

## Alaska Update - April 2004

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The Association Press reports that this year's high school seniors who have disabilities will be able to graduate without passing the State's new high school exit exam. The change, resulting from an agreement in a class-action lawsuit, will affect more than 500 twelfth-graders this year. The status of disabled students in future years is currently under consideration.

Disability Rights Advocates had filed a class-action lawsuit against the State of Alaska charging that the State's high-stakes assessment system discriminates against students with disabilities. According to [Education Daily](#) and [The New York Times](#), the suit claimed that, under the current policy, approximately 75 percent of the State's seniors who are classified in special education would not be allowed to graduate with their class. The suit said that the Alaska system placed unfair limitations on allowable accommodations, did not provide appropriate alternative assessments, and created confusion by repeatedly changing its regulations for disabled students. Disability Rights Advocates has also been successful in challenging other proposed high school exit exams in California and Oregon.

## Arizona Update - April 2004

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The Arizona Republic reports that opposition to the No Child Left Behind Act is growing in Arizona. A group of legislators -- both Democrats and Republicans -- have proposed withdrawing from the Federal program arguing that it is underfunded by \$167 million in the State. Public schools in Arizona could lose as much as \$340 million in Federal funds if the plan is implemented. Moreover, the Arizona Education Association recently sponsored a rally at the State Capitol to protest the new testing/accountability requirements of NCLB and its lack of adequate funding.

Arizona has developed a number of three-person teams who have been trained to determine why the State's under-performing schools are failing. In the past two months, these teams have conducted three-day visits at 56 of Arizona's 134 under-performing schools. More than 80 of these schools are facing the possibility of State takeover. The most common problem found by these "solution teams" is the schools' failure to teach the reading, writing, and mathematics achievement goals included in the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards.

A bill introduced in the Arizona legislature would allow the State's ten community college districts to offer bachelor's degree programs in selected fields. An effort to meet the needs of rural areas for professional staff, the measure would authorize a six-year pilot program to offer four-year degrees in teaching, nursing, law enforcement, and fire science.

According to Education Week, the Arizona State Board of Education has approved a new testing contract. CTB/McGraw-Hill was the successful bidder on the \$45 million, five-year contract to develop a new version of the Arizona Instrument for Measuring Standards (AIMS) exam. Other bidders were Harcourt Assessment and Riverside Publishing.

Over the last two-three years, the Arizona School Facilities Board has allocated \$212 million of State money for school technology -- including classroom computers, wire infrastructure, and educational software. Its objective is one computer for every eight Arizona public school students. Educational technology experts in the State have labeled the one-shot technology plan

“a positive step,” but have noted that there are no State funds earmarked for the maintenance, repair, or upgrading of the hardware, nor is there any Statewide system to train teachers in the appropriate use of technology.

## Arkansas Update - April 2004

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Arkansas has hired, as its State Superintendent, Ken James, the Superintendent of the Fayette County (Kentucky) school system. According to Education Week, the new State Superintendent's State-mandated salary will be supplemented by donations through a State foundation.

## California Update - April 2004

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Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has proposed a level of school funding that is a total of \$2 billion less than that supposedly guaranteed by Proposition 98. This would reduce the per-pupil spending allocation by \$175.

In early March, California voters approved, by a very narrow margin, Proposition 55 which provides \$12.3 billion for school construction. Education Week reports that \$10 billion of the bond issue will be allocated to K-12 school construction, with the remaining \$2.3 billion devoted to higher education. The voters also passed a plan set forth by Governor Schwarzenegger to balance the State budget by issuing bonds to spread out the \$15 billion budget deficit.

The intent of many educators to strengthen the California high school diploma has been met with another setback. More than a third of the high school districts in the State have applied for, and are expected to receive, waivers from the requirement that this year's seniors must pass an algebra class. This year's graduating class has also avoided the requirement that they pass an exit exam.

Test scores released in mid-March show that English language learners in California have made significant progress for the second consecutive year. As reported in the Los Angeles Times, in 2003, more than 43 percent of the State's 1.4 million students for whom English is a second language showed proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking English. As measured by the California English Language Development Test, this proficiency rate was up markedly from 2002 (34 percent) and 2001 (25 percent). The numbers in Los Angeles closely paralleled the Statewide rates with proficiency rates improving from 16 percent in 2001 to 29 percent in 2002 to 42 percent in 2003.

In early March, voters in San Francisco approved Proposition H which will establish a fund to supplement City spending on public education. According to Education Week, the City will contribute an additional \$10 million in 2005 from its general fund and will increase its

contribution to \$60 million by 2009. The additional funds will be earmarked for preschool education, school libraries, arts, physical education, and classroom improvements.

The Los Angeles Unified School District will begin phasing in full-day kindergarten in some schools next school year. As reported in the Los Angeles Times, the district will change its traditional half-day kindergarten classes to full-day over the next four years. Because not all elementary schools have available space, the program will be implemented next year only on campuses that have space. The local teachers' union has strongly opposed the plan on the grounds that it is unfair to offer full-day classes only to some students. Although the union supports full-day kindergarten, it argues that it should only be implemented districtwide.

