

## Alabama Update – August 2005

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The Birmingham News reports that 313 Alabama schools will be required to offer school choice under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This represents a large increase over the previous year when only 80 schools fell in that category. State officials attribute the jump to a large increase in the number of students being tested under NCLB; in 2003-04, only students in grades 4, 6, and 8 were tested.

The Birmingham News reports that, using a \$300,000 Federal grant, Alabama will offer free online tutoring after school hours at all 219 public libraries in the State. Located at [www.homeworkAlabama.org](http://www.homeworkAlabama.org), the website will allow students to interact with teachers and professors from 3:00 P.M. to midnight each school day.

Mobile County had 33 schools last year that failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). More than 80 percent of them (27 schools) missed AYP solely because of the reading and math test scores of special education students.

## **Alaska Update – August 2005**

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As reported in Education Week, rising gas prices have added considerably to Alaska's State revenues. The legislature has increased the State per-pupil allocation by 7.5 percent for the 2005-06 school year. The overall education increase will be five percent, bringing total education spending for the next school year to \$849 million.

The Anchorage Daily News reports that about 60 percent of Alaska's schools met or exceeded Federal academic standards. In Anchorage, 66 percent of the schools made adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act, up from 40 percent in 2003 and 58 percent in 2004. The States does not expect any State takeovers of failing schools this coming school year.

## Arizona Update – August 2005

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The percentage of students passing the Arizona Instrument of Measure Standards (AIMS) has gone up dramatically in the past year. For example, 71 percent of fifth-grade students passed the math section of the AIMS, up from 47 percent the previous year. Similarly, 71 percent of eighth-graders passed the reading section, up from 50 percent. There has, however, been skepticism about the results because, since 2004, the tests have been rewritten and passing scores have been lowered in every grade and subject. Moreover, teachers were given guidelines about the test's content and sample exams were available online.

A Federal court has been asked to waive the requirement that English language learners pass the AIMS test in order to graduate from high school. Filed by the Center for Law in the Public Interest, the suit wants to suspend the AIMS requirement -- scheduled to become effective with the Class of 2006 -- for limited-English-proficient seniors. The suit notes that 83 percent of last year's eleventh graders identified as English language learners failed either the reading or writing section of the AIMS.

The Arizona Republic reports that 6,000 Arizona high school seniors participated in State-provided tutoring before taking the AIMS for the third time this Spring. More than 90 percent of these students improved their scores on the exit exam, although they did not all pass (the State does not know how many). Last December, the State established a \$10 million fund to pay for tutoring 37,000 members of the Class of 2006, the first which must pass the exam in order to graduate. Because only 6,000 students participated more than \$9 million of the fund was returned to the State General Fund. The State plans to spend \$12 million this school year for tutoring -- \$7 million from a voter-approved sales tax and \$5 million new legislative appropriations.

Contrary to the trends in other states, Arizona has temporarily lowered its graduation requirements. As reported in Education Week, the State has reduced the required passing scores on the AIMS for this year's seniors and will allow AIMS scores in reading, writing, and math to be adjusted by as much as 25 percent based on high school grades.

The U.S. Department of Education (USED) has ruled that operators of for-profit charter schools in Arizona are not eligible to receive Federal funds for special education and other at-risk students. The State has a total of 52 for-profit charter schools serving 12,000 students. The USED ruling could cost the schools \$3.6 million.

The Scottsdale Unified School District is developing a comprehensive plan to improve its use of technology. The draft five-year plan is designed to complement the existing technology budget allowances of \$2.6 million for the 2005-06 school year and \$2.2 million for 2006-07. By 2009-10, the technology budget would be \$12.4 million. Implementing the plan would require a capital override which must go before the voters. It is expected that the District will establish a technology committee in October and present a formal plan to the school board by the end of the year.

The Vail School District in Tucson will be equipping each of the 350 students in Vail High School with laptop computers instead of textbooks. Using a wireless network, the school's teachers will incorporate electronic information and online articles into their lesson plans. As reported by [eSchool News](#), the laptops will cost the district \$850 apiece -- compared to \$500-\$600 for textbooks. The school will be expanding to 750 students in the years to come.

## Arkansas Update – August 2005

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A result of a court ruling that Arkansas schools are unconstitutionally inadequate, the State is expected to implement more rigorous academic standards, offer more courses, and provide more funding for distance learning. Last year, only about 3,500 Arkansas students took advantage of some kind of formal, school-approved distance learning. This is expected to grow to 4,000-5,000 students in the 2005-06 school year. Most of these will be taking foreign language classes.

Arkansas students have shown significant improvement in middle and high school math scores this past year. In 2005, 23 percent of the students scored at the highest (“Advanced”) level on the Algebra portion of the Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment and Accountability Program (ACTAAP) compared with only 14 percent the previous year. Similarly, in 2005, 17 percent scored in the Advanced category on the ACTAAP Geometry test compared with 10 percent the year before.

According to the Arkansas News Bureau, the number of Arkansas students taking Advanced Placement exams has grown to 13,900, more than double last year’s total. The increase can be attributed to a number of factors, most notably the new legislation requiring all schools to offer AP classes. In addition, more teachers are participating in summer AP training and the State has begun paying the fees for students taking AP tests.

## California Update – August 2005

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Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and the State legislature have reached agreement on the next year's budget. The budget plan will give \$3 billion more to schools than the previous budget. The Governor's proposal to shift \$500 million in teacher retirement payments to local school districts was not included in the agreement, although half the amount could be counted against funds districts receive under Proposition 98.

As reported in Educational Marketer, California has approved four supplemental programs for addition to the State's Reading First Intervention list: *Breakthrough to Literacy* (McGraw-Hill); *Destination Reading* (Riverdeep); *Elements of Reading Vocabulary* (Harcourt Achieve); and *Soliloquy Reading Assistant* (Soliloquy Learning). Three years ago, the State adopted two comprehensive reading programs for Reading First – Houghton Mifflin Reading and Open Court Reading (McGraw-Hill/SRA). California's next language arts adoption is not until 2008.

The Los Angeles Times reports that the California Teachers Association has sued Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in an effort to make the State allocate an additional \$3.1 billion for public schools. The lawsuit, which has been joined by State Superintendent Jack O'Connell, claims the Governor's budget violates the State Constitution. The plaintiffs argue that the additional funds would keep open 100 schools that scheduled to close for lack of money, stop class size increases at the elementary level, double the availability of new textbooks, and expand transportation services. The Governor says that such a boost in education funding would result in severe cutbacks in such programs as healthcare for the poor and road construction or make it necessary to raise taxes.

Education Week reports that a number of bills currently in the State legislature designed to allow more alternative assessments are being watered down. Assembly Bill 1531 says that schools may not use any alternative assessments to which the State Superintendent objects. Senate Bill 517 would require that the State certify that students in low-performing high schools have access to minimal necessary resources including textbooks, certified teachers, counselors, and

supplementary instruction. The Senate bill also requires the State to study alternatives to the high school exit exam.

The California Department of Education announced that 29 local school districts have been awarded \$24 million in competitive grants from the Federal Enhancing Education Through Technology (E<sup>2</sup>T<sup>2</sup>) program. A total of 131 districts applied for the grants. Serving a total of 80,000 students in 94 schools, the successful districts will receive grants of between \$11,000 and \$5,850,000, based on the number of students in grades four through eight. The grants are:

Alameda City	Sacramento
Oakland	San Juan
West Contra Costa	Upland
Eureka	Lodi
Arvin	Santa Maria-Bonita
Corcoran	Campbell
Glendale	Pajaro Valley
Los Angeles	Cascade
Madera	Sylvan
Atwater	Corning
Monterey Peninsula	Lindsay
Placentia-Loma Linda	Tulare
Santa Ana	Davis
Palm Springs	Washington
Riverside	

The specific schools and the amounts of each grade is available at [www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r5/eettc04result.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r5/eettc04result.asp).

