

Alabama Update - February 2004

Governor Robert Riley is tempting to reinstate approximately \$80 million for textbook, instructional supplies, and training purchases next year. All sorts of funds were cut in this year's budget.

In addition to the \$80 million request for textbooks, instructional supplies, and teacher training, Governor Riley used part of the State's \$180 million (or six percent) increase to expand the Alabama Reading Initiative to all classrooms in grades K-3. The Alabama Reading Initiative is the heart of the State's Reading First program. Alabama was one of the first states to have its plan approved.

Alaska Update - February 2004

The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner reports that many Alaska schools -- particularly in the western part of the State -- are having difficulty dealing with the requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that third graders must pass Federal assessments written in English. Some school districts teach elementary students exclusively in the native Yupik language. There are more than 20 aboriginal languages and dialects spoken by the people. Meeting Federal requirements could be enormously expensive and would conflict with native cultural traditions and local village control. The Anchorage school district, the State's largest, has more than 93 languages spoken by its students. The State argues that it can not afford to translate tests into as many as 100 languages.

Arizona Update - February 2004

In early January, State Superintendent Tom Horne proposed a number of new initiatives including expansion of a Tucson pilot program that provides education in the arts -- drama, music, dance -- to elementary school students. As reported in Education Week, the Superintendent also proposed expanding the professional development of the Federal Reading First program to all of the State's 1,800 public elementary schools (only 63 schools currently participate). He also plans to establish teams of exemplary teachers and administrators who would provide assistance to schools that are "failing" under Arizona's assessment system.

In her State-of-the-State address on January 12, Governor Janet Napolitano has proposed an ambitious plan to improve education in Arizona, despite the State's current budget deficit of \$350 million. The plan includes a new system for rating preschools and full-day kindergarten in high-poverty schools. The Arizona Republic reports that the new rating system for preschools and child care, based on North Carolina's approach, will consider the quality of facilities, teacher credentials, and class size among other factors. The full-day kindergarten program would be phased in over five years and would cost the State more than \$200 million over that period. The plan also includes \$24 million to provide child care for low-income families. Republican legislators have expressed opposition to the Governor's plan, questioning the expense and also whether or not some of the programs are the responsibility of the State.

The Associated Press reports that a bipartisan group of Arizona State legislators has proposed to have the State opt out of the No Child Left Behind Act. If the legislation is approved, Arizona could lose as much as \$327 million a year in Federal education funding -- about ten percent of the State's annual education budget. Supporters of the legislation argue that the costs of complying with NCLB requirements would far exceed the Federal contribution.

A bill in the Arizona legislature would require illegal aliens to pay out-of-state tuition at State colleges and universities. Currently, according to The Arizona Republic, anyone living in Arizona for at least one year is entitled to pay in-state tuition. The Republican-originated proposal is strongly opposed by many Democrats and pro-immigration advocates who argue that

many of the students who could be affected have lived in the State for most of their lives. In recent years, legislation has been passed in at least seven states -- California, Texas, Illinois, Utah, New York, Oklahoma, and Washington -- allowing undocumented immigrants who graduate from high schools in the states to pay in-state tuition at state higher education institutions.

Arkansas Update - February 2004

In partnership with the Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN) and United Learning, the Arkansas Department of Education is planning to make the Internet-based, video-on-demand service of United Learning available to all public schools. Called “unitedstreaming,” the delivery system is said to be the only standards-based digital video application that has been proven successful in an independent evaluation. The “unitedstreaming” system provides 2,200 videos and 22,000 video clips correlated with State content standards, as well as appropriate teacher guides, black line masters, and an interactive quiz center.

The Arkansas Special Education Resource Center program, in collaboration with other groups, has developed a professional development program which combines the practice of functional curriculum and instruction with computer technology. Teachers were trained to adapt materials for students with disabilities; these could be used in both special education and general education settings. The tools that were used for adopting materials included Microsoft Word and Power Point.

Well past the January 1, 2004 deadline for revising the State’s education funding formula, the Republican Governor and the Democratically-controlled legislature are still wrangling over a solution. As reported in Education Daily, the Lake View school district successfully sued the State claiming the existing formula was unconstitutional; the court imposed the January 1 deadline for implementation of a revised formula. On January 17, the State House approved a new formula which included \$441 million in additional public school funding, nearly 90 percent of which would come from new taxes. The final issue between the Governor and the legislature is how to consolidate the State’s smallest school districts within the formula. Meanwhile, Lake View has asked the court to prohibit the State from allocating funds under the old formula until the new formula is in place. In response, the Arkansas Supreme Court has appointed a special master to oversee the State’s development of an equitable school funding system.

A recent study by the National Institute for Early Education Research rated Arkansas among the top three states in terms of quality pre-K preschool programs and alignment of curriculum with

teacher training. The legislature recently added \$40 million to the State's pre-K program which is operated by the Department of Human Services in recognition that such students have the need for help as well as education services.

California Update - February 2004

The funds planned for education under California's Proposition 98 will not all be available according to a budget compromise between Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and education officials. About \$2 billion of the \$4 billion slated for schools under Proposition 98 will be used to offset partially the State's \$14 billion budget deficit. As reported in the Los Angeles Times, California's K-12 schools and community colleges will receive a two percent cost-of-living increase and some additional funds to account for growth in district enrollments. The Governor's budget will increase average per-pupil spending in the State from \$6,800 to about \$7,000.

The State's Curriculum Commission has recommended that one of the criteria for the K-12 textbook adoption would limit the amount of hands-on experience to 25 percent. Such a limit on experiments and practical hands-on activities would likely increase the amount of direct instruction and group discussion by teachers. The California Science Teachers' Association has been very critical of the recommendation which will be taken up by the State Board of Education within a month.

State Superintendent Jack O'Connell, in his State of Education address, proposed that the legislature provide greater flexibility to districts but that they address his five state priorities which include raising student expectations, improving instructional materials, upgrading training for teachers and administrators, and expanding transition programs from middle to high school and then to higher education.