## Colorado Update - April 2004

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The Denver Post reports that a legislative committee has approved a Republican-backed bill that would allow the State to issue vouchers that could be used by college students at public and private colleges across Colorado. The measure is in response to warnings that State-funded institutions could be forced to close without such State assistance because of revenue shortfalls and spending restrictions. Democrats oppose the bill because it allows support for private schools. The committee is reviewing the \$400,000+ annual cost of tracking the students and vouchers.

In mid-February, a Colorado legislative committee approved the creation of a pilot voucher program for students with disabilities. As reported in Education Daily, the program -- which is slated to begin during the 2005-06 school year -- will allow more than 5,500 students Statewide receiving scholarships of up to \$6,000 to attend private schools. Modeled after the McKay Scholarship program in Florida, the Colorado voucher demonstration will be supported by a combination of State and Federal IDEA funds.

According to the Rocky Mountain News, Colorado's alternative teachers (i.e., those in alternative route certification programs) average less than 20 hours of preparation before beginning classroom instruction. The State has 44 alternative teacher preparation programs, 30 of which responded to a survey conducted by the Alliance for Quality Teaching. Originally considered a stop-gap measure during teacher shortages, alternative teachers are providing more and more of Colorado's teachers. Alternative teachers tend to be older (average age 35) and better educated than other beginning teachers. However, the Alliance report shows that the quality of their preparation varies widely with nearly a quarter of the programs requiring no orientation for alternative teachers.

## Connecticut Update - April 2004

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A study directed by the State's Commission on Children at the request of the legislature's Education Committee, has found that young children who go to at least two years of preschool are more than twice as likely to develop basic skills as children with no preschool experience. The study, which surveyed 400 kindergarten teachers and 3,300 students, indicated that nearly two-thirds of children with two years of preschool had most of the math, language, and literacy skills needed for kindergarten. Only 25 percent of Connecticut children with no preschool had such language skills and only 30 percent had the requisite math skills.

Connecticut educators have been facing long delays in receiving statewide test results. Scores from this year's Connecticut Mastery Test were to have been reported shortly after the first of the year under the State's \$48 million, seven-year contract with CTB/McGraw-Hill. Now, the full report on scores is expected by June 15. CTB has stated that it "misjudged the complexity" of scoring the test, particularly for the questions requiring written responses. The test was administered in September to 125,000 students in the fourth, sixth, and eighth grades. The initial scores on the written answers were significantly lower than the prior years and the State has required CTB to rescore the exam.



## **Delaware Update - April 2004**

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Delaware had planned to implement a three-tiered diploma system for its high school graduates this June. The system would award distinguished, standard, or basic diplomas based on students' tenth grade scores on the Delaware Student Testing Program. However, legislation is pending that would delay implementation of the system for two years. Critics of the tiered system say it will hurt low-achieving students who, seeing they won't get a standard diploma, might drop out. They also say high-achieving students could have a bad test day and get an undeservedly "low" diploma. The State's Secretary of Education says retests are available so the latter argument is irrelevant.

## Florida Update - April 2004

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The Miami Herald reports that a Democratic legislator has called for an independent evaluation of last year's version of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). There is the feeling among many educators that the third-grade exam was dumbed down in order to show Statewide improvement in student performance.

Despite Governor Jeb Bush's ambitious plan to provide universal pre-kindergarten, a State Senate committee voted to delay the plan while establishing a pilot program to operate this summer. The Miami Herald reports that Miami-Dade Mayor Alex Penelas, the author of the 2002 Constitutional amendment that called for universal pre-kindergarten, has recommended that the scaled back program be "shelved" rather than pass as a "glorified babysitting program."

The St. Petersburg Times reports that the Florida Center for Reading Research in Tallahassee, established two years ago, is conducting research to guide State policy on reading and to help teachers of reading. The Center, developed in response to the Federal Reading First initiative, helps educators design programs that follow the principles detailed in Reading First. The State has awarded Reading First subgrants to more than 300 schools in high-poverty areas.

The Florida Department of Education's website (<http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org>) provides the test scores for all public schools in the State, broken down by grade level. Similar information is not, however, available for private schools despite the fact that publicly funded vouchers are used in many non-public schools. Legislators from both parties want aggregated scores for private schools released so that voucher schools can be measured. There is a provision pending in the current voucher bill that would require the release of aggregated scores for schools with at least ten voucher students (only voucher student scores would be included).

## Georgia Update - April 2004

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The State legislature has passed a budget cutting education funding by \$180 million. This represents a smaller decrease than Governor Perdue's original proposed \$400,000 cut.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reports that, in late April, Georgia students in grades 1-8 took the Criterion Referenced Competency tests on such subjects as math and English. Third-graders, in particular, were under pressure because their reading results will determine whether they are promoted. It is estimated that more than ten percent of the State's 100,000 third-graders will fail. Students who fail to pass the exam can try again after a summer program. Those who don't try, or fail to pass, a second time will be left back or be placed in a between-grade transitional class. Many Democratic State legislators have opposed Governor Sonny Perdue's "pass-or-stay-back" initiative, but finally agreed after requiring that an outside organization evaluate the exam's success and assess the ways failing students respond.