The Los Angeles Times reports that 300,000 Los Angeles students are eligible next year for free tutoring under the supplemental educational service provision of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Poor students in 173 low-performing schools can receive tutoring from 40 private, State-approved providers. Last school year, the Los Angeles school district itself provided supplemental educational services, but is not supposed to do so this year because it is identified for improvement under NCLB. LAUSD negotiations with USED continue on this issue.

## **Colorado Update – August 2005**

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The Rocky Mountain News reports that results from the Colorado Student Assessment Program showed few gains and continuing gaps between student groups. Fifth-grade students improved their passing rate in math by four percentage points to 63 percent. Tenth-graders improved their math passing rate by three percentage points but only reached 30 percent. The reading gap between White and Hispanic students has actually increased in the past four years from 33 percentage points in 2001 to 35 this year. And the gap between poor and non-poor fourth-grade reading students has remained at 33 percentage points since 2001.



## Connecticut Update – August 2005

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In an action long-expected, Connecticut has become the first state to sue the U.S. Department of Education over the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The State's lawsuit claims that NCLB is an unfunded mandate, forcing the State to spend millions of dollars on new tests without providing evidence that the Law's assessment requirement helps to improve student performance. To date, no other states have joined in the legal action, in large part out of fear of Federal retaliation. Maine has considered joining the Connecticut suit but will await results of a study of NCLB's impact before making its decision.

As reported in the Hartford Courant, Connecticut is one of nine states that will see a reduction in their Federal Title I funding. Total Title I grants for 2005-06 will be \$107.5 million, a 1.4 percent reduction from the previous year. The Hartford school district could be particularly hard hit, facing a cut in its \$20 million in Title I money last year. Three of the district's schools are in restructuring under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), 22 schools are in earlier stages of improvement under the Law, and approximately 12 Hartford schools will be operating new behavior management programs requiring more staff, training, and supplies.

A total of 145 Connecticut schools were identified as "in need of improvement" under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) for failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for at least two consecutive years. A large proportion of these schools are in Bridgeport (19 schools), Hartford (20), New Britain (8), New Haven (12), Stamford (6), and Waterbury (12). The U.S. Department of Education (USED) has said that schools may not be required to allow student transfers if space is not available in the new schools. Moreover, the State is reluctant to take over a school or district that has failed to make AYP for six consecutive years.

## **Delaware Update – August 2005**

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Education Week reports that Delaware is in the process of developing a model high school curriculum designed to prepare students better for college or technical careers. The State will conduct “gap analysis” to help districts match their requirements with the State’s model curriculum and will provide appropriate technical assistance. Delaware has dropped its never-implemented plan for a three-tiered diploma system. For the classes of 2006 and 2007, there will be a two-tiered (standard and distinguished) system and, thereafter, Delaware schools will offer only one kind of diploma.

## District of Columbia Update – August 2005

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Starting in the Fall of 2006, D.C. Public Schools is planning to offer a fifth year of high school to help at-risk students. The program would provide individual tutoring, smaller classes, and extensive support services.

As reported in the Washington Post, in early August, D.C. officials notified parents of students in 80 schools that they are eligible to transfer their children to other schools under the parent choice provision of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Many parents have complained that the information came too late and that the District did not provide a final list of schools required to offer transfers or schools accepting the transfers. According to the District, 80 of the school systems 147 schools are in need of improvement, up from 68 last year.

The Washington Post reports that only eight of D.C.'s 31 charter schools made AYP last year. Twelve (39 percent) of the campuses failed to meet standards for two or three consecutive years. By contrast, 56 percent of the Districts' traditional public schools fell in this category. These schools -- "in need of improvement" -- are required to offer their students school transfers or free tutorial services.

As reported in Education Daily, the percentage of D.C. elementary schools making adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) increased from 52 percent in the 2003-04 school year to 58 percent last year. The percentage of elementary students scoring at "proficient" or above rose from 46 percent to 50 percent in reading and from 56 percent to 58 percent in mathematics. At the secondary level, the percentage of schools making AYP in both reading and math jumped from 16 percent to 33 percent. However, the proportion of secondary students reaching proficiency dropped from 31 percent to 30 percent in reading and from 37 percent to 33 percent in math.

## Florida Update – August 2005

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As reported in Education Week, Florida's FY 2006 budget for K-12 education has been increased by 6.4 percent (\$561 million) to \$9.3 billion.

As reported in The Miami Herald, Florida is asking educational publishers to provide teachers with electronic copies -- in addition to the traditional print versions -- of their textbooks. Students in seventh and eighth grade Statewide currently receive their mathematics, science, and language arts books in electronic format. Starting next Fall, textbooks in civics, American history, and world cultures will also be provided electronically.

During the Spring session, the legislature expanded the tax-credit scholarship program by raising the Statewide cap from \$50 million to \$88 million. This change will increase the number of available scholarships from 11,000 to 20,000. The legislature – financed by private donations – rejected Governor Jeb Bush's proposal to provide private school vouchers for students who fail the State's reading assessment for three consecutive years.

As reported in Education Daily, more than half of Florida's 67 school districts received As or Bs (on an A through F scale) under the State's accountability system. Based on student scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), schools' scores included 15 As, 17 B, 22 Cs, 3 Ds, and no Fs, a distribution very close to the previous year. For the first time, special education and limited-English-proficient students' scores were included in the school calculations.

The St. Petersburg Times reports that the Statewide initiative to improve reading skills for middle and high school students has resulted in a de-emphasis on elective courses that often keep struggling students from dropping out of school. Many Florida school districts are rearranging schedules at the upper grades to accommodate the Statewide effort to provide more reading classes. As many as 260,000 of the State's lowest-performing high school students are slated for the additional reading instruction. Career-technical educators are concerned that this emphasis will eliminate classes some students see as relevant and could result in higher dropout rates.

As reported in the Orlando Sentinel, more than 600,000 Florida middle and high school students -- half of the State's sixth through twelfth graders -- will be required to take special intensive reading classes next year because they failed the reading portion of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Only 44 percent of Florida's eighth-grade students and 32 percent of tenth-graders rated "proficient" or higher on last year's reading FCAT. Districts are having difficulty setting up these reading classes because the State does not have enough secondary-level teachers who are certified to teach reading.

As reported in Education Daily, Florida, in partnership with the College Board, is offering online SAT preparation materials to low-income high schools throughout the State.

The Miami Herald reports that, in early September, last year's versions of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) given in grades 4, 8, and 10 will be posted on the State's website, including all questions and correct answers. The State has resisted making the tests public on the grounds that questions released to the public can never be reused and generating new questions is expensive. But the State now believes it has an adequate cache of questions. Each year, the State will publish the tests from all three grade levels; if an additional \$3 million is made available from the legislature, tests from all grade levels will be published.

A number of school districts in Southwest Florida are establishing technology initiatives using laptop computers and wireless connections. Sarasota County is spending \$15 million to upgrade its instructional technology by providing all schools with wireless connections and giving all students access to laptops within the next five years. Manatee County is incorporating wireless capabilities in its new schools and has provided students in 16 schools with their own laptops. Charlotte County, rebuilding from hurricane destruction, will include wireless capabilities in all new construction and renovations.

As reported in Education Week, three chronically failing schools in Dade County are to be restructured over the next few years. Holmes Elementary School will be closed for two years while a new building is constructed. Miami Edison and Miami Central High Schools will

continue to operate for grades 10-12 while plans are developed to establish career academics in the schools and to renovate the two buildings. Entering ninth-graders will stay at their middle schools. The three schools are targeted for restructuring because they received two “F” grades over the last three years under the State accountability system.

As reported in Education Technology News, Broward County (Fort Lauderdale) is establishing a one-to-one laptop computer program. As part of this program, the County expects to purchase 30,000 new Apple iBooks.

