

## Alabama Update - October 2003

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The Birmingham News reports that there is unlikely to be any State money this coming school year for schools to buy books or supplies (including computers and software). Last year, each teacher received \$500 for such materials. A cut of \$100 million in State K-12 funding is expected this year, with another \$200 million cut projected for next school year. Cuts are also expected in tutorial programs designed to help students pass the Alabama High School Graduation Exam.

Based upon Governor Riley's proposed budget, Alabama public schools can expect to see a significant cut in State funding next year. The State has two principal sources of funds for education: the General fund which will spend \$1.2 billion (a decrease of \$67 million from last year), and the Education Trust fund which will spend \$4.2 billion (a decrease of \$10 million from last year). According to The Birmingham News, further shifting of money will be required to pay for increased staff health insurance costs (\$100 million) and higher pension costs (\$46 million). This will result in significant reductions in spending for textbooks (\$42 million), classroom supplies (\$10 million), and school technology (\$8 million).

A school improvement grant received from USED addresses four broad areas, including team skills; student engagement; student behavior and discipline; and recruitment, detention and ongoing professional development. One of the school improvement grant initiatives is training classroom teachers -- including those dealing with special education students -- in increased student engagement which is called the "Make Sense Strategic" (MSS) instruction, developed by Professor Ed Alice, University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa. These schools are currently involved in pilot programs and each receives a percent of the MSS software free.

Alabama needs to cut between \$140 million and \$190 million in public school spending. According to Education Daily, the State education agency is considering a number of cost-saving options including reducing the school day to six hours and eliminating or charging student fees for academic electives and extracurricular activities. The State may also choose to lower

standards on the State high school graduation test. This shift would be accompanied by the elimination of the “High Hopes” program which offers remediation for students having difficulty passing the graduation exam.

## **Alaska Update - October 2003**

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In mid-September, Alaska received its Reading First grant. The State will receive \$14.4 million over the next six years, with \$2.1 million flowing to the State this school year. Alaska will devote \$1.7 million of this year's funds to subgrants for about 14 schools in eligible districts with funds allocated next Spring. The State will also conduct Beginning Reading Institutes for K-3 teachers and other staff.

Only 16 percent of the K-12 classes in Alaska are taught by "highly-qualified" teachers, the lowest rate in the country by far. Alaska officials question this percentage because the State definition of highly-qualified teacher has not been approved by USED. By 2006, every core subject teacher in the State must be rated as highly qualified.

## Arizona Update - October 2003

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A result of a unanimous vote by the State Board of Education in mid-September, the State has revised the rating scale to identify Arizona schools from “excelling” down to “underperforming.” Last year, 276 of 1,271 ranked schools were rated as underperforming; the new rankings have fewer than 200. The ratings are based on Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) test and the Stanford 9. The SEA intends to send teams of experts to each underperforming school to review instructional methods and budgets and to recommend ways the schools can improve.

Education Daily reports that more than a quarter of the schools in Arizona failed to meet Federal achievement standards. About 28 percent (444) of Arizona’s schools did not reach the student achievement goals set by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Under the less rigorous State accountability rating system, only 150 schools were classified as “underperforming.” The State also released a list of 110 Title I schools that did not meet adequate yearly progress for the second consecutive year and are subject to Federal sanctions. The State Superintendent, Tom Horne, criticized the NCLB accountability system, arguing that the State accountability system is a far more accurate measure of school performance.

A hotbed of charter school activity, Arizona has approved a rigorous new system to monitor the State’s nearly 500 charter schools and to stiffen requirements for opening new charter schools. The new system, developed by the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools, will require yearly independent audits and will enforce appropriate sanctions up to and including school closure. The Board will hire independent consultants to conduct in-depth inquiries into companies and individuals seeking to open new charter schools.

Arizona students currently take two assessment exams: the State’s content-based exam, Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) and the nationally-normed Stanford-9. Education Daily reports that the State will merge the two exams so that nationwide comparisons can be made. State Superintendent Tom Horne has proposed the change to reduce the amount of time students spend in testing and to save as much as \$1 million annually.

## Arkansas Update - October 2003

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The Northwest and Western Regional Education Cooperatives initiated a new teacher training initiative, referred to as “No Teacher Left Behind: Entering a New Era in Special Education.” In addition to traditional teacher training foci, additional components include behavioral interventions, extended school year, alternative portfolio assessments, Medicaid reimbursements, prereferral interventions, test interpretations, and differentiated instruction. For more information about the initiative, contact Becky Balavic at 479-632-4791.

Under a new proposal from Governor Huckabee, the “Leadership for Education Accountability Reform Now” (LEARN) plan would require districts with fewer than 425 students, who fail to meet State academic and teacher salary goals by July of next year, to be dissolved or merged with other districts. The previous proposal was applicable to districts with fewer than 1,500 students. However, resistance to consolidation forced the Governor to reduce the number of districts which could be sanctioned. The Governor has called for a special legislative session on December 8 to come up with an alternative school funding system by January 1, 2004, as the result of a court order released last November.

## California Update - October 2003

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Education Week reports that last-minute budget maneuvering this summer averted a major crisis for California's K-12 schools. Before the recall, Governor Gray Davis, working with the legislature, reduced a potential \$38 billion deficit to \$8 billion through program cuts, bonds and accounting gimmicks. As a result, K-12 education was cut only \$300 million to \$41.3 billion for the current school year. Because of enrollment increases across the State, the budget reduced per-pupil spending to \$6,900 -- a 2.5 percent reduction.

Over the past few years, kindergarten requirements for California's early learners have become more and more rigorous. Rather than play and socializing, children are expected to develop an academic background for first grade, including reading, writing, and arithmetic. Some parents have expressed concern over this effort to introduce academics into kindergarten, claiming it places too much pressure on young children.

Incoming Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger intends to retain much of the education priorities of his two predecessors. According to the Association Press, Schwarzenegger has promised not to cut school funds. He does, however, favor two initiatives that the State Legislature has rejected in the past. He wants to repeal a law that requires school districts to prove outsourcing will save money and will not undercut district pay scales. He also wants to turn California's nearly 100 "categorical" education programs into block grants to give districts greater spending flexibility.

A State Appeals Court recently ruled that the Sequoia Union High School district in Redwood City, California, must provide facility space to a conversion charter school for those students who would otherwise attend the specific school in that district. A large percentage of charter schools in California are conversion schools and a recent study (see Washington Update) by the Brown Center at the Brookings Institute found that, when one controls for demographic variables, conversion charter schools have shown the greatest achievement gains compared with start-up charter schools and regular schools within a state.

## Colorado Update - October 2003

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The Denver School Board has approved 67 new applications from private schools seeking to participate in Colorado's new voucher program. The Rocky Mountain News reports that the new applicants and the three already approved will offer nearly 2,500 private school slots for district students starting in the Fall of 2004. Of the total of 82 applications, at least 53 had a religious affiliation.

