to State colleges and universities.

Missouri Update - May 2003

The Governor has announced plans to cut State funding for local districts by 11 percent. Teacher layoffs can be expected if such cuts are implemented.

The State's House has passed legislation that would totally eliminate the State's SCHIP program. More than 80,000 children would lose insurance coverage.

More than ten bills related to vouchers and public school choice have been proposed in the State legislature. However, a number of groups have formed a coalition called People for Public Schools to fight such proposed legislation. In addition, teacher groups and labor and civil rights groups opposed the proposal.

In late April, the U.S. Department of Education has approved Missouri's state accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act. Missouri is the 15th state to be approved.

On May 23, Governor Bob Holden declared that he would veto the K-12 education budget passed by the legislature and would call for a special legislative session to revise the budget. The budget sent up by the legislature called for a cut of \$224 million in K-12 education spending which could have resulted in layoffs for as many as 3,000 teachers. The budget would also have dropped nearly \$9 million planned for computers and instructional software.

Nevada Update - May 2003

In early April, the U.S. Department of Education approved the Reading First Grant for Nevada making it the 28th state funded. Nevada will get \$26 million over the six years of the Grant with \$4 million allocated in the first year. The State will conduct a subgrant competition this Spring with the expectation that about 20 schools in eligible school districts will be funded. The State will conduct Nevada Reading First Academies for all K-3 teachers in the State and for all K-12 special education teachers. These academies will focus on comprehensive reading instruction based on scientific reading research.

New Hampshire Update - May 2003

Republican legislators have recently proposed to pay parents to withdraw their children from public schools as a way of reducing student enrollments, which cost approximately \$7,500 per pupil per year. Constructing new classrooms would cost an estimated \$20,000 per pupil. Parents, under the proposal, would be offered \$1,700 to withdraw their child from public school.

In early May, New Hampshire became the 31st state to receive its Reading First grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The State is scheduled to receive \$14.4 million in support over the grant's six years, with \$2.1 million approved for the first year. New Hampshire will hold a competition for subgrantees within the next two months with the expectation of funding about seven eligible schools. The State will also conduct six workshops for K-3 teachers (and K-12 special education teachers) on scientifically-based reading instruction.

New Jersey Update - May 2003

In March, all 11th grade students took the new high school proficiency assessment which is aligned to State content standards. In October 2003, students who failed either the basic math or language arts sections can retake the specific portion they failed. Students who cannot pass the formal exam may still use the special review assessment, a portfolio assessment, to get a diploma. As part of its NCLB accountability system, third grade students will be tested next year and the state plans to create tests for Grades 5 and 7 by 2005. As reported in Education Assessment Insider, SEA officials noted that all of the costs will be covered by Federal funding because the state received a 28 percent increase this year, up to a total of \$425 million across all Federal programs.

The State of New Jersey is considering a reduction in the foreign language and fine arts requirements for high school graduation. The State Board of Education has said these courses (and others including career education and technology) are important but should not be among the “core” requirements for graduation, but rather as electives.

On May 8, the U.S. Department of Education approved New Jersey’s accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act. New Jersey is the 17th state to be approved.

New Mexico Update - May 2003

On May 19, the U.S. Department of Education announced that New Mexico has become the 19th state to have its accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act approved.

For the 2004 fiscal year, New Mexico has increased spending for K-12 education by \$1.9 billion -- a 4.2 percent hike. Among the legislative actions was a proposal for a referendum this Fall on abolishing the elected State school Board and Superintendent of Schools and going to a Secretary of Education appointed by the Governor. Another bill approved by the legislature -- the Indian Education Act -- would establish a new division of the State education agency to oversee history and native languages instruction for Indian students.

New York Update - May 2003

New York City Public Schools is in the process of revamping its special education program, which serves nearly 150,000 students. The principal goals of the revised structure is to ensure that all truly disabled students receive appropriate special education services and to intervene early so that young students are not improperly placed in special education. Part of this new plan is the elimination of dual assessments -- at both school and district levels. Instead, students will be evaluated only at their schools, thus reducing paperwork and allowing teachers to devote more time to instruction. The City is planning to hire 200 specialists to train teachers to use nationally recognized Orton-Gillingham reading programs.