Education Week reports that two low-rated charter schools in Palm Beach County have been closed under pressure from the State. Enrolling 95 students, the schools will be closed under State rules passed just this year.

## Georgia Update – August 2005

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As a result of higher tax revenues, the Georgia legislature appropriated \$500 million more for schools in the FY 2006 budget than the previous year -- an eight percent increase.

In the 2004-05 school year, more than 80 percent of Georgia's 2,040 schools made adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The number of schools in the "Needs Improvement" category (failed to make AYP for two consecutive years) went down by 59 and, of the 354 schools still in "Needs Improvement," 135 made AYP last year. Approximately 95 percent of the State's elementary schools made AYP and 56 percent of its middle schools did so, a seven percentage point improvement.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reports that the State has created a new website that provides high school students with free access to extensive test preparation materials, including practice exams, test-specific lessons, and individual score reports. The website -- [www.satonlinecourseschool.com](http://www.satonlinecourseschool.com) -- was established by the College Board and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

As reported in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, in late July, a county Superior Court judge had ordered an immediate halt to Cobb County's ambitious laptop computer program. The judge's ruling had nothing to do with the merits of the initiative but hinged on the fact that the County failed to tell voters that funds from a special sales tax would be used to pay for it. Unable to use sales tax proceeds, the district is unlikely to implement the program because its general fund cannot support the program's cost -- \$25 million for the first phase alone. Moreover, Superintendent Joseph Redden resigned in August.

## Hawaii Update – August 2005

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Education Week reports that Hawaii's State budget of \$8.9 billion for FY 2006 includes \$1.7 billion for K-12 schools; this represents a 17 percent increase over the previous year. The new teachers' contract calls for an 11 percent increase over the next two years. The total cost of the raises will be \$20.4 million in FY 2006 and \$77.1 million in FY 2007.

The Honolulu Advertiser reports that disappointing test scores for middle and high school students have caused the State to consider loosening its academic standards which are now among the highest in the country. Currently, 24 schools in the State are facing takeover by private companies after failing to reach targets for six years. The State may change the Hawaii State Assessment (HSA) to make it more like the Stanford Achievement Test (on which Hawaii students traditionally score well) by eliminating open-ended questions.

The Honolulu Advertiser reports that Hawaii plans to create after-school programs in six middle schools this Fall. The State has found that many students are arriving in middle school with inadequate academic skills and eighth-grade test scores have indicated little progress. A pilot after-school program on Molokai has shown some anecdotal success and will be continued this school year. The Molokai pilot program was expensive, 68 students last year at a cost of \$193,000. The State Education Department is trying to establish partnerships with other State agencies to fund similar programs in other schools.



## **Idaho Update – August 2005**

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As reported in The Idaho Statesman, the State School board has approved a plan to make Idaho's high school academic standards more rigorous. Among the proposed changes are more high school math and science, a requirement for a senior project, and requiring that more than half of students' electives be in career development. To become effective with the Class of 2012, the plan would also require entering high school students to have a C average in middle school language arts, math, science, and social studies. State officials estimate that the cost of hiring the necessary additional math and science teachers would be \$17 million, but believe the State will save about \$2 million by requiring less remedial work for college freshmen.

## Illinois Update – August 2005

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In July, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) approved four changes to Illinois' accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB):

1. Districts will not be identified as “failing” unless every tested grade in the district fails to meet State testing standards.
2. The number of students required to constitute a subgroup will increase from 40 to 45.
3. Students must be enrolled in a district for a longer period of time before their scores are counted toward NCLB calculations.
4. Districts will be allowed to adjust the scores of special education students.

In late August, Governor Rod Blagojevich signed a bill that would give Illinois more flexibility in the assessment of special education students under NCLB. As reported in *Education Daily*, the new law makes the following changes: (1) the progress of special education students toward IEP goals will determine whether they make adequate yearly progress (AYP); (2) schools would be placed in “improvement” status only if they failed to make AYP for two consecutive years in the same student subgroup; and (3) schools would be removed from “improvement” status if they make AYP in all subgroups for one year (rather than the current two). These changes have not been approved by SUED which has rejected similar requests from other states.

Education Daily reports that a number of bills intended to reduce school administrative costs were signed into Law in early August. H.B. 404 permits schools to shorten the school day below five hours to accommodate State testing. S.B. 1851 eliminates the dates for school districts to file reimbursement claims for the cost of transitional bilingual education services. These bills are part of a Statewide effort to reduce administrative rules.

Under Illinois' new High Standards, Better Schools plan, students will be required to take three years of high school math, two years of science, four years of English, and two years of “writing intensive” courses in order to graduate.

In early August, a law went into effect that would require schools in Illinois to teach about acts of genocide around the world. Sponsored by two Chicago Democrats, the legislation stresses the importance of understanding the national, ethnic, racial, and religious animosities that can lead to tragedies.

As reported in Education Week, a Federal district court in Chicago has dismissed a lawsuit, filed by two Illinois school districts, that the No Child Left Behind Act conflicts with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The Chicago Tribune reports that 21 Chicago schools -- 12 elementary and nine high schools -- have failed to meet State academic standards for six consecutive years and are thus subject to "restructuring." The district says that, rather than creating a new plan, it will follow its own system for retooling schools that fits the Federal definition. Control of these schools -- over budget, curriculum, and staffing -- will be shifted from the principal to area administrators. Two elementary schools on the list will close. Five of the schools -- two elementary and three high schools -- will become "Fresh Start" schools under a partnership with the Chicago Teachers Union. The remaining 19 schools will be analyzed by a consultant -- Learning Point Associates - - under a \$1.5 million contract, to determine the best course of action.

The Chicago Sun-Times reports that reading scores for Chicago students went up in three of the four grades tested (grades 3, 8, and 11) but went down slightly in math at all four grade levels (grades 3, 5, 8, and 11). District officials were most pleased with the nearly five percentage point gains in both eighth and eleventh grade reading scores on the Prairie State Achievement Tests. Overall, 83 percent of Chicago's high schools improved their reading scores over the previous year after four years of virtually no improvement.

## Indiana Update – August 2005

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Education Week reports that Indiana has enacted a law requiring students -- beginning with the Class of 2011 -- to complete a college-preparatory curriculum (known as Core 40) to earn a high school diploma. Students would have to complete Core 40 satisfactorily to be eligible for admission to any of the State's four-year colleges. Indiana is one of 13 states participating in the American Diploma Project Network, dedicated to raising graduation standards and preparing all students for work and college.

As reported in eSchool News, Indiana has been pilot testing its one-to-one program for the past three years. As part of this effort, the State will purchase 1,600 new desktop computers running the Linux operating system. State officials believe the Linux machines will allow Indiana school districts to save millions of dollars by using open-source products that are available at much lower cost than comparable proprietary software.

## Iowa Update – August 2005

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As reported in Education Week, funding for K-12 education in Iowa will increase by five percent -- to \$2.2 billion -- for FY 2006. The State's teacher-quality initiative, which had been in danger, will in fact receive a \$24.3 million increase to \$69.6 million, including \$10 million to provide an extra day of professional development for every teacher in the State and another \$6.6 million which will be allocated to districts for increasing teacher pay and training. The new budget did not restore the \$12 million cut made two years ago to the State's area education agencies which have traditionally provided much of Iowa's teacher training.

Iowa has passed a law calling for the development of a model core curriculum which is to be successfully completed by 80 percent of the State's high school graduates -- including special education students -- by July 2009. Education Week reports that, under the new law, districts must report on the percent of graduates who complete the core curriculum and each eighth-grade student must have a plan for completing the core curriculum. Parents are to receive annual reports on their students' progress.

## **Kansas Update – August 2005**

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Education Week reports that the Kansas Supreme Court, as part of a long legal battle, has approved the State's \$148 million supplemental education bill passed by the legislature in early July. These funds are in addition to the \$2.4 billion in school funding already in the basic State FY 2006 budget.