The Colorado Department of Education has initiated the Positive Behavior Support project. George Sugai and Ann Todd of the Center for Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support, University of Oregon, will be training building-level teams. The primary districts participating in this initiative are Commerce City and Harrison which have been conducting pilot programs since last year. The primary focus of the University of Oregon-directed training is reading and other coaches within these two districts. Preliminary evidence indicates that more teachers spend less time responding to problem behaviors and more time teaching; data suggests a correlation between decreased office referrals and increased state assessment scores. The contact is Jackie Borock at 303/866-6694.

The Legislature has approved a \$4.3 billion K-12 budget which will result in a 6.6 percent increase in per-pupil expenditures over the last year. The Legislature also approved a pilot program which will allow districts to provide vouchers to parents of at-risk students who wish to have them attend private schools. On other hand, the Legislature reduced the line item for purchasing new textbooks by \$15 million and reduced bonus grants that would have been given to districts to the tune of \$150,000. Also the Legislature reduced the pre-school program by 2,000 slots and zero funded a \$4 million program to help low-performing districts pay for teacher bonuses. In spite of the cuts in state funds, local funds continue to increase as the result of Amendment 23, passed in 2000, which requires K-12 per-pupil spending to increase at a rate of inflation plus one percent over the next eight years.

## Connecticut Update - October 2003

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In recent months, 38 Connecticut school districts have been warned about disproportionate classification of minority students as mentally retarded. The State has, as a follow-up to the warnings, provided State-funded training and extensive monitoring. In addition, districts are eligible for grants of up to \$50,000 if they develop an action plan for improving their special education classification mechanism.

Two Connecticut school districts have rejected Federal Title I funds rather than comply with the accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Cheshire and Somers -- both affluent towns with small pockets of poverty -- turned down the grants of \$80,000 and \$45,000, respectively. Neither district had any schools on the State's list of schools that failed to make "adequate yearly progress" under NCLB.

## **District of Columbia Update - October 2003**

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On June 9, the U.S. Department of Education announced that the District of Columbia had become the 34<sup>th</sup> state or territory to gain approval for its accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act.

On October 10, the U.S. Department of Education announced that the District will receive \$14.4 in Reading First funds over the next six years with \$4.7 allocated for the first year. D.C. plans to allocate the bulk of the funds to eligible schools in January 2004. The City will train all K-3 teachers, reading teachers, and reading administrators using the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS).

## Florida Update - October 2003

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The number of schools identified for improvement under No Child Left Behind for having failed at least two consecutive years continues to change. Earlier, local press in Miami reported that 2,600 schools were failing, while later SEA officials indicated between 35 and 49 were identified for improvement based upon the most recent FCAT scores. As reported in the St. Petersburg Times (September 17), after SEA recalculations now almost 60 schools would fall under the parental choice transportation sanctions, while other schools, initially identified, were taken off the list. Approximately 325 schools had their status changed based upon SEA recalculations. During an SEA meeting involving all Title I directors during the week of September 8, high-level SEA officials, including Secretary Horne, reassured Title I directors that only a very limited number of schools would be identified for improvement. Attendees who we interviewed stated that SEA officials responsible for Title I responsibilities clearly indicated their lack of knowledge about the Law and were circumspect in fielding hard questions. Last year, when the final Title I allocation to Florida was found to be almost \$40 million less than preliminary allocations (which were based upon data submitted by the SEA Title I office), all of the SEA officials in that office were relieved of their duty.

Florida's plan to enable high school students to graduate early has met opposition from higher education officials. In an effort to cut the costs of K-12 education, the Florida education department has established a program, which becomes effective this school year, to allow high school juniors to graduate with 18 -- rather than the traditional 24 -- credits. Participants in this plan must still take four credits and must pass the tenth-grade Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. College faculty have expressed concern that these students will not be adequately prepared -- academically or socially - for college.

The Florida State pension fund has made an offer to purchase Edison Schools, Inc., the for-profit company that manages more than 120 public schools across the country. Education Daily reports that the offer was for about \$174 million in pension funds to purchase the firm. State employee unions in Florida -- particularly those representing public school staff -- are vigorously

protesting the potential acquisition.

Florida's newest voucher program, the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program, allows corporations to forgo paying their State income taxes if they donate an equal amount to a scholarship funding organization that pays private school tuition for low-income students. The St. Petersburg Times reports several recent problems with the \$88 million program, including duplicate vouchers for some children and missing funds from one scholarship provider. The State's Education Commissioner, James Horne, has made a series of recommendations to improve the program, including requiring participating private schools to administer standardized tests to voucher students and reporting aggregated results to a "third-party research entity." The Commissioner would also prohibit scholarship funding organizations from operating a school that participates in the program. He has also appointed a new director for the voucher program.

The Orlando Sentinel reports that the class size amendment passed last November will cost the State nearly \$1 billion in the first two years. The amendment limits class sizes -- to 18 in pre-kindergarten through third grade, 22 in grades four through eight, and 25 in high school -- by 2010. Current budgets call for \$517 million to be spent on the initiative this school year and \$468 million next year. These amounts include only operating costs and do not address the requirement to build more classrooms. Many State Board members argue that the resources needed for class size reduction could be better used in other ways to benefit Florida's students.

Earlier this year, Florida made the decision to "outsource" the management of the Florida Information Resource Network (FIRN) to a private firm (Hayes E-Government Resources, Inc.). In awarding the two-year contract, the State apparently failed to apply "best price" criteria and, as a consequence, \$7.6 million in Federal E-rate funding for FIRN has been withdrawn. This represents nearly 60 percent of FIRN's operating funds. Florida officials say they used "best value" rather than "best price" to evaluate contract proposals. The State has filed an appeal to USAC (the E-rate governing body) and is providing emergency funding to operate FIRN while the appeal is being heard.

On October 23, the Florida Legislature unanimously approved a \$98 million public school funding package; \$38 million of which will go to the State's 67 K-12 school districts. The \$38 million will be drawn from a surplus in Florida's corporate voucher program; fewer students than expected enrolled in private schools.

## Georgia Update - October 2003

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The Georgia pre-K program, which now serves more than 65,000 students, is under pressure for the first time in a decade to reduce services. The full-day program is open to any four-year-old child and has been supported over the last decade with approximately \$2 billion of state lottery funds. The lottery also funds the Hope Scholarship program, which provides a scholarship to any student with a B average, is also under pressure to reduce State lottery funding. According to Education Week (September 24), Republican Governor Perdue is hoping that Head Start funds can be commingled with State pre-K funds. This will likely result in an overall reduction of funds for pre-K programs, including Head Start.

Many schools in Georgia (and in other states as well) are having difficulty meeting the requirement in the No Child Left Behind Act that children with disabilities show academic progress like other students. Many parents of special needs students believe NCLB will force schools to provide better educational services for their children -- particularly those who have more severe disabilities (e.g., autism). Other such parents are worried that schools may shunt these students into alternative programs to avoid counting them against the school's AYP requirement.

The Atlanta Journal Constitution reports that a legal battle is brewing over the pending requirement that high school students obtain a minimum SAT score in order to receive a HOPE scholarship. Paralleling a similar issue in Florida, civil rights groups are threatening lawsuits which could put at risk the State's Federal funding. Governor Perdue wants the requirement added to provide incentives for students to do better on the SATs (Georgia ranks 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation in average SAT scores). Civil rights advocates believe the requirement will disproportionately disqualify minorities from the HOPE scholarships.