It can be expected that there will continue to be considerable political upheaval in the next six months. The legislative leadership will change in both houses and the State faces a \$6 billion budget deficit. Moreover, if a \$15 billion bond issue on the ballot in March fails to pass, the deficit would grow to more than \$11 billion. The Governor's 2003-04 budget includes \$363 million for instructional materials. About \$185 million of this falls in a categorical program for the 2002 English/Language Arts adoption and the 2005 History/Social Science adoption. The remaining funds will be shifted from a categorical account for instructional materials into a

general purpose account. This elimination of some categorical programs is part of the Governor's plan to streamline school funding by reducing the number of State categorical programs from 88 to 49. The approximately \$175 million that will be shifted from the instructional materials categorical programs to a general pupil fund would not be subject to the current requirements for instructional materials.

Starting this year, eleventh grade students in all of California's high schools will be allowed to take a new college proficiency assessment in English and math as part of the regular state assessment (California Standards Test) given in the Spring. Currently, students entering the California State University system take college placement tests after enrolling on campus. If they fail, they must take remedial courses during their freshman year. According to the Mercury News, the new procedure will give college-bound juniors a more accurate picture of their basic skills capabilities and still give them their senior year to improve their skills if they fail. The optional college placement component would add one hour and 45 minutes to the 10-hour California Standards Test administered over several days.

The Sacramento Bee reports that State Superintendent Jack O'Connell has proposed to require all high school students -- not just those who are college-bound -- to complete more rigorous course requirements. O'Connell argued that most of the State's 1.7 million high school students are not achieving at adequate academic levels. This is particularly true of poor and minority students. The Superintendent noted that less than ten percent of the State's high schools have achieved at optimum levels on State assessments and less than half of freshman entering the California State University system are proficient in reading and mathematics. The Superintendent's proposal would require all high school graduates to have completed: four years of English, three years of advanced math, two years of laboratory science, two years of social science/history, two years of a foreign language, and one year of art.

The Los Angeles Unified School District is planning to expand its kindergarten program from half-day to full-day for all students within four years. Whether this goal can be met may be determined by a \$3.9 billion school facilities bond proposal to be considered by the voters on March 2. The Los Angeles Times reports that Measure R earmarks \$200 million which, along

with matching State funds, could cover the cost of providing facilities for the expanded kindergarten program. The District expects to implement the change in 159 schools (out of a total of 432 elementary schools) next school year. If the bond issue fails, it may not be possible to make the complete shift within the anticipated four years.

Mesa Unified School District has received a \$700,000 state grant for classroom technology. As reported by the Los Angeles Times, the grant has been used to provide all 625 seventh grade students at Ensign Intermediate School with handheld computers, PDAs which will allow students to download books, write reports, and communicate with their teachers.

Colorado Update - February 2004

In his State-of-the State address on January 8, Governor Bill Owens said that Colorado's financial troubles were easing. As reported in Education Week, the Governor praised the progress made in the schools and proposed new student accountability reports. He also promised to fight the recent court decision halting the State's innovative voucher program and introduced legislation that would provide school choice options to special needs students. The Governor said he would not seek significant additional funds for education in FY 2005. The State's Amendment 23 requires increases in K-12 education funded over the next ten years based on inflation data and increases in school enrollments.

Education Daily reports that Nancy Spence, a Colorado legislator is planning to introduce legislation that would establish a State-funded program to provide scholarships for special needs students. In spite of a recent District Court decision striking down the State's voucher program for low-income children, Spence is proposing an initiative similar to Florida's McKay Scholarship program; it would provide scholarships (vouchers) for disabled students to attend any public or private school they choose.

According to a new four-year study by the Community Training and Assistance Center of Boston, the Denver Public Schools' Performance Pay Plan has increased student achievement in many classrooms and has served as a catalyst for change. The plan was developed by the Denver school board and local teachers union which have continued to monitor its implementation. Both groups' memberships agree to a referendum this month. The plan will expand to include all schools in the district. Currently 13 percent of the schools take part in the program which began in 1999. The report advises other districts thinking about adopting the Denver Performance Pay that they must accept the fact that they will likely have to reallocate funding and possibly receive outside financial assistance. As in Denver, almost \$4 million was contributed by foundations. The report is available at www.ctacusa.com.

According to the Rocky Mountain News, about a quarter of Colorado's schools are failing to made adequate yearly progress on State assessments. The published results pleased many State

officials who feared that nearly all schools would fail to make AYP. There are, however, large differences among districts. Denver, with an 80 percent minority enrollment, showed fewer than half of its schools making AYP. In neighboring, non-minority Jefferson County, more than 80 percent of the schools made AYP.

Connecticut Update - February 2004

The Connecticut birth-to-three system has issued an RFP which would provide online proctored assessment for pre-K students. The RFP was released on March 1 with a due date of April 30. For a copy of the RFP, contact Cathy Grenata (860) 418-6146.

Connecticut schools and libraries will receive about \$3.5 million in discounts under the Federal e-rate program. These funds will result in a considerable expansion of the Connecticut Education Network. Currently consisting of 74 sites, the CEN will, in the next year, expand by 87 schools, 12 colleges, and 23 libraries. Within a year, the Network will be accessible by 90 percent of the State's college students and more than 80 percent of public school students.

In early February, Governor John Rowland proposed a voucher plan that would give \$4,000 tuition vouchers to up to 500 students in Connecticut's lowest-performing schools so they may attend private schools. Other features of the Governor's overall budget plan include maintaining current levels of State aid to school districts (eliminating a planned \$55 million mid-year cut) and adding \$2.7 million to the \$20 million Priority School District grants to help the State's low-achieving urban school systems. Overall, the Governor expects to add about \$20 million in new or expanded programs to the State's \$2 billion public education budget.

Florida Update - February 2004

The Palm Beach Post reports that Florida's K-8 "virtual school" is being investigated by the State's finance office for its secretive management. Governor Jeb Bush initially supported one-year pilot programs which provided funding to two for-profit firms who provided resources (computers, software, books) so that participating children could attend school from home. The two companies -- Connections Academy and K-12 Inc. -- had initially attempted to provide their services through the Florida Virtual School, which provides online classes for high school students, but were turned down. Florida's Chief Financial Officer, Tom Gallagher, after learning that the two programs were enrolling kindergarten and first-grade students who had never before attended public school, has called for an investigation.