The number of Kansas schools failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has dropped from 30 three years ago to 21 two years ago to 15 last school year. Two years ago, most of the failing schools (15 of 21) were elementaries; last year, the majority (10 of 15) were middle schools. Most of the schools on the current list are from the urban areas of Wichita and Kansas City. Kansas City (Kansas) has its six failing schools as high priorities and will be increasing staff and funding for the schools, as well as seeking national models of success to replicate in the schools.

## **Kentucky Update – August 2005**

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As reported in Education Daily, the number of Kentucky schools making adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) went down slightly last school year. A total of 74.1 percent of schools made AYP last year compared with 75.6 percent in 2004-05. The decline is being attributed to new higher standards and the fact that different data calculations were used. The State has received Federal approval of a calculation method by which schools can aggregate student performance over several years.

## **Louisiana Update – August 2005**

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Education Week reports that Louisiana's total FY 2006 budget of \$18.7 billion includes \$2.9 billion for pre K-12 education, a three percent increase over FY 2005. The budget reinstates \$10 million for the classroom-based technology fund, a program that has been zeroed out for the past two years.

Louisiana has formed a non-profit organization, called the Education Venture Fund, to encourage private support of public schools in the State. The fund will seek public and private money to support its projects. It plans to invest \$4 million in ten projects during the 2005-06 school year and \$10 million the following year. During the Fund's first year, it will concentrate on failing schools. Eligible applicants for grants from the fund include universities, non-profit organizations, and charter school operators.

Participation in Louisiana's pre-Kindergarten classes has increased markedly in the past three years. The State has been slow to offer pre-K instruction with the first State-funded program opened in January 2002. Since that time, the number of students participating in pre-K has grown from 2,000 to nearly 10,000 and the number of districts offering pre-K has increased to 41 of the State's 68 school districts (up from 11 in 2002). Moreover, State funding for pre-K programs has increased from \$15 million to \$55 million in the past three years and the Governor has requested an additional \$20 million for next year despite a very tight State budget.

The New Orleans school district is facing huge financial and academic problems. The most recent school budget was found to be close to \$48 million out of balance because of overestimated revenues and under counted staff expenses. Last Spring, a Federal audit found \$70 million of the district's funds unaccounted for. Moreover, 73 of the district's 120 schools have failed to meet Federal academic standards.



## **Maine Update – August 2005**

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As reported in Education Week, Maine's budget for K-12 education will increase by 13 percent - - to \$837 million -- in FY 2006 and to \$873 million for FY 2007. These significant increases will occur despite a continued decline in the State's number of K-12 students.

Spearheaded by former Governor Angus King, the Maine Learning Technology Foundation has established a program to provide free home Internet access for low-income middle-school students. King, who launched Maine's heralded laptop computer project, has raised \$850,000 for the effort which will apply to all 35,000 middle-school students in the State as well as to some ninth- and tenth-graders who have school-issued laptops.

## Maryland Update – August 2005

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According to the Washington Post, nearly 150 schools in Maryland appealed their results on the State's reading and mathematics achievement tests. More than 100 of the schools that appealed the results took advantage of a one-time waiver offered to schools in which special education students were the only group failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) on the Maryland School Assessments.

The Washington Post reports that Maryland's revenue surplus for this year could result in full-funding of the State's \$1.3 billion school reform effort, known as the Thornton Plan. Under the plan, education spending is intended to increase by \$400 million between now and 2008.

As reported in the Washington Post, Maryland has seen little improvement in the reading scores of middle school students despite significant improvement at the elementary grades. Close to a third of the State's seventh-graders, for example, failed the State reading test this Spring, about the same rate as the year before. Local school districts are taking steps to address this problem. Baltimore City, the State's lowest performing district, plans to allocate \$6 million to failing schools and will replace 11 of the district's 23 middle school principals. Wealthy Montgomery County will expand literacy programs next year in 14 middle schools and this Summer has provided extra training for reading teachers in grades 6-8

The Baltimore Sun reports that Maryland has allowed a number of appeals that have resulted in the removal of a number of schools from the list of those failing to make AYP under NCLB. The appeals were based on the treatment of special education students under the State's accountability program. Maryland currently gives the Alternate Maryland School Assessment to the one percent of students who are classified as severely learning disabled. The U.S. Department of Education has allowed the State to create a shorter, modified version of the MSA for as many as an additional two percent of each district's enrollment.

The Baltimore Sun reports that Maryland education officials have called for a major overhaul of the management of Baltimore City Public Schools or even a takeover by an outside provider.

The State has called the City's special education program "a failure of extraordinary magnitude" and believes the district is incapable of delivering appropriate services to its 15,000 students with disabilities. Nearly 99 percent of Baltimore City's tenth-graders with disabilities failed the State reading exam and the graduation rate for special education students has failed to reach the 41.6 percent level agreed to in a 2001 consent decree. The State's plan -- to cost \$1.4 million -- calls for eight managers from other school systems, as well as a lead administrator to oversee various departments including general instruction, finance, and human resources. The lead administrator is likely to be Harry Fogle from Carroll County Public Schools. The ruling is the most recent action in a 20-year lawsuit filed on behalf of special education students.

## **Massachusetts Update – August 2005**

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Education Week reports that Massachusetts has established a two-year course that will train approximately two-thirds of the State's urban principals over the next five years. Beginning this summer, district administrators and principals from 12 urban school districts will train to become trainers in the program. Funded by a combination of Federal and State money, the program will, by 2010, have trained 370 of the 528 principals of the State's urban schools. The course was designed by the National Center on Education and the Economy.

## Michigan Update – August 2005

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Scores on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) for the past year's seniors went down in every subject area except reading. The percentages of twelfth graders who met State standards were 77.9 percent in reading (up from 76.2 percent for the Class of 2004), 57.2 percent in writing (down from 57.8 percent), 56.9 percent in mathematics (down from 58.7 percent), 58.0 percent in science (down from 63.4 percent), and 33.8 percent in social studies (down from 35.0 percent). In 2006-07, the State plans to replace the current high school MEAP with a specially-developed college entrance exam.

An audit by the U.S. Department of Education (USED) of the Michigan Department of Education has determined that the State has not effectively overseen the notification of parents whose children were eligible for transfer and tutoring services under the No Child Left Behind Act. The audit also found that the State did not properly monitor the quality and effectiveness of tutoring providers, nor did they provide results from the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests in a timely manner.

As reported in Education Technology News, Michigan education officials are crediting the State's Freedom-to-Learn (FTL) laptop computer program with significantly improving student scores on State assessments. The FTL program has provided laptops and wireless Internet connections to 20,000 middle school students and 1,200 teachers in 188 schools in 95 school districts across the State. FTL uses instructional software from Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, Classroom Connect, and others, along with appropriate training and support. Despite its apparent success, FTL has not received funding beyond 2005. According to eSchool News, the Governor has proposed a \$3.7 million cut in State funding for FTL and Federal support could drop from \$17.3 million to \$4.6 billion. A legislative proposal would provide \$11 million including \$3 million in State money and another \$3 million in Federal funds that will be left over from this year. This proposal calls for a quarter of the Federal funding to be used for Statewide professional development. Information on the FTL program is available at [www.ftlwireless.org](http://www.ftlwireless.org).

The Detroit Free Press reports that a bureaucratic mistake in Detroit has resulted in near chaos in the Detroit school system. A school tax on business and landlords was approved by the voters through June 30, 2002, but the City continued to collect the tax through 2004 to the tune of a \$259 million overcharge. The money -- six percent of the district's \$1.3 billion annual operating budget -- will likely be repaid through a special tax on all taxpayers. Only a few months ago, the State approved debt refinancing for Detroit to help address the district's \$48 million deficit.