The University of Georgia System has received a \$34.6 million grant from the National Science foundation to improve mathematics and science instruction in the State. As reported in Education Technology News, the program -- called PRISM (Partnership for Reform in Science and Mathematics) will fund professional development for teachers, developing more rigorous

curricula, and creating P-16 learning communities. The Atlanta Journal Constitution reports that, under the grant, seven state colleges and universities will work with K-12 schools in all four of the State's regions to improve math and science curriculum and to enhance training for math and science teachers. In the northeast portion of the State, the University of Georgia provides faculty and students for K-12 classrooms. In Atlanta, Georgia Tech and Georgia State universities will provide such support. The contact at the University is Arlethia Perry- Johnson (404/656-2318).

In mid-September, the United States Department of Education announced that Georgia would be receiving its Reading First grant of \$180 million over the next six years. A total of \$51 million will be allocated for the first year, consisting of all of the State's FY 2002 award and 80 percent of its FY 2003 award. Georgia will use about \$40.8 million of the \$51 million allocation to make subgrants to schools in eligible school districts. These subgrants will be used by the schools to implement research-based reading programs for young children and to provide appropriate professional development for their teachers.

The Georgia policy of paying bonuses to teachers who earn national board certification is putting a strain on the State's already stretched budget. As reported in the Atlanta Journal Constitution, the program of paying annual ten percent bonuses to these teachers cost the State \$100,000 in FY 2000; it is projected to cost \$15.6 million next year. The soaring costs of the program and the continuing budget crisis are causing legislators to consider whether the bonuses are, in fact, improving education in the State. Governor Perdue and the State Department of Education are planning on conducting a review of the program this Fall.

## **Hawaii Update - October 2003**

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On May 29, the U.S. Department of Education approved Hawaii's accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act. Hawaii is the 24<sup>th</sup> state to be approved.

Hawaii is looking at a budget shortfall of \$152 million in the FY 2004-05 biennium. Among the K-12 education areas to be affected may be new positions for school safety managers, higher fees for after-school programs, and reductions in staff positions.

Based upon Hawaii's first Statewide assessment under the No Child Left Behind Act, 180 out of 280 schools in the State failed to meet adequate yearly progress. A total of 88 schools have been failing for two years and are required to offer parents a transfer option. Another 46 schools are considered failing for three or more years and may be faced with corrective action.

## Illinois Update - October 2003

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The After School Matters program, designed for high school students who serve apprenticeships, will receive an additional \$8 million which boosts the budget to \$17 million. Approximately 14,000 high school students will participate this school year. Under the program, students are paid stipends and must develop products related to their field of study, which includes technology.

A total of 223 school districts in Illinois will receive more than \$5.5 million in grant funds through the State's Technology for Success Program. The funds are coming from the "Closing the Gap" technology grant initiative. Grant funds may be used to purchase hardware, software, supplies and online resources, as well as professional development for teachers. The list of districts receiving grants can be accessed at: [www.isbe.net/news/2003/close\\_gap\\_recipients03.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/news/2003/close_gap_recipients03.pdf).

A total of 133,000 low-income students in Chicago were offered free, after-school tutoring in reading and mathematics; only 11 percent actually enrolled. District officials have been criticized for not informing parents adequately about the remedial services or helping them sign their children up.

Based upon last year's assessment results, 270,000 students in Chicago's public schools were eligible to transfer schools under the "choice" provisions of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. About seven percent of these (19,000) actually applied for transfers, but the district was only allowing 1,035 slots for students in 38 high-performing schools. Last year, only 1,200 Chicago students out of 29,000 who applied were able to transfer.

## Indiana Update - October 2003

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As reported in the Indianapolis Star, the State is considering a plan to reduce dropout rates as part of a large education reform package. Entitled “Indiana’s P-16 Plan for Improving Student Achievement,” the program will require students to stay in school through age 18. The budget for the initiative has yet to be determined. Final recommendations on the plan are expected to be made by the Indiana Education Roundtable at the end of October.

The Wilson Service Center in Charlestown, a provider of support for schools and school districts in 12 Indiana counties, has received a \$500,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development program to provide distance learning equipment to the schools. Fourteen elementary schools will receive desktop video-conferencing units and 22 middle schools will get mobile video-conferencing units.

The Indiana Department of Education has developed a new alternative assessment for students with severe cognitive disabilities and limited English proficient students who are unable to participate in statewide testing for education progress (ISTEP +). The Indiana Standard Tool for Alternative Reporting (ISTAR), is web-based and can be taken at different grade levels and is adaptable to students with various learning needs and disabilities. ISTAR is the only alternative assessment recognized by the Indiana Department of Education for the purpose of NCLB compliance and calculating AYP. Most students taking ISTAR will be working toward a certification of completion rather than a regular high school diploma. In addition to being an assessment tool, ISTAR also facilitates a range of classroom management tools such as State standards alignment; IEP development, and standards-based lesson design. All participating school sites must have at least one computer with Internet access to participate in the Student Test Number System and teachers who administer ISTAR also have access to video streaming, instructional materials, and webcasting for interactive training, particularly for coaches.

## Iowa Update - October 2003

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Earlier this year, the legislature cut \$20 million from the State's area education agencies budget and eliminated a \$10 million fund for teacher training. AEAs provide significant amounts of teacher training throughout the State and also take a lead role in facilitating large group discount purchases of technology and related programs. Teacher training is part of the two-year old initiative which was designed to pay teachers based upon performance. About \$44 million was earmarked this year; however, in neither year has the "paid for performance funds" been allocated to appropriate schools and teachers. With an anticipated \$400 million shortfall for K-12, it is likely that the "paid for performance" initiative will once again not be implemented next year.

The Iowa Communications Network is offering classes -- using video-conferencing -- to foreign language and upper-level mathematics teachers in rural areas of the State. Manning High School provides the instruction, which is conducted by highly-qualified teachers.

## Kentucky Update - October 2003

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A group of school districts in Kentucky has filed suit against the State for its funding of public education. According to Education Daily, 164 districts has asked the Court to require the State to add to the basic funding formula because the State has failed to meet its Constitutional “responsibility to provide an adequate and equitable education for all students in Kentucky.” In the past decade, State support for public education has dropped from 48 percent to 41 percent of the State’s budget. The suit charges that, in spite of this lowered funding, the Governor has cut taxes making it impossible to educate students properly.

A recent report from Kentucky’s human rights commission has highlighted the continuing achievement gap of more than 20 percentage points between white students and minority students as well as those with special needs. According to Education Week, a September report, entitled “Ensuring Education Equality,” faults the State for not having a comprehensive plan to reduce the achievement gap.

## Louisiana Update - October 2003

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K-12 funding for the new fiscal year has been reduced from \$2.69 billion to \$2.59 billion. On October 4, voters voted to support the Governor's proposal to establish a "recovery" school district run by the State Board of Education to operate failing schools which had been designated as academically unacceptable for at least four years. The plan was opposed by the Louisiana School Boards Association and the Louisiana Federation of Teachers. The budget recently passed by the legislature includes \$5 million for bonuses to be provided to schools that show the greatest growth in achievement scores and almost \$5 million for distinguished educator's programs.