According to the Florida Department of Education, there are approximately 45,000 home schooled children in the State. Parents believe the flexible schedule, wider curriculum, and individual attention enhance the breadth of their children's education. The State's online high school -- the Florida Virtual School -- and an increasing number of support groups are strengthening the trend toward more home schooling.

In mid-January, Governor Jeb Bush proposed a \$13 million initiative to provide reading coaches in 240 of Florida's low-performing middle schools. The approach would also require individual improvement plans for sixth-grade students who perform poorly on State assessments. As reported in The Miami Herald, the reading coach program is one part of the Governor's \$46.4 million "Just Read Florida" initiative to be considered by the legislature in March.

A study by The Orlando Sentinel found that Florida's substitute teachers are badly under-qualified. The only Statewide requirement for substitutes is a high school equivalency diploma; further qualifications are determined by the county school districts. Most of the State's larger districts require some college experience and a few even require an undergraduate degree. But many smaller districts would be unable to staff classrooms if they maintained high requirements. The low salaries paid substitutes (often no more than \$50 per day) is big reason for the substitute teacher shortage.

Georgia Update - February 2004

Georgia has been recognized by the National Institute for Early Education Research as providing high-quality “universal access” by serving more than half of the four-year-old students in the State. On the average it allocates \$3,700 per student.

The State Board of Education has adopted an “alternative route for certification” for individuals who wish to enter the teaching profession. Each would-be teacher would have to pass three written tests and would have to have a college degree in the subject area in which they wish to teach. There is no requirement that the individuals would have to be trained in pedagogy or instructional techniques.

State Superintendent Kathy Cox has recently released the new Georgia Performance Standards which are expected to drive instruction and assessment across the State. These Standards have four principal components: (1) content standards which guide the purpose of the curriculum content and which are followed by specific learning goals; (2) suggested tasks which demonstrate what students should know by the end of the course; (3) samples of student work which shows teachers and students what meeting the standard “looks like”; and (4) teacher commentary which maintains communications between teachers and students.

DeKalb County schools has established a large partnership program among the school systems and nearly 20 colleges in the State. The Atlanta Journal Constitution reports that district officials hope these partnerships -- which include historically black institutions -- will narrow academic achievement gap between white and minority students and will prepare more students for college. Under the plan, each of DeKalb’s high schools will develop teacher training programs, research initiatives, and tutoring/mentoring programs in partnership with a postsecondary institution.

Idaho Update - February 2004

Preliminary analysis shows that, last year, close to 80 percent of the public schools in Idaho failed to meet Federal standards under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The State Department of Education has been re-analyzing the school performance data to reflect more accurately the performance of public schools.

The Idaho Statesman reports that the legislature will be considering whether or not to implement the new Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) as a measure of school performance under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). As currently scheduled, this year's tenth graders will be required to pass the ISAT before graduating in 2006. The test has met considerable criticism for being used as both a school performance measure and a graduation requirement. Only if both houses of the legislature vote to block the exam will the requirements not become effective.

Illinois Update - February 2004

As reported in the Chicago Tribune, the State will retain at least some “open-ended” questions on its new reading and mathematics standardized tests. Illinois education official had considered dropping the “open-ended” questions because of the cost of scoring responses.

In mid-December, the State released its annual report card of schools which details average test scores for subgroups of students (disabled, minority, low-income), as well as for the whole school. The report card also reports on the degree to which all students were tested. However, according to a Chicago Tribune analysis, there were nearly 35,000 data errors; close to 75 percent of the State’s schools had at least one such error. Most of the errors were in the classification of students into subgroups; in particular, approximately nine percent of the low-income students that took the test were not reported as such. The magnitude of the errors have led to as many as 368 schools being erroneously listed as failing. About 12 percent (458) of the schools in the State have been allowed to submit corrected data. Since then, Illinois has discarded more than 80,000 student test results that had been used to determine whether schools in the State had made adequate yearly progress. The Chicago Tribune reports that most of the disqualified test scores occurred as a result of a new State policy which does not count scores of students who were not attending their school on September 30. Some scores were ruled “invalid” because the student did not attempt to answer enough questions. The disqualifications resulted in 23 schools meeting AYP in reading and 22 schools meeting AYP in math that had earlier been ruled as failing. Close to 1,000 schools each improved their passing rates by at least one percentage point in reading and math. Some schools, with large transient populations, showed improvements of as much as 18 percent.

On January 11, Governor Rod Blagojevitch announced a program by which Illinois children can receive, at no cost, a book a month until they are five years old. Parents who sign their children up at birth will get a book every month so their children will have a 60-volume library by their fifth birthday. The Chicago Tribune reports that the program is expected to cost as much as \$26 million per year, but the Governor hopes it will have a significant impact on the State’s literacy rate.

The Chicago Sun-Times reports that, on January 14, Governor Blagojevich called on the State legislature to create a totally new education management organization. The Governor claims that the reconstituted State Department of Education, under direct gubernatorial control, would save \$1 billion over the next four years. Among the features of the Governor's plan is a reinstatement and expansion of "Project Success," a \$5 million program that unites parents, community leaders, and service providers to address to needs of students. The Governor can expect to meet opposition from educators across the State who believe the change will not bring new funds into K-12 education.

Indiana Update - February 2004

Indiana has been carrying a deficit since FY 2002 with a deficit for FY 2004 of 7.1 percent of the General Fund. In the past, the State has addressed the deficit by delaying school and payments and cutting educational technology funding.

In mid-January, Governor Joseph Kernan proposed an initiative that would provide access to full-day kindergarten for all five-year-olds in the State by 2007. When implemented, the program is expected to cost approximately \$150 million per year. The Governor proposes to pay for the program -- at least in the first three years -- by diverting lottery funds (\$30 million that would have gone into the Teacher's Pension Stabilization Fund) and abandoned property reversions (\$11.5 million). Currently, 26,000 children attend full-day kindergarten; under the Governor's plan enrollment would grow to about 80,000 by 2007.

Resisting the Governor's request to pilot a full-day kindergarten program, the State Senate is dragging its feet on the initiative. However, as reported in Education Week) Governor Kernan's spokesperson feels that chances are good that the program -- which would serve approximately 20,000 students -- will begin next Fall.