## **Minnesota Update – August 2005**

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Education Week reports that the Minnesota legislature has approved a plan to establish a licensure system for teachers of nontraditional, multiple subject classes. This “interdisciplinary license” would provide teachers with credentials covering more than one subject and would provide particular benefit to teachers in rural, charter, and alternative schools who are often asked to teach multiple subjects. Before the plan can be implemented, the legislature must pass separate legislation when they convene next March.

Part of the State’s \$12.6 billion K-12 education budget is QCOMP -- Quality Compensation for Teachers, a voluntary performance-based pay system that would tie teacher compensation to student academic achievement and completion of professional development requirements.

Although Minnesota had an 11 percent increase in revenue for the first quarter, the Governor and the legislature reached a budget impasse. So, as of July 1, the State furloughed many employees including most of the education department. Local school districts continued to operate on local revenue but had a difficult time planning for the 2005-06 school year because they do not know the level of State funding they can expect.

## **Nevada Update – August 2005**

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The Las Vegas Sun reports that more than half of Nevada's public schools have failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the requirements of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). A total of 174 schools failed to meet standards for two consecutive years (up from 122) in 2004 and another 165 schools failed to make AYP for one year (up from 103). State officials attribute the decline to increases in the minimum test scores. Of the schools failing to make AYP, 19 missed solely because of math and 14 failed language arts. Two-thirds of the schools in Clark County (Las Vegas) and 55 percent of the schools in Washoe County (Reno) -- the State's two largest districts --failed to make AYP.



## **New Jersey Update – August 2005**

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New Jersey's Commissioner of Education, William Librera, has resigned his post as of September 30. A former superintendent, principal, and teacher, Mr. Librera is credited with making significant academic progress in the State's poorest school districts, known as "Abbott districts."

Education Technology News reports that New Jersey is using a new online licensing system to simplify credentialing for new teachers. New Jersey requires all teachers -- Pre-K through Grade 12 -- to be licensed. The State's rigorous certification requirements mean that the State processes approximately 45,000 licensing applications every year. The new system allows teachers to check the status of their applications and see results of their State licensing tests online. It is expected that, in the near future, three-quarters of the licensing applications will be submitted online. Information on the system is available at [www.nj.gov/njded/educators/license](http://www.nj.gov/njded/educators/license).

As reported in Education Daily, New Jersey has begun closing a loophole that allowed students to graduate without taking the required High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPS). Originally intended to help a few students who do poorly on timed assessments, the Special Review Assessment (SRA) lets students pass by taking a series of untimed exercises. However, because large numbers of students have been taking the SRA to avoid the HSPS, the State is planning to phase out the SRA and modify the appeals process. Students who fail the HSPS will have to retake the exam several times and participate in academic interventions.

New Jersey has released a list of 851 schools that failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), a sharp increase over the 585 schools the previous year. The increase can be largely attributed to higher required scores for passing. The list includes 376 schools labeled "early warning" for missing AYP for the first year and 522 schools identified as "in need of improvement" for failing to make AYP for two or more years (some schools may be counted twice if they give more than one test). A total of 71 schools are under "restructuring" for failing to make AYP for five consecutive years; most of these are middle schools.

As reported in the Philadelphia Inquirer, New Jersey's Schools Construction Corporation, which provides State funding for school construction and renovation (now including computer purchases), does not have enough money to support approved projects. Created in 2002 to expedite \$6 billion State-funded school construction in the State's special needs (Abbott) districts, the Corporation has expended its resources much faster than anticipated. Only 59 of the 270 projects that had initially been approved will actually be funded. Particularly hard hit will be districts in South Jersey which will have only six projects funded. New Jersey's problems with its school construction agency continued with the resignation, on August 18, of the agency's chief executive, John Spencer. As reported in The New York Times, Spencer's resignation follows an Inspector General's report that charged the agency with widespread mismanagement, cost overruns, and excessive bonuses.

## **New Mexico Update – August 2005**

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As reported in The Albuquerque Tribune, because of higher gas and oil prices, New Mexico has received \$216 million more in revenue than expected; roughly the same level of increased revenue is projected to continue for the next four years. Although the legislative session which must approve additional spending doesn't begin until January 2006, the State is developing plans for using the money. Among the items being considered are higher teacher salaries, more early reading and math programs, universal preschool, every-day physical education, and better student health care and nutrition programs.

## **New York Update – August 2005**

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Education Week reports that 39 New York high schools have received waivers from the requirement that their seniors pass State Regents exams in order to graduate. The five-year waiver will allow the schools -- most of them in New York City -- to gather information to show that their portfolio approach as a measure for graduation is as good a measure as the State exams. The schools hope to get a permanent waiver and, perhaps, to cause the State to develop an alternative assessment.

The New York Post reports that New York City has established a program to provide laptop computers to sixth-grade students in 22 schools across the City. Three-quarters of the City's 1,100 schools are currently set up with wireless connections and the remaining schools will have their computer labs converted to wireless over the next five years. Funding plans for the laptop program have not been developed but the money is expected to come from capital funds.

According to The New York Times, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg plans to extend his policy of holding back failing third- and fifth-grade students to seventh-graders. The emphasis on middle schools – including the allocation of \$40 million for the effort – came after disappointing results on the eighth-grade reading exam. The Mayor plans to offer remedial instruction for seventh-graders beginning this Fall. He also says he will tie staff promotions to results on the seventh-grade reading test next school year and on reading and mathematics the following year when math requirements are implemented.

According to Education Daily, New York City has proposed to cut the payment rate for tutors who use school facilities by nine percent. This proposal amounts to a \$189 per-student charge to tutoring providers according to the Education Industry Association.

## North Carolina Update – August 2005

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Education Week reports that North Carolina's New School Projects for improving secondary education will establish four new high schools focusing on international studies. Funded by an \$11 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the four schools will eventually enroll 400 each and will be available to students from eight districts: Alamance-Burlington, Chapel Hill-Carrboro, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Durham, Johnston, Onslow, Orange, and Wake. The districts will share a fund of \$185,000 for planning during the upcoming school year and will open the new programs in 2006-07.

Education Daily reports that North Carolina Governor Mike Easley has signed a bill that would allow community colleges to provide teacher licensing courses for "lateral entry" teachers recruited from other professions. During the 2004-05 school year, 2,000 such teachers were hired under the proviso that they complete their required education courses. Heretofore, these teachers were required to attend four-year teacher colleges.

The ABCs of Public Education is North Carolina's annual report on school performance used for State -- not Federal -- accountability purposes. ABC grades are determined by the academic improvement of a school's students and the percentage of students at or above proficiency levels. Schools meeting goals earn their teachers a \$750 salary bonus; teachers in schools exceeding their goals get a \$1,500 bonus. Results for the 2004-05 school year showed a slight drop from the year before: approximately 69 percent of the State's schools meet or exceeded their goals as opposed to 75 percent in 2003-04. About 30 percent of the schools (674 schools) failed to make growth goals.

The Charlotte News & Observer reports that, this Fall, approximately 80 traditional public schools and 10 charter schools will be required to provide tutoring to students because they failed to make adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) for three consecutive years. Last year, only ten traditional and ten charter schools were required to offer tutoring. This year, the State expects to approve a list of 47 outside tutoring service providers -- up from 18 last year. This year's providers include three school districts -- Durham, Guilford,

and Wake -- that plan to provide their own tutoring. To handle the tutoring and transfer transportation requirements of NCLB, districts are having to hold back significant portions of their Federal Title I allocations. Durham, for example, is holding in reserve \$1.4 million out of its \$7.3 million in projected Title I funds. Similarly, Guilford is holding \$3 million of its \$15 million in reserve; Winston-Salem/Forsyth is reserving \$1 million out of \$10 million; and Wake is reserving \$600,000 out of its \$13.5 million in expected Title I funds.