## Idaho Update - April 2004

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The Idaho legislature has passed legislation establishing a commission to approve new charter schools. Supported by Governor Dick Kempthorne, the measure also directs more funds to Internet-based charter schools and removes the five-year limit on charter approval. As reported by The Idaho Statesman, the new law also requires charter schools to be more open with their financial information and public records.

As reported in The Idaho Statesman, the Idaho legislature has approved a plan to provide additional funds to the struggling Idaho Virtual Academy. The spending plan would funnel \$1.6 million in State funds to the school, eliminating most (all but \$144,000) of the school's deficit for this year. Many legislators objected to the bailout of a private enterprise operated by K-12, a private company owned by former Education Secretary William Bennett.

The Christian Science Monitor reports that at least one rural school district in Idaho is cutting costs by instituting a four-day school week for its students. The Orofino district -- along with many other rural school systems in at least twelve states -- is experimenting with a plan that saves on such costs as heating and transportation by eliminating either Monday or Friday and lengthening the other school days by at an hour each. The Orofino plan faces vocal national and local opposition from those who believe the plan carries too high an academic cost, in addition to causing lifestyle problems for many families.

## Illinois Update - April 2004

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The Chicago Daily Herald reports that enrollments in online courses in Illinois increased by 54 percent in the 2002-03 school year (the latest year data are available) to a total of more than 125,000. The statistics were compiled by the Illinois Virtual Campus -- part of the University of Illinois -- from 68 public and private higher education institutions in the State.

According to the Chicago Tribune, the Illinois Alternative Assessment, used to evaluate nearly 8,000 of the State's most severely disabled students, is being sharply criticized by the educators required to use it. Teachers must spend as much as 40 hours per student compiling a student work portfolio which is scored by a test contractor. Teachers argue that the IAA is too subjective to measure students' performance accurately, does not help to improve instruction, and consumes many hours of valuable teaching time.

Education Daily reports that a study of Chicago third grade students shows that the City's policy of minimizing social promotions could be beneficial to some of the affected students. Conducted by researchers at Harvard and Brigham Young Universities, the study found that students who attended summer school -- including many who faced being retained in the third grade -- did better academically than those who narrowly passed the assessment. The study also determined, however, that the summer school program and the City's effort to end social promotion offered no benefits for older students (sixth graders) who participated in the study. As reported in the Chicago Tribune, sixth-graders retained in grade showed less improvement in reading than comparable low-achieving students who were promoted. The report also showed that about 20 percent of third and sixth graders retained in grade were placed in special education within two years, a rate far higher than for comparable students. A parallel study showed that Chicago students retained in the eighth grade were more likely to dropout eventually than were comparable students.

Education Daily reports that the Chicago school system, concerned about its strict policy regarding social promotions, is considering an easing of the requirements. Under current policy, students now in the third, sixth, and eighth grades must pass standardized tests in reading and

mathematics in order to be promoted. Students who fail are required to attend summer school and may be promoted if they pass a retest. The revised policy proposed by the district would eliminate the math requirement, meaning students need only pass the reading component to move up in grade.

## Louisiana Update - April 2004

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A Louisiana legislative committee has proposed a series of resolutions highly critical of the No Child Left Behind Act. As reported in The Advocate, the resolutions include one asking the U.S. Congress to fully fund NCLB, another asking the State to calculate the cost of NCLB to Louisiana, and a third affirming the State will not comply with NCLB requirements unless additional Federal funding is forthcoming.

The New Orleans School District has decided to close eleven failing middle schools as part of its plan to improve learning in the school system. As reported in The Times-Picayune, Superintendent Tony Amato plans to phase out the middle schools over the next 2-3 years. Students currently in the schools will continue until they graduate into high school. Students who would have moved to these schools from elementary schools will go to the middle school grades in their elementary schools. A total of 45 elementary schools will be expanded to accommodate K-8 in the next two years.

## Maryland Update - April 2004

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The original budget proposed by Governor Ehrlich was more than \$40 million below the funding level needed to maintain current education operations and pay expenses for the phase-in of the new Thornton plan. The budget, as actually passed by the State legislature, reduced school funding by an additional \$30 million.

As reported in the Baltimore Sun, many Maryland school districts do not have the staff to provide adequate English instruction for English language learners. Overall, Maryland has more than 28,000 English language learners speaking 174 languages, the most common being Spanish, Korean, Chinese, and Creole. Some districts, particularly those in suburban Washington, D.C., have been teaching sizable ESOL populations for many years. However, other large districts -- including Baltimore City and Anne Arundel County -- are only now facing the problem of teaching these students. Many of these districts are extremely short staffed in ESOL teaching positions.