Iowa Update - February 2004

Staff in over 40 state agencies and local districts have participated in staff development relating to the implementation of Iowa's "instructional decision making" model, which is designed to identify and meet the needs of gifted and talented English language learner students with behavior problems and students with special needs. Several steps are involved, including:

- Administering screening measures in all instructional areas to all children;
- Interpreting data from screenings to determine individual and group discrepancies;
- Use of diagnostic assessments to identify specific needs more accurately;
- Provide supplemental research-based instruction in small groups to students with similar needs; and
- Using data to determine on-going student needs.

The contact person at the Iowa Department of Education is Eric Neesen, (515) 281-0345.

Iowa's budget situation has made it difficult for State education officials to meet their funding goals. As reported in the Des Moines Register, State educators are requesting a six-percent increase in per-pupil funding for FY 2004. But the legislature is still considering ways to offset the 2.5 percent budget cut in October 2003, as well as accommodating the two percent growth in spending promised for the 2004-05 school year. The current K-3 block grants used to reduce class sizes are slated to end next school year and will cost approximately \$35 million a year to be renewed. Iowa has been trying to base teachers' pay on performance rather than seniority. In 2001, the legislature allocated \$40 million for the teacher salary plan to recruit and retain teachers, expecting to provide upwards of \$300 million in five years. The program has floundered because the State's budget crisis has hampered its growth. The State legislature is also considering privatizing some parts of the State's fiber-optic network, Iowa Communications Network, to avoid continuing subsidies for upgrades.

According to Education Week, during a recent visit by Secretary Paige, Governor Vilsack gave a speech in which he said the Federal Government has forced the State to pay for \$300 million of unfunded mandates under NCLB and IDEA.

Kentucky Update - February 2004

In early January, Governor Ernie Fletcher implemented \$6.9 million in cuts for Kentucky's education programs. The Governor says his reductions will not affect the State's basic school funding mechanism, Support for Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK). According to the Louisville Courier-Journal, the cuts represent 2.5 percent reductions in the budgets for preschool and after-school programs (\$2.5 million) which provide services for low-income and at-risk students.

The State began implementing its alternative assessments for special education students, referred to as the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) online 03. Based upon feedback, the DOE is streamlining the process for the Spring 2004 test. Special education students who are eligible to take the online assessments are those with IEPs that include need for a reader and those that have used text readers or screen readers for instruction. In a follow-up survey, 60 percent of teachers found that a combination of online instruction and assessment using text readers resulted in improved vocabulary, sight word recognition, reading fluency and comprehension. The contact at the Kentucky Department of Education is Preston Lewis, (502)564-4970.

Governor Fletcher, the new Republican Governor, has proposed to reinstate slightly over \$20 million in state funds for purchasing textbooks for FY 2005. Such funds were not requested in the FY 2004 budget. The State textbook adoption for mathematics will not occur in 2004 but is planned for next year, especially in light of lower student scores in the area of mathematics.

Louisiana Update - February 2004

New Louisiana public school diploma rules require eighth-grade students to declare a high school major and to establish career plans. State Superintendent Cecil Picard says the rules force students to think about their future. Critics of the new rules claim eighth grade is too early for students to commit to a career path or even a high school major.

A total of 79 schools in Louisiana -- 54 of them in New Orleans -- have failed to make adequate yearly progress. The New Orleans Times-Picayune reports that the total number of failing schools will rise to more than 250 in two years unless considerable improvement is made.

Recently the State Board of Education has approved an initiative to place 14 chronically failing schools in the New Orleans Parish under a state-operated recovery district which would be operated by one or more independent groups as charter schools.

The New Orleans Times-Picayune reports that the New Orleans school district has recently received more than \$22 million in Federal e-rate funding. In the prior two years, the district failed to receive any e-rate funds because the district's technology directors failed to submit grant applications appropriately. New Orleans is currently applying for another e-rate grant for even more funds.

Maine Update - February 2004

Governor Baldacci has proposed to expand the middle school laptop initiative to include ninth grade students. He has also stated, as a goal, to have 70 percent of state high school graduates seek a higher education. Enrollment in the new community college system increased 18 percent last year. The Governor has also proposed an initiative to allow parents of students who participate in laptop programs to have online access to training programs.

As reported in the Portland Press Herald Writer, the Maine legislature is considering that would prohibit the use of State education funds to pay for reforms required under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). By opting out of NCLB, the State could forfeit between \$90 million and \$110 million in Federal funds.

Maryland Update - February 2004

Dealing with the State's large budget deficit, Governor Robert Ehrlich has determined that the plan to spend an additional \$1.3 billion annually on public education by 2008 is not mandatory. As reported in the Baltimore Sun, the Governor will withhold considerable funds from the State's large school districts. Some parts of the State's funding formula, known as the Thornton Plan, are mandatory and some are not. The major losers under the Governor's revised plan are Montgomery, Anne Arundel, Carroll, Baltimore, and Howard Counties and Baltimore City.

As reported in Title I Reports, the Maryland Department of Education has decided to withhold \$35 million in Title I funds from the Baltimore City Public Schools because of the district does not have an adequate plan. The first version of the plan was rejected by the SEA because Baltimore City did not set aside appropriate levels of funding to provide choice and supplemental services for students in schools identified for improvement. The SEA argues that the appropriate amount earmarked for such purposes would be \$10 million or about 20 percent of the \$50 million Title I allocation. The City has requested that only \$5.1 million be set aside. The district has a \$58 million deficit that has resulted in hundreds of layoffs according to Superintendent Bonnie Copeland. She noted that "the problem, of course, that we have across the board is cash flow so withholding Title I money just compounds the problem."

Funding from various sources will likely bail out Baltimore City Public Schools, precluding the need to release more than 1,200 employees. Governor Ehrlich has asked the State legislature to provide a \$42 million advance to the district while Baltimore Mayor O'Malley pledged to provide an \$8 million loan. The Abell Foundation will provide a matching \$8 million. The Governor indicated that this is a one-time amount and that Baltimore City Public Schools would have to demonstrate their accountability. Since 1997, the SEA has exercised control over Baltimore City schools as part of a five-year, \$254 million categorical program to reduce the number of failing schools in the district which were greater than the number of failing schools everywhere else in the State.