While over 30,000 students in New Orleans Parish schools were eligible to be transferred from schools identified for improvement, fewer than 500 are expected to go to higher-performing schools. Almost twice that number of parents wanted to have their students transferred but they were denied because of inadequate capacity in high-performing schools. Situations such as this one in Orleans Parish, provide firms good opportunities to work with high performing schools which are to become approved supplemental service providers and which provide tutoring to children who remain in failing schools through online services or in afterschool environments.

## Maine Update - October 2003

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In mid-September, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Maine would be receiving its Reading First grant of \$19.9 million over the next six years, with \$2.2 million allocated for the first year. The State plans to use about \$2 million of the first year's allocation to make subgrant awards to about 12 schools in eligible school districts. Also, Maine will conduct a 16-session course on Reading First for K-3 teachers, K-12 special educators, literacy specialists, and literacy support staff. The course will focus on scientifically-based strategies for reading instruction.

This Fall, Maine has continued its laptop program, providing Apple iBooks to all eighth-graders in the State in addition to the seventh graders who got the laptops last year. Funded at \$37.2 million, the laptop program has provided computers to 33,000 students and 3,000 teachers in 240 schools. However, faced with a large budget deficit, the State has heard from many critics who claim that the technology is not helping students perform better in the classroom.

## Maryland Update - October 2003

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Education Daily (August 29) reports that Maryland's new High School Assessment (HSA) tests - the replacement for the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program which did not meet NCLB requirements -- would result in about half of the current students in the State failing. The State also determined that no more than a third of the State's disabled students would have passed the new assessments in grades 3,5, and 8.

End-of-course examinations for high school students in English, Algebra, Biology, and Government produced dismaying results for State officials. Fully half of all students failed under standards approved by the State Board of Education, causing the Board to delay making the tests a graduation requirement. The results show that, in each subject, approximately half (e.g., 45 percent in English, 57 percent in government) of the State's students pass. The test results had particularly strong impact on special needs students. For example:

- 91 percent of students with disabilities failed the English test;
- three-quarters of African-American students failed the Algebra test;
- 70 percent of low-income students failed the Biology test.

As a result, State Superintendent Nancy Grasmick has recommended that the graduation requirement be pushed back two years -- the Class of 2009.

In early September, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Maryland would receive its Reading First grant of \$65.8 over the next six years with \$20 allocated for the first year. Most of the first-year allocation will be awarded to approximately 40 schools in eligible school districts. Maryland will also conduct a series of four-day "Institutes on Beginning Reading" for K-3 teachers, ESL teachers, special education teachers, and principals. These institutes will provide in-depth training in the five essential components of reading instruction as well as valid and reliable reading assessment.

The conflict between the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and the Law requiring accommodations for students with disabilities came to a head in Maryland. The Washington Post reports that thirty elementary schools failed to meet Federal NCLB standards

because they provided assistance to children with disabilities or limited English proficiency. The issue arose in March when, in one test section, adults read test questions to LEP students and students with disabilities, as is standard procedure. Following national scoring rules, however, the students' scores on the test were invalidated and schools were allocated the lowest possible student scores under NCLB. More than half of the schools affected are in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. State Superintendent Nancy Grasmick has expressed deep concern over the conflicting laws that could impose a heavy burden on schools that are identified for improvement because of the conflict.

As reported in the Washington Post, school districts in Maryland are seeking to eliminate the State mandate that requires districts to provide all-day kindergarten for every five-year-old by 2007. A proposed approach would require schools serving large numbers of poor children to meet the deadline, but most affluent communities would have flexibility as to whether and when they would move from half-day to full-day classes. It is estimated that as much as \$24 million could be saved by the schools through this plan.

Baltimore City is the only school district in Maryland that has been identified as failing to meet adequate yearly progress for at least three years and is, therefore, subject to "corrective action." State Superintendent Grasmick has identified a series of reforms that the school district must begin implementing this year at a cost of more than \$1 million. The first step is an indepth audit of the City's curriculum to ensure that it is in accordance with the State standards -- \$300,000. Professional development to ensure that all City teachers are "highly qualified" by 2006 could cost \$150,000 in the first year. Establishment of a cluster of low-performing high schools reporting directly to the district superintendent would cost approximately \$475,000. These outlays will require significant restructuring of the district's budget.

Within special education students, the middle school subgroup scored far below their peers on both the Statewide functional tests required for graduation and on school performance assessments in reading, language arts, language usage, and writing. The Board recently made the following recommendations to target the State's middle schools, including:

- upgrading instruction, particularly academics;
- revamping teacher prep programs;
- requiring middle schools to use the most current research-based approaches related to adolescent development and learning.

Maryland is one of 18 states which received a State improvement grant in 1999 for more than \$5.5 million over five years. The Maryland SEA received approval to redirect \$200,000 to a middle school demonstration project. This project uses the research-based teaching techniques, including the strategic instruction model, created by the Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas. For more information, contact Doris Williams, MSDE Project Consultant at the SEA, Division of Special Education, Early Intervention Services, at 410/767-0839.

## Massachusetts Update - October 2003

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According to knowledgeable Title I sources, the Massachusetts Department of Education will continue identifying schools for improvement last school year for this coming school year. Current plans are not to identify any new schools who failed to meet AYP for the second consecutive year during the 2002-2003 school year. Final analysis of test scores may change the picture.

As of October 1, about 95 percent of the Class of 2003 have passed the State's high school graduation exam (MCAS) after five retests. This still leaves 3,300 of last year's seniors who have not passed the MCAS. The pass rates for demographic subgroups are as follows: white students - 97%; Asian students - 95%; African-American students - 86%; Hispanic students - 83%. Moreover, 82 percent of limited-English-proficient students and 80 percent of disabled seniors have passed the MCAS. Seniors are allowed to take the MCAS as often as they wish in order to earn a diploma. Also, as reported by Education Daily, 89 percent of this year's Class of 2004 have passed after two retests. The State Legislature is considering a bill that would make it easier for students with disabilities to appeal their failing scores on the MCAS.

Improvement in skills and knowledge of mathematics teachers will be achieved through a series of training initiatives rather than imposing a controversial competency exam on teachers. Education Week reports that State Superintendent David Driscoll, formerly an advocate of the competency test, now supports the plan to use Federal funds to provide math courses for Massachusetts teachers, to develop a CD-ROM for teachers covering the State's math standards, and to develop an optional self-diagnostic test that would allow teachers to assess their own skills online.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has contributed \$13.6 million to Boston Public Schools for the creation of five new small high schools and enhancement of 14 others. Payable over four years, the grant will help fund teacher training, linkages between schools and internships in the community, and development of schools-within-schools. The effort will break many large high school campuses into independent schools with particular areas of specialty and will create small

“academies” in many high schools to focus on special populations or subject areas.