The Washington Post reports that Maryland is planning to change the way it interprets test results in order to ease the standards by which schools are measured. The new Maryland School Assessments have been criticized by educators and parents as being too stringent, particularly with respect to special education students and English language learners. Last year, more than a third of Maryland's 1,400 schools failed to meet standards. Currently, the State counts a subgroup toward a school's performance if it has at least five members; other states use considerably larger cut-off numbers for their AYP subgroups. New procedures are being developed and will be applied to this year's test scores to be released this summer.

Baltimore City Schools, facing bankruptcy, has rejected an offer of a State bailout, claiming too many strings were attached. Instead, according to The Washington Post, the district accepted an emergency loan of \$42 million from the Baltimore City Council. Combined with a \$16 million loan from the Abell Foundation, the City loan will allow the school district to avoid massive layoffs and pay cuts. It will, however, almost certainly require tax increases for citizens of Baltimore City.



## Massachusetts Update - April 2004

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Although Governor Romney's budget for school funding next year is up slightly from last year, it is nearly \$135 million lower than in FY 2003. After adjustment for inflation, this represents a seven percent cut.

The Boston Globe reports that dropout rates increased in the 2002-03 school year, corresponding to the first year students were required to pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exam in order to graduate from high school. Statewide, the high school dropout rate increased to 3.3 percent from 3.1 percent the prior year -- an increase of 900 students. Boston public schools had an increase in the number of dropouts of more than 1,400 students; so the rest of the State, in total, experienced a slight decline. In some school districts, however, the rates jumped significantly. Holyoke, for example, saw an increase from 7.6 percent to 10.2 percent and Dorchester's rate increased from 12.7 percent to nearly 20 percent.

## Michigan Update - April 2004

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The Governor's proposed FY 2005 budget restores the funding cut in December for all school districts except those with per-pupil spending of more than \$9,000. To include these high-spending districts in the restoration would have cost an additional \$50 million.

As reported in the Detroit Free Press, Michigan's scaled-back plan to give laptop computers to sixth grade students across the State -- known as Freedom to Learn -- has run into a snag in the form of Federal eligibility requirements. The plan called for as many as 44,000 students to receive the laptops next school year under the Freedom to Learn program, which is supported by Federal grant funds and must abide by Federal eligibility rules. A total of 82 school districts and charter schools applied to the State, only 30 applicants -- including seven that were participating in this year's pilot study -- meet the strict Federal eligibility requirements. In fact, only \$6.6 million of the \$17 million in available funds will be allocated. The current program will provide nearly 12,000 laptops to sixth-graders this year. The State may discuss with USED easing the restrictions in order to allow more districts to participate in the program.

The Detroit Free Press also reports that Michigan's laptop program has run into considerable obstacles among Detroit area school districts. Despite evidence of the program's effectiveness -- based upon pilot test results -- some districts may choose not to participate for a variety of reasons. Most commonly cited are the hidden costs of training, updating, repair, and inventory control for which no resources are provided.

A total of approximately \$5 million in Federal set-aside funds for school improvement is being allocated to 109 (\$45,000 per school) schools across Michigan that have failed to make adequate yearly progress under NCLB for a number of years. As reported in the Detroit News, the funds will be used by the schools -- two-thirds of which are in the Detroit area -- to plan for restructuring. These plans, which could include replacing staffs or privatizing school operations, will be implemented if the schools fail to meet NCLB standards this school year (the testing results will not be available until late in the summer).

In March, the Michigan legislature introduced bills that would have the ACT college admissions test become the Statewide assessment exam for high school students. According to The Detroit News, the ACT would replace the controversial Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). The MEAP has been criticized by parents and educators for its time-consuming structure; it is administered over a two-week period while the ACT is a three-hour exam, thus freeing up class time. Moreover, because the ACT would become the State assessment, the State, rather than parents would pay the \$26 exam fee. Critics of the MEAP also believe that students will take the ACT more seriously because Michigan colleges currently use the ACT as an admission criterion.

## **Missouri Update - April 2004**

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According to an Associated Press report, teachers in 95 percent of Missouri's public schools were rated "highly qualified" under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The State credits its rigorous certification process for the high rate of qualification. Some critics question the value of such ratings citing the fact that half of the State's schools were identified as failing to make adequate yearly progress under NCLB.

## Nebraska Update - April 2004

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Nearly 70 percent of Nebraska's school districts failed to meet the adequate yearly progress requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act according to the Lincoln Journal-Star. District officials point out that, unlike many other states, Nebraska has not lowered its academic standards to improve the pass rate. In fact, many districts have set standards at a higher level than the Federal minimum. A similar experience is likely to occur this year in North Carolina where 110 of the 115 districts are likely to be identified for improvement.

## **New Jersey Update - April 2004**

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New Jersey is planning to permit eighth-grade students to take a foreign language proficiency exam. By passing the test, these students who are capable in a second language can earn high school foreign language credits toward the five-credit world language graduation requirement. An online oral test is now being piloted in four districts. The test requires students to speak into microphones -- in Spanish, French, German, or Japanese -- in response to computer prompts. To date, more than 500 students, from Linden, Edison, Haddonfield, and Northern Valley Regional, have volunteered to take the exam.