## Ohio Update – August 2005

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The Associated Press reports that Ohio will increase the size of its school voucher program more than threefold, creating the largest voucher project in the United States. For the past nine years offered only in the Cleveland school districts, vouchers for private school tuition will be available to 14,000 more students this Fall. The program has been allocated \$500,000 for administrative costs. Unlike the State's existing voucher program, the new initiative is available only to students in schools identified in Ohio's lowest performance category, "academic emergency." The vouchers would be worth \$4,250 for K-8 students and \$5,000 for high schoolers. Voucher students, like other students Statewide, would be required to take annual State assessments. This expansion is an outgrowth of a 2002 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court that ruled the Cleveland program does not violate the separation of church and state.

Akron-based White Hat Management operates 34 charter schools in Ohio enrolling more than 13,000 students. The education management firm will earn close to \$110 million for the past school year. In 2003-04, half of the company's schools were rated in the State's lowest two academic categories: "academic watch" and "academic emergency." White Hat is one of a number of private firms that operate 55 charter schools with 30,000 students. Overall, these companies will earn more than \$200 million in State and local funds.

According to Education Week, Ohio has begun requiring that charter schools that fail to meet academic standards must administer a new set of standardized tests in addition to the regular State assessments. Charter schools that miss State-mandated goals for three consecutive years will be closed down.

The Cleveland Plain Dealer reports that more than a third of Ohio's tenth-graders failed at least one part of the Ohio Graduation Test given in March. Only 53 percent and 35 percent of Black sophomores passed the mathematics and science components, respectively.

Education Week reports that, in early August, Cleveland voters rejected a tax levy that would have raised \$45 million and restored the jobs of many laid-off teachers. The tax rejection will also force cutbacks in the district's afterschool programs.



## **Oklahoma Update – August 2005**

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As reported in Education Week, Oklahoma has approved the Achieving Classroom Excellence program which – starting in the 2006-07 school year – requires all high school students to take college-preparatory curriculum. The new program increases graduation requirements to include three years of high school math. As of the Class of 2012, students must pass four of six end-of-course exams in core academic subjects in order to graduate. The plan also requires the State to pay tuition for up to six hours of college instruction per semester for each student.

## Oregon Update – August 2005

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Oregon education officials report that, although 90 percent of the State's elementary schools are making yearly progress (AYP) under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), most middle and high schools are not. A total of 261 Oregon schools failed to make AYP last year -- 15 elementary schools, 97 middle schools, and 149 high schools; 43 of these are Title I schools that are required to offer a transfer option or free tutoring. The primary reason many (180) schools were rated as failing was low scores for special education students on the State reading and writing tests. In fact, only seven percent of Oregon middle schools met Federal standards for special education students in reading and writing.

According to a report by The Oregonian, schools in Oregon showed gains across grades, content areas, and racial lines. Passing rates for White students increased in reading and math at every grade level. Scores for low-income, Hispanic, and Native American students went up even more. For example, the State's fifth-grade Hispanic students improved by eight percentage points in reading and by nine percentage points in math. While the achievement gaps between White and minority students is shrinking, it remains high particularly at the high school level.

As reported in eSchool News, Oregon students improved in all subjects, at all grades, during the 2004-05 school year, with the gains attributed, in large part, to the State's web-based testing service known as Technology Enhanced Student Assessment (TESA). Overall, Oregon's third, fifth, eighth, and tenth grade students showed a 3.1 percent increase in reading scores, a 4.1 percent increase in math, and a 4.4 percent increase in science. State officials consider web-based testing to be more secure, less expensive (\$1.30 per-student exam less than paper-and-pencil tests), and able to give students and teachers immediate feedback. It is likely that all State testing will be online in the near future.

## **Pennsylvania Update – August 2005**

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The Philadelphia Inquirer reports that the State has settled an 11-year-old lawsuit that would require that more students with disabilities be taught in regular classrooms and be provided additional help. During the 2003-04 school year, more than 55 percent of Pennsylvania's special education students received more than 20 percent of their instruction outside the regular classroom; nearly a fifth of the disabled students spent more than 60 percent of their time outside the regular classroom. Under the settlement, the 20 school districts with the worst records of serving special education students in their regular classroom will be assessed by State teams who will work with the districts to eliminate the deficiencies. The 30 school districts with the next lowest ratings will be monitored more intensely.

As reported in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, a State high school reform initiative -- known as project 720 -- is attempting to increase high school academic requirements. Project 720 calls for school districts to require four years of high school math, including at least Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2. It also urges schools to require three years of science (Biology, Chemistry, and Physics/Physical Science), three years of social studies, and four years of college-preparatory English, and strongly recommends two years of a foreign language. The State has allocated \$5.3 million in grants (ranging from \$50,000 to \$168,000) to 63 school districts, two area voc-tech schools, and one charter school to implement some of the recommendations of Project 720.

## **Rhode Island Update – August 2005**

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In mid-July, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) approved Rhode Island's request (along with similar requests from New Hampshire and Vermont) to forego testing elementary and middle school students while transitioning to the new New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP).

As reported in Education Week, Rhode Island has continued to emphasize professional development on the integration of technology into the classroom. The State has conducted two-week summer seminars for teachers who wish to improve their teaching using technology. Among the topics covered in these seminars are learning to use handheld devices to organize literacy instruction in Grades K-3 and creating electronic portfolios of students' work which can be used to satisfy the State's performance-based graduation requirements. These seminars are paid for by funds from the Federal Enhancing Education Through Technology (E<sup>2</sup>T<sup>2</sup>) program.

## South Carolina Update – August 2005

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The South Carolina legislature has approved \$2.8 billion FY 2006 budget for K-12 education, up \$190 million (7.4 percent) over FY 2005. Included in the budget is funding for a 1.7 percent increase in teacher pay, which can be supplemented by local funds.

State funding of educational technology in South Carolina has dropped steadily from \$40 million five years ago to \$15.9 million in the 2004-05 school year. Among the funded efforts is an online professional development system, begun in 2004, that offered 50 courses to more than 1,100 educators last year; most of the courses were for teacher license renewal. South Carolina has used Federal funds to hire and train 30 full-time instructional technology coaches to be deployed in poorer schools across the State.

As reported in Education Week, a new Law in South Carolina calls for the State to reorganize its curriculum around “career clusters” in such areas as health science, finance, and information technology. The Law will also require an increase in the number of guidance counselors from the current ratio of 500 students per counselor to 300:1 by the 2006-07 school year.

In early May, the South Carolina House voted down a bill, supported by Governor Mark Sanford, that would have given tax credits to parents of students in private schools.

## **South Dakota Update – August 2005**

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As reported in Education Week, South Dakota has focused its technology efforts, in the past year, on training teachers to integrate technology into the classroom to help students meet State reading and math achievement goals. Among the new initiatives is the online Criterion Referenced Test (CRT) that provides educators with access to data from the State assessment, a requirement of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The CRT allows educators to track student progress and to identify areas of academic weakness.

Under a new law, the State will regulate the distribution of distance learning courses offered by Northern State University, providing free access to these courses by the State's poorest K-12 schools. In addition, over the past three years, South Dakota has used Federal funds to provide professional development for teachers of distance learning courses, which play an important role in the State's many remote rural communities.

State funding for educational technology has remained the same at \$8.2 million for both the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years.

## Tennessee Update – August 2005

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According to Education Daily, 93 percent of the schools in Tennessee made adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) last school year. Of these schools that made AYP, 85 percent were in “good standing.” The remaining schools were labeled “high priority” which means they must make AYP again next year to be considered in “good standing.”

Tennessee has allocated \$2 million in State funds for an online formative assessment program which will build online tests for each of the State’s K-8 curriculum objectives and provide online teacher support.

Tennessee does not earmark any State funds for technology; it is estimated that schools spent about \$15 million on technology during the 2004-05 school year.