In 2000, the Massachusetts Legislature approved a law that would require the State to reimburse school districts for 75 percent of the cost of educating special education students whose annual costs exceed \$29,000 -- generally the most severely disabled students. These costs often included specialized private residential or day schools. Education Daily reports that, in October, State education officials informed the districts that the State would be able to reimburse approximately 27 percent of these costs with the remainder of the costs the responsibility of the school districts. Needless to say, this added burden on already strapped school systems has created an uproar.

## Michigan Update - October 2003

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A compromise agreement between Democrat Governor Jennifer Granholm and the Republican-controlled legislature could increase the number of charter schools in the state over the next ten years by 150. To make up for revenue shortfalls due to declining enrollments in public schools (i.e., students going to charter schools), \$15 million would be earmarked to cushion the funding reduction in these public schools.

Through the middle of September, schools across Michigan had still not received final scores for State tests taken by students in the Spring. Education Week reports that results of the Michigan Educational Assessment tests (MEAP) -- about 600,000 students -- were supposed to be reported in May. Results for fourth, fifth, seventh, and eighth grade students are supposed to inform instruction for the new school year. The scoring delay left hanging a number of students for whom college scholarships are dependent on the MEAP tests.

A number of school districts within the State are hesitant about participating in the Governor's \$39 million effort to give every sixth grader across the State a laptop computer. A number of districts, including Detroit, Livonia, Warren, among others, have expressed concern about the hidden costs which could be as high as \$25 per student. In addition, software licenses, insurance, printing services and other costs may also be incurred according to e School News (October 16). Many of these districts remember the computer initiative in the mid-1990s where the Governor convinced the legislature to appropriate the initial funding for a three year effort to provide computers in virtually all classrooms. However, during the second year after the computers were purchased, the legislature did not appropriate any money leaving the payment burden squarely on the districts. In addition to the Governor's initiative, the Gates Foundation has provided approximately \$6 million to provide Palm 505 hand-held computers in the offices of 4,000 school superintendents and principals. Several years ago, former Governor Engler also initiated a \$110 million initiative to place laptop computers in the hands of all teachers in the state.

The Associated Press reports that a major gift to Detroit Public Schools offered by a local businessman has been withdrawn because of protests from the District's teachers union. Robert

Thompson had planned on donating -- through his foundation -- \$200 million to create fifteen new charter high schools in the City. The legislation enabling the establishment of 150 charter schools was passed by the State legislature in early September and became Law by the end of September.

## Minnesota Update - October 2003

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As reported in Education Week (September 3, 2003), USED has withheld slightly over \$100,000 in NCLB funding to the Minnesota SEA as it opted not to use the results of state assessments for middle and high school students to meet the Federal reporting requirements. Instead, it administered testing only in the third and fifth grades. By the middle of September, almost 150 schools at the elementary level had failed to meet AYP.

The Minnesota Department of Education has selected Harcourt Education Measurement to conduct its state assessment for reading and math for grades 4, 6, and 8.

Governor Tim Pawlenty recently announced an initiative involving several projects to assess the impact, rewards and financial incentives to teachers based upon student performance. One initiative would create “super” teachers in five schools. Principals would have overriding authority and decision-making and would not be bound by normal union contracts and tenure rules. Teachers could receive bonuses of between \$20,000-\$40,000 based upon their performance in student achievement. The estimated cost would be \$2.5 million in new funding annually. The Governor’s plan is designed to attract high-quality teachers to work in low-performing schools and to attract individuals who received their teacher certification through alternative certification routes.

In seven pilot schools, existing teachers would be paid bonuses based upon student achievement. They would have access to a newly-created online database of lesson plans for teachers and to have services of mentors available to them. In five other schools, an alternative compensation initiative is underway. This initiative, which will be evaluated for relative effectiveness, is designed to reduce, in many cases, the achievement gap between “colored” and “non-colored” students. As Commissioner Yecke noted during the ELC Conference (see September Washington Update), the achievement gap in Minnesota is greater than that in any other state.

In mid-September, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Minnesota would receive its Reading First grant of \$59.1 million over the next six years. A total of \$17.3 million will be

allocated for the first year -- all of the State's FY 2002 award and 80 percent of its FY 2003 grant. Minnesota will use about half of its \$17.3 million allocation to award subgrants to about 20 schools in eligible school districts in March 2004. The State will also conduct Minnesota Reading Academies for all K-3 teachers and K-12 special education teachers.

## **Missouri Update - October 2003**

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In mid-September, the United States Department of Education announced that Missouri would be receiving its Reading First grant of \$108 million over the next six years. A total of \$29.2 million will be allocated for the first year, consisting of all of the State's FY 2002 award and 80 percent of its FY 2003 award. Missouri will use most of the allocation to make subgrants to schools in eligible school districts. These subgrants will be used by the schools to implement research-based reading programs for young children and to provide appropriate professional development for their teachers.

The late approval of the Missouri Reading First application and receipt of almost two years of funding will likely result in relatively more products being purchased vs. reading coaches being hired during the next school year.

## **Montana Update - October 2003**

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Science instruction in rural areas of Montana, as well as in the seven Native American Reservations, is being provided by the JASON Foundation for Education. JASON's comprehensive curriculum, provided through cable, video-conferencing and the Internet, presents science instruction through real time, interactive research expeditions worldwide.

## Nebraska Update - October 2003

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K-12 schools will receive a 3.6 percent or \$63 million reduction in State aid compared to the last biennium. School districts have been approved to add five cents in property taxing authority to \$1.05 for every \$100 valuation. The three percent cut is less than the 9 percent opposed by Governor Johanns.

In late September, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Nebraska would receive its Reading first grant of \$23.8 million over the next six years. A total of \$6.2 million will be allocated for the first year consisting of all of the State's FY 2002 award and 80 percent of its FY 2003 grant. The bulk of the \$6.2 million allocation will be given in the form of subgrants to schools in eligible districts, probably in November 2003. The State will also conduct three-day Teacher Training Institutes addressing research-based reading instruction and will provide additional training for reading coaches, lead teachers, and building administrators.

## **Nevada Update - October 2003**

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The Las Vegas Sun reports that, as of October 2, more than half of Nevada's public schools failed to make "adequate yearly progress" under NCLB requirements. More than 250 (100 in Clark County) of the State's 517 schools have been put on a "watch" list. After school districts have the opportunity to appeal their ratings, a final list will be published. A total of 21 Title I schools (including nine in Clark County) have been identified as needing improvement. Concern has been expressed by local politicians about the SEAs reluctance to release the names of the identified schools.

## **New Hampshire Update - October 2003**

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Education Week reports that seventh graders in five school districts in New Hampshire will be given laptop computers as part of a project patterned after the more extensive laptop program in neighboring Maine. Approximately \$1.2 million has been contributed for the laptop program by business donors in the State. Nineteen districts will be competing for the five district slots in the program. No decision has yet been made as to whether students will be permitted to take their computers home with them.

The State Board of Education has approved a resolution requiring Statewide public kindergarten probably by 2007. Although most New Hampshire districts already have public kindergarten, at least 18 school districts in the State do not.