North Carolina Update - May 2003

North Carolina is still awaiting the results of the peer review of their assessment and accountability plan which the White House has noted is one of the state systems that most closely matches the NCLB requirements. Because the districts took the option of not including failing schools using the most current test scores, the number so-identified is relatively small and most of them are the 49 “on-watch” schools, all of whom are likely to be targeted for improvement next year. SEA officials note, however, that a major problem could be the 300-400 non-Title I schools that are failing. The State Board has to come up with a policy to determine what types of sanctions or additional resources will be provided to these schools as they are not eligible for Title I. It could be that North Carolina will end up having a two-tier accountability system. Approximately 80 percent of the Title I schools (more than 830) are Title I schoolwide programs. Officials believe that any subsequent deletion of the requirement that schoolwide programs meet the supplement not supplant requirements currently in the Law will not have any great impact. What continues to have a great impact is the Federal use of “advanced funding,” especially for rural small districts with Title I programs as they do not have the local resources to open the Title I classroom doors in September.

North Carolina has a Teacher Assistant Scholarship Loan program to help teacher assistants further their educations. Current paraprofessionals with at least one year of experience and former paraprofessionals whose positions have been eliminated with at least five years of experience may pursue either two- or four-year degrees. Teacher assistants pursuing four-year degrees can receive as much as \$3,500 per year. Those seeking associate degrees can get \$1,200 annually. Participants must continue working as paraprofessionals while working toward their degrees and must work in a North Carolina public school one year for each year they receive scholarship loan assistance.

Governor Mike Easley continues to keep K-12 education as his highest priority as he has requested additional funding for the academic pre-kindergarten program and for reducing class size at the elementary level.

Pennsylvania Update - May 2003

A budget battle has been raging in the Pennsylvania legislature as Governor Edward Rendell has cut \$4 billion from the State's K-12 education budget that he had originally proposed. In early March, the Democratic Governor proposed a budget that level-funded K-12 education expecting to add funding to the bill later in the month. The Republican legislature passed the initial budget in record time. In response, the Governor cut all State funds for K-12 education. He then restored the State's education subsidy and added a 2.5 percent increase. The legislature is now dealing with the revised proposal.

The University of Pennsylvania's University-Assisted Community School Program is the recipient of a \$100,000 youth development prize from the William T. Grant Foundation. Through this program, Penn students work with students in Philadelphia Public Schools on projects dealing with community service. Students from Penn have also developed curricula and tutored middle and high school students.

In mid-May, the Pennsylvania Department of Education approved the Commonwealth Connections Academy (CCA) as the State's first virtual charter school. Headquartered in Harrisburg, CCA will enroll students for the next school year. It will provide a free computer with an Internet connection and will offer a centralized resource center, regular online assessments, and training for both teachers and parents. CCA is to be operated by Connections Academy, Inc., a subsidiary of Sylvan Learning (www.connectionsacademy.com).

Philadelphia's Superintendent, Paul Vallas, has proposed a major overhaul of the district's high school curriculum. He has suggested the elimination of a total of more than 300 courses and reallocation of freed-up funds to more teacher training and more guidance counselors.

The Superintendent in Philadelphia has also proposed a drastic cut in the supplemental funds paid to Edison and other for-profit and non-profit organizations that operate some of the City's schools. Currently, Edison receives an additional subsidy (above basic costs) of \$881 per student. Other organizations earn somewhat less. The new plan calls for all private school

operators to receive a per-pupil subsidy of \$450 unless the state is willing to contribute funds, on unlikely prospect. The Superintendent hopes to use the money saved for overhaul of the district's high schools and to induce other groups to manage schools in Philadelphia.

Rhode Island Update - May 2003

In an attempt to comply with NCLB high quality requirements for teaching assistants, the SEA has implemented a multi-faceted approach to certifying all teacher aides in the State, estimated to be about 2,200. A similar Law was passed by the legislature in 1997. Thirty programs have been approved, many of which are operated by districts, colleges, and private agencies. The SEA is proposing to amend State standards to require teacher aide training programs to address reading, math, and writing, including readiness. To implement the training program the ETS ParaPro Assessment is being used, including website versions. The SEA has recommended ParaPro be the exclusive test to be used. The contact is peggy_hayden@ids.net.

On May 15, the U.S. Department of Education announced approval of Rhode Island's state accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act. Rhode Island is the 18th state to be approved.

South Carolina Update - May 2003

In collaboration with Clemson University, the SEA Office of Assessment has instituted a recertification credit course to assist special education teachers in understanding how to embed standards-based instruction into current practice. Participants would learn how to plan and adapt curricula to meet the needs of students with disabilities while ensuring quality through the use of South Carolina Curriculum standards as an integral part of the individualized education program. The primary focus of the training would be to develop skills among school staff in the following areas: (a) prepping special education students on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT); (b) how to administer off-grade level state assessments; and (c) how to administer PACT alternative assessments. Baseline information will be collected on teacher opinions, perspectives and perceptions. Subsequent surveys will be used to determine changes in these areas over time.