Education Week reports that Tennessee is continuing to expand its effort to provide local schools with technology coaches. The newest phase of the program will establish “orbits” of five schools in nine areas of the State, building upon the 13 schools that already are participating. Each new participating school will have a technology coach -- a teacher with specialized technology training who will help other teachers integrate technology into the classroom and run small-group workshops on new technologies. Supported by \$4.8 million in Federal funds, the program will give grants of \$538,000 to schools in each of the State’s nine regions, chosen competitively. The State will also use \$1.7 million in Federal funds to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Tennessee has entered into a contract with The Princeton Review to implement formative assessments on a Statewide basis. Under the contract, The Princeton Review will provide online delivery of formative assessments in reading and mathematics at strategic intervals throughout the school year. The firm will also provide professional development for the State’s teachers on how to understand the data from the assessments and how to integrate the results into instruction.

Beginning this school year, Tennessee schools will see a number of changes including more rigorous academic requirements. Among the important changes is the requirement that, starting with this year's freshmen, high school students must take three years of mathematics in order to graduate. In addition, reading and math scores for all students in grades 3-8 will be counted when determining whether a school has made adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In prior years, only grades 3, 5, and 8 had been used. The State will also inaugurate 300 new State-funded pre-K classes and 35 mid-career professionals will enter the State's classrooms through a "fast track" program.

Tennessee has established a new policy for improving the reading skills of its students. The "layered" approach includes in-depth reading instruction for all students, daily reading periods, frequent testing, improved teacher training, and additional reading time for struggling students. The new strategies will build on the State's ongoing six-year, \$111 million Federal Reading First grant which focuses on replicating lessons in other schools across the State.

As reported by [eSchool News](#), a private partnership has been formed in Nashville to teach State history in middle schools. Known as Tennessee History for Kids, the program is a collaboration of educators, a State legislator, and a web designer. Developed because the district dropped the State history requirement a few years ago, the program is operating on a budget of \$100,000, half in State funds and half from private donations.



## Texas Update – August 2005

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The Texas State legislature is still wrangling over the issue of school funding. Textbook funding is part of the school finance reform package which is dependent on a tax bill which was vetoed in June by Governor Rich Perry. Textbook orders in health, foreign language, and fine arts worth an estimated \$295 million are currently in limbo. The funds have been held up in an effort to fund a laptop computer project. As a result, Texas students began school with old textbooks, even though replacements are sitting in warehouses. Distribution of the textbooks has had to await passage of the funding measure.

Research from Texas shows that the number of illegal immigrants enrolled in Texas' public colleges has increased tenfold since 2001 when a State law was passed allowing these students to enroll for in-State tuition. Most of these enrollments have been at community colleges where out-of-State tuition is more than twice the in-State average of \$1,600.

As reported in Education Week, Texas pays schools \$30 per student each year for educational technology -- a total of \$117.8 million last school year. State officials indicate that districts are spending the largest portion of their technology funding on professional development. Other significant uses of these funds are for Internet access, technology support, and electronic textbooks.

As part of its technology immersion pilot test, begin in the Fall of 2004, the State has provided \$14.5 million in Federal funds to 25 schools -- primarily middle schools -- in 23 school districts. These schools receive a technology bundle including a wireless computer for every student and teacher, professional development, online instructional resources and technical support, and online assessments.

The Dallas Morning News reports that next year, for the first time, Texas students earning GEDs will be counted as dropouts in the school and district accountability ratings. The change is intended to encourage students to work toward the more valuable high school diploma and to correspond with the national dropout definition. Some educators believe that the new definition

may cause some districts to discontinue their in-school GED programs that currently serve about 2,500 Texas students.

Higher State academic standards in Texas have resulted in more districts and schools receiving the lowest rating -- “Academically Unacceptable” -- based upon student scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Last Spring, a total of 61 districts (19 regular districts and 42 charter operators) received the State’s Academically Unacceptable rating, compared with 24 districts (4 regular districts and 20 charters) in 2004. Similarly, 364 of the State’s 7,908 schools received the Academically Unacceptable rating, up from 95 schools in 2004. This increase in the number of low-rated districts and schools can be attributed to: (1) poor student performance on the math TAKS which required a 35 percent pass rate for all groups and subgroups; (2) poor performance on the science TAKS requiring a 25 percent pass rate; and (3) failure to meet the acceptable passing rate of 50 percent on the State-Developed Alternative Assessment II (SDAA II), a test being given for the first time to special education students in Grades 3-10.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) reports that 87 percent of the school districts in the State -- and 77 percent of the schools -- made adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The most common reason that 149 districts and 900 schools missed AYP standards was poor math performance. Many more secondary (middle and high) schools failed to make AYP than elementary schools. A total of 14 districts and 122 Title I schools missed AYP for two consecutive years for the same reason and are, therefore, on the Stage 1 School Improvement Program (SIP) list. These schools are not required to provide students with a transfer option but must take specific actions such as additional staff improvement. No school districts, but 60 schools are in Stage 2 of SIP and must provide tutoring to students from low-income families. In addition, three charter schools are in SIP Stage 3 because they missed AYP standards in mathematics for four years in a row; these schools must take “corrective action” to improve their programs.

According to Education Week, Caveon Test Security has been hired by Texas to investigate allegations that teachers in individual schools provided students with improper help during testing sessions, resulting in unusual swings in test scores.

As reported in The Dallas Morning News, Texas and the U.S. Department of Education have reached agreement on testing of special education students under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Normal NCLB regulations limit the number of severely learning disabled students who take alternative assessments to three percent of the district's enrollment. The agreement raises the limit to five percent this coming school year and three percent for next year.

The Houston Chronicle reports that the Houston School Board has approved an allocation of \$18.4 million for a new computer system to track the academic performance of students. Developed by Chancery Software, the new system replaced a ten-year-old system. The funds will come from the general fund (\$7 million), the "permanent fund" established with funds from asbestos lawsuits (\$7 million), and the food service and technology budgets (\$4.4 million).

## Utah Update – August 2005

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Education Week reports that the Carson Smith Special Needs Scholarship program, being implemented this year, has adequate funding to provide the maximum allowance of \$5,000 to all eligible applicants. As of the July 22 deadline, only 125 applications had been received. Under the program, private schools in which 80 percent of the students qualify for special education are eligible to receive the vouchers.

Despite budget difficulties, Utah is continuing to support its online testing program. As reported in Education Week, the legislature provided \$5 million for the effort in FY 2005 but cut funding to \$2.5 million for FY 2006.

Among the State's other technology initiatives is the Utah Test Item Pool Service (UTIPS), a website that provides no-cost testing support for teachers. UTIPS allow teachers to use the site to create tests and to gather information about student performance on State tests. The site provides an average of 40,000 tests per month.

Utah also has begun -- with the Class of 2006 -- to require all students to complete (or test out if they already have sufficient skills) a basic computer skills class. Students can take the course online through the State's electronic high school which offers classes covering the entire core high school curriculum.

## Vermont Update – August 2005

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In mid-July, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) approved Vermont's request (along with similar requests from New Hampshire and Rhode Island) to forego testing elementary and middle school students while transitioning to the new New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP).

As reported in Education Week, Vermont has established grade-by-grade expectations for students' technology skills, supplemented by online models for assessing these skills, as well as downloadable activities to strengthen students' technology capabilities. A three-year, \$1.5 development grant from IBM Corporation (which ended this Summer) has supported online teacher professional development and relicensing. IBM will continue to support implementation of the system.

The Rutland Herald reports that Vermont is planning to redesign its high school exit exams but will not make them a requirement for graduation. The State is considering whether to develop its own customized exams for high school students or to use one based on the SAT or ACT exams used for college admissions.