## **New Jersey Update - October 2003**

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A Federal court in New Jersey has ruled that, by accepting Federal IDEA funds, the State (and districts and schools) waives its right to “sovereign immunity” and can, therefore, be sued for IDEA violations. Education Daily reports that the judgment was based upon a suit filed on behalf of six Newark children whom never received special education evaluations or whom received services only after “years of neglect by local education agencies and the state.”

As the result of several recent decisions issued by administrative law judges, the New Jersey Department of Education will have to allocate approximately \$80 million in additional State aid to 17 of the State’s neediest school districts. Nineteen of the so-called Abbott districts appealed the SEA plan to cut \$27 million from their aid request because of alleged misuse of funds. These Abbott districts have been receiving collectively about \$250 million more of State aid than other districts for the last several years and recently those Abbott districts with failing schools were given greater flexibility in selecting what types of effective Title I programs they wish to use.

## New Mexico Update - October 2003

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On September 23, voters approved a proposition which would allow the Governor to appoint a State Secretary of Education and to make the State Board of Education an advisory group.

In a September vote, New Mexico voters barely passed a Constitutional amendment setting aside more funding for education. The amendment authorizes earmarking more royalty money from the State's Land Grant Permanent fund for schools. According to Education Daily, New Mexico's permanent school fund is currently at \$6.8 billion; under the new amendment, funding will increase to \$14.5 billion over the next 12 years. In the short term, \$14 million in new funding will be available to the schools. The additional funds are expected to be used for higher teacher salaries, recruitment of more qualified teachers, and other priorities.

New Mexico State University has seen a dramatic increase in the number of students enrolled in its distance learning courses. Education Technology News reports that distance learning enrollment has gone from 373 last year to 855 this Fall. University officials believe the jump is attributable to the range and comprehensiveness of the programs offered online. NMSU's contact for distance learning is Carmen Gonzales (505/646-4692).

School districts in New Mexico are using personal digital assistants to help manage reading instruction. District assessment officials can receive immediate, accurate reading test results and provide assessment information instantaneously to help teachers improve their instruction.

The September 22 ballot measure for increasing funding for schools passed by 195 votes. Over 12 years, it will add \$600 million to State school aid funding. Funding would come from the State's permanent fund, which is made up of royalties from public land leases, and will increase from 4.7 to 5.8 percent of the amount of funds going to K-12 education.

Much of the funding will be used to support the Governor's new school reform initiative, including the creation of an American Indian Education Division within the SEA. Districts are

required to spend an additional one percent over budget for classroom instruction and to reduce the amount of money held in reserve.

Alan Morgan, former state superintendent, is taking charge of a 30-person task force to find potential candidates for the new Governor-appointed position of State Secretary of Education.

## **New York Update - October 2003**

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In late September, the U.S. Department of Education announced that New York would receive its Reading First grant of \$460.8 million over the next six years. The first year's allocation of \$129 million includes all of the State's FY 2002 award and 80 percent of its FY 2003 grant. Most of the funds will be given in subgrants to schools in eligible districts, probably in February 2004. The State will also provide the New York State Reading Academy, a web-based program focusing on research-based reading instruction and assessment. The Academy will provide professional developments for all of New York's K-3 teachers and K-12 special education teachers.

In early October, a report commissioned by the State Education Commissioner sharply criticized the State's high school math testing, saying there is very little correlation between instruction and assessment. The State Board of Regents had planned to increase the passing threshold from 55 to 65. The results of last year's math Regents exams -- 72 percent of juniors and seniors failed -- suggest that the 55 cutoff will probably be retained in all subjects. The report indicated that both the curricula and standards in math should be rewritten.

In early October, the New York Board of Regents agreed to delay implementation of some of the State's testing requirements. Education Daily reports that the pending increase in the passing scores for high school graduation will be deferred for three years (until the Class of 2005) and the requirement that disabled students pass the exams will be postponed from 2004 until 2009.

The New York City Public Schools have entered into a partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to establish 67 new, small high schools to serve disadvantaged students. The partnership, funded at \$51.2 million, is part of a larger effort to create as many as 200 small high schools in the City. City officials believe that smaller schools will reduce dropout rates and improve the rate of college attendance by graduates. The Gates Foundation has awarded nearly \$600 million nationwide to support more than 1,500 schools, mostly high schools. The New York City grant will be administered by seven non-profit organizations, including New Visions for Public Schools which has worked with other foundation projects in the city.

As reported in the September 30 New York Times, New York City officials are considering offering students tutoring instead of transfers because of the over-capacity in most high-performing schools to which parents may wish students to be transferred. This alternative was put on the front burner after New York City officials participated in the Talk Back Live presentation (see Washington Update item) when Secretary Paige indicated that supplemental services could be used sooner or that schools inside of schools can be created or that technology could be used to provide choices and options. Approximately 300,000 students in 315 schools are eligible for transfers although less than 10,000 have requested transfers.

Last year, when free tutoring was available for the first time, only 12.5 percent of the nearly 250,000 eligible students applied for the extra help, even after the deadline was extended for 12 days. School advocates and service providers said that the information about the program was not adequately disseminated to parents. This year looks to be a repeat. With 212,000 students qualifying for free tutoring, school district officials report the response has been even lower even though the city has made serious efforts to increase participation. Companies such as Kaplan and Sylvan -- which provide much of the supplemental services -- report declines in enrollments for their tutoring programs, according to the New York Times.

## North Carolina Update - October 2003

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Education Week reports that, for the first time in many years, the North Carolina legislature expeditiously passed (and the Governor signed) an FY 2004 budget of \$14.8 billion that includes \$6 billion for education, a 2.4 percent increase. The budget includes an increase of \$8.6 million (to \$43 million) for the Governor's preschool plan, "More at Four," to expand the program Statewide. About \$25 million of the increase will be used to reduce class size in second grades to an average of 18 students. Class sizes in kindergarten and first grade had been reduced in prior years. Another \$10 million will add teachers in the State's lowest-performing elementary schools to reduce even further K-3 class sizes. Budget cuts will affect seventh grade vocational education -- which will see a 32 percent (\$8 million) reduction -- and a school breakfast initiative which will be cut by \$800,000.

Teacher bonuses in North Carolina far exceeded expectations last year. According to Education Week, the State's ABCs for Public Education program calls for \$1,500 bonuses for teachers in schools that meet or exceed expected test gains. The State Department of Education budgeted \$96 million for these bonuses but test results showed that many more schools met expectations, requiring a total of \$140 million in additional pay. Despite the tight State budget, Governor Easley has authorized payment of the maximum amount.

Education officials in North Carolina believe that the accountability provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act have resulted in marked improvement in reading and math test scores this Spring. Elementary students appear to be showing the greatest signs. Among the examples cited is Charlotte-Mecklenburg (the largest district in the State) which showed improvement in reading and math in all grade levels. Durham, Chapel Hill, and Johnston County also demonstrated consistent improvement.

North Carolina has established a new program called the e-NC Authority to improve the reach of technology into rural areas of the State. The purposes of e-NC are to increase awareness of, and access to, the Internet. For more information go to [www.e-nc.org](http://www.e-nc.org).