In late April, South Carolina became the 29th state to receive its Reading First grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Over the next six years, South Carolina will get a total of \$88.6 million; \$13 million will be allocated for the first year. This Spring, the State will conduct a subgrant competition for eligible districts with the expectation that schools in 36 school districts will receive support. South Carolina will conduct a series of six professional development workshops for K-3 teachers, as well as K-12 special education teachers, on how to base their instruction on research-based information.

According to the Southern Regional Education Board, South Carolina has a Teacher Loan Program in which paraprofessionals with at least three years experience may participate. Instructional assistants may borrow up to \$15,000 per year (with a maximum of \$60,000) to change careers into teaching. The loans may be forgiven (generally at the rate of \$3,000 per year) if the participant teaches in a geographic area and/or in a subject in which there is a shortage of teachers.

On May 22, the U.S. Department of Education announced that South Carolina's accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act had been approved, making it the 22nd state to be so approved.

South Dakota Update - May 2003

The South Dakota school accountability plan, under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act, is being administered by the State Department of Education. Yet to be approved by the U.S. Department of Education, the plan would establish a set of incentives and penalties for district academic performance. The legislature also aligned the State's testing program with Federal requirements by establishing testing in grades 3-8 and grade 11. The Governor's budget, calling for a \$15.1 million increase in K-12 education funding (a 4.8 percent increase), was approved by the legislature.

Tennessee Update - May 2003

The Tennessee Department of Education E-Rate office has asked the FCC to replace its current Internet service provider because the FCC has held up approval of the current service provider pending a Federal and FCC investigation. The current service provider is Education Networks of America, which (according to [eSchool News Online](#) May 1), was founded by friends of former Governor Sunquist. Approximately 70 percent of the \$106 million existing five-year contract to run the state-wide network ConnectTENN comes from the E-Rate. The State is proposing as a substitute for ENA, Bell South, currently a subcontractor to ENA. If approved, Bell South would act as a prime contractor to pay the more than 20 other subcontractors who are owed money. The action by the State is unique and is intended to serve as a stop-gap measure. According to [E-School News Online](#), over a third of ENA's employees have been laid off and ConnectTENN is operating at about 30 percent capacity. Currently ENA provides Internet service to almost 900,000 students in over 95 percent of the State's public schools.

Tennessee is planning to adopt an alternative means of demonstrating that teachers are "highly qualified" as called for by the No Child Left Behind Act. To be certified as "highly qualified," a teacher must be licensed and demonstrate subject-matter competency, generally on a rigorous test. Tennessee is proposing a voluntary alternative that would use student test scores as a measure to show teacher competence. Using an approach called "high, objective, uniform state standard of evaluation" (HOUSE), the State will extract data from the Tennessee Value Added Assessment System to measure the progress of individual students and thus isolate the impact of the teacher on student performance.

Texas Update - May 2003

Conducted two years ago, of teacher turnover in Texas districts in 1999 found that turnover cost Texas schools between \$329 million and \$1.59 billion, or about 20 percent of each leaving teachers' annual salary. The higher estimate included organization costs related to termination, recruitment and hiring, substitute salaries, learning curve loss, and training. As reported in our recent Washington Update (February 2003), a study released at the end of 2002 found that working conditions was among the top three reasons for teachers leaving the professional or at least their current job, and pointed to technology as one of the means to improve working conditions for teachers, particularly special education teachers. The Texas study conducted by the Texas Center for Education Research can be found at www.sbec.state.tx.us/SBECOnline/txbess/turnoverrpt.pdf.

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission has proposed a budget for the 2004-05 biennium that cuts Medicaid and SCHIP by 12½ percent from 2002-03. These cuts would cause about 400,000 children to lose their coverage by 2005.

Texas has revised its Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) as an informal assessment device that allows teachers to determine how well elementary students are progressing in their reading skills. The TPRI screens reading concepts at various grade levels and times of the year, including book and print awareness, phonemic awareness, graphophonemic knowledge, oral reading ability, listening, and reading comprehension. Tejas LEE is an additional reading assessment instrument that provides -- for Spanish-speaking students -- comparable assessment capabilities as the TPRI.

The Southern Regional Education Board reports that Texas' Educational Aide Exemption program helps paraprofessionals and substitute teachers further their education. Educational aides with a full year of experience and substitute teachers with 180 days of teaching (in the last five years) are eligible for tuition and fees at a four-year institution (or at a two-year college if they plan to transfer to a four-year school for an education degree). Participants must continue their employment while working toward their degrees.

The Texas B-on-Time loan program has been approved by the Texas Senate. If passed by the House and approved by the Governor, the program would provide zero-interest college loans to Texas students. The loans could be forgiven if the recipients maintain a B average and graduate on schedule.