The \$23.8 billion budget proposed in mid-January by Governor Ehrlich includes \$326 million for Maryland's "Bridge to Excellence" program (commonly known as the Thornton Plan) to increase student performance by narrowing spending gaps between rich and poor school districts. As reported in The Washington Post, this represents only about 90 percent of the funding expected by the districts. The Governor has also proposed legalization of slot machines which he claims could eventually provide an additional \$800 a year for education.

Massachusetts Update - February 2004

The Boston Globe reports that Governor Mitt Romney's State-of-the-State address was much more upbeat than last year about the State's budget situation. The Governor proposed a series of new initiatives that would cost close to \$100 million annually within four years -- \$56 million in FY 2005. The plan relies on increasing State revenues to fund such programs as full-day kindergarten, parenting classes, college scholarships for top performers on the State assessment (MCAS), and additional aid for school districts that are failing to meet State standards. The Governor's plan also promises to restart at least 100 school renovation projects that have been stalled for lack of funding. Some legislators question the ability of the State to pay for such an ambitious proposal.

The Governor's plan would allocate \$34 million to mostly urban districts who would receive intensive afterschool and summer school help. The proposal also mandates parents take courses to help their students in low-performing schools. Approximately \$10 million would be used to fund interventions in low-performing schools.

Governor Romney has proposed an initiative that would provide generous scholarships for the State's top students. Education Daily reports that, under the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship Program, students scoring in the top quartile on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) would receive four-year scholarships for tuition at any State college. Students scoring in the top ten percent would also receive \$2,000 annually to cover room, board, and other college costs. The plan has been met with some opposition, particularly by critics of high-stakes testing, who argue that the program would discriminate against poor and minority students.

The Governor has appointed a task force to come up with initiatives to address schools and districts which have a track record of low performance.

A report by associations representing superintendents and teachers have found that over half of the 150 districts included in a survey had to increase class size, especially in low-income districts

which had received previously \$18 million to reduce class size. One of the ways which districts reported coping with the \$525 million reduction in State funding last year was by eliminating high school electives, reducing art and high school tutoring programs, and charging for full-day kindergarten. The report is available at www.massteacher.org.

The Boston Herald reports that the Massachusetts Board of Education is reconsidering graduation requirements as they relate to student scores on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Until recently, any student must get a score of 216 (four below the 200 passing grade) on the tenth grade English and math MCAS components before he or she could appeal. Recently, the Board eliminated the requirement for a minimum score for appeals by special needs students. Fearing a two-track appeals process, the Board is considering a similar easing of the requirement for all students.

According to The Boston Globe, the budget proposed by Governor Romney in late January would end the current limits on enrollment in Massachusetts charter schools. Currently, there are restrictions on: (a) the amount of funding school districts can allocate to charter schools (9 percent); (b) the portion of the State's students who can attend charter schools (4 percent); and (c) the number of charter schools allowed to operate in the State (120). The Governor argues that his proposal would open charter schools to as many as 13,000 students who are waiting to enroll. Critics of the plan, including the State's teachers union, question the number of students on waiting lists and argue that there should be a moratorium on new charter schools.

Michigan Update - February 2004

In late January, The Detroit News reported that close to 120 schools in Michigan will be required to develop restructuring plans because they have failed to meet requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) for five consecutive years. Having to reach Federal benchmarks on the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) for five years, the schools must select one of four restructuring options: (1) close and reopen as a charter school; (2) replace all or most of its staff; (3) allow the State or an outside group to operate the school; or (4) restructure the school's governance. A school failing to make progress for another year must then implement its plan. It is expected that as many as three-quarters of the affected schools could be in the Detroit area.

The State has published school "report cards" based on results of the MEAP as well as such other factors as attendance, curriculum, and family involvement. Overall, 259 schools were rated "A" on their school report cards, 976 received "B", 99 got "C", and 94 were rated "D." More than 40 percent (1,143) of the State's schools were not graded because they were too small or because they didn't provide appropriate data.

In late February, the State agreed to a four-year contract with Hewlett-Packard calling for laptop computers in the hands of sixth grade students across Michigan. The \$68 million contract is supported by an anticipated \$17 million a year in Federal funding which is limited to schools that fail to make progress under the No Child Left Behind Act. Called "Freedom to Learn," the laptop program is the descendent of the "Learning Without Limits" pilot grant program created in 2002 by House Speaker Rick Johnson. As many as 40,000 students could get laptops or handheld devices in the first year with hopes that eventually, the program could extend to 130,000 sixth-graders. Under the project, which is operated by the Michigan Virtual University, Hewlett-Packard has agreed to charge no more than \$275 per student for the equipment, insurance, technical support, and training.

Minnesota Update - February 2004

State Commissioner of Education Cheri Yecke has created a working group to consider ways to address problems in chronically low-performing schools.

Shortly before Secretary Paige made a site visit to St. Paul, the Minnesota Senate Education Committee passed a bill that would have the State withdraw from NCLB. The bill was sponsored by a Republican in a Democratically-controlled Senate. The bill would be included in an omnibus education bill that has to be voted by the Senate this Spring.

In his State of the State address, Governor Pawlenty, a Republican, stated that approximately \$4 billion of the \$4.5 billion deficit last year has been erased. One of his priorities next year will be reform of State policies and procedures for allocating State funds to districts.

As reported in the Twin Cities Pioneer Press, the number of students participating in online learning is expected to grow rapidly in the next few years. Currently, the offerings facing parents and students are extremely confusing with only about 1,000 out of the State's 850,000 public school students receiving their instruction online. Minnesota Virtual Academy is a one-year-old online charter school with an enrollment of 340 students. The school believes it would have tripled that enrollment but for State restrictions. Cyber Village Academy is a charter middle school that combines two days of in-class instruction with three days of in-home online learning .

The controversial State history standards have been endorsed by professors at many of Minnesota's colleges and universities. First proposed in December by Education Commissioner Yecke, the history standards were initially met with considerable criticism on the grounds they were misaligned with their designated grades and were too politically conservative. The Minneapolis Star Tribune reports that revisions made in the last two months have muted much of the criticism.