North Carolina has instituted a national pre-engineering program in middle and high schools across the State. As reported in Education Daily, the State plans to have at least two of these engineering academies operating in each of the State's eight regions. Called "Project Lead the Way" (PLTW), will begin in the Research Triangle area. Initially implemented in 1997, PLTW operates in 31 states and provides its four-year curriculum and professional development at no cost. Graduates of this program can earn college credits at both in-state and out-of-state university engineering programs.

## Ohio Update - October 2003

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Ohio has at least 16 online charter schools enrolling nearly a quarter of the 38,000 charter school students in the State. Overall, approximately two percent (\$255 million) of Ohio's total education budget goes to charter schools, \$50.6 million of which goes to the online charter schools. The State Board of Education has ruled that these privately-operated online charter schools must establish a separate committee to guide their policies and procedures. All schools offering online courses would also be required to develop policies for attracting qualified teachers and to explain student rights when equipment installation is delayed.

## Oregon Update - October 2003

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October 15 was the deadline for all Oregon school districts to submit their reports to the State Department of Education specifying the ways they plan to use Federal funds next year to improve student performance. As reported in the Statesman Journal, 350 Oregon schools -- a large portion of which were high schools -- failed to meet Federal and State standards. Many of these schools labeled as “needing improvement” were so tagged because some subgroups of students -- rather than the school as a whole -- did not meet adequate yearly progress. Concentrating on such subgroups is a new experience for Oregon educators.

## Pennsylvania Update - October 2003

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Continuing since March, the standoff between Democratic governor Rendell and the State's Republican-controlled legislature has resulted in no FY 2004 budget agreement and no school spending plan. The Governor is seeking to spend more than \$500 million in new funding for teacher training, smaller classes, and a new early-childhood program. The Legislature is determined to maintain a bare-bones budget. Because of the impasse, as reported in Education Week (October 8), State subsidy payments have not been made to local school districts. If the standoff continues, districts could have trouble meeting their payrolls and be forced to lay off personnel. A recent survey showed that school districts are having to borrow funds to keep their schools open.

Last year, more than 1,400 schools in Pennsylvania -- more than half of the State's public schools -- failed to make adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act based upon preliminary data. However, approximately a quarter of the schools that did not make AYP appealed the State's determination and more than two-thirds of these appeals were granted. As reported in Education Week, nearly all (85 percent) of the appeals were approved because of corrected or updated school data. By the most current count, 1,684 schools are meeting AYP. A total of 157 schools have missed AYP for two years and are required to offer parents transfer options. Another 143 schools are on the more serious list requiring corrective action.

## **Rhode Island Update - October 2003**

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Out of Rhode Island's 180 Title I schools, about 20 percent are classified as in need of improvement. Twenty-seven schools will be required to offer parents tutorial services or the opportunity to transfer their children to another school. According to the Providence Journal, State officials expect these school ratings to change when final analysis is complete in October.

On October 8, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Rhode Island would receive its Reading First grant of about \$18.2 million over the next six years, with \$2.4 million allocated in the first year. Most of the first year funding will be given in subgrants to eligible school districts in November 2003.

## South Carolina Update - October 2003

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The state K-12 budget for fiscal year 2004 at \$2.4 billion -- is about \$200 million less than last year's budget. However, for the last three years, almost \$420 million has been cut from K-12 spending. Even though the State House and the Governor's office are controlled by Republicans, there has been very little support, due to budget cuts, for choice-related initiatives. The State Department of Education has reduced its staff by about 80 slots.

A new report from the Strom Thurman Institute provided estimates of the amount of FY 2004 State funds and FY 2003 Federal funds which are being allocated to activities to meet many of the goals of various Titles under NCLB. Approximately \$12 million of State funds and \$15 million of Federal funds have been allocated for the administration of Statewide assessments. Almost \$38 million has been allocated for school improvement and interventions using State funds; the amount of Title I funds have yet to be determined. Approximately \$51 million of State funds and \$16 million of Federal funds are allocated for early childhood programs, while \$78 million of State funds and almost \$40 million of Federal (mostly Title I) have been allocated for professional development. Federal funds allocated for technology initiatives are almost \$9 million; State funds are slightly over \$16 million. Almost \$50 million of State funds that have been allocated for instructional materials and approximately \$21 million has been allocated in State funds for summer school or comprehensive remediation programs. For a copy of the report contact Barbara Neilson, former State Superintendent in South Carolina, at the Strom Thurman Institute.

In a conversation with Barbara Neilson, the author of the report, she emphasized that virtually all of the State's \$40 million in lottery funds will be used to purchase products and services (vs. salaries) and that, for more than a decade, the funding for the textbook and instructional materials have also been used for purchasing similar products, including software. She also noted, to her knowledge, no other state is conducting such a functional analysis to determine the total amount of resources from various sources that are being allocated to implement some of the major NCLB requirements. In the October 14 Education Daily, Gordon Cross of the CCSSO

said that his organization has a consortium of states that will try to quantify their expenses program-by-program within the next six months.

## Tennessee Update - October 2003

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The East Tennessee Technology Access Center (ETTAC), supported by the United Way, provides assistive technology to help people with disabilities of all ages learn, work, and communicate. ETTAC lends assistive devices to people with disabilities so they can try them out before purchasing. The lender also adapts books, as well as classrooms and teaching techniques, to benefit learners with disabilities. In addition, ETTAC provides programs and technologies to help children enhance their literacy and communication skills.

On September 30, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Tennessee would be receiving its Reading First grant of \$111.4 million over the next six years. The State will receive \$29.3 for the first year, consisting of all of its FY 2002 award and 80 percent of its FY 2003 grant. The State plans to allocate most of the first year funding to schools in eligible school districts in January 2004. In addition, Tennessee as part of its professional development plan, will conduct a “Reading First in Tennessee Academy” a ten-day basic training program on scientifically-based reading instruction for all K-3 teachers, K-12 special education teachers, literacy leaders, and principals. The academy will consist of a five-day summer institute featuring national reading experts and five days of job-embedded in-school practice using the new skills. In later years, the State will offer intermediate and advanced programs.

## Texas Update - October 2003

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Discussion with several Texas district Title I directors confirmed that the TEA Title I office is understaffed to the extent that few questions are being resolved. Moreover, there appears to be a consensus that the Governor's office is attempting to eliminate many of the functions currently provided by the 20 regional service centers which would result in further staff cuts. For the most part, State funds paid for many of the salaries of service center staff. During the last five years, such centers have been instrumental in the implementation of several Texas initiatives such as the TIF and general technology-related staff development. With the abolishment of the technology office in the TEA, these functions are likely to be given a very, very low priority.

The State Board of Education has approved an increase in the passing criteria for students taking the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Despite questions as to whether appropriate textbooks are available to cover material on the test, the Board hiked the standard for elementary and middle school students. The old standard was maintained for high school students. According to the Houston Chronicle, third-graders last year, the first to be required to pass the Reading TAKS to be promoted, saw an 89 percent pass rate using the old standard (20 right out of 36 questions); this year the standard will be 22 out of 36.