## **New Mexico Update - April 2004**

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New Mexico legislature has established a “school in need of improvement” fund which was designed to provide resources and technical assistance to students in schools that have failed to meet AYP for two consecutive years.

A Democratic leader in the New Mexico legislature has introduced a bill -- known as the Parental School Choice Scholarship Act -- that would establish a four-year pilot program to allow students from low-income families in grades K-8 to transfer to another public or private school using a voucher (called a scholarship) worth approximately \$6,500. The program would focus on school districts with low test scores, high dropout rates, large numbers of low-income students, and schools identified as in need of improvement by the State’s accountability system. As reported in School Reform News, the bill identifies eleven such districts -- including Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Gadsden, Las Cruces and Gallup-McKinley -- which serve more than 160,000 students. The plan would give up to 20 percent of these K-8 students (approximately 30,000) the opportunity to transfer to another school of their parents choosing. Parents would be given a voucher valued at 80 percent of the per-pupil expenditure in their districts.

## **New York Update - April 2004**

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Governor Pataki's proposed budget for FY 2005 contains \$150 million in additional State aid of which \$100 million is specified as a one-time "outside the formula" matching grant. It is estimated that New York school districts will need more than \$600 in State aid just to maintain the current level of services.

New York has made its competitive grant awards under the Federal Reading First program (see attached list). A total of 48 school districts and charter schools across the State will receive \$71.3 million in Reading First funds this year. New York's four largest districts -- New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse -- will receive nearly two-thirds (\$46.3 million) of the total grant amount. About 175 schools - 84 in New York City -- will participate in the program. Grantees will use Reading First funds to: (a) provide tutoring for low-performing students; (b) provide appropriate professional development; (c) implement scientifically-proven literacy programs; (d) select appropriate assessments; and (e) support early literacy in families where English is not their native language.

Education Week reports that a study by Teachers College at Columbia University indicates that Statewide universal pre-kindergarten could bring the State long-term savings by lessening the need for special education and reducing the number of students repeating grades. The study estimates that State spending of \$7,000 per child for pre-K would result in savings in special education of approximately \$300 million to the State over the course of the child's public education. The study also estimates that grade repetition would drop by more than nine percent, saving the State another \$22-51 million over the same period.

Education Daily reports that New York, moving in the opposite direction from other states (see Utah, Oregon), is phasing out its two-tiered high school diploma structure. The existing system awards basic diplomas and Regents diplomas (for college-bound seniors). The State anticipates reaching a system with high expectations for all students.



The New York Times reports that students are performing better on the Statewide Regents exams despite higher standards. On the downside, the achievement gap between white and minority students has not significantly decreased. Current data show that 94 percent of white students and 82 percent of Asian students who started high school in 1999 reached their senior year by June 2003, compared with only 61 percent of Hispanic and 65 percent of black students. New York City data indicated that overall only 63 percent of students starting high school in 1999 reached their senior year by 2003. Joel Klein, New York City's school chancellor, cited these statistics to emphasize the need to eliminate social promotions in the early grades. Approximately 36 percent of the City's ninth grade students and 43 percent of its tenth graders are retained in grade. Mayor Michael Bloomberg has used extraordinary mayoral powers to impose strict promotion requirements on third grade students.

As reported in Education Week, a USED audit report shows that New York City has inadequate control of its inventory of school computers and related equipment purchased with E-rate funds. The audit, based on a sample of 12 schools, indicates that the City cannot be certain that technology purchased through E-rate discounts are being used for their intended purposes.

New York City Schools are taking serious steps to end social promotion. As reported in Education Daily, the district has approved a plan to retain third-grade students who score in the bottom tier on the city's reading and math assessments, unless they improve their scores in summer school programs.

The New York Times reports that the New York City school district is planning to eliminate as many as two-thirds of the City's middle schools, nearly half of which have been designated as "in need of improvement." The middle schools will be replaced by expanded -- K through eighth grade -- grammar schools or new high schools covering grades six through twelve. City officials have indicated that more than 30 new schools could be operational by the start of next school year, although it could take five years to complete the construction needed for all of the new schools. Experts are not convinced that this type of change in grade configuration will improve school performance. Along with the new schools, the City is expecting to provide more

personal attention to students and perhaps to employ new instructional strategies such as having the same math teacher follow students from grade to grade.