New Jersey Update - February 2004

In his annual address to the State legislature, Governor James McGreevey announced a Statewide after-school program modeled after a private program established in New York. As reported in The New York Times, the New York after-school program, begun in 1998, is operated by the After School Corporation which provides matching funds for schools and community-based organizations that run such programs. Close to 50,000 New York students in nearly 200 -- mostly low-income -- schools benefited from the program. The New Jersey Governor's plan is to be established by executive order and, therefore according to the Governor's office, does not require legislative approval. A not-for-profit corporation would be set up to provide seed money, to raise additional funds from private sources, and to allocate the funds to local afterschool programs.

The State allocates approximately \$7,000 per pre-K student through the Abbott District preschool program, which is the highest allocation in the nation.

New York Update - February 2004

In late January, the New York State Comptroller rejected a no-bid consulting contract to assess the cost of a sound, basic education in New York. The \$1.2 million contract, awarded to Standard & Poor's, was intended to identify the costs needed to comply with a court order issued last June. According to The New York Times, opponents of the contract, led by Sheldon Silver, majority leader of the State Assembly, believe the agreement would represent a conflict of interest because Standard & Poor's already receives millions of dollars from the State to rate the State's bonds and to assess the quality of standardized tests used in the public schools.

The New York State United Teachers Community College Distance Learning Committee has developed a document called "Negotiating the Distance" which provides guidance regarding policy and bargaining issues surrounding distance learning. The union report draws its language from community college contracts across the State.

New York City Public Schools is planning to replace its new city-wide curriculum, initiated four months ago in 49 low-achieving elementary schools, with the Harcourt *Trophies* program in order to receive \$34 million in Reading First funds according to the New York Times. The article states that other school systems that use reading approaches similar to the recently-adopted city-wide reading curriculum have "refused" to bow to the Federal mandates. Applications by districts who wish to participate in the Reading First program, under the guidelines negotiated between USED and the State Department of Education, must have been submitted by the first week in January. Knowledgeable observers have noted that some eligible districts are not submitting for all of the eligible schools in their districts because of disagreements with the prescriptive reading approaches and/or the creation of other problems which make the money not worth the "hassle." As reported in the November TechMIS Washington Update, the USED Office of Inspector General will be conducting an audit this year of the approval processes and other implementation provisions of Reading First in selected states and districts.

The New York Times reports that New York City schools is planning to establish more rigorous promotion requirements for the City's third graders. The new requirements would rely on standardized reading and mathematics exams and would have all students scoring at Level 1 (the lowest of four ranking levels) retained in grade. It is estimated that as many as 20 percent of the City's approximately 75,000 third grade students could be affected. The City plans to establish intervention teams to provide tutorial assistance to second and third graders after school, on weekends, and during an intensive summer school program. The City has earmarked \$25 million for this special assistance. Skeptics claim that retaining large numbers of third graders this year will only serve to increase scores on the Statewide fourth grade assessment in 2005 when Mayor Bloomberg is up for re-election.

In late January, New York City Schools Chancellor, Joel Klein has called for major changes in the way City teachers are paid. As reported in The New York Times, the Chancellor has worked with the teachers' union to eliminate most work rules and to facilitate the discipline or dismissal of incompetent teachers. In addition, the plan calls for bonuses based on student achievement and higher salaries for teachers in high-demand subjects (such as math and science) and for those who work in troubled schools.

According to The New York Times, a recently released, 18-month study of school costs indicates that New York City Public Schools would need an additional \$4.1 billion annually to provide a "sound basic education" -- defined as a State Regents high school diploma -- to all of its students. The court-ordered study will generate considerable debate in the legislature because the State is currently facing a \$5.1 billion budget deficit. The additional \$4.1 billion would represent a 36 percent increase over expenditures for the 2001-02 school year (the most recent year for which data is available). Expanding the study to schools across the State would add another \$3 billion to the cost of education. The Governor has proposed using video lottery terminals to raise at least part of the needed revenues. It is estimated that these lottery terminals would provide \$325 million for the State's schools.

Ohio Update - February 2004

As part of its overall effort to develop a single state accountability system which includes special education students, the State has awarded \$3.8 million to districts to align curriculum and instruction for students with disabilities with Ohio's academic content standards. According to Counterpoint (Winter 2000), the Mason City Schools in Warren County have developed a guide used by other districts entitled "Rating Expectations: Aligning IEPs with Academic Content Standards." For more information contact (614) 466-4650.

Education Daily reports that 94 percent of Ohio's high school seniors have passed all parts of the exit exam required for graduation. Pass rates for reading (99 percent), writing (98 percent), citizenship (97 percent), and science (96 percent) were considerably higher than the pass rate for mathematics (94 percent). The 7,600 seniors Statewide who have still not passed the exam (which was first given in ninth grade) have two more chances to pass the exam between now and the end of the school year. The current exit exam will be replaced -- beginning for the Class of 2007 -- with the new Ohio Graduation Tests which State officials believe are more aligned with the State curriculum.

A recent report by an independent education finance research group has estimated that the actual annual cost of implementing NCLB throughout the state will be \$1.5 billion; USED funds will cover about \$660 million, while the State will have to pay \$840 million. Because the State's objective prior to NCLB was to have 75 percent of its students meeting proficiency levels, the additional costs of meeting the 100 percent proficiency level under NCLB were significant, accounting for most of the \$1.5 billion total. One expert, James Guthrie of Vanderbilt University, who provided consulting services to the Houston Independent School District under former Superintendent Rod Paige, felt the estimates were accurate. On the other hand, Jack Jennings, Director of the Center for Education Policy, felt the estimates were much too low, while Accountability Works President Theodore Rebarber felt the report substantially over-estimated costs. Accountability Works has received several million dollars from USED directly or indirectly through groups such as the Education Leaders Council or through pro-administration associations such as the Fordham Institute. Rebarber was a policy analyst at

USED during the first Bush presidency. The CCSSO recently published an RFP soliciting proposals from education finance experts to come up with a template model which can be used by states, including state legislatures, to estimate the cost of full implementation of NCLB provisions in the states.

Oklahoma Update - February 2004

State funding to local school districts will be about eight percent less than expected. This will cause major cuts in district programs. Tulsa, for example, has increased class size and replaced substitute teachers with volunteers.

Last June, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Oklahoma had become the 26th state to gain approval for its accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act.

The National Institute for Early Education Research identified Oklahoma as one of the top three states for having quality pre-K programs. Over half of the four-year-old students in the State are served by preschool programs.