Texas school districts are facing a school year with more outdated textbooks than expected because of the legislative cut in textbook funding of \$182 million this school year. Of the textbooks scheduled to be adopted this year, biology will be the only subject to have new books approved (in November). The remaining subjects will have to wait for the next legislative session in 2005 for adoption. This means that many books now in use will be 10 to 14 years old. Health textbooks, in particular, published in 1989, are inadequate in such areas as AIDS and HIV.

## Utah Update - October 2003

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The State of Utah's Office of Legislative Research, on behalf of the State's education interim committee of the Utah legislature, has issued an RFP which seeks proposals for new elementary and secondary education delivery systems that: (1) result in improved student performance and are financially feasible; or (2) create cost efficiencies. The RFP calls for a competency-based education system which would include: how students may advance through the education system based upon acquisition of skills, knowledge or competencies; how students' progress may be measured and tracked; how to organize schools and school systems to allow instruction to be delivered based on individual student needs; and identification of resources including instructional materials and equipment to implement competency-based education. One unique aspect of the RFP is that it calls for a market-based educational system. One interpretation of this RFP is that the legislature is looking for some group to design the entire K-12 education system for Utah. Up to three offers could be funded from a total pot of \$150,000. A copy of the RFP is available from [www.le.state.ut.us/rfp](http://www.le.state.ut.us/rfp) or call (801) 538-1032.

In early October, the State Office of Education released State-mandated school report cards from the Utah Performance Assessment System for Students (U-PASS). These online report cards provide a wealth of data about each one of the 800 public schools in the State including: enrollment, ethnicity, number of staff, faculty experience and certification, and class sizes. The data also presents grade-by-grade proficiency levels for each school in language arts, mathematics, and science so comparisons can be made among Utah schools and with a national sample. U-PASS information can be seen at [www.usoe.k12.ut.us/U-PassWEB/](http://www.usoe.k12.ut.us/U-PassWEB/).

About nine percent of Utah's population -- 200,000 residents -- are Hispanic. On 2002 year-end standardized language arts and mathematics exams only about half of the State's Latino students scored "proficient." By contrast, more than three-quarters of Anglo students are graded proficient. The Salt Lake Tribune reports that State officials are awaiting results of last spring's testing to find out if progress has been made in reducing this performance gap. The State Board of Education is proposing a \$393 million reform package to improve teacher training, before- and after-school programs, and other services for academically struggling students.

## Vermont Update - October 2003

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Education Week (October 1) reports that three Vermont districts are switching Title I funds allocations from schools that are not making adequate yearly progress and redistributing the funds to other schools in their districts. By doing so, schools identified for improvement are no longer under the sanctions or have to set aside the 20 percent for choice-related transportation and supplemental education services. District officials claim that what they are doing is legal under a strict interpretation of the Law even though it could be in conflict with USED non-regulatory guidance.

## Virginia Update - October 2003

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Governor Mark Warner recently announced a six point K-12 initiative which will add \$525 million more to K-12 funding in his proposed biennium budget. Warner is proposing to expand early childhood education and childcare programs with much of the funding coming from Medicaid and social security insurance. Recently he also chided school districts for not taking advantage of reimbursements for “related services” for special education students under the Child Health Insurance Program. He would also increase the number of teams which provide technical assistance to failing schools to turn them around. High school students would be encouraged to earn college credit to reduce the amount of time spent in four-year colleges. A mentoring program for new teachers would also be created. Another initiative would streamline existing workforce development programs and provide opportunities for seniors not only to graduate with a high school degree but also with an “industry certification diploma.”

Governor Mark Warner has set forth a proposal to minimize the problem of “senioritis,” the sudden disinterest in academics that occurs when college acceptance letters arrive. Education Daily reports that the plan, called “Senior Plus,” will offer seniors the option of earning college credits or workforce certification during the second semester of their senior year. College-level credits would be earned through Advanced Placement classes and dual enrollment courses. Skill-building students would sign a “compact” which would require them to complete their academic coursework and enroll in a technical training program.

Fairfax County, located in suburban Washington, D.C., and one of the largest districts in the country, is considering a consultant’s recommendation that the County close down a majority of its special education centers. Currently, most of the district’s 23,000 special education students attend regular schools. A small portion of these students -- approximately 1,000 -- go to the County’s 20 special education centers. According to the Washington Post, the independent consultant has recommended that the County refer fewer students into special education and close two centers each year for the next seven years, leaving only six such centers open. The report estimates that the district could save as much as \$500 million over the next 12 years.

## West Virginia Update - October 2003

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The U.S. Department of Education has announced that West Virginia will receive Reading First funding of about \$43.8 million over the next six years with \$6.1 million allocated for the first year. The State is completing its subgrant competition, expecting to support approximately 40 schools in eligible districts. The State will also conduct weeklong training sessions for all K-3 teachers and K-12 special education teachers on scientifically-based reading instruction.

The West Virginia Virtual School is providing Internet-based classes in reading/language arts, mathematics, sciences, social studies, fine arts, foreign languages, and health, as well as Advanced Placement and gifted courses. These classes provide students in rural areas of the State with a broader range of instructional opportunities and access to more highly qualified teachers. The content for these courses comes from a variety of sources including Apex Learning, Intelligent Education, Florida Virtual School, and Stanford University.

## Wisconsin Update - October 2003

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Education Daily reports that the State of Wisconsin has begun an initiative, called “Keeping the Promise,” which will initially allocate \$1.5 million in Federal funds to provide services to special education students with the highest cost needs. Claims of up to \$30,000 annually for each such student -- for services such as assistive technology or nursing -- may be made by districts. If total claims exceed available funding, reimbursement will be prorated. The program may be adjusted in future years based upon needs and available resources.

On October 6, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Milwaukee Public Schools has received a \$4 million Early Reading First grant for its “Building Blocks for Literacy” program. Designed to improve the language and pre-reading skills of young children, the program is a partnership of the Milwaukee school system, Marquette University, the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, and the Milwaukee Partnership Academy.

In early October, the Wisconsin legislature passed a bill that would raise the limit on participation in the Milwaukee voucher program. According to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, the new law would lift the cap on number of program participants from its current limit of 15 percent of the enrollment of the school districts -- about 15,000 students. The new plan would also allow families whose income rises to exceed the cutoff to remain in the program. Another measure would allow private schools in the entire county -- not just the city school district -- to participate.

Milwaukee Public Schools will receive a \$20 million grant from the National Science Foundation to train mathematics teachers and to improve communication between secondary school and college-level teachers. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reports that the grant will go to a partnership that includes -- in addition to the school district -- the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the Milwaukee Area Technical College. The grant will also be used to create central office “math specialists” who will work directly with the schools. The NSF program has

received strong criticism from some educators because it embodies a strongly “constructivist” approach.

## Wyoming Update - October 2003

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In mid-September, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Wyoming will receive about \$14.4 million in Reading First funding, with \$2.1 million available in the first year. The State will use approximately \$1.7 million of the first year's grant to make subgrants to approximately nine eligible districts, probably in April 2004. The State will also conduct Wyoming Early Learning Institutes for principals, reading coaches, K-3 teachers, K-12 special education teachers, and Title I reading specialists.