## Virginia Update – August 2005

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The Washington Post reports that the U.S. Department of Education (USED) has approved a waiver for Virginia to lower the State's benchmark passing rates for tests students took this Spring. Last year, 70 percent of students in each school and subgroup had to pass the English and mathematics tests, up from 61 percent in English and 59 percent in math the year before. Under the waiver, the benchmark rates will be 65 percent and 63 percent, respectively. The State's plan calls for continued raises in the benchmark pass rates each year under the waiver. Last year, 451 Virginia schools failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). If the current standards had been applied last year, 816 schools would have failed to make AYP. The State legislature has said it will consider withdrawing from NCLB if changes are not made in the next year. If it did so, the State could forego as much as \$350 million in Federal funding. In recent years, Virginia has made 14 requests for adjustments to NCLB rules. Six have been approved, five have been rejected, and three are pending.

As reported by Education Week, during the 2004-05 school year, Virginia provided \$60 million in State educational technology funds to equip schools the technology needed to administer online its end-of-course Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. Although most Virginia high schools already have appropriate technology, State funding for elementary and middle schools will continue through 2009.

Beginning in the 2004-05 school year, Virginia also established a support program for teachers in use of classroom technology. The State provided \$3.8 million last year so that schools could hire an information technology specialist for every 1,000 students. Another \$18 million will be made available to provide a technology-resource teacher for every 1,000 students.

The Washington Post reports that nearly a third of Virginia's eighth-grade students failed the State reading test in 2004, a rate similar to the past three years (34 percent in 2003, 31 percent in 2002, and 27 percent in 2001). This lack of progress at the middle school level has caused some changes at the local level. Fairfax County, for example, is requiring low-performing middle

school students to take reading or math class during summer school and additional remedial literacy classes during the next school year.

Education Technology News reports that Henrico County schools (near Richmond) has changed its laptop computer program from Apple iBooks to Dell laptops. The switch will only affect high school students; elementary and middle school students will continue using Apples. The decision to switch was based on the lower cost -- by about \$4 million -- for the Dell machines and the desire on the part of teachers to work with Microsoft Office rather than Appleworks.

## Washington Update – August 2005

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As reported in Education Daily, Washington has become the first state to be granted flexibility by the U.S. Department of Education (USED) to include in the Federal accountability system students who take longer than four years to graduate. USED's approval of this flexibility was based on three main factors: (1) the State's data system which can track students beyond the four-year graduation track; (2) the State's testing all grade levels required under NCLB; and (3) the State's efforts to improve the overall graduation rate.

Education Week reports that the Washington State legislature has increased school funding by nine percent for the 2006-07 biennium. The education budgets are \$5.7 billion in FY 2006 and \$5.9 billion in FY 2007. It is expected that the increase will largely go toward higher teacher salaries, and smaller class sizes.

As reported in Education Week, Washington State Technology funds supports two major initiatives: nine educational technology support centers and the State's K-20 telecommunications network. For the past two biennia – 2001-03 and 2003-05, each of these initiatives has been funded at about \$3.9 million. But the State's general budget shortfall is likely to cut into this funding. The State also provided \$1.6 million, during the 2004-05 school year for the pilot phase of Washington's Digital Learning Commons which provides education materials and online courses to 35,000 students in 60 high schools and five middle schools Statewide. The State expects to provide \$3 million over the next biennium to support program implementation.

The Seattle Times reports that online learning programs are booming in Washington State. The number of Washington students enrolled in for-credit online courses has grown from 3,000 in 2000-01 to more than 10,000 last school year. Most of the online participants are high school students. State officials believe that the number of online students could triple again within the next five years.



## West Virginia Update – August 2005

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Education Week reports that the wife of Governor Joe Manchin is working on a plan to promote distance learning in West Virginia. The State is continuing to expand its technology infrastructure to provide the bandwidth needed by schools to participate in the distance learning initiatives.

During the 2004-05 school year, West Virginia spent about \$20 million on educational technology, up from \$12.3 million in 2003-04.

West Virginia has been awarded two Federal grants intended to help the State evaluate how technology can improve student achievement. The first, for \$1.3 million, is comparing face-to-face vs. virtual instruction in foreign languages. The second, \$1.4 million, is studying a State-sponsored teacher trainer initiative.

West Virginia has also begun requiring some students to take State assessments online. This past Spring seventh and tenth-grade students were required to take their writing tests online. Adult, vocational and technical students were also required to take their end-of-course exams online.

A grant of \$250,000 from Verizon, combined with a matching grant from the State of West Virginia and Marshall University, will be used to develop online high school courses for students -- and professional development for teachers -- in rural areas of West Virginia. The new program will include distance learning, video, and next Generation SMART Boards.

Seventeen counties in West Virginia have been awarded grants through the U.S. Department of Education's Enhancing Education Through Technology (E<sup>2</sup>T<sup>2</sup>) program. Each participating school district will have Technology Integration Specialists (TISs) who will provide professional development for teachers and administrators. Each TIS will receive 40 days of training so he/she can effectively train teachers to integrate technology into their teaching. The grants are generally for \$150,000 per county. For further information, contact John Merritt, Coordinator at (304) 558-0304.

## Wisconsin Update – August 2005

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The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reports that the percentage of Wisconsin third-grade students rating “proficient” or higher on the State reading assessment was 87.4 percent -- up 2.5 percentage points from the previous year. The improvement was even greater in the Milwaukee school district where the proficiency percentage went to 70.6 percent, up from 66.4 percent last year. The report noted that, since 1998, the percentage of white third-grade students in Milwaukee rated proficient or better rose from 71 percent to 92 percent, while the improvement for black third-graders went from 46 percent to 69 percent. The gap has remained about the same. It is also noteworthy that proficiency percentages tend to decrease as grade levels go up. Milwaukee third-graders scored 71 percent proficient or better; 60 percent of fourth-graders do so; and 57 percent and 42 percent of the eighth and tenth graders, respectively, rated proficient.

Wisconsin’s State educational technology spending has decreased significantly in the past two years since elimination of its Technology Education Achievement (TEACH) agency. Districts lost \$35 million a year in Technology block grants and \$4 million a year in a teacher technology training program.

As reported in Education Week, most of Wisconsin’s educational technology budget goes to subsidizing schools’ links to the Statewide telecommunications network. Funded by a tax on consumers’ telephone bills, the new system -- known as BadgerNet II -- received \$16.5 million in subsidies for the 2004-05 school year. These subsidies will go up slightly -- to \$17 million -- for 2005-06.

## Wyoming Update – August 2005

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According to Education Week, the Wyoming Equality Network (WEN), a Statewide high-speed videoconferencing and data system, is funded at \$13.9 million for 2004-06, \$500,000 more than the previous biennium. WEN links the State's many small schools to the State University and community colleges through which K-12 students have access to classes not always available in rural areas.

The State is also expanding the Wyoming Education Gateway, a service that provides online resources (including lesson plans) for students, teachers, and parents.

As reported in Education Daily, Wyoming is beginning to roll out its new data delivery system to track students and maintain education statistics. The Wyoming Integrated Statewide Education Data System is expected to improve reporting of mandated data including: graduation rates, teacher salaries, highly-qualified teacher statistics, and discipline records. The five-year, \$6 million project was established using Federal E-Rate and State funds and costs about \$15 per student per year.

As reported in the Billings Gazette, 20 percent of Wyoming's schools failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the requirements of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The number of failing schools is expected to go up next year as standards are increased. Last year, for example, only 30 percent of the students in an elementary school had to test at grade level in reading (as well as 23 percent in math) for the school to meet AYP. These standards will rise to 42 percent in reading and 36 percent in math for the 2005-06 school year. It is noteworthy that three of eight Wyoming schools that failed to meet AYP for the third consecutive year were in Laramie County School District No. 1.

On August 1, Wyoming's Superintendent of Public Instruction, Trent Blankenship, stepped down to become Superintendent of Alaska's North Slope Borough school district.