Oregon Update - February 2004

A recent report by The Oregonian strongly suggests that the academic progress Oregon students have been making in elementary school is being lost at the high school level. The trend has been discouraging to State education officials. In 1997, two-thirds of Oregon's fifth grade students were rated proficient on the State reading assessment. By the time this cohort of students finished tenth grade, fewer than half met State standards.

Currently, more than a quarter of the Oregon students entering high school do not graduate. Only about half of those who do graduate meet the State's tenth grade reading and mathematics standards. More than a third of the State's minority students drop out of high school and only about 20 percent meet the State's math standards. The heart of Oregon's school reform movement was supposed to have been the Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM), a credential of high school achievement. Only 29 percent of the State's high school graduates earned their CIM.

Most Oregon high schools failed to make adequate yearly progress under Federal standards last year. In particular, only three of the State's 74 largest high schools meet AYP. The State's largest district, Portland, was notably poor. At four of the city's traditional high schools, more than two-thirds of all students do not meet reading or math standards. And none of Portland's high schools made AYP under Federal standards.

In early February, Oregon voters rejected an \$800 million legislature-supported tax increase. The failure of Measure 30 will result in a budget cut of \$299 million for schools across the State. Last year, due to budget shortfalls, Oregon had to cut short its school year by 17 days. How it plans to deal with the current crisis is currently under consideration.

Pennsylvania Update - February 2004

In late November, Pennsylvania agreed to give parents sole decision-making authority as to whether their children are to be placed in special education programs. As reported in Education Daily, the State's change in policy came in response to a warning from the U.S. Department of Education that State policies must be brought into alignment with Federal regulations by July 2004 or the State could lose more than \$300 million in IDEA funding. The State has published the regulation change in the Pennsylvania Bulletin, its official rule making document. The State has also informed all local school districts that they must conform to the new policy.

At the end of December, Governor Edward Rendell proposed a budget of \$258 million over the next year and a half, ending a six-month period during which Pennsylvania school districts did not receive their full State subsidies and were left scrambling for interim funding. As reported in the Philadelphia Daily News, the Governor's budget includes increases in basic, vocational, and special education, as well as funds for more tutoring. The Philadelphia school district will be the beneficiary of \$51 million in additional funding, including \$18 million for basic education, \$5.5 million for special education, \$11 million for tutorial programs, and \$16 million for empowerment grants. It is expected that the State will pay for some of the \$1-2 million in fees and interest Philadelphia accrued as they borrowed funds (up to \$225 million) while State subsidies were frozen. The Governor is pressing the legislature to approve legalized slot machines to provide revenue needed to support \$1 billion in property tax relief and \$2 billion in economic stimulus bonds.

In an effort to compete with Pennsylvania's online charter schools, a consortium of rural school districts has established Blendedschools.net. eSchoolNews reports that the new organization, founded this summer, has developed a K-8 distance learning curriculum taught by State-certified teachers. The curriculum is supplemented by online courses from such outside providers as class.com and Keystone National High School. With a current enrollment of about 4,300 students, Blendedschools.net plans to offer an online high school curriculum in the near future. Districts participating in the consortium currently pay a fee (approximately \$10,000) to cover the

cost of the online programs. A member of the legislature's education committee is planning to introduce a bill to require the State to reimburse districts for their participation fee.

Education Daily reports that the Pennsylvania School Boards Association is considering legal action challenging the No Child Left Behind Act. Specifically, the PSBA charges that NCLB creates unrealistic requirements, conflicts with existing State law, lacks adequate funding, and restricts the autonomy of local school boards. It is unclear, however, who exactly the PSBA intends to sue.

According to Education Week Pennsylvania is one of two states (the other being Idaho) to adopt the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE) program (affiliated with the Education Leaders Council) in which teachers are enrolled in a certification program as well as a training program. Now the State is reconsidering the licensing arrangement as the result of recent State Board decisions mandating that new teachers enrolled in the ABCTE alternative route certification process now have to enroll in state-approved education programs and complete internship before receiving a state license. The ABCTE initiative has been opposed by teachers' unions and schools of education within the State. As noted in the last TechMIS report, ABCTE is scheduled to receive between \$7-\$8 million annually over the next three or four years totaling \$35 million from Congressional earmarks and USED discretionary funds to implement the initiative.

The State plans to establish a pre-K program next school year which will provide approximately \$175 million in the form of block grants to districts who can spend such money on half-day preschool or full-day kindergarten programs. The State has already implemented its CyberStart program which provides nearly 50,000 students in grades pre-K through one with access to technology. Phase IV of the program is currently in process; district grant applications were due at the State on January 23 and are now being evaluated. It is anticipated that 250 child care providers will participate in Phase IV.

As reported in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, more than 96 percent of the teachers in Pennsylvania meet the State's definition of "highly-qualified." The State "report card" released in late January

shows that approximately 94 percent of the teachers in poorer districts meet the State's standards. Charter schools, however, show the lowest ratings with many of them showing less than 50 percent of their teachers as "highly qualified."

Rhode Island Update - February 2004

Rhode Island is working, as part of a collaboration with Vermont and New Hampshire, to develop common reading, writing, and mathematics assessments for grades 3-8. Rhode Island has identified nearly a third of its schools for improvement under NCLB. The states issued a Request for Proposal and are currently evaluating proposals. Development of the exams is expected to begin in January 2004.

State Superintendent Peter McWalters has proposed to increase the minimum amount of hours, from five and five and a half respectively, to seven hours for elementary and secondary students. It is not clear whether additional funding will be appropriated and whether or not such extension of daily instruction time would conflict with collective bargaining agreements. Apparently the only state that has a seven hour minimum per day is Texas. Most of the other states require six to six and a half minimum hours of instruction.

According to the Providence Journal, 11 elementary schools will each receive between \$150,000 and \$200,000 to hire reading coaches, train teachers, and purchase scientifically-based reading materials. Funded under the Federal Reading First program, eight of the schools are in Providence -- Alan Shawn Feinstein, Alfred Lima, Charles Fortes, Laurel Hill Avenue, Mary E. Fogarty, Robert L. Bailey, Webster Avenue, and Windmill Street. The other three recipients are in Pawtucket.