<b>District</b>	<b>Requested Grant Amount</b>
Addison	\$399,792
Altmar-Parish	\$1,350,000
Amsterdam	\$450,000
Ausable Valley	\$384,594
Belfast	\$428,846
Brushton-Moira	\$408,838
Buffalo	\$3,600,000
Central NY Charter	\$191,460
Cherry Valley-Springfield	\$385,787
Clyde-Savannah	\$450,000
Corinth	\$448,229
Elmira	\$1,086,221
Eugenio Host Charter	\$229,126
Fallsburg	\$450,000
Fonda-Fulton	\$630,788
Franklinville	\$445,043
Global Concepts Charter	\$450,000
Gloversville	\$1,237,541
Greenport	\$450,000
Hannibal	\$525,736
Ilion	\$443,388
King Center Charter	\$606,552
Lackawanna	\$541,734
Marathon	\$408,873
Moravia	\$450,000
Morristown	\$326,592
Mt. Morris	\$343,536
New Covenant	\$417,982
North Rose-Wolcott	\$450,000
NYC	\$37,871,866
Oswego	\$1,097,946
Our World Neighborhood	\$310,207
Peekskill	\$685,775
Pine Valley	\$446,960
Poughkeepsie	\$788,450
Randolph	\$446,877
Red Creek	\$388,259
Rochester	\$1,800,000
Sandy Creek	\$449,329
Schenectady	\$1,799,362
Sherman	\$375,175
Sodus	\$449,137
South Country	\$854,221
Stamford	\$442,170
Stepping Stone Charter	\$450,000
Syracuse	\$3,036,714
Watervliet	\$787,904

## North Carolina Update - April 2004

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The North Carolina Department of Education has expanded its technical assistance program to assist low-performing districts. Conceivably, 110 of the 115 districts in the State could be identified for improvement next year.

The potential for large numbers of North Carolina students changing schools next year has raised concerns on the parts of State and local education officials. Last year, as reported in the News Observer, only 47 percent of the State's schools met the standards of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. This school year, 18 schools in the State were required to provide parental choice. Of the 7,200 students in these schools, only 377 requested transfers -- 300 of which were students from low-income families. Many local educators believe that, in the future, middle-class students will begin transferring out of the failing schools at a higher rate.

## **Oklahoma Update - April 2004**

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The proposed FY 2005 budget increases funding for teachers' health insurance, but it does not completely restore the cuts made last year, including those made to the school lunch program, special education, reading remediation, and parenting education for at-risk families.

## Oregon Update - April 2004

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As reported in Education Daily, Oregon has a system for awarding special certificates in addition to its basic high school diploma that has served as a model for other states, notably Utah. Beyond the basic diploma, many Oregon school districts award a “Certificate of Initial Mastery” which signifies that the student has passed State and local exams in English, mathematics, and science. Students can also earn special “endorsements” for achievement in such other subjects as foreign languages, physical education, and the arts. The State is currently developing a “Certificate of Advanced Mastery” focusing on career-related goals.

As reported in The Oregonian, Oregon is one of the few states that allows English language learners whose native languages are Spanish or Russian to see questions on standardized math tests in their native language as well as English. This Spring, State officials expect that 17,000 Oregon ESL students -- in grade three, five, eight, and ten -- will take math tests in Spanish or Russian; fewer than 5,000 did so last year. The two languages comprise 85 percent of the State’s ESL students. The questions are translated into Spanish and Russian by Via Language, a Portland-based translation agency.

Education Week reports that a group of anti-tax activists are seeking to repeal a \$384 million local income tax measure in Multnomah County. The Taxpayer Association of Oregon is seeking to get 14,000+ signatures on a petition by early May in order to place the repeal on the State’s September ballot. If the repeal is successful, it would put even greater financial pressure on many Oregon schools which have already had to lay off teachers, reduce sports programs, and reduce the school year.

## Pennsylvania Update - April 2004

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Governor Rendell and Education Secretary Vicki Phillips have questioned the State's ability to implement the accountability measures of the No Child Left Behind Act without more Federal funding and flexibility. They believe the current NCLB approach unfairly penalizes schools by applying the performance levels expected of all students to groups of special needs students such as English language learners and special education students. Some superintendents suggested a range of different testing methods for special education students. Recently, 130 Pennsylvania school superintendents signed a petition asking Senators and Congressmen representing Pennsylvania to urge a change in NCLB requirements.

On April 1, the State released to local school districts their share of the Governor's \$175 million in accountability block grants. As reported in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, the funds will be spent during the 2004-05 fiscal year on projects to improve student performance, tutoring, teacher education, class size reduction, pre-kindergarten, or full-day kindergarten. The funding formula for districts is based on the district's percentage of students below proficiency on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (75 percent) and the percentage of students scoring proficient or higher on the PSSA (25 percent). Also released were guidelines for grant applications that are due at the State on May 9. Among the allowable uses set forth in the grant guidelines are: (a) improving the performance of student subgroups identified under NCLB; (b) establishing or expanding strong science and information technology programs; and (c) providing additional teacher professional development programs. Estimated grant amounts and grant guidelines for each district can be viewed at [www.pde.state.pa.us](http://www.pde.state.pa.us).

In early March, the Pennsylvania legislature began consideration of a bill to establish a statewide telecommunications network for K-12 schools. As reported in Government Technology, the bill would create a Pennsylvania Education Technology Fund with an appropriation of \$50 million for the 2004-05 school year. Over the next year and a half, the funds would be used to set up a framework for awarding grants to school districts, voc-tech schools, intermediate units, and non-public schools. These grants would be used to improve technology infrastructure and to provide services to students, parents, and teachers that would expand network usage.