The Texas Education Agency is conducting an audit of dropout records for the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years in the Houston Independent School District as a followup to allegations that dropout rates had been falsified. Previous studies over the last year by independent groups have also pointed to a much higher than reported dropout rates in Houston, attributing such high rates to students leaving high schools, sometimes at the prompting of teachers when such students were not likely to pass the state assessment and other exams required for graduation. According to Education Assessment Insider (May 2003), a leaked report on TEA findings thus far found more than 1,500 unreported dropouts throughout the district. If dropout rates were falsified by the district, then HISD's accountability rating by the state would have to be changed. Similar allegations have been made over the last year regarding unreported dropouts in other large Texas districts.

Utah Update - May 2003

Recent mid-year budget cuts of \$117 million managed to avoid major effects on K-12 education funding. But earlier cuts reduced the State's K-12 education budget of \$1.6 billion by \$52 million. For FY 2004, Governor Michael Leavitt has proposed a \$60 million increase for public schools but budget considerations may reduce this amount considerably.

The Utah Education Network (UEN) is a Statewide network linking all public schools and institutions of higher education in the State. UEN has recently contracted with Qwest Communications for a five-year upgrade of its network infrastructure. The upgraded network will use Qwest's high-speed GeoMax service to deliver Internet-based, bandwidth-intensive applications like distance learning. This will make more advanced classes available to high school and college students across the State.

A major piece of education legislation was passed by the Utah legislature on March 5. It includes provisions that would: (1) require students to demonstrate academic competence before moving to the next grade; (2) implement new, more rigorous graduation requirements for high school seniors; (3) establish a training system for outside professionals who wish to become certified teachers; and (4) provide more flexibility in hiring teachers. The program is to be funded over three years by a \$97 million increase in State income taxes.

Western Governors University (WGU), located in Salt Lake City is a consortium of 19 states and 40 colleges providing online instruction toward two-year, four-year, and graduate degrees as well as professional development courses for educators. Begun in 2001 with a \$10 million Star Schools grant from the U.S. Department of Education, WGU will offer certification and advanced degrees in reading, mathematics, technology, science, and English as a Second Language. WGU has received additional funding from private corporations and foundations, as well as Federal teacher education grants. WGU's Internet-based program will offer educators the flexibility to take standards-based courses on a schedule of their own choosing.

Virginia Update - May 2003

On May 7, Governor Mark Warner vetoed a bill that would have denied in-State tuition at public colleges to illegal immigrants. The bill had little practical significance because Virginia law already bars illegal immigrants from receiving public services. The Governor has proposed legislation that would allow illegal immigrants to receive in-State tuition under a number of conditions: (a) they must have graduated from a Virginia high school; (b) they must have lived in Virginia for five years; (c) they must be in the process of becoming citizens; and (d) their parents must have paid State taxes for at least three years.

The Class of 2004 is the first group of Virginia high school students who will be required to pass the State's Standards of Learning English exam in order to graduate. In the Loudoun County school district, this year's juniors will be taking the test online unless their parents opt out. By taking the exam online, students can receive their results much more promptly than will paper-and-pencil tests that would not provide results until the summer. Online testing will allow students who fail to retake the test before the end of the school year.

The Virginia legislature avoided any further budget cuts for K-12 education this year and added \$25.5 million next year to the planned increase of \$255 million over the next two years.

West Virginia Update - May 2003

The SEA is participating in a joint project of the CCSO and NASDSE to explore ways to promote greater collaboration between Title I and IDEA. The SEA Office of Special Education has also undertaken a new initiative to train school officials and, in turn, make parents of special education students aware of alternative ways to mediate differences between the two rather than going the legal route. One of the major changes in the reauthorized IDEA will be mandated mediation in certain cases with time limits on closed cases.

In early April, West Virginia became the ninth state to have its State Accountability Plan for the No Child Left Behind Act approved by the U.S. Department of Education.

Wisconsin Update - May 2003

On May 12, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Wisconsin is the 34th state to be approved for its Reading First grant. The State will receive \$74.5 million over the grant's six-year duration with \$11.1 million allocated in the first year. Wisconsin will conduct subgrant competition for eligible school districts later this Spring.

Wyoming Update - May 2003

The Wyoming legislature approved a \$121 million supplemental budget that gives an additional \$15 million to K-12 education next year -- a two percent increase. Last year education funding increased 4.7 percent. Most of the new funding (\$13 million) goes toward inflation increases and school maintenance. However, \$1.5 million will be spent to connect more schools to the Internet and \$1 million will be used to develop a Statewide computer-based tracking system for student assessments. Another program approved by the legislature is a \$2.2 million bill sponsoring studies on improving special education in small schools and establishing a task force to make Wyoming's testing program comply with Federal requirements.