Tennessee Update - February 2004

Support is mounting within various quarters throughout the State to take steps now to prevent larger than expected numbers of students from failing graduation exams next year. The State Board of Education now supports initiatives such as having vocational educational students take core academic courses that are aligned with the State assessment, expanding dropout prevention programs, and providing necessary accommodations for special education and LEP students. As reported in Education Week, the State Board on January 30 made recommendations which would require districts to “offer research-based interventions to students scoring below proficiency level on the State’s tests in the third, fifth, and eighth grades.”

Texas Update - February 2004

Governor Rick Perry has proposed a number of education initiatives based on incentives rather than increases in the State's basic school funding formula. The new programs are expected to reward schools for improving their dropout rates, preparing students better to take college entrance exams, and increasing the percentage of school funds spent directly for instruction. Earlier, the Governor had stated that the State's \$27 billion education budget would not have to be increased.

The Houston Chronicle reports that a group of Texas educators have developed a plan that would result in massive changes to the State's preschool programs. The proposal calls for free preschool for all children in families with low and moderate incomes. With a total budget of \$5.6 billion -- \$2.4 billion annually in new State funds -- the plan would subsidize preschool attendance for public and private preschools meeting State-specified standards for curriculum and teacher-student ratio.

In late January, Governor Perry proposed a \$500 million plan to provide financial incentives for schools that improve student test scores and reduce dropout rates. As reported in The Dallas Morning News, the Governor's proposal would give school districts \$600 for each student who stays in school through the twelfth grade and who passes the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). The plan would also provide districts with \$100 for each regular student (\$200 for each student at risk of dropping out) who scores at the "commended performance" -- 90 percent -- level on the TAKS. In addition, the plan would give \$1,000 for each regular student (\$2,000 for each at-risk student) who completes the most rigorous academic course of study -- the Distinguished Achievement Program.

The Lt. Governor, at the same time, proposed development of a new exam that can compare the achievement of Texas students with those in other states.

Governor Perry has used NEA statistics to argue that Texas schools spend \$10,400 per pupil each year. The Dallas Morning News reports that the Governor has used this data to support his

new \$500 million plan of financial incentives for the State's public schools. The Governor's critics, including the NEA, argue that the true number is much lower. In fact, the TEA's own financial records show that, in 2002-03, schools spent an average of \$7,088 per student. The NEA's summary data ranked Texas 33rd in annual education spending at \$7,152, below the national average of \$7,829.

Utah Update - February 2004

The New York Times reports that the Utah House has passed a bill prohibiting the use of State funds to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). An original bill would have forced the State to return \$103 million in Federal education funds. As passed, the bill allows use of the Federal funds but allocates no State money from NCLB. This move by the Republican-controlled legislative body represents a rebuke to President Bush and highlights the lack of full funding for NCLB.

The Deseret Morning News reports that a Republican-sponsored bill currently in the legislature would give vouchers for students with disabilities to attend private schools. The bill is modeled after the McKay scholarship program in Florida. The bill's supporters also see the plan as a way to pilot test a voucher system. For the same reasons, the bill is opposed by the Utah Education Association, as well as by Utah's State Superintendent. The proposed bill would give parents a "scholarship" equal to their child's State allocation (as measured by the weighted pupil unit determined by the level of disability) -- as much as \$5,400 -- for private school tuition.

Virginia Update - February 2004

The Virginia Board of Education has passed a proposal which will be submitted to the General Assembly that would allow it to sue school districts that are chronically low achieving. Unlike other states, the Virginia Board of Education does not have the right to take over failing schools or districts. If the proposal is passed by the legislature, the Virginia Board of Education would have the power to force school districts to comply with detailed remedial plans which could include curriculum or staffing changes. The State will develop improvement plans for these districts and wants the power to impose legal sanctions on those that fail to cooperate. Failing schools in Virginia are those in which fewer than 70 percent of students pass state Standards of Learning exams. This list will be available later this Spring.

Governor Warner proposed a \$770 million increase over the next two years for K-12 to pay his proposed overhaul of the state tax system. It is likely to receive opposition in some Republican quarters that control both legislative chambers.

Nearly unanimously, the Virginia House of Delegates passed a resolution asking the Federal government to exempt Virginia from the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. As reported in The Washington Post, the Republican-controlled legislative body has called NCLB an unfunded mandate that represents Federal intrusion into local control of education and claims that it undermines the State's own school improvement efforts. In response, the U.S. Department of Education says that Virginia has approximately \$170 in unspent Federal funds accumulated over the past four years. Other states, including Ohio and North Dakota, have agreed that NCLB is significantly underfunded and many states, including Virginia, Utah, and Arizona, are considering opting out of NCLB requirements and funding.

The Virginia House of Delegates has passed a bill that would prohibit State colleges and universities from enrolling illegal aliens. The Washington Times reports that the Republican-controlled House has sent the measure to the State Senate for further consideration.

Washington Update - February 2004

In June, the Washington State Board of Education will decide whether or not to maintain 2008 as the date by which high school seniors must pass the Washington Assessment of student Learning (WASL) in order to graduate. The Seattle Times reports that only about a third of last year's tenth grade students met standards on all three of the WASL's content areas -- reading, writing, and mathematics. The Board is debating the possibilities of adjusting the passing standards. Currently, a student must get a "3" (on a scale of 1-4) in reading and math to be considered "meeting standard." The Board could drop this to "2." In addition, the legislature is considering allowing WASL retakes (currently not permitted), but funding for the retakes is an issue.

West Virginia Update - February 2004

The West Virginia Department of Education conducted a conference for special education and Title I administrators in September designed to improve communications and coordination between these separate programs. Moreover, both Title I and special education are now in the same division within the Department of Education. At the district level, both special education and Title I are required to jointly develop strategic plans for schoolwide programs and shared professional development initiatives.

This Spring, West Virginia will conduct its second grant competition under the Federal 21st Century Community Learning Center program. The State expects to award as many as 20 three-year grants of at least \$50,000 per year. The State is encouraging applications from underperforming Title I schools and other identified as low-performing by the State. It is expected that applications will represent collaborations between local school districts and one or more community-based organizations. A technical assistance workshop for potential applicants was held on February 27, 2004, and applications are due on March 29. Grant recipients will be announced in May with projects beginning operation in July 2004.