PNC Financial Services Group has established a ten-year, \$100 million initiative to improve early childhood education in Pennsylvania. The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review reports that the “Grow Up Great” program will soon establish an advisory panel of early childhood experts to guide the effort and will inaugurate a public awareness campaign highlighting the importance of early school readiness. In addition, grants totaling \$500,000 will be made to 12 early childhood programs across the State including two in the Pittsburgh area: a science initiative for the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Head Start Center and a home-based language development program for the Family Foundation/Head Start program at the University of Pittsburgh.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education reports that a large portion of the State’s teachers passed the tests to become certified as highly qualified under the No Child Left Behind Act. More than three-quarters of the teachers outside of Philadelphia were rated highly qualified. In Philadelphia, however, the results were markedly different. Overall, half of the middle school teachers failed. More than a third failed the social studies exam, 43 percent failed the English test, more than half flunked science, and almost two-thirds failed the math exam. The results are for tests taken in September and November 2003. The teachers can take the tests as often as they want through June 2006 in order to meet the Federal mandate. The Philadelphia School District is planning to offer teachers a 12-hour test preparation program to help them pass their teacher certification exams to become “highly qualified” by 2006 as required by the No Child Left Behind Act. The district is undertaking this effort because half of its 690 middle school teachers taking the exams last fall failed.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has approved two new charter schools. The Achievement House Charter School (610/527-6160) is an online school for high school students that provides teachers, mentors, and the curriculum online. The school expects to have between 200 and 250 students starting next Fall but plans to grow to no more than 450 students. The Pennsylvania Distance & Electronic Learning Academy Charter School ([www.pdela.com](http://www.pdela.com)), covering K-12, will be managed by Akron-based White Hot Management, a for-profit organization.



## **Puerto Rico Update - April 2004**

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Last June, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Puerto Rico had become the 28<sup>th</sup> state to gain approval for its accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act.

As reported in Education Week, Puerto Rico could lose as much as \$110 million in Federal Title I funds because of mismanagement. According to a USED audit report, \$16 million has already reverted to the U.S. Treasury and \$94 million may also be reverted unless Puerto Rico can demonstrate that the funds were obligated during the appropriate grant periods.

## South Carolina Update - April 2004

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Tired of waiting for the U.S. Congress to clarify requirements for “highly qualified” special education teachers, South Carolina has adopted new guidelines in the area. As reported in Education Daily, USED suggested that the State use a reading specialty test to assess beginning special education teachers, but the State chose to require the Praxis exam which measures knowledge in reading and mathematics. New special education teachers in South Carolina must have majored in special education, met State certification requirements, and passed the Praxis II. In stand-alone classrooms, special needs teachers must, in addition, demonstrate mastery in their academic subjects. South Carolina has not established an alternative certification route for special education teachers but is exploring means to make certification more convenient (e.g., online classes).

## **South Dakota Update - April 2004**

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Northern State University's e-learning center, established in 2001, provides no-cost Internet classes for high school students through the State's Dakota Digital Network. This school year, the center has provided classes to 624 students from 69 school districts at a total cost of \$536,000 -- about \$850 per class. The program serves as a "safety net," providing classes that rural school districts cannot afford to provide on their own. Another group of schools, the Digital Interactive Academic Link (DIAL), hires teachers to deliver courses to group members through distance learning.

South Dakota will be participating in the No Child Left Behind Summer Reading Achievers Program this summer. Summer Reading Achievers encourages students in grades K-8 to read during their summer vacations to help them retain their reading skills.

## Texas Update - April 2004

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Education Week reports that Governor Perry recently announced his plan for fixing the State's school finance system. The plan devotes an additional \$2.5 billion to education and reduces school property taxes by \$3.2 billion. The added funds would come from new taxes on cigarettes and adult entertainment and from the installation of video slot machines at horse and dog racing tracks. The Governor's plan would replace the current system, established in 1993, that requires wealthy school districts to share property tax revenues with poorer districts. The plan includes a series of incentives for schools such as: (1) \$100 per student for every grade completed; (2) \$100 for every English-language learner who passes the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills; (3) \$1,100 for every student who graduates from high school in a rigorous (e.g., Advanced Placement) course of study; (4) \$2,200 for every at-risk student who completes a rigorous course of study.

In early April, the Texas State Board for Educator Certification approved a plan to permit college graduates to teach in their field by taking two tests designed to demonstrate their knowledge of instructional practices (TExES PPR exam) and their expertise in their content area (TExES content exam). The new plan applies only to new teachers in grades 8-12. The Certification Board also issued guidelines for districts to ensure that new teachers have appropriate support. These guidelines include 80 hours of training before teachers begin classes and 300 hours of professional development over their first two years of teaching.

The Houston Independent School District has changed its policy to allow high school students who fail core subjects to be promoted if they have adequate credits from other classes. As reported in The New York Times, the more stringent promotion policy only served to increase dropout rates. This shift comes against a backdrop of under-reported dropout rates dating back to the years that U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige was the district's superintendent. A recent report by a local television station has indicated that students have been held back (often multiple times) in the ninth grade and not given adequate classes to allow them to be promoted.

## Utah Update - April 2004

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An attempt by the Utah legislature to reject Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) funding has died in the State Senate. Education Week reports that an original, Republican-backed bill to turn down \$103 million in Federal education funds was later modified to require the State to accept the Federal funds but to spend no State funds to comply with NCLB. But just before the March 3 end of the legislative session, the bill was sent to the Senate rules committee for further study, effectively killing it for the time being.

The Utah legislature has approved a plan which would provide special education students with scholarships to attend private schools. Education Daily reports that the Carson Smith Special Needs Scholarships could provide vouchers worth between \$3,500 and \$5,300 to as many as 52,000 special needs students Statewide. According to the Republican-supported measure, the voucher funds would come from a separate State pool and would not use Federal or local funds or resources from the State's general education fund.

Education Daily reports that Utah is considering the establishment of a diploma system that describes "value-added" to a students' record through advanced classes or special certifications. The high school diplomas would identify achievements beyond the basic graduation requirements including high scores on State exams and participation in Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate classes. In addition, schools would get credit through the State's accountability system for awarding these "value-added" diplomas.

## Virginia Update - April 2004

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Education Week reports that a policy change will allow new teachers in Virginia to avoid taking the Praxis I licensing exam if they scored well on the SAT college-entrance exam. Prospective teachers who took the SAT after April 1995 and scored a total of 1100 (and at least 530 on each of the sections -- verbal and mathematics) would not be required to take the licensing exam. Lower scores (reflecting “recentering” of the SAT) are required to new teachers who took the SAT prior to April 1995. The Educational Testing Service, which designed both the Praxis and the SAT, has indicated that the SAT cut-off scores are equivalent to passing scores on the Praxis.

Three different Virginia institutions have been announced as recipients of Mathematics and Science Partnership grants from the U.S. Department of Education. Receiving a total of \$1.3 million, the grantees are:

- Russell County Schools (\$269,000) -- “A Mathematics Achievement Program for Rural Schools” designed to increase the number of highly qualified mathematics teachers in the middle grades. Partners include the University of Virginia (Wise Campus) as well as Buchanan, Dickenson, Scott, and Tazewell Counties;
- Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) (\$374,000) -- “Preparing Highly Qualified Middle School Mathematics Teachers Across Virginia” whose goal is to develop four graduate-level courses to create 100 new highly qualified teachers. Partners include James Madison University (JMU), Mary Washington College, Norfolk State University and Virginia Tech, as well as school districts in Augusta, Roanoke, Rockbridge, Shenandoah, Stafford, and Spotsylvania Counties and the cities of Harrisonburg, Norfolk, Richmond, and Roanoke;
- University of Virginia (UVA) (\$750,000) -- “Virginia Mathematics Specialist Project” to establish Master’s programs at Norfolk State, UVA, and VCU which will award mathematics specialist licenses. The plan calls for 80 teachers to earn licenses by September 2005. Higher education partners include JMU, Mary Washington, Norfolk State, Longwood University, VCU, Virginia Tech, and the College of William and Mary. A total of 25 school districts are also partners in the project.

## Washington Update - April 2004

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The Washington State legislature approved, and the Governor has signed, a bill that would make Washington the 41<sup>st</sup> state to allow charter schools. As reported in The Seattle Times, the measure passed by narrow votes in both houses and was signed by the Governor, a strong supporter of charter schools. Over the past ten years, charter school referenda have twice been rejected by the voters. The law permits the establishment of as many as 45 new charter schools over the next six years. Most of these are expected to serve primarily disadvantaged students. These may be new campuses or conversions of existing schools.

The State of Washington has backed off from some of the rigor included in its standardized testing program. Education Daily reports that a measure signed into law in late March relaxes many of the requirements for the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). Among the changes enacted are:

- seniors will be given up to four chances (rather than one) to pass the WASL high school graduation exam starting with the class of 2008;
- seniors who repeatedly fail the high school exit exam will be allowed to take alternative assessments;
- private school and home-schooled seniors will not be required to pass the exit exam;
- the listening section of the WASL will be eliminated for tenth grade and younger students.

As reported in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, in recent years, tenth graders have not taken the WASL seriously, often not answering and writing flip or inappropriate answers. This makes it difficult for the WASL to measure learning effectively. To combat this trend, the State is putting tenth-graders' WASL scores on their transcripts and is urging colleges and universities to make WASL scores a factor in the admissions process.

## West Virginia Update - April 2004

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Education Technology News reports that West Virginia has provided its school principals with handheld computers and the Palm operating system that can be used to conduct teacher evaluations. Using customized mVal software from Media-X, the State system allows principals to record notes and checklists on their Palm handhelds and later transfer the data to their desktop computers. The system produces a wide array of reports including the official observation and evaluation forms required by the State.



## Wyoming Update - April 2004

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Governor Freudenthal in his second State of the State Address expressed a desire to use part of the \$1.2 billion state surplus to make up for postponed school construction. Through FY 2009 over \$700 million of capital costs for K-12 buildings would be spent. The budget surplus resulted from relatively large increases in oil, gas, and mineral